

Gaming Pet Peeves¹

Casting an actor as an rpg character

It seems that nearly everyone picks the same cliché actors. I can never find an actor who matches the image in my head. Dammit, I want to be the actor, not someone else; I want my name to appear on the opening credits. And unless I am playing Dream Park, do I not want to play a character playing a character.

Playing canon characters

I want to make my own characters; I do not want to play Wolverine, Willow, or Wesley. I have no issue playing in the same universe, but I have no desire to interact with these characters. Most gamers who play canon characters do it poorly and painfully anyway. I see a lot of online game featuring canon characters, and the concept just leaves me cold.

Playing "not" canon characters

If you are going through the process of making your own character, why make a carbon copy of a canon character? Even worse are those who do this with no regard to genre, setting, or the focus of the campaign.

Fifth Street Bookshop²

Hidden away in a discrete section of town, on a nondescript street off the beaten path, tucked between a kosher butcher and a travel agency is a narrow three-story building with a large foot window display with the words "Fifth Street Bookshop" in black and gold block letters. The door of the building bears two names: "Fifth Street Bookshop" and "Broadway Detective Agency." The upper-most story has three windows with horizontal blinds facing the street. Entering the door, there is a long straight stair that leads up to the detective agency. Past the door, to the immediate right, is the entrance to the bookshop.

The bookshop has a wide selection of used books in both fiction and non-fiction. It has a reputation for carrying scholarly first printings of rare volumes and obscure titles. The interior is designed to fit as many books into the small shop as possible, with aisles of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Fifth Street's florescent lighting, drab decor, and lack of romance novels and best-seller titles limits its clientele to the bibliophiles and academics. At the back of the mezzanine level, through an unassuming door that no one notices unless they have reason to find it, resides the "special collection."

A water cooler and coffee maker are located under the stairs that lead to the mezzanine. Patrons may help themselves and an assortment of mismatched ceramic mugs are available, as is non-dairy creamer and sugar. Cleveland will sometimes stop at a bakery on the way in and have bagels or pastries. A cup is available for donations to the "coffee and donuts fund," customers wanting to buy a latte and biscotti best go elsewhere. There is a single small round table upstairs with two chairs at the front of the mezzanine level, overlooking the entryway and cashier area but these are used for research, not coffeehouse chitchat.

The bookshop only has two full-time employees: Cleveland Dale and Deni Carpenter. A cleaning agency handles janitorial duties.

Cleveland Dale

Cleveland is a bibliophile with a degree in library sciences from San Francisco State. He became aware of the Fifth Street Bookstore through his research and ended up hanging out there so much that he became a permanent fixture and then eventually a full-time employee. His button-down shirts, slacks, and tweed vest perfectly fit the image of the bookshop. He opens the store at eight a.m. and stays until Deni shows up.

Patrons find him very helpful and knowledgeable; he seems to have the title of every volume in the store, including the special collection, memorized. He actively enjoys the act of research and will often comb the stacks with the customers. While he has some exposure to the supernatural and knows that demons and vampires walk the earth, he does it best to avoid them.

Deni Carpenter

Deni comes in between three and five in the afternoon and closes the shop each night. How late the store stays open depends on her plans. Usually, there is some party or rave or similar event that she leaves to attend between eleven o'clock and midnight. Her gothic-punk attire, appearance, and attitude are more at home in a modern record or fetish store than Fifth Street. No one knows how or why she was hired.

Unlike Cleveland, Deni spends most of her time behind the counter ignoring the customers except to ring up sales. Despite her apparent lack of attention, she has a psychic awareness of what everyone is doing in the store and is will make a perfectly-timed comment to deter any untoward activity without looking up from her magazine. While she knows few of the books on sale, she can ring up a sale without seeming to even look at the books brought to the counter. She considers vampires, demons, sorcerers, etc. "just like everyone else—they're assholes."

¹ Some, anyway, for I have many.

² From my San Francisco-based Angel campaign.

Robert Dushay

Regarding wise spell casters, I have great fondness for Quintus, my 5th level sorcerer whose cat familiar is as intelligent as he is (INT and WIS of 8).

Lee Gold

Thanks for *Shields in the Viking Sagas*. A fair number of shields were penetrated, broken, or otherwise rendered useless. Do you know if this was a case of dramatic license or was it representative of warfare at the time?

Spike Y Jones

As one of those who nitpicked the Open Gaming logo, I think it is silly not to change it.

You do not think that Monte Cook specifically used the name *Arcana Unearthed* as a marketing ploy, to evoke memories of the original *Unearthed Arcana* and that WotC did not specifically choose to re-use their trademarked *Unearthed Arcana* in the same vein they reused *Fiend Folio*? I do not think is a case of them not finding better names, but rather they wanted to use those specific names for marketing the books.

Jonathan Nicholas

Your thoughts on magic vs. technology parallel mine. The differing scale and definition of "long distance" for fantasy and technology was insightful.

Paul Mason

I do not think that competitive games or forcing the players to act in turns makes roleplaying more accessible to newbies. I believe that cooperative games, where the players must work together and they encourage each other to get into character and help the game progress, makes the game more accessible. The issue of accessibility is complex with no silver bullet or magic formula for success.

I think one of the things that makes D&D, especially the classic dungeon crawl, so accessible, despite all its flaws, is that the characters have meaningful, but limited, choices with a clear goal that does not require roleplaying all the time. Detective games can be quite accessible for the same reasons, but instead of a maze of corridors, you have a maze of clues. Given the popularity of mysteries, crime dramas, and "host your own murder mystery" games, I think detective games have the best shot of any genre for making rpgs mainstream. But they need not be competitive (except for maybe the PC who actually is the murderer) or turn-based.

The system was interesting, but seemed cumbersome. Since every action requires a GM-determined target number and negotiated bonuses, I am not sure how well the system will flow over the

course of gaming session. I would feel more comfortable using a default target number based on the character's ability that can be adjusted up or down.

I have come to realize that I tend not to make decisions about difficulty levels when I GM. Even though I can change a target number or adjust a roll up or down, I do only one or two times in a session. Non-default difficulty levels are typically reserved for things I decide before the game whereas rolls made on the fly use the default difficulty. It is not that I actively choose to use the default difficulty; rather, the thought never crosses my mind. On the other hand, forcing the GM to think about the difficulty may change that and may be for the better; I do not know.

If you do not like subtraction, you can apply penalty dice to the roll (roll Nd6 and keep the highest 2). You can also give bonus dice (roll Nd6 and keep the lowest 2). You lose resolution using dice in this way instead of numerical modifiers (adding two penalty dice typically reduces the odds of success much more than reducing the target number by 2), but it is quicker and gives a more visceral feel for the dis/advantages.

Lisa Padol

I like events to unfold over days, not hours, of game time. In my current Angel campaign, each of the two sessions have each spanned several days worth of events and investigations.

Comic books, a hybrid of visual media and books, have many examples of multiple protagonists in addition to many examples of a solitary protagonist.

Robert Rees

My name is Marlon Deavers and I am a dead rotting corpse which is great because I don't eat much and don't worry about drowning. People I meet always recognize my stench but they don't know I smelled like this while alive. One day I shall turn to dust and I know I shall succeed because of entropy but if I should fail I would be happy to be a skeleton. I can't stand without help and I am constantly dogged by dogs. When times get bad I can always rely on maggots and flies. With a cry of "Dear Lord, what is that thing?" from the innocent babes and ladies who see my gruesome visage. I am looking for adventure!

Players and GMs cannot agree upon every eventuality that might arise in the game, especially since so much of traditional roleplaying revolves around the players not knowing what is around the bend. "And a spaceship lands and clowns wielding chainsaws pour out." "But this is a fantasy game." "You didn't say you didn't want killer space clowns³." If you insist that players have no right to veto, then they will exercise their right by walking out on you.

3 Inspired by the film *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*.