How to Play Roleplaying Games

For the past ten-plus years of my life, I've been writing roleplaying games. I've been playing them for much longer. Back when I started, you could abbreviate "roleplaying game" to RPG without people immediately thinking about "rocket propelled grenades" and the acronym is still around causing trouble today.

In that time, I've watched the market bulge, shrink, grow, recede and, constantly, change. The consensus as I write this is that the hobby is shrinking. To counteract that, of course, we need to recruit new players. Hopefully, that's you.

RPGs are fun. They're worthwhile. They take more effort than a computer game but I believe you can get a different kind of payoff. Give it a try and you may come to agree. But I'm not just going to ask you to baldly trust my assertion. I'm going to see if I can explain the precise appeal of this peculiar habit that's absorbed so much of my time. In the process, I'm going to show you how to get the most fun out of it, by being a good player. At the same time, I'll warn you about the pitfalls of being a bad player. It's the whole package. Enjoy.

Greg Stolze

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What's Gaming?

It's like Cops and Robbers, only with dice and rules to curtail the endless round of 'I hit you!' 'No you didn't!' disputes.

That's one standard explanation, but it's really only the thin edge of the wedge. It's the first step into the territory, but it merits some expansion.

Like Cops and Robbers, in roleplaying games you pretend to be someone else. Only in games, the characters are far more detailed than the generic cops or robbers who run around the yard shooting each other. The characters in RPGs are more like characters in novels or TV shows — they grow and change over time, they have tastes and history and quirks and motivations. They exist, not only to do things, but also because they're interesting in and of themselves.

RPGs are games built through, and around, stories. The story progresses as the game is played. There isn't a winner or a loser, and there isn't a board, but there are dice and rules… a radical departure from standard Cops and Robbers.

The stated reason that most games have all these rules, with dice or cards or other random number generators to provide absolute impartiality, is that it "keeps things fair" and "resolves uncertain actions". I'm going to break with tradition and assert that this is a crock.

The dice are impartial, but their application and interpretation can be confusing and subjective, giving a decided edge to the guy who understands the rules best. The more complicated the game, the more advantage accrues to that guy. Known in the parlance as a "munchkin" or a "rules lawyer" or a "min-maxer," he's a player who tries to build his character for optimal performance in some area of play (stereotypically, it's combat). He also plays his character in such a fashion that events are resolved through his character's strengths. This is regarded as a bad thing.

Yet I find myself hesitant to dismiss a player who puts that much effort into his game. If only there was some way to harness that drive and make it a force for Good, not Annoyingness. Hm…

I got off on a tangent there. I was talking about dice and impartiality and resolving disputes. If you really wanted an impartial dispute resolution system, reach in your pocket and grab a coin.

Heads you win, tails you lose. Bingo. Fair, impartial, and easy to understand. Let's tell our story!

The only problem with this is that, if you're telling a story like "Lord of the Rings," the coin-flip gives Sam Gamgee a fifty / fifty chance of knocking out Aragorn with one sucker punch to the jaw, which any reasonable person knows Sam would need a ladder to even *reach*.

On the other hand, it seems reasonable that Sam would have some chance of decking a goblin, or Peregrin Took, or Gollum. What's needed, then, is some way of determining which chances are "reasonable."

Enter the Game Master. In gaming's frenzy of acronymming, she's called the **GM**.

For Cops and Robbers, no one wanted some know-it-all standing on the porch saying, "Tommy, you can't hit him! He's around the corner and bullets only go in straight lines!" Or, in our hobbit example, "Give it up Sam. Aragorn's been beating people up since you were a sperm."

RPGs are more complicated than Cops and Robbers because the characters and roles are more involved, and the setting is more complicated, and the events have both more factors influencing them, and more repercussions arising from them. So I think we can set Cops and Robbers aside.

Football has impartial referees to pass judgment on the teams, and a GM is something like that. The rules of the game serve the same purpose, providing an agreed-upon structure. What is this structure for? It provides the *logic of the setting*.

The Logic of the Setting

Okay, I'll try really hard not to be overblown and pompous here. But RPGs come with their own little worlds, an imaginary map on which the characters move. But this isn't just a map of physical places, it's a map of events and people and governments and starships and beliefs and magic spells and battle tactics and… well, everything that makes up a world, supposedly. RPG stories aren't told in the real world, because the real world is taken up with our lives. So we build a pretend world, out of words and consensus, and we tell stories there.

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The advantage to making your own world, obviously, is that you can depart radically from reality. In fantasy games, wizards weave smoke into air-weight castles as strong as steel and bold beggars with a treasure map and a plan can unearth troves of rubies the size of hen's eggs. In science-fiction games, starships break the lightspeed barrier with impunity in search of new alien races to conquer (or learn from, if that's your bag). In a horror game, the awfulness you need to fear isn't a terrorist, it's an unquiet ghost. Unless it's the unquiet ghost of a terrorist.

Does the beggar find the rubies? Which alien race triumphs? Can the undead terrorist be stopped? The rules and dice are there to resolve these issues, not by a fifty-fifty coin-flip, but with degrees of likelihood.

Believe it or not, degrees of likelihood are fun. They don't sound fun, but watch people playing poker — they're calculating degrees of likelihood. Betting on a football game, playing the stock market or bellying up to the roulette wheel are exciting and fascinating because there's uncertainty, but it can be managed. You pick the horse with the best record on muddy track or you fold instead of drawing to an inside straight. Interacting with uncertain events and testing your judgment against them is neat, and that's part of the thrill of gaming. Only instead of betting your hard-won real-world cash, you bet the fate of a character you've created, being rewarded with more power, glory or knowledge when you win... or being punished with humiliation, injury or even that character's death when you fail.

Understanding the rules means understanding the logic of the setting, which means understanding how things are meant to go. Now's a time when it's helpful to compare games to fiction. Characters in soap operas behave differently than characters in action movies, because they're different types of stories. A character on "Days of Our Lives" is unlikely to resort to Tae Kwon Do to resolve her problems, because in that setting success arises from emotion and social interaction — you can't just spinning-back-kick your troubles away. Furthermore, Jackie Chan can take on legions of enemies armed with nothing more than a ladder. In "Saving Private Ryan," a grittier ethos is in place (and rightly so). Am I comparing apples to oranges? Yes, but only to explain why you need different tools to get the juice out of each.

The rules in whatever game you're playing should reinforce the setting and the way events turn out. The game *EVERWAY* settles things with draws from a deck of symbol-laden cards, because the setting is based on symbolism and intuition rather than the logic of strict realism. *Dogs in the Vineyard* emphasizes emotional motivation for actions and emotional consequences for them. Most other games tend more towards the idea of modeling physics, but even then they may be modeling the physics of an action movie (where the hero can survive falling off a hotel if he lands in the pool) or the physics of horror fiction (where, no matter how fast the heroine runs, the shambling zombie is always right behind her).

Why is this 'Fun'?

Roleplaying games have been evolving since the 1970s, and there are some features that most of the games written have in common. Specifically, they have CHARACTER GENERATION — some means by which players create characters who roam through the world having adventures, making huge messes and/or cleaning up huge messes. Games almost universally have COMBAT SYSTEMS that resolve physical conflict, often in loving, minute detail. Finally, games usually have a SETTING, with pages and pages of description intended to evoke a particular feel or flavor or style of game.

I don't think that's an accident of lazy game design. Most games have these things because all these things entertain. In one way or another, those three elements cover nearly everything that's fun about RPGs.

Character Generation, or, The Joy of Ham

It's a good time, pretending to be someone else. If you agree with this statement, you probably don't need the rest of this section and can skip right down to the bit about fighting.

All right, for all you skeptics: Inhabiting another role is entertaining in and of itself, at least for many people. It makes a nice change from the day to day life of a parent or a plumber or a punk teenager — instead of acting the way you always do, because it's right or expected or you'll get fired if you don't, you get to act out. If you're normally laid back and noncommittal, you can find out how it feels to be a passionate, noisy troublemaker. Since it's all in fun, all in the game, all in a made-up world, it doesn't count.

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For many, the chance to have a change of pace in the form of a change of behavior is reason enough to game, period. Not to mention the opportunity to use outrageous accents and gesture wildly. (I'm thinking right now of one of my most flamboyant players, who by day is an educator and presumably can't run around screaming, "So angry! So angry! I'll piss on your shoes when you're dead!")

So pretending to be someone else can vent ya-yas whose expression is otherwise unacceptable, what with the violent murders and shoe-pissing and all. But there's more.

Playing another role can go deeper and have a more profound impact than the superficial level of wilding and ranting and blowing off steam. Like theater or literature, game stories can confront characters (and, through them, you) with truly challenging issues. Your character could end up deciding whether a mother or father gets the kids in an acrimonious divorce. You could be a tribal chief who has to decide whether a neighbor tribe's cattle rustling is worth going to war, or if you should just let them get away with it. Your character might need to give up true love for honor... or for peace or just for political advantage.

RPGs, like all stories, can present us with choices between conflicting values (or conflicting perils). With the remove of knowing it's fiction, we get all the interest and excitement of making important decisions... without having to actually deal with the unpleasant consequences that such choices have in real life.

Trouble: The Overactor

Some players invest very little in their characters and get little out of them. That's really their lookout, and as long as they're contributing to the game they're only hurting themselves. One group of players who damage the collective are actually those who get *too far* into character.

This can take two forms. The first is someone who gets too solidly into a role that doesn't contribute or which actively impedes the rest of the group. Say, for example, four of your players create hardy merchant sailors who are going to roam the seas trying to outwit goblin pirates. Great: Lots of fine, swashbuckling, sea-faring excitement there. The fifth player creates a powerful wizard with a lot of connections to one specific port town. This wizard doesn't particularly care for sailing – she gets seasick, in fact – but signs on out of greed or simply because she needs to get out of town until the heat dies down.

This contrast *can work*, if the player is willing to let her character grow into being a sailor with the others. The contrast can actually provide a lot of friction, interest, and comic relief. That's not a problem.

It's a problem if the player constantly tries to pull the whole crew out of this week's adventure because *her* character has no interest in it. She wants to get back to her port town and work her intrigues and have the ship's crew serve as her patsies and sidekicks. If anyone calls her on this spotlight-hogging, she says, "Hey, I'm just staying in character."

As if staying true to a toxic character is somehow a *virtue*.

Players like this need to understand that they don't call the shots, that the group isn't there to serve their pleasure at the expense of their own, and that it's okay for selfish, odd-duck characters to *grow and change* so that they work better with the rest of the party.

The other problem thespian player is the one who may work very well in the party, and has no need to be a jerk or a control freak... but he meanders. He enjoys playing his character so much that going to the shop to pick out a new space suit is as exciting as a clandestine mission to extract a prisoner from a tightly-guarded prison moon. He jaws on and on (in character), maybe amusingly, maybe only amusing himself, while everyone else sits around drumming their fingers on the table... or worse, discussing their latest DVD purchases.

A little in-character chatter is great. Some groups are composed *entirely* of meanderers and for them, that works. They can have long, involved, *satisfying* campaigns in which very little happens except that their characters were interestingly characterized. The problems arise when you get more typical players who have a heavy interest in plot and mechanics, and who see the in-character noodling as pointless. They're not out of line. In his own way, this meanderer is as much of a spotlight-hog as the selfish control-freak, but in this case the fix is much simpler. The GM just has to give him opportunities for in-character behavior *within* the scope of the plot. Ideally, these chances let him *contribute* to the success of the party. In the space jail example, he'd probably be just as happy developing his character by fast-talking the guards into letting the party land their supposedly-crippled ship there for emergency repairs. The difference is, now the other players are happy with the character too.

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Furthermore, by playing a character very different from oneself, you can make those choices based on different values, combining the joy of thinking through the tough stuff with the joy of chewing the scenery.

Combat: The Crimson Bliss of Power

RPGs grew out of wargames and it shows. Combat is nearly universal in these games, and for good reason: It's an intense, dramatic and exciting form of conflict, one everybody can understand. If you think you'd enjoy having your proxy in the game mow through hordes of unfortunate enemies with tireless swings of his mighty axe, you probably get it and don't need a lecture on the desirability of specific combat rules.

But maybe you do need that lecture. Maybe you think fighting should be just another character element, like looking good and speaking suavely and being an unfairly-cashiered starship captain. Why does "fearsome warrior" get a whole chapter devoted to it when "compelling public speaker" does not?

Here's why: Fighting is the lowest common denominator. A fist to the face is a language everyone understands. So too in gaming. A player who doesn't have the verbal skill to engage in a legalistic duel of wits can still stack his character to dominate in combat – and it's a lot easier to drag the courtroom down to a brawl than it is to elevate a fistfight into articulate discourse. Furthermore, the consequences can be severe. You fail to grasp the nuances of manners and your character looks like an oaf. You fail in battle and his skull could become your arch-enemy's new goblet.

Beyond its intensity, and the possible permanence of its outcome, complex fighting rules may be desirable because many players

Trouble: The Powergamer

The stereotypical min-maxing twinkie combat munchkin abuses character generation to get a character who is staggeringly efficient at fighting, often at huge expense to his abilities in other areas. This is because he is not concerned with exploring the nuances of character, or appreciating the interesting elements of the setting. He's going to ignore that stuff and get to fight scenes, which he will win, so that he can get some form of power-increasing reward, which is plunged into optimizing his character for *more* combat. Furthermore, whenever any other player tries to do something besides fight, he finds a way to sabotage it. Even when the other characters can fight, he seeks out means to hog the spotlight, be the most powerful warrior, and suck up as much of the GM's time and attention as he can. As far as he's concerned, the game is about his character's prowess and glory, full stop. The other characters are sidekicks, barely more important than the endless parade of enemies. The setting is just a backdrop. The GM's ideas about theme or motive, or intrigue or story or meaning, are dismissed with a resounding "Who cares?"

Doesn't this guy sound like a pain in the neck?

Luckily, this pure-form stereotype is rare, and if you do run into one your GM has ample justification to give him the boot. Honest. Tell her I said it's her sovereign duty to expel him for the good of players who aren't jerks. But really, it should almost never come to that.

If you're a min-maxer, odds are good you *don't realize how annoying you are*. Quick, who's the most irritating player in your group? If you don't have a ready answer, it may be you. The good news is, help is here if you aren't doing it on purpose.

To cure munchkin syndrome, you just need to understand that RPGs aren't about winning, aren't about getting the most power-ups, aren't about being the toughest, and aren't about hogging the spotlight. These games work best when players are working half for their own characters, and half for the good of the game as a whole. One of the biggest rewards RPGs offer is the opportunity to keep playing, but that's a cruddy payoff if every player is trying to one-up everyone else. No one wins at RPGs, but it's perfectly possible for everyone to lose.

If you want to be the best fighter in the group, that's *fine*... as long as the players rally around that idea and there's enough GM attention to go around. Many other players actually don't like combat all that much and are more into characterization or just grooving on the setting and plot. If you're a combat monster player, you can be a great fit with players who couldn't care less. All you have to collectively do is understand when you need to step back and let the expert do his job. For them, that's solving mysteries or making diplomatic overtures or coming up with the overarching master plan for world domination. For you, it's when diplomacy fails.

Most players just need to have it explained that there *is* a wider view of cooperation, and then they perceive it, pursue it, and are willing to take turns with the spotlight. Those who can't are probably real crybabies and your game's better off without them.

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like them. Strategy is fun. Chess has been popular for centuries. Furthermore, figuring out a complex set of rules is, for many players, very engaging. It's interesting to try and optimize a character to succeed at a difficult task.

This is known as MIN-MAXING and, as I mentioned earlier, it's got a bad reputation. But as I also mentioned earlier, putting a lot of attention into the game is something I'd like to *encourage*. So I'm going to go out on a limb and suggest that it is not the min-maxing itself which other players find so annoying, but rather a host of behaviors that usually *accompany* min-maxing. Many of these can be dealt with, and advice for such dealing is in the nearby boxed text.

Setting and the Sedentary Compensations of the Couch Potato

The third common element to the archetypical game is its setting. Sometimes this is a licensed setting like Dying Earth or the Star Trek universe, but more typically it's something custom built, because that's more satisfying and provides more creative freedom. Cheaper, too. It's not uncommon for a successful game line to have dozens of books providing ever more intricate details of the nations, races and cultures of the setting.

Why, though?

Chess doesn't need a setting, nor does Cops and Robbers. But RPGs do because events and circumstances form character, and without characters in your game you're not really playing a role. Setting matters for the same reason that character matters, because it shapes the story.

Trouble: Mr. Lazybones

Some players are used to being spoon-fed their entertainment by TV and movies. I love the tube and the theater as much as the next guy (though I'm just lukewarm on spoons), but gaming requires more investment. You have to figure out what your character's doing and have at least a sketchy rationale for why he's doing it.

The lazy gamer, however, just goes with the flow. He likes to hear about the cool spaceships and brutal bloodbaths. He contributes, he has ideas but... he's passionless.

This can actually be just fine.

If you are having fun and keep showing up, don't worry that you feel no urge to produce in-character journals, or use CAD software to lay out a space station, or indulge in all the other diversions of geek-craft typical to character-ham players. (There's no shame in it if you do, though. I've personally done some lovely colored-pencil character sketches.) Maybe your big reward is the company of your friends, together, gaming. Or doing whatever.

This is *okay*. Arguably, you're getting less out of it than the frothing and committed fanatics, but that's your choice. In fact, laid-back players make a fine counterbalance for those whose natural instincts make them want to hog the spotlight.

The problem arises when you get a whole *group* of passive players. They expect to be fed a plot with several options, they casually discuss them until they pick, then they roll dice to see how it turns out. Lather, rinse, repeat, see you next week.

If that's your situation, someone needs to step up. Someone needs to invest some energy and thought into the party and push in a consistent direction. If you don't take that initiative, either someone else will, or the game is doomed.

Maybe the person who puts the pepper in the recipe is your GM. Most experienced players prefer to be the ones making plans and developing strategy: When there's really only one path to follow, the game might as well be a scripted computer game. This is called "railroading" and while it's widely despised, it's widely known for a reason, and that reason is that it works... kinda. It's far from optimum, but it's better than having a game flatline due to terminal apathy. Many GMs, rather than see that happen, put the game on this sort of bossy life-support system. Just like a respirator in a hospital, it's an artificial method of doing something a body ought to do.

As a player, you're there to have fun, but you also have a responsibility to contribute something fun for others. (In fact, helping others have fun is, itself, fun – having your creativity appreciated by an audience is one of the primo perks of the GM job, I find.) If you're uncertain or shy or don't trust your ideas, it's okay to hang back – especially if your group is full of people who aren't shy and don't hang back. The role of audience is necessary, if not exactly glamorous. But don't be afraid to speak up when you become comfortable. Maybe even a bit before that, just to get practice. After all, it's all imagined, and the only repercussions are to characters who don't really exist and can't sue you.

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Different settings provide different pleasures. Hard SF gives a glimpse into a future that will never be, while historical revisionism offers an alternative past that never was. Comic book settings let players find out if flight really is better than invisibility, which is a meditation on power and temptation all on its own.

In short, the outré and bizarre settings of RPGs give us a break from the real world, just as playing characters offer us a break from our real selves. Furthermore, the kind of profound and literary emotions stirred by a deeply-empathized character going through a wrenching and difficult choice are mirrored in the tragedies or triumphs of nations in conflict. All within the safety of fiction.

Setting provides a chance to explore alternate societies, places of unreal grandeur and bizarre philosophies based on a world that is magical, not logical. In a word, it provides spectacle.

There are many gamers who find settings interesting. They like having characters – possibly characters who are two-dimensional and rather passive – tour the regions, hear the neat descriptions, run into fascinating denizens, and engage in hand-to-hand combat with them. They're not obsessed with finding the optimum killing attack in every situation, they're not chewing the scenery, they're enjoying richness of the setting. This is the third joy of gaming: Seeing what new marvel the GM or the game designer has to show you this week.

The only real problem setting-explorers is that they can sometimes are little bit *too* laid-back.

Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It

With all that stuff about character, system and setting in mind, just what are your duties as a player? When you play, what are you expected to do?

Show up

Most obviously, you're expected to be there and be a warm body. Gamers refer to "sessions" which means (for example) that I'm going to be at Thomas' house around 1:00 on Sunday afternoon, and we'll play the game until 5:00 or so, then meet again the next Sunday for another. Most games go from session to session, like issues of a comic book – there's usually a session climax, but the characters continue to press on towards a larger goal that takes many sessions to accomplish. If you're going to be part of a gaming group, make the time commitment or explain to the GM that won't be able to be there every time. If you're only showing up every other session, get used to sketchy rundowns of what you missed, and get used to plots that focus on the people who are there consistently. No one's demanding Cal Ripken-like perfect attendance, but it's hard for a GM to center stories on your character if she doesn't know if you'll be present.

If you like gaming but your schedule just won't let you commit to your group, there are a couple ways around it. If the plot and structure permit it, your character may just be intermittent – like a recurring character on a TV show who isn't in every episode. Otherwise, you may have to agree to let the GM control your character while you're away, expecting her to play it safe, not take big risks, and not depict him getting drunk and fathering a slew of illegitimate children (unless, of course, that's the character you want). Alternately, you can let your fellow players run your character by consensus in your absence. Neither one is a perfect solution but, hey, it's an imperfect world.

Pay Attention

You can't expect to be spoon-fed the joy like you can with passive media. Gaming is interactive: If you don't respond to what's going on, it doesn't work. This means you're expected to understand the rules. Total command of every nuance isn't required, but have a general idea of how the game's mechanics kick in to determine success or failure. Pay particular attention to rules that come into play a lot for your character. If your game has fairly involved systems for piloting a starship in combat, either do the homework of learning them or let someone else be the flier. Similarly, in a high fantasy game you probably don't need to study how magic works if your character isn't going to be casting spells. If she is a sorceress, understand the game's idea of magic. Not only does this keep you from dragging the pace of the game to a crawl as you look up the rules, it makes your character more effective since you actually know what she can and cannot do.

More than that, follow the script. Pay attention to what the GM tells you. Remember the characters' names, and if you can't remember them, write them down. In a mystery novel, the detective eventually puts the pieces together. In a game with a mystery plot, those pieces aren't going together unless the players do it. You don't need to be obsessed, but you do need to be invested.

Let It Go

Involvement yields enjoyment... until things go poorly. It's quite possible in many games to spend multiple sessions building a great and powerful character and then, through the cruelty of a few bum rolls, your character dies. Or goes insane or breaks his magic helmet or undergoes some other miserable setback that certainly wasn't in your plans. When that happens, you have to be philosophical.

It is possible to *enjoy* the death of your character, if it's a kick-ass death. If you go down swinging and are overwhelmed, while the other characters survive and complete the mission, that's about as heroic as it gets. It's particularly poignant if the GM lets you get in some cool last words like "Tell Martha I always loved her" or "Avenge me, Kuin!" or "I am fortunate. I shall rest with honor. You, my friend, must continue the struggle."

Far more often, the setback won't be something so dramatic. You roll badly and the villain makes you look silly. Your character throws up at the drinking contest. You bungle an easy task and, instead of being suave and cool, your character looks like a ninny.

If you're willing to take those lumps without taking it personally, you may enjoy the setback as comic relief. Failing that, you can look at it as the background for the eventual triumph. After all, in movies the hero typically gets knocked around a lot before his final success. You can't have a dramatic, come-from-behind, underdog victory if you've always succeeded at everything. If you can negotiate a course between apathy towards the game and obsession with it, you can groove on the highs and shrug at the lows.

It's not just character problems that can stick in your throat, either. It may be that your GM misinterprets a rule and your character suffers as the result. Let it go. Every pro ball game has some bad calls, and GMs aren't perfect. Many great GMs sacrifice complete fidelity to the rules in order to keep the game moving at an exciting pace, or to provide for a better plot in the long run, or simply because they made a mistake. If you really must make a case for a different interpretation of some specific text in the book, talk it over with your GM after the session. Nothing makes a GM defensive like being criticized in front of the other players, because she needs to have some authority to run the game. Even if she admits it was wrong, don't hold a grudge and don't demand some kind of redress. Just accept that bad calls happen to good characters and hope that the next fumble goes in your favor. Usually, they balance out.

Share

The game is not about your character, it is about your group's characters. If your GM is doing her job, you get your time to excel and look like a champion, and so do the other players. One very common complaint about bad players is that they're RPG ball hogs – they want to be the most important actor in every scene. When you get a group of these attention magnets together, it's ugly. It's like babysitting toddlers on a rainy day.

Good groups, on the other hand, support each other. Suppose events have been building towards Leon's character Xanthar's confrontation with High Lord Gharst. Your last several adventures have involved finding evidence to link Gharst with the plot to poison the queen, and now Xanthar (the good looking and eloquent diplomat) is going to present what you know. But, in a surprise twist, Gharst shows up to frame him. It's down to a battle of wits.

Leon's a big ham, so he's got all kinds of speeches planned. If you're a good player, you sit back and let him have his moment in the sun. If you're a bad player, you have your stuttering barbarian attack Gharst so that it degrades into a big fight scene (that's the Powergamer tactic). If you're a *great* player, you find some way to enhance Xanthar's speech. Even simply shouting "Hear hear!"

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when he makes a good point can work. Most essential, though, is respecting his turn in front. If you do that, Leon's far more likely to enjoy a scene where Xanthar talks about what an indomitable warrior your character is (or expert sailor, or smooth loverman, or whatever your character concept is).

CONTRIBUTE

In the spirit of aiding Leon and Xanthar, learn how to contribute to the game. The more you put into it, the more enjoyment you're going to get out of it, and that doesn't just apply to your character. If you're seeking ways to make other characters look good, their players just might return the favor. If you look for ways to make the GM's job easier, everybody benefits as the game runs more smoothly. If you show up planning to accept whatever you're given, you get something. If you show up wondering how you can make the game cooler for everyone, you get more. If everyone shows up focused on making the game great with their characters, instead of making their characters powerful in the game, you can get something spectacular.