System Color

A typology of RPG mechanics

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Abstract

Role playing game design is an art, "a system of principles and rules for attaining a desired end". However, it's an art in its infancy. Although many models have been available to describe the experience of role-playing game, not much have been done regarding mechanics. We have the DKF description, some designation regarding levels of design or mechanics elements but mostly nothing about goal of mechanics, or only in a very abstract form. This article aim to explore a single aspect of game mechanics, which is to determine which qualities are necessary or at least desirable in all role playing games. This, we hope, will be a first premise to more characterization of mechanics, helping us to discuss and evaluate different systems, and, with the help of other tools, finally create a real science of role-playing game design.

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Introduction

What's the art of game design? The Webster 1913 defined art as a system of rules and principles for attaining a desired end. So, what are those rules, those principles, and more important, what's this desired end? For this last question, I think you can have as many answers as there are role players. Although some people have defined and described carefully the motivations and goals of players, not much have be done regarding how those goals can be satisfied.

The goal of this article is to make a new step in this direction. What I try to do is to answer to a single question: "What's desirable, if not necessary, in every role playing game system?" That's a very hard question to answer since most role playing games have different goals, different settings, different ways to make the role playing experience exciting and fun. But strangely, this appeared to be the easier obstacle encountered on this road. The bigger obstacle I met were the lack of a common vocabulary among designers. No designer has the same way of naming things, and that's true either in French or English. Also, people often used the same word for talking about very different things. So to avoid this problem, I chose a very different approach: I decided to use a color metaphor. Since colors are a bit opaque to role playing system terminology, which doesn't help at all for a tool aim to help communication, I had to add some adjectives to them, just clear enough to hint the new reader about the possible meaning of such colors.

The first version of this paper will solely be about those colors of mechanics, as well as a short presentations of examples. I however plan to add more to it, especially regarding other aspects of role playing, like the relation between those colors and the already existing typologies, like GNS. But for the beginning, we have to define first what constitutes a role playing game, and especially, what's a role playing game system.

What's a Role Playing Game?

This section is not about defining in details what's a role playing game but mostly to propose a common vocabulary about what constitutes a role playing game, so that we can know what we are talking about. A typical role playing game can be seen to be constituted of two parts:

- a description of an imaginary universe called the *setting*;

- a set of rules to handle events resolution in the setting, called the *system*.

Usually, the setting is divided in many more elements, like the characters we can encounter in this particular universe, the environment (either social, technological, historical and/or geographical) in which those characters evolve, examples of situations those characters can encounter, as well as notes about the intended atmosphere of this universe. Some or even all of those elements can be omitted or more or less detailed. When most elements are omitted, or without specified with much details, we call this kind of system universal or generic. I prefer the second appellation because, although most generic system pretend to be usable in any setting, they are often just a generalization of one or many settings, sharing some common elements. Except for this small difference, we will now only talk about setting and generic setting as a whole, without addressing more concerns about their internal elements. Is not that those elements aren't important in designing a good role playing game, but it's a way to stay on our focus.

Systems are also often divided into multiple parts, classified in multiple differents ways, etc. Systems often even contains some elements of setting, like particularity of the environment. For now, we just want to consider systems as a whole. We only make one distinction: system elements that contain no element which can be considered part of the setting would be called mechanics, and mechanics or system elements that contains or describe part of the setting (including situational elements like combat or character description) will be called rules. This is certainly not enough for a more in-depth exploration of system composition but it will be sufficient for our purpose.

Meta-gaming elements are elements often external to a role playing game. They included things like the location where the game is set, the current mood of the players, their perception of the reality, the quality (access, language, medium) of communication between them, the presence of materials, their relationship, etc. They are aspects of the gaming experience which can be seen as out of the current setting but are still part of the role playing experience. Some systems or even setting elements can influence or help to make some meta-gaming elements either less intrusive or more fun and interesting. They can also adapt to accommodate some less optimal meta-gaming elements, like the presence of a noisy environment. Meta-gaming elements can often influenced both (although the designer have mostly no control over them except written recommendation) and some role playing games even used them to enhance the role playing experience.

The color model

The color model are composed of the three primary additive colors: red, green and blue. Just like any colors, some people prefers some of them more than the others. That's OK, from taste and colors, one can't discuss. However, we want to make a small exception to this rule: we will supposed that everyone will prefer bright colors instead of darker one. Brightness represent the adherence of a system to a specific color (mix are allowed). So, since we supposed that any color are at least desirable, you'll always prefer a brighter mechanic instead of a darker one, as long as it is of the right color. Take note that a system that mix all colors will be white and bright. And a system that have no color at all will be black. Maybe you still prefer darker colors in real life (like most role players, if you look at the way most of them are dressed up), but make a small effort now or use negative vision. Elsewhere, you'll just fall in the darker side of role playing game, full of munchkins and rules lawyers. Are you sure you want to go there?

To help to better understand the concept behind each color, especially when talking to a non-initiate, an adjective is added to each of them. You are free to used it when you think is necessary but try to make a link to this page for reference so people know what you are talking about.

Here is the three primary colors and their definitions:

Consistent Red
  Consistent Red is the color of system that are consistent with the setting elements they are supposed to describe. If your setting describe, or more often suppose, swords as more lethal than daggers, the system should respect this and not make daggers equally or more lethal than swords. A dark red system tend to interfere with `Suspension of Disbelief`. Break in Suspension of Disbelief is a phenomena which can be best described as players rolling their eyes toward you, the mouth wide open in an expression of incredulity, and leaving your table to never came back again (and no, that's not because their lost their way to the refrigerator). Red was chose because of the its relation with this *stop attitude*, as well as the tendency of very high red system to be a bit bloody in action. *This is not, however, a universal characteristic!*

  A good example of system with a strong red color is RoleMaster™ with their very detailed systems for med-fan universe[1].

Fluid[2] Green
  Fluid Green system are easy to learn and have often low search and resolution time. They can however have a lot of options to chose from, as long as those options are clear and easy to handle. Those systems are often

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[1]Really, I'm not sure if this is a good example. Any better suggestions welcome.
[2]Don't like this name but I want to avoid using Simple in it, since Green is much more than only Simplicity. Fluid is currently the only word I can think.

perfect for beginners or people wanting quick pace systems, without stopping to details. This is two good reasons to give them the green color, this color being often associated with beginners and speed.

A good example of a green system is The Window©, a free RPG game with very simple mechanics.

Immersive Blue

Immersive Blue rules help to sustain a particular atmosphere in a game. This atmosphere can be either dramatic, heroic, epic, scary, peaceful, imaginative, or all of them at the same time. Just like the Consistent Red, blue rules are strongly associated with the setting. Blue was chose because of its association with atmosphere and emotions.

One of the bluest system that the author know is eight©, a free RPG where all of the few rules participate to the setting atmosphere.

All of the three colors can be mixed together, in different quantities. This give us 4 more different colors[3]:

Clear-Sight Yellow (Red and Green)

Usually, when you want brighter red, you compromise on a darker green, and when you want brighter green, you often compromise with darker red. So this color is quite rare, and yellow rules are real pearl of wisdom. Yellow systems are able to give a maximum of consistency and details from your setting, without removing speed and ease of play. They promised really good play for those who like to explore different elements of the setting.

As I said, yellow rules are quite rare. Yellow systems even more. I failed to see a system where this color dominate. If you think you have one, please tell me.

Dramatic Cyan (Green and Blue)

One of the most popular color in new games presently. The Cyan systems bring to front a very narrative aspect with quick pace and easy rules. Consistent is not really important since GM will just adjust the plot consequently. This however give somewhat limited play and one should be careful with the Suspension of Disbelief syndrome which often augment with those kind of systems.

One popular example of Cyan systems are Nobilis™ and the Storyteller™ system (at least by intentions).

Expressive Magenta (Red and Blue)

A rare combination: Magenta systems tend to immersed you into details. *Many* details. You will be transport in a world where everything, actions or materials, are described to the finest element. The trap is that, too often, the lack of green in those systems lead to a very hard to use and very slow progression of the action. The players must be patient or the GM a real expert to be able to handle such systems.

Good examples of those systems included mostly science-fiction or military oriented settings. Heavy Gear™ can be described as one of them under certain aspects.

Pure White (Red, Green and Blue)

White system can be think as the perfect system and can be easy obtain for a very limited and specific setting. However, such settings are often very limited in use and, as we will see later, white system tend to dilute (we call this a lack of Tenacity) and get darker very easily.

I have no really good example of such systems. As said, most white system tend to became darker with usage and/or a new color quickly dominate.

Freedom

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[3]Remember, this is the three *additive* primary colors, just like your television but unlike water painting, which used primary *subtractive* colors.

Since both the red and blue colors have deep root in the setting, we also want to know how colors are affect by change to the setting. For this, we defined two different movements or degrees of freedom for the color:

Tenacity
  Tenacity represent how much a system retains the same color when the setting change. This is a researched quality for generic systems, but also for RPG with a very diversified setting. Systems that are limited to a few character types or situations (like only combat) doesn't need a great Tenacity in their colors.

  Example of system with a good Tenacity is GURPS™.

Chameleon
  Chameleon systems are able to change their colors to fit better with the new setting. This is a very rare quality, mostly research for generic system.

  The only system I know which try to be chameleon is Multiverser™, a system with a bias parameter for fitting with different universes.

Both degrees of freedom can appear together for a particular system and react differently. They can also keep their quality only for a specific range of settings. For example, the D&D system has a Tenacity mostly in general medieval-fantastic settings.[4]
I currently doesn't like this section much. The old idea behind adaptability is not well enough represent. But for this, I should probably work a little more with the background setting.

Beauty of the system

The colors aren't the only important qualities of a system. One very important, if not the most important one, is the fun factor. We are doing role playing for only one thing: having fun. However, fun is a very personal thing where everyone have opinion about. Some people can find one system fun and other can find them dull. Since fun are "in the eye of the beholder", we use another quality related to our painting metaphor that have the same characteristic: Beauty.

Why some people find something beautiful and not something else? Well, there is too much factors to enumerate all of them, but colors can have something to do with it. Someone can prefer the red color, and another one will prefer a yellow color. Same thing for mechanics. Some people can prefer Red Mechanics, other want Yellow mechanics and dislike Blue mechanics. Could you satisfy all of them? Well, the golden rule in RPG is that if you dislike a rule, ignored it. It's very easy to ignore a rule, less easy to change it or replace it. In the color metaphore, this is equivalent to wearing colorized glasses. If you have some white light and wear yellow glasses, you'll see the world in yellow. But if you only have blue light, your yellow glasses will block it and you'll see nothing. Same thing for mechanics. White mechanics are good because you can please everyone by simply using the right filter on everyone. If one color is lacking, however, whatever the color of your glasses, you will not be able to create it, except if the mechanics is sufficiently Transparent, a matter we will see later in the section called "Brightness and Transparency".

The visibility of the rules

Systems are composed of rules, but not all rules are necessary of the same color. How each rule influence the global system apparency is called the visibility of the rule. Visibility represent mostly how often a rule can be used and what will be their influence on the current game. This is an important aspect when designing a role playing system. Often, you can make a tradeoff in a not so much visible aspect of the system without affecting

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[4] I think the best way to describe of this components is talking about inertia and direction changes, but this add a new level of metaphor so I ended up inventing new terms that will fit better with the metaphor. What do you think about?

the whole color. By *hiding* such color into less visible aspect, you can, for example, achieve an overall more reddish system, without necessary affecting the green brightness.

Visible rules are often the resolution mechanism, combat rules (in action oriented settings) and PC statistics. Less visible rules are often the initial creation mechanism (you just used it once) and evolution mechanics of the character (which usually only happens at the end of a game).

Brightness and Transparency

Before going further, a little more clarification is needed. What is Brightness? How it affects the role playing experience?

Well, Brightness in this model looks more like a spell of Light, and is opposite, the spell of Darkness. Dark colors will not only have a low effect but even make your settings and your whole role playing experience *darker*, which means less fun and less interesting. On the opposite way, a brighter system will not only let your setting and GM talents show up, but will enhance your experience, sustaining and even creating a more fun and entertaining experience.

So one should not think that ignoring a color will do no harm. All colors are necessary, but some settings and/or GM can provide their own light to the role playing experience and so don't need much. So, the point where a rule color switch from being dark to bright really depends on the quality of the setting and the talents of the GM. A beginner GM will find a system very bright that a more experienced GM will find too dark for him. This is however not a good reason to compare GM with the color system. How a GM can make a system looks Greener, Bluer or Redder for the players it's an open question not address in this article. Same thing about the settings. But it's clear that the brighter the system, the best it can help the GM to make a good role playing experience for his players, and fit the needs of more GM.

Transparency

There is some system which depends a lot on the GM abilities to bring some brightness to it. We call this characteristic Transparency. A Transparent system let the GM take more decisions about the right way to handle differents situations. They have a very low strictness, often just providing guidelines on how to interpret some results, determine difficulty, or even how to resolve differents situations.

There are two common misconceptions with Transparent systems. The first is that Transparent System necessary Green. This is not true at all. By letting the GM abilities take care of many aspects of the role playing experience, transparent system are mainly for mature and experienced players, which is the opposite of some Green qualities.

The other misconception is that Green systems are Transparent. This misconception is part due to the fact that Green systems seems to go mostly with the flow that we have the impression that the system is absent, the game going by itself. This is a quality of Green systems, not Transparent one, although that with a good GM, it can be seen this way. In fact, transparent systems take more easily the color the GM want and, for this, looks a lot like Chameleon systems.[5]

Transparency, however, is not necessary a goal desirable for any RPG system. As we have said, Transparent system can be very hard on newcomers to RPG. They need some experience from the GM and also the players to make the role playing experience fun and interesting. Transparent systems provide no light by them self, but also no darkness. So, if you're an experienced GM or aim your game to experienced GM, transparent system can be great.

Examples of transparent systems include The Window© and Hero Wars™.

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[5]Transparent system denomination is often in a more broad context than here. The right definition seems to vary a lot and so, I prefer to make my own. Generally speaking, what people seems to call transparent systems seems to be more a kind of either Bright Green or Transparent systems in the Colors model. Try to not confuse people by specifying clearly that you are talking about Transparent Color systems.

The red color

Consistent Red elements of a particular system are hard to define. The first thing to know when trying to set the red part of a system (or to evaluate the red component of a system) is to know what's the particular element of the setting which is currently simulate and how this element must be and behave. For most setting elements, the creator simply doesn't know.

A common assumption is to considered the setting as an image of our reality. This assumption is good most of the time except that there is also many parts, not always explicitly state as so, that differs from our reality laws. For example, we want our characters to be greater than normal, to have special powers, to not die easily and we have this special race which are incredibly big or small and which could not have survived within our physical laws or those spaceships that can warp the universe using an improbability motor. For all of this, as well as for avoiding useless complication, we normally don't want our system to be an exact simulation of *our* reality. We want it to allow some break with our normal physical laws and history, without affecting too much the overall credibility of the setting. Players are usually ready and even interest to accept such break with the normal rules of our daily reality, in exchange of some fantasy.

But here an important word was said: *credibility*. What's make a system credible? A credible system act in a predictable way when you ask it to simulate different setting aspects. If the setting say that an experienced fighter will be able to resist easily and with no danger to a peasant, the simulation should represent this by giving greatest chance to the fighter to win against the peasant. How much exactly is a matter of perception, but here again, another important word was said: the system must be *predictable*. With a predictable system, the creator or the GM can adjust the representation of the setting elements in the system, the way she expects them to react, which is certainly the best way to have a credible system.

Another important factor for reddish system is about limits. The setting often put some limits on the capacity of many of its elements. A fighter can't lift more than a certain amount of weight and magic power couldn't change the past for example. Those limits must be represent in the system. Although those limits can often be directly imposed by the mechanics used in the system, another way is to use a limitless mechanics and to let arbitration imposed such limits. This make things more complex a little but act like a chameleon mechanism to the system. So the creator or the GM don't have to change the core mechanics when the setting change, they just have to change the few rules that set the limits.

Having a limitless mechanism also give another degree of freedom to the system. Limitless mechanism act on a more broader range of settings by definition and so have a better Tenacity. Finding what's the limits of a system is a very good way to evaluate both the red component of a system, as well as its Tenacity. A system that have some setting elements out of its limits doesn't have a bright red color, and a system that have limits very close to the setting elements usually doesn't have a good Tenacity neither. System that can move its limits however without big modification also have a good Chameleon freedom.

Finally, an important thing to understand about this color it is that's not because you put more details that your system became necessary redder! Details often just add to the complexity, without giving any real brightness to the red components. To add brightness to the red color, details must really sustain a dissimilar assets to the setting elements linked to it and this asset must be justified in the setting.

The green color

The green color is probably the color which is the more affected by the visibility. Putting a green element on a low visibility aspect of your setting will probably not affect your gaming experience very much, but putting a bright green element on a very visible system can totally change it.

The green color is the only one who addresses only system or meta-gaming aspects. The setting isn't touch by it, at least not directly. Its importance however is very high if you want to let the setting take some place since a dark green system often take all the place in the game, taking away all the other elements. The Green color help a lot to not let the system impede into the role playing experience.

There is many way to make a system greener, some of them being quite opposed to each other and more a

question of balance. For example, a complex formula can be replace by a chart for a better access, but too many charts is slower than using a generic formula. There is also a learning curves that can change the color aspect: a system can have a very stiff learning curve (making it very dark green for a beginner) but once learn and some practice add to it, becoming very quick and easy to use (bright green). The best is to have both aspect together (smooth learning curve and fast resolution time) but it's all a question of tradeoff.

Using character classes, not only make the system greener, but can also help to aboard the setting. Using derived attributes instead of summing them in play can also help, as long as they aren't too much. This method is especially useful for high visible elements of the system. There can be many gaming help also like a good index, summary charts for most visible elements, especially on the player character sheet or the game master screen. Multiple rolls or too much dice can also slow down the game, as well as too complex formula or too many factors. Try to combine them when needed in just one roll and avoid adding unnecessary randomness. For example, use the success margin of a `to hit` roll instead of rolling another dice to determine the level of damage can help if the margin of success is easy to determine, or in an opposition roll, let only one opponent roll instead of both: the result will automatically determine the result of the other guy.[6]

The blue color

This color is clearly the more difficult to talk about. Blue is the less tenacious color and is mostly based on the setting elements. More over, contrarily to the red color, there is no clear common ground of setting elements that we can consider to be desirable for most settings. So, the only way we can speak about the blue color, is by speaking about genre.

Genre is a very vague term defined as a specific kind of artistic work. For our concern, we will define genre as a set of different setting elements share between many settings. Genre can overlap between them and a setting can have different genres at the same time. The most common elements addressed by rules are the following:

Risk factor
  The risk factor is a common concern of many genres. It measures the importance or consequence of decision by the players. A very risky setting will put players on their toes, carefully thinking about any decision. Rare and scarce resources (like hit points), with very hard actions difficulties and possibility of botches, increase this aspect. High risk factor is popular in the horror genre and some very *realistic* setting.

  On the other side, a low risk setting will encourage players to try different things and take risk. Generous resources or a resolution mechanism allowing impossible actions to be succeed (like destiny points) are different ways to achieve such goals. Low risk factor is especially popular in the so-called epic and heroic genres.

  It's not very clear how Fortune mechanics (mechanics primarily based on random elements) can affect this aspect. A very high fortune system may allow incredible success but also incredible fumbles. So, how much an open-ended dice affect this factor is not clear at all and can vary.

We are heroes
  Heroism is for characters that are kind of chosen by their Gods. They aren't allow to fail easily nor even to die. For this, they often have a kind of Destiny points that can be spent at critical moment to avoid a fatal hit or succeed a critical action. They can also be more powerful than most of the other characters, either by greater statistics, special gifts, or a systematic advantages against their opponents. Sometime, this systematic advantage is replace by a systematic disadvantage towards minor NPC, which are treated as a single opponent, how many they are. Those advantages aren't necessary reserved for PC. Important NPC have often similar advantages and so, constitute greater adversaries for the PC.

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[6]This is good only if that make sense, like in a strength test. If they are some chance for both opponents to fail simultaneously, just allowing this kind of rolls could tarnish the red color of your system.

This aspect is part of many genres, including heroism, action movies, super heroes and often space opera. They are often link with a low risk factor, although not necessary.

Temptation of the Dark Side
Temptation is an important part of many fantasy settings (either medieval, modern or space opera) and represent the struggle of passion where a character lost control upon herself. It is usually represented with a counter that count down (sometime without even the possibility of reversal) and make the player lost the control over her character. Each time the player do something wrong or are in contact with a temptation, the counter can decrease (may be after a failed test) and the PC must check if it doesn't fall in the dark side (often represent by some frenzy). The check usually represent just a temporary lost of control, but when the counter goes down to zero, the PC is, must of the time, considered a NPC, and the player must create a new one.

Temptation can also take another aspect of opposite values (like Chastity and Lust) going from one side to the other. Each test failed reinforce the Value on the victorious side, making each new test either more harder to resist. It's usually very hard to change the balance of the pairs of value otherwise.

This list is very partial and mostly presented here as examples of blue color rules. A more complete study of genres and their support in system elements are expected in a future project, not yet plan however. One important thing to note is that the system is not the more important part into getting the right atmosphere to a setting. The GM style and the setting is often far more important. The blue color is more about how a system can support such atmospheres but doesn't necessary create neither guarantee it at all.

Meta-gaming elements

Meta-gaming elements can be as important to a role-playing game as the system or even the setting. Why not rules can used them as well to encourage a better role playing experience? In the color model, system that encourage some positive meta-gaming elements are considered bluer. This is mostly because positive meta-gaming elements often also encourage to create a better atmosphere for game play.

Although citing every way a system can encourage the usage of positive meta-gaming elements to sustain a good playing experience is not the scope of this article, a good example how this can be achieve is by rewarding (either in direct action bonus, or gain of some resources like Destiny points or XP) for good role playing attitude (good description, character sacrifice that increase the drama, etc.), extra work on the character background, or log keeping for the group, etc. Some games even have very specific mechanism for meta-gaming, like Marvel Super Heroes™'s Humor Points. One could even encourage other players to participate into this kind of rewarding by allowing them a certain amount of points to give each session to other players.

GDS-derived model and colors

The GDS model, also known as Threefold model[7] was created to address the concern that many role players have diverse interests in role playing games. How those aspects are exactly defined or even named vary between people, and how those aspects must be addressed by role playing games vary even more, to the point of complete contradiction between different opinions. However, I will try to see how system can sustain the different interests expressed in the models, using the colors. It's clear that, by definition, all colors are important, but we will try to see why they are, and how much, relatively to each other, for each group of interests.

Gamist interests

Gamist interests can be seen as mainly defined by challenge and fair play. Importance is set to being able to have relatively large set of options to influence the game (and make the challenges interesting), to be able to have good knowledge of the situation for fair decision, and some measurable goals must be set to determine a condition of victory.

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[7] http://www.darkshire.org/~jhkim/rpg/styles/faq_v1/faq1.art

This is probably the most difficult aspect to determine the right color, but will we go for the Red color. This color is important to provide a good environment for fair play. If the rules are incoherent, your players will begin to play by the rules instead of letting them go in character, to have some chance of winning. You'll recognized this by sentences like: "I do this since it gives me a greater bonus" instead of "I do this since it puts me in a better position."

The Green color is also important, as long as it doesn't remove dissimilarities of assets. The player should be able to distinguish between different options here and there and their decision shouldn't be simply based on pure luck. Green rules can still lead to a very good set of options with a lot of complexity in it. Think about games like chess. Also, green rules allow someone to more quickly be efficient, so the mental abilities of the players become more important than it's knowledge of the game rules, although this can also be taken as an element of competition that please to some gamist oriented players.

Finally, the Blue color can sometime help to give players some goals to reach. This shouldn't be neglected although, sometime, the goal of gamers can be in a more meta-gaming level.

Dramatist interests

Dramatists interests are mostly toward the story line. They tend to consider a good story as the most important part of role playing, with interests directed more toward a good drama then victory or even verisimilitude. The system must give them greater control upon the events with, if possible, mechanics to create good climax and interesting endings, while sustaining the right atmosphere for the game.

The must important color of dramatist is Blue. A blue system have a lot of elements to favor climax and atmosphere. The Green color is also important since it usually give a little more control in the hand of the GM, and doesn't impede too much into the flow of the game. Finally, the Red have still an important part to play to enforce some verisimilitude of the story, as long as this doesn't contradict with the goals of the story.

Simulationnist interests

Simulationist interests are also called Explorer interests and I tend to prefer this latter term. Explorers are mostly interest in discovering new setting elements, but also, to a minor extend, some elements of the system or even meta-gaming aspects (like how players react to RPG situations).

For Simulationists, the Red color is the more important. An inconsistent system will invalidate the exploration experience, making the situation sound not very believable. The Blue color is also very interesting for this kind of interests, allowing them to better immerse into the game world, sustaining the experience by itself. Finally, the Green color is seen more like a default necessity, the system must be fluid enough to not impede into the exploration experience.

Summary

So, Gamers are mostly Orange (Red, Green and Blue), Dramatists are Turquoise (Blue, Green, Red), and Simulationists are Purple (Red, Blue and Green). This is very near the Clear-Sight Yellow, Dramatic Cyan and Expressive Magenta of the the section called "The color model", seen before. Those colors are called complementary of each other and make me think that the colors model is complementary to the threefold model about role playing games and so shouldn't be ignored when designing game. It make in contrast the fact that's different kind of interests can be addressed by the same system, although some tradeoffs are often necessary.

A SCARy history

The story of the color model begin with a heat discussion between me and Cédric Lemaire on the createurs-jdr mailing list. The thread subject was about what's a better system, or what's can be ameliorate in a given system, regardless of personal taste. We quickly find that we were talking about different things using the same words, and so that we need to find a little bit of vocabulary. After some work, we find up four qualities upon which we

agree that can only be an asset for any role playing games, with particular definition for each, since some of this qualities aren't very well defined when applied to role playing game.

Months passed and I began to follow the English RPG forums on Game Design. I found a lot of new theories about RPG but nothing like the four qualities we have ended up on the French mailing list. I decide to make an attempt to translate them and call this system SCARF, including a new fifth quality to it, the Fun factor. SCARF stand for Simplicity, Coherence, Adaptability, Realism and Fun, and the definition were very conceived (for example, a better definition of Realism should have been Consistency between setting and system). The awaited flame war that follow were bigger than I was expecting and I was a bit surprise. On a somewhat impulsive reply where it seems that all this mess where mostly a question of vocabulary, I ended up to suggest that the SCARy Qualities were replace with colors. I set Green for Simplicity, Blue for Coherence, and Red for Realism. Adaptability was declared to be Tenacity.

It ended up that I really like the system. True, this were more opaque than the precedent, but the color metaphor bring with it many different aspects, especially the some undiscover one, like the fact that Adaptability wasn't truly a Quality by itself, but a Quality over the other Qualities. I promise to get back with a more develop version of the SCAR color model and return to the createurs-jdr mailing list. One post and a few replies later, I quickly added new aspects to the Tenacity model, dividing it between Tenacity, Chameleon and Transparency. A remark about Légendes™ as a bright green system once you pass the creation rules made me think about the Visibility of a rule. Some more thoughts, and reading from the Forge make me push Transparency was move from the colors freedom to the Visibility section and finally to Brightness section (which was mostly create the same day, with the Darkness Spell metaphor add to it.).

That's all for the moment folks, but I think the color model doesn't have entirely reveal itself and can still reserved some good surprises. More works on it is to come soon, I hope.

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