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A QUICK GUIDE TO THE ANATOMY OF A CLICHÉ

This guide is intended as a supplement to S. John Ross's "Anatomy of a Cliché" from his *Risus Companion*, which is available to members of the International Order of Risus

(<http://www222.pair.com/sjohn/risus.htm>) for all things Risus!)

Personal History

Sometimes adding a variation on "former" can add a level of depth to an otherwise ho-hum cliché.

- Former Elvis Impersonator
- Defrocked Witch-doctor
- Retired Paperboy

Degree of Dedication

The numbers don't tell the whole story. Is your character committed to his chosen cliché, or does his enthusiasm lag sometimes? Is his talent natural-born, or does it come with great difficulty?

- Part-time Pacifist
- Struggling Brain Surgeon
- Assistant Assassin
- Fanatical Frothing-Mouthed Fundamentalist

Social Class or Financial Means

Though Risus does not have rules for money or buying stuff, you can tell a lot about the financial means of a character by his clichés.

- Generous and Popular Vagrant
- Stingy, Inhospitable Philanthropist
- Penniless Tycoon
- Imprisoned Billionaire Homemaking Guru

Gender

Many clichés imply a gender (like Professional Football Player or Housewife), but gender-based clichés are quite fun to play with.

- Female Donald Trump
- Aging Male Prostitute With A Heart Of Gold
- Cross-Dressing Paladin
- Blacksmith Babe

Demeanor

Attitude is often everything.

- Jolly, Happy Berserker
- Affable, People-Friendly Assassin
- Careful, Timid Demolition Derby Driver

Ham-Handed Reference

These would be references to actors, actresses, fictional characters, and genre conventions.

- William Shatner
- Rhyming Lawyer
- Gomer Pyle
- Martha Stewart
- Red-Shirt (from *Star Trek*)
- Used Chariot Salesman
- A “brick”, “flyer”, “energy blaster”, or other comic book stereotype.

Goals

Your character’s personal goals determine how his skills develop, and distinguish them from characters with similar Cliches

- Eager Young Performer Lookin’ for Nookie
- Dedicated AcTOR In Search Of Eternal Fame
- Bitter Mad Scientist Out To Have His Revenge On Everybody Who Laughed At Him

Self-Image

How does your character see himself? Do others see him the same way?

- Self-Loathing Accountant
- “The Best Pickle Salesman In The Whole Darn Faire!”
- Grieving, Suicidal Lawyer

Subplots and Relationships

Cliches can involve other people and how they interact with the character.

- Handsome Young Swordsman Working His Way Through The Local Girls
- Nervous Ex-Gangster On The Run From The Mob
- Plastic Surgeon to the Stars

Problems

Some see them as problems; others see them as opportunities.

- Enormously Obese Contortionist
- Stuttering Country-Western Singer
- Blind Fighter Pilot