

## *What is Role Playing?*

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*Every culture on the face of the earth has had games and every generation of humanity its unique forms of entertainment. Our civilization is no different. We have sports games, board games galore, card games, and the centuries of gambling games that are still with us. One of the more creative types of games recently developed is the role-playing game, or RPG. RPGs cover every conceivable genre, time period and location. While each of the various games has complicated rules involving how actions are to be performed, the real mainstay of RPGs is the assumption of a role (other than yourself). This is one of the main features of role-playing games, the distinction between player and character. The player is the person and the character is the fictional person in a fictional world.*

*To the uninformed, it is very hard to describe a role-playing game. Most people understand games. Games have winners, but the very nature of the role-playing game makes it impossible to win. There cannot be a winner because role-playing games are not a competition. It is not a race that ends with the first to cross the finish line, nor are there points that accumulate to determine the victor when the game ends. It is a game of pretend. Of make-believe. The only individuals who could even possibly be considered the winner are the players who play well. The old adage of "It doesn't matter whether or not you win or lose, but how you play the game" is the rule of winner determination in role-playing games.*

*In the introduction of every role-playing game is a notice of the impossibility of winners in a role-playing game, but there are still those who play the game to win. These are the players who record their successes by the amount of numbers they can rack up on a character sheet. They believe strongly that he who dies with the most toys wins. The other people in the game, whether fellow players or individuals designed and run by the GM, are only the means to an end. Opponents are there to provide experience points and treasure items. They manipulate game mechanics and search for loopholes to make themselves even more powerful. These sad souls are frustrated with the role-players who, they feel, slow the game with wordy explanations of simple game mechanics.*

*These "power gamers" play as one might play a board game. They often follow the logic of "Kick in the door, kill the monster, and on to the next door." These gamers do not play any role. They just move their characters on the playing board collecting items. They are just waiting until they pass the mythical GO to collect what ever the rules say they should receive. This same mentality assumes that once objects are reached, one has only to extend a palm face up to receive a reward. These individuals cannot wait to meet the some grand vizier, as he is the one to ask for the powerful magic items. Never mind that the situation might not warrant such requests. Unfortunately, these non-role-players believe that every event within a game has some reward associated with it.*

*Sadder still are the gamers who play their characters as they might play themselves should they have access to the fantastic powers and abilities that abound within games.*

*They act as if they were suddenly able to kill with impunity, fling lightning bolts at their enemies, and steal with the skills of a master cat burglar. These gamers have no real role. There is no difference between who they are and who their characters are. Game after game, each of their characters has the same personality regardless of abilities, race, or genre. Rarely do these characters even have names, being called whatever the player's name is!*

*Role-players, good role-players, understand that the character they create is not a human raised in the modern world. It is someone else, someone who has had different social factors to shape their psychological makeup. It is very difficult to imagine how one might behave if one had centuries to live, could smell gold, or was raised in the lap of fourteenth century luxury. Therein lies the true test of a good role-player and the reason for participating in the role-playing game instead of playing chess. Role-playing is akin to improvisational acting. It is about people becoming someone other than themselves, but with no script, just motivational cues. People who have had different factors shaping their lives, affecting their social views and their outlook on life in general.*

*Some role-players view their characters as some third person puppet. They speak as if they were some omnipotent god controlling their characters. "James wants to stand watch first." No one sounds like that. A real person would say, "I'll take the first watch." Good role-players note that real people do not walk into the Sears, look at the salesperson and say, "I want to ask the salesperson about buying a lamp." Good role-playing is acting, or trying to act, just as that person would. It is talking as a real person would, even if the person you are interacting with is a lowly merchant who is never dealt with again. The good gamer plays out negotiations with others, speaking just like a person in real life, and such acting is major part of any quality role-playing games.*

*Like a good writer, the true goal of a quality role-player is to create the feel that characters are more than scraps of paper with a series of numbers upon them. We've all seen those great role players who worked to avoid the use of game mechanic terms. Even the players who enjoy number crunching often take notice of players who worked hard to find real life expressions to state mechanical terms. "I have 1 hit point left," became, "I've been severely wounded. I'm coughing up blood, and I've lost the feeling in my toes." "Faster than a speeding bullet," may be a fine way to describe a superhero, but not a fantasy character in a world that has yet to develop gunpowder. This is the heart and soul of the role-playing. This is the reason for the game, not the how high you can rack up statistics.*

*The best role-players work to make their characters seem alive. After a gaming session, you get the feeling as somebody else was in the room with you. They seem like another person entirely. It is like some otherworldly presence that invades the room during your gaming session. You may walk away angry that your dark lord was turned in by the player running the chivalrous knight, but you should respect when the knight refuses to take part in an adventure because the line between right and wrong was unclear. He has sacrificed for the sake of the role, which is the name of game.*