

Role-playing game

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A **role-playing game (RPG)** is a broad family of games in which players assume the roles of characters, or take control of one or more avatars, in a fictional setting. Actions taken within the game succeed or fail according to a formal system of rules and guidelines.^[1]

The original form, sometimes called the *pen-and-paper* RPG, is conducted through speech. In live action role-playing games (LARP), players perform their characters' physical actions.^[2] In both of these forms, an arranger called a game master (GM) usually decides on the rules and setting to be used and acts as referee, while each other player plays the role of a single character.^[3] At the heart of these formats is in-character participation in a collaborative narrative. Several varieties of RPG exist in electronic media, including text-based MUDs and their graphics-based successors, massively multiplayer online role-playing games.

Role-playing games also include offline role-playing video games in which players control a character or party of characters who undertake quests, and whose capabilities advance using statistical mechanics. These games often share settings and rules with pen-and-paper RPGs, but do not enable the same collaborative storytelling.^{[4][5]}

Despite this variety of forms, some game forms such as trading card games and wargames that are related to role-playing games may not be included. Role-playing activity may sometimes be present in such games, but it is not the primary focus.^[6] The term is also sometimes used to describe roleplay simulation games and exercises used in teaching, training, and academic research.

Contents

- 1 Purpose
- 2 Varieties
 - 2.1 Pen and paper
 - 2.2 Live action
 - 2.3 Electronic media
 - 2.3.1 Single-player
 - 2.3.2 Multi-player
- 3 Gamemaster
- 4 See also
- 5 Notes
- 6 References
- 7 External links

Purpose

Main article: Role-playing game theory

Role playing games are fundamentally different from most other types of games in that they stress social interaction and collaboration, whereas board games, card games, and sports emphasize competition.^[7]

Both authors and major publishers of role-playing games consider them to be a form of interactive and collaborative storytelling.^{[8][9]} However, they are not considered true narratives like novels or films as there is no actual story within a role-playing game. Instead events, characters and narrative structure give a sense of a narrative experience.^[11] Like stories, role-playing games appeal because



Part of a series on:

Role-playing games

Types

- Role-playing game (pen and paper)
- Live action role-playing game
- Role-playing video game

Topics

- Campaign setting
- Character creation
- Gamemaster
- History of role-playing games
- Role-playing game system
- Role-playing game terms
 - Player character
 - Non-player character
- Role-playing game theory
 - GNS Theory
 - The Big Model
 - Threefold Model
- Statistics

Lists

- List of campaign settings
- List of Japanese RPGs by genre
- List of LARP groups
- List of RPG artists
- List of RPG designers
- List of RPG publishers
- List of RPGs by name
- List of RPGs by genre
- Timeline of RPGs

More info

- Portal:Role-playing games
- WikiProject Role-playing games

they engage the imagination. Interactivity is the crucial difference between role-playing games and traditional fiction. Whereas a viewer of a television show is a passive observer, a player at a role-playing game makes choices that affect the story.^[12] Such role-playing games extend an older tradition of storytelling games where a small party of friends collaborate to create a story.

While simple forms of role-playing exist in traditional children's games such as "cops and robbers" and "cowboys and Indians", role-playing games add a level of sophistication and persistence to this basic idea with the addition of numeric rule sets and the participation of a referee. Participants in a role-playing game will generate specific characters and an ongoing plot. A consistent system of rules and a more or less realistic campaign setting in games aids suspension of disbelief. The level of realism in games ranges from just enough internal consistency to set up a believable story or credible challenge up to full-blown simulations of real-world processes.

Varieties

Role-playing games are played in a wide variety of media ranging from the spoken pen-and-paper form, to physically acting out characters in LARP or playing characters virtually in digital media.^[13] There is also a great variety of systems of rules and game settings. Games that emphasize plot and character interaction over game mechanics and combat sometimes prefer the name storytelling game. These types of games tend to minimize or altogether eliminate the use of dice or other randomizing elements. Some games are played with characters created before the game by the GM, rather than those created by the players. This type of game is typically played at gaming conventions, or in standalone games that do not form part of a campaign.

Pen and paper

Main article: Role-playing game (pen and paper)

The game is conducted through speech in a small social gathering. The GM describes the game world and its inhabitants. The other players describe the intended actions of their characters, and the GM describes the outcomes.^[14] Some outcomes are determined by the game system, and some are chosen by the GM.^[15]

This is the format in which role-playing games were first popularized. The first commercially available RPG, *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D), was inspired by fantasy literature and the wargaming hobby and was published in 1974.^[16] D&D inspired the birth of a new industry of pen-and-paper role-playing games, with a growing number of games being published with diverse themes, rules, and playstyles.



A pen-and-paper RPG

This format is often referred to simply as a *role-playing game*. To distinguish this form of RPG from other formats, the retronyms *pen and paper role-playing game* or *tabletop role-playing game* are sometimes used, though neither pen and paper nor a table are strictly necessary.^[3]

Live action

Main article: Live action role-playing game

A LARP is played more like improvisational theatre.^[17] Participants act out their characters' actions instead of describing them, and the real environment is used to represent the imaginary setting of the game world.^[2] Players are often costumed as their characters and use appropriate props, and the venue may be decorated to resemble the fictional setting.^{[18][19]} Some live action role-playing games use rock-paper-scissors or comparison of attributes to resolve conflicts symbolically, while otherLARPs use physical combat with simulated arms such as airsoft guns or foam weapons.^[20]

LARPs vary in size from a handful of players to several thousand, and in duration from a couple of hours to several days.^{[21][22]} Because the number of players in a LARP is usually larger than in a tabletop role-playing game, and the players may be interacting in separate physical spaces, there is typically less of an emphasis on tightly maintaining a narrative or directly entertaining the players, and game sessions are often managed in a more distributed manner.^[23]



A fantasy LARP group

Electronic media

Pen-and-paper role-playing games have been translated into a variety of electronic formats.^[24] Some authors divide digital role-playing games into two intertwined groups: single player games using RPG-style mechanics, and multiplayer games incorporating social interaction.^{[25][26][27]}

Single-player

Main article: Role-playing video game

Single player role-playing video games form a loosely defined genre of computer and console games with origins in role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, on which they base much of their terminology, settings and game mechanics.^[25] This translation changes the experience of the game, providing a visual representation of the world and losing the feature of collaborative, interactive storytelling.^{[4][5]}

Multi-player

Main articles: Online text-based role-playing game, Massively multi-player online role-playing game, and Virtual tabletop

Online text-based role-playing games involve many players using some type of text-based interface and an Internet connection to play an RPG. Games played in a real-time way include MUDs (multi-user dungeons), MUSHes, and other varieties of MU*. Games played in a turn-based fashion include play-by-mail games and play-by-post games.

Massively multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs) combine the large-scale social interaction and persistent world of MUDs with graphic interfaces. As of 2004, most MMORPGs did not actively support role-playing. Where this is the case, experienced role-players can take advantage of the game's communication functions to do so. However, this method requires the active participation of other players to be successful.^[28]

Virtual tabletop software or Internet chat clients can be used for online play of what would otherwise be a traditional pen and paper RPG. Computer-assisted gaming can be used to add elements of computer gaming to in-person pen and paper role-playing, where computers are used for record-keeping and sometimes to resolve combat, while the participants generally make decisions concerning character interaction.

Gamemaster

Main article: Gamemaster

A common feature of many RPGs is the role of gamemaster, a participant who has special duties to present the fictional setting, arbitrate the results of character actions, and maintain the narrative flow.^[29] In pen-and-paper and live action RPGs the GM performs these duties in person. In video RPGs many of the functions of a GM are fulfilled by the game engine, however some multi-player video RPGs also allow for a participant to take on a GM role through a visual interface called a *GM toolkit*, albeit with abilities limited by the available technology.^{[30][31]}

See also

- Role-playing game terms
- Gaming conventions
- Timeline of role-playing games
- List of role-playing game artists
- List of designers of role-playing games
- List of publishers of role-playing games
- List of role-playing games by name
- List of role-playing games by genre
- List of campaign settings
- Polish role-playing games
- Japanese role-playing games

Notes



Dragon Quest, a single-player role-playing game.

1. ^ (Tychsen 2006:76) "The variety of role playing games makes it inherently challenging to provide a common definition. However, all forms of role playing games – be they PnP RPGs, CRPGs, MMORPGs or LARPs – share a group of characteristics, which makes them identifiable from other types of games: storytelling with rules, control of fictional characters, a fictitious reality, usually the presence of a game master (or game engine), and at least one player."
2. ^ ^{a b} (Tychsen et al. 2006:255) "LARPs can be viewed as forming a distinct category of RPG because of two unique features: (a) The players physically embody their characters, and (b) the game takes place in a physical frame. Embodiment means that the physical actions of the player are regarded as those of the character. Whereas in a RPG played by a group sitting around a table, players describe the actions of their characters (e.g., "I run to stand beside my friend")"
3. ^ ^{a b} Kim, John. ""Narrative" or "Tabletop" RPGs" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.darkshire.net/~jhkim/rpg/whatis/tabletop.html>) . <http://www.darkshire.net/~jhkim/rpg/whatis/tabletop.html>. Retrieved 2008-09-09.
4. ^ ^{a b} (Tychsen 2006:75) "PnP RPGs are an example of interactive narratives. The rules and fictional worlds that form the basis for these games function as a vessel for collaborative, interactive storytelling. This is possibly the most important feature of PnP RPGs, and one that CRPGs have yet to reproduce."
5. ^ ^{a b} (Copier 2005:5) "From a commercial perspective, digital offline games like Baldur's Gate (Bioware, 1998 onwards) are also considered RPGs. I would argue that these games don't necessarily encourage role-play because players cannot add their own information or discussion over the rules as in table-top, live-action and online role-playing. Therefore I would consider offline RPGs being adventure games (always having fixed rules and quantifiable outcomes) rather than role-playing games."
6. ^ (Heliö 2004) "In the family of role-playing games there are also a whole bunch of other game types and game-like activities that can be included or excluded, like the collectible card games (such as Magic: The Gathering) and board and strategy games (like Warhammer 40.000), or different forms of theatrical and larp-like combinations, such as fate-play. The action of role-playing is usually somehow present in these game forms, but the focus can be more either in the competitive nature of the game (MtG, Warhammer), or in the immersive performance (as in fate-play), than in role-playing itself."
7. ^ Rilstone, Andrew (1994). "Role-Playing Games: An Overview" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.rpg.net/oracle/essays/rpgoverview.html>) . RPGnet. <http://www.rpg.net/oracle/essays/rpgoverview.html>. Retrieved 2006-09-01.
8. ^ *Werewolf: The Apocalypse (2nd Edition)*. White Wolf. 1994. pp. Chapter 1. ISBN 1-56504-112-7. "Although Werewolf is a game, it is more concerned with storytelling than it is with winning. Werewolf is a tool enabling you to become involved in tales of passion and glory, and to help tell those stories yourself."
9. ^ *GURPS (4th Edition)*. Steve Jackson Games. 2004. pp. Chapter 1. "But roleplaying is not purely educational. It's also one of the most creative possible entertainments. Most entertainment is passive: the audience just sits and watches, without taking part in the creative process. In roleplaying, the "audience" joins in the creation. The GM is the chief storyteller, but the players are responsible for portraying their characters. If they want something to happen in the story, they make it happen, because they're in the story."
10. ^ *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook (4th Edition)*. Wizards of the Coast. June 6, 2008. pp. Chapter 1. ISBN 0-7869-4867-1.
11. ^ (Heliö 2004) "Still, we must note that there is no actual story in the game of the role-playing game, though there are events, characters and structures of narrativity giving the players the basis for interpreting it as a narrative. We have many partially open structures that we may fulfil with our imagination during the course of the game – within its limitations. We also have the ability to follow different kinds of narrative premises and structures as well as imitate them for ourselves to create more authentic and suitable narrative experiences. We have the 'narrative desire' to make pieces we interpret to relate to each other fit in, to construct the plot from recurring and parallel elements."
12. ^ Waskul, Dennis; Lust, Matt (2004). "Role-Playing and Playing Roles: The Person, Player, and Persona in Fantasy Role-Playing" (https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.colorado.edu/ibs/pb/thornberry/socy5031/pdfs/waskul_lust_role_playing.pdf) . *Caliber* 27 (3): 333–356. doi:10.1525/si.2004.27.3.333 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://dx.doi.org/10.1525%2Fsi.2004.27.3.333>) . http://www.colorado.edu/ibs/pb/thornberry/socy5031/pdfs/waskul_lust_role_playing.pdf. Retrieved 2008-12-23.
13. ^ Tychsen, Anders; Newman, Ken; Brölund, Thea; Hitchens, Michael (2007). "Cross-format analysis of the gaming experience in multi-player role-playing games" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.digra.org:8080/Plone/dl/db/07311.39029.pdf>) (PDF). Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference: Situated Play. Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA). <http://www.digra.org:8080/Plone/dl/db/07311.39029.pdf>. Retrieved 2010-01-01. "The Role-Playing Game (RPG) is one of the major genres of games, and has proven an extremely portable concept - from the physically embodied live action and tabletop formats to the various digital, mobile and even enhanced and augmented reality formats."
14. ^ (Tychsen 2006:77) "In PnP RPGs, the general game process consists of information-feedback cycles between the players and the GM, or internally within the group."
15. ^ (Tychsen 2006:78–79) "The GM assumes a variety of responsibilities in PnP RPGs, depending on the playing style used, however, these normally include facilitation of game flow and game story, providing environmental content of the fictional reality, as well as administrating rules and arbitrating conflicts. ... In RPGs, the rules specify a great deal more than how pieces are moved on a game board. Because these games are focused on player characters, the rules are designed to govern the nature of these story protagonists and the fictional reality they act in. ... Note that the rules systems in PnP RPGs can be modified or ignored on the fly by the GM or players if so desired."
16. ^ (Copier 2005:3) "...fantasy role-playing as a commercial product was developed in the 1970s as Dungeons and Dragons (D&D, 1974) by Gary Gygax and Dave Anderson. The game was based on a combination of their interests in table-top wargaming and literary fantasy."
17. ^ Kilgallon, John; Sandy Antunes, Mike Young (2001). *Rules to Live by: A Live Action Roleplaying Conflict Resolution System*. Interactivities Ink. p. 1. ISBN 0-9708356-04. "A live action roleplaying game is a cross between a traditional 'tabletop' roleplaying game and improvisational theatre."
18. ^ Falk, Jennica; Davenport, Glorianna (2004). "Live Role-Playing Games: Implications for Pervasive Gaming" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://springerlink.com/content/up8k3p2xywdf49ag/?p=c2914626bfa243b299327f78722deb90&pi=1>) (PDF). *Entertainment Computing – ICEC 2004. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*. **3166**. Springer Berlin / Heidelberg. pp. 131.

ISBN 978-3-540-22947-6.

<http://springerlink.com/content/up8k3p2xywdf49ag/?p=c2914626bfa243b299327f78722deb90&pi=1>. Retrieved 2008-

10-28. "The LRP player, like a stage actor, is a person who undergoes a transformation into a character. The character's costume and accessories, or kit, aids this transformation ... Physical structures may be used as game locations, and sometimes even purposely constructed to enhance the game world ... Players frequently use physical artifacts as props and tools in their role-play, primarily to back up their character roles."

19. ^ (Heliö 2004) "Naturally, an off-game object does not actually transform into the object it is imagined as being in-game: for instance, if an airplane in the sky becomes a dragon in some larpers' imaginations, it does not actually turn into a dragon – and even the players do not actually think so. The group of players have a common contract stating how to behave in the situation, because they willingly share the game's make-believe world. In order to sustain the agreed immersion, the 'dragon's' airplaneness' should not in any case be directly voiced aloud."
20. ^ Young, Mike (Editor) (2003). *The Book of LARP*. Interactivities Ink. p. 7-8. ISBN 0-9708356-8-X. ""Live combat... requires the players' abilities to perform an action. You want to hit someone with a sword? You have to actually hit the player with a prop representing a sword, usually a padded weapon. ... Simulated combat is more abstract. It uses an external method that does not rely on player ability. For example, if you want to hit the other person with a sword, you may have to make a rock-paper-scissors challenge."
21. ^ Widing, Gabriel (2008). "We Lost Our World and Made New Ones: Live Role-Playing in Modern Times". in Markus Montola, Jaakko Stenros. *Playground Worlds*. Ropecon ry. ISBN 978-952-92-3579-7. "...the participants sustain these temporary worlds for a few hours or several days"
22. ^ (Tychsen et al. 2006:258) "Games range in size from a handful to more than 4,000 players"
23. ^ (Tychsen et al. 2005:218) "[The LARP GM is] forced to let go of the game and let it take on a life of its own outside his or her control. While based on similar principles, the requirements [are] therefore very different in practice from GMs in PnP RPGs... The GM is generally, unless the LARP is small in terms of number of participants, *not* responsible for keeping the narrative flow. The GM can however oversee the progress of the game and help or influence where needed... Establishing a hierarchy of GMs and NPCs to monitor the game and ensure everyone is entertained and activated within the shared game space is a typical way of controlling large fantasy LARPs. This structure is usually established before the game commences."
24. ^ (Tychsen 2006:75) "A major source of inspiration of computer games of all genres is role playing games. Being of a somewhat similar age as computer games, Pen and Paper Role Playing Games (PnP RPGs), a specialized form of table-top games (TTGs) involving multiple participants interacting in a fictional world, have influenced not only the Computer Role Playing Game (CRPG) genre [6], but virtually all types of computer games..."
25. ^ ^a ^b Dungeons and desktops: the history of computer role-playing games (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://books.google.id=IMXu61GbTqMC>) By Matt Barton
26. ^ Yee, N. (2006). The Demographics, Motivations and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively-Multiuser Online Graphical Environments. *PRESENCE: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 15, 309-329.
27. ^ (Tychsen 2005:218) "CRPGs can be separated into single- and multiplayer categories..."
28. ^ (Heliö 2004) "Even if a game does not support active role-playing, as most of the massive multi-player online role-playing games fail to do (Dark Age of Camelot and others), experienced role-players may adopt the mindset and take advantage of the game's communication functionalities, and start to role-play. This, however, requires the willing support or at least acceptance of the other players – any one of us can act like a prince, but if the others won't play along, it does not constitute role-playing."
29. ^ (Tychsen et al. 2005:215-216) "The areas for which a GM can be responsible, regardless of the game platform (PnP RPG, LARP, CRPG or MMOG), vary not only internally in games from each platform but also across platforms. A GM in a MMOG generally has different responsibilities than a GM in a PnP RPG. These differences can be related to a limited number of variables, such as the media of expression. The full range of possible responsibilities of GMs can be subdivided into the following five categories, which also cover the functions of automated storytelling engines: [Narrative flow, Rules, Engagement, Environment, Virtual world:]"
30. ^ (Tychsen et al. 2006:255) "In a computer RPG, the role of the GM is taken on (with varying degrees of success) by software."
31. ^ (Tychsen et al. 2005:218) "CRPGs can be separated into ... those few who have incorporated a GM toolkit instead of a fully automated storytelling engine. ... In PnP RPGs and LARPs all lines of normal human communication are available: Speech, Emotion and Body Language (Figure 3). In CRPGs and MMOGs, they become narrowed down due to technical limitations, albeit with the added feature of Scripting as a means of communications. Additionally, contemporary game engines do not allow for on-the-fly updating of the game world and generation of new content in reaction to the actions of the player-controlled avatars (or characters in PnP RPG terminology)."

References

- Copier, Marinka (2005). "Connecting Worlds. Fantasy Role-Playing Games, Ritual Acts and the Magic Circle" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.digra.org/dl/db/06278.50594.pdf>) (PDF). Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views--Worlds in Play. Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA). <http://www.digra.org/dl/db/06278.50594.pdf>. Retrieved 2009-04-26.
- Heliö, Setu (2004). "Role-Playing: A Narrative Experience and a Mindset" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.ropecon.fi/brap/ch6.pdf>) . *Beyond role and play* (PDF). Solmukohta. ISBN 952-91-6843-8. <http://www.ropecon.fi/brap/ch6.pdf>. Retrieved 2009-01-09.
- Tychsen, Anders; Hitchens, Michael; Brolund, Thea; Kavakli, Manolya (2005). "The Game Master" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1109180.1109214>) . The Second Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment. Creativity and Cognition Studios Press. pp. 218. <http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1109180.1109214>. Retrieved 2008-12-03.
- Tychsen, Anders (2006), "Role Playing Games – Comparative Analysis Across Two Media Platforms" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1231906>) , Proceedings of the 3rd Australasian conference on Interactive entertainment, Australia, pp. 75-82, <http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1231906>

- Tychsen, Anders; Hitchens, Michael; Brolund, Thea; Kavakli, Manolya (July 2006). "Live Action Role-Playing Games: Control, Communication, Storytelling, and MMORPG Similarities" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://gac.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1/3/252>) . *Games and Culture* (Sage Publications) **1** (3): 252–275. doi:10.1177/1555412006290445 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://dx.doi.org/10.1177%2F1555412006290445>) . <http://gac.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1/3/252>. Retrieved 2007-11-04.

External links

- Role-playing game (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.dmoz.org/Games/Roleplaying/>) at the Open Directory Project
- John H. Kim's Role Playing Game Page (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.darkshire.net/~jhkim/rpg>) - Encyclopedia of role-playing games and companies
- Pen & Paper (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://www.pen-paper.net/rpgdb.php>) - RPG Database
- RPG.Net (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://rpg.net/>) - RPG Community and database
- RPG Geekdō (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100220021543/http://rpg.geekdo.com/>) - RPG Community and Database

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role-playing_game"

Categories: Role-playing games | Role-playing

- This page was last modified on 18 February 2010 at 03:23.
 - Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. See Terms of Use for details.
- Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.