

## **A definition for Role Playing Games**

A Role Playing Game is an entertainment.

It is a game where players act as characters in a story, an adventure, while another person, the “game master”, serves as referee and director of the story.

This is mainly a game of dialog, where game mechanics and numbers describe the abilities and skills of characters, allowing the resolution of characters' actions during the course of the story.

One important thing to remember : there is no “winner” at the end of a role playing game. The game isn't so much about competition as it is about survival and pure wits while building a story in concert. The goal for players, beside enjoying the story they create with the game master, is to reach whatever goals they determine for their characters in the story.

This is a game of imagination. Like when you are reading a novel, you imagine what is going on in the story as it is told by you and your partners in the game, game master and players. Like in movies, you try to play your characters according to the personality and goals you decided for him or her prior to the game. This is “the role”.

Where is “the game”, then? The game is to solve situations, enigmas and other difficulties the characters will be confronted to. The game master is the only one knowing all the difficulties before they occur in the game. Thus, Role Playing involves suspense for the players, just as if they were the heroes of the story wondering and discovering what's going on in the world revolving around them.

A typical game session involves mysterious characters, problems solved via investigation, role playing or action. It is like an episode of a TV series in many ways, but where neither the players nor the game master know the end.

### **What do I need to play?**

**Game Rules:** the game master at least should have a copy of the rules. These are usually presented in the form of books or boxed sets sold for prices between \$25 and \$60, US, but one may also find some free games available for download on the world wide web. The themes and subjects of role playing games are extremely varied. It can be Victorian horror stories in the style of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, space opera like the *Star Wars* movies, high fantasy similar to *The Lord of the Rings*, and so on and so forth.

**Players:** beside yourself, you will need three to five players for a role playing game session. Tell them that you play a role playing game, not a board game or

murder party or anything like this. They don't need to put on costumes nor make-up. It is preferable that the one proposing the game takes charge of it by being the game master. If it isn't you, however, make sure the game master has a copy of the rules to read at least one week prior to the game.

**A scenario/module:** many role playing games propose ready-to-play scenarios (also called “modules”) as supplements to the rulebook. You might want to pick up one of these for your first game, if only as a model for your first own creation.

**Dice:** Most role playing games use different types of dice, including the standard six-sided die. Four, six, eight, ten, twelve and twenty-sided dice usually compose the entire “arsenal” of a roleplayer.

**A game master's screen:** again, many role playing games propose these for sale as supplements to the original rulebook. You may also make your own from scratch, using cardboard and photocopies of art and game mechanics and putting it together with tape or something similar.

**Miniatures:** you can use whatever you want to represent your characters on maps – chess pawns, erasers, tokens, or crosses on the paper, it will do perfectly. Of course, buying and painting actual 25 mm miniatures may be a lot of fun and more pleasing for the eyes and the game.

**A place:** you will need at least a room with a table and enough chairs for everyone. While role playing games are usually quiet, there might be a lot of excitement at times, so avoid rooms aside of people sleeping and the like.

**Pencils, erasers and paper:** you will probably need to write some game information down during the game, like the names of the characters and places, the clues discovered by your character, and so on. You will also need to keep track of some of the game mechanics.

**Food and drinks:** a typical game session can last 4 to 6 hours. Make sure you bring some not-too-messy food and drinks that you can share with everyone. This will make the all thing far more enjoyable.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Role Playing Games are computer games, right?**

Not this sort of RPG. “Tabletop” Role Playing Games are played with friends including a game master and players. Since Role Playing Games, particularly *Dungeons and Dragons*, have been successful on the market of the 80's, they have been adapted to the booming computer business during the same period. Games like *Eye of the Beholder*, and later *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter*

*Nights* have each been great pioneers of computer roleplaying games (CRPG) each at different periods of their evolution. CRPG are thus inspired of “real” RPG (i.e. “tabletop” ones): the player controls one or more characters in the computer game, while the software acts as a “game master”, but the possibilities are more limited here. A computer does not respond to your imagination like a real flesh and blood individual can. If the software does not allow you to force your way through a door with your shoulder, there is no way you'll be able to do it. In a tabletop RPG, you may, if the game master agrees with what you are undertaking.

### **What about Live Action Role Playing?**

LARP, or Live Action Role Playing, is different than tabletop role playing. With LARP, you are “really” playing your character with costumes, make-up and props. This is usually taking place over a large area, and involves a lot more organization than regular tabletop roleplaying games.

### **I play Magic: The Gathering. It is a Roleplaying Game, isn't it?**

Though *Magic* has been developed by Wizards of the Coast, the same company publishing *Dungeons and Dragons*, the most popular Roleplaying Game of all time, it is not a role playing game itself, but a Trading Card Game (TCG). It is much more like a typical card game with winners and losers, and relies on supports like token and cards where tabletop RPG can take place in just your imagination, and involve no player having to “win” over another. RPG rarely use cards, to begin with. With TCG, the rules are much more precise and unbendable, like a board game, while tabletop RPG rules must be adaptable with most actions players can come up with spontaneously.

### **Are Role Playing Games family games?**

They can be easily. Role Playing Games are on the market for more than 30 years. As a result of these decades of gaming, players of RPG now range between 10 and 50 years old. Many families are known to enjoy role playing games with parents and children at the table. Many role playing games, like *Vampire: The Requiem*, use adult themes and references however, like pictorial violence and explicit sexual contents, but others are suited for family entertainment, like *Dungeons and Dragons*, for instance. With the supervision of a responsible adult, there is no reason why children couldn't enjoy role playing games safely.

### **What's the catch, if there are no winners?**

The “catch” is to create an enjoyable story together. It is to play situations one couldn't know “for real” without taking tremendous risks if they were even possible in real life. It is to entertain the players and game master, relax and simply have fun during an afternoon or an evening. It isn't to glorify the

supposed superiority of any player over another, or the players over anyone else, for that matter.

### **Role Playing Games, this is Dungeons and Dragons?**

*Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) is in fact one of many published role playing games. Literally hundreds of different roleplaying games do exist, covering dozens of different types of subjects, themes, moods and audiences. D&D was the first modern role playing game, however. It was published in 1974, written by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, and immediately met an immense commercial success. Since 1974, more than five hundred roleplaying games have been officially published, while hundreds of others have been written and distributed for free by fans and passionate people all over the world, in many different languages.

### **I have a Role Playing Game. Can I start playing this evening?**

Wow! Hold on there! A role playing game may seem simple to organize for players, but it requires more organization for a game master. You need one day at least to read the rulebook entirely and familiarize yourself with its principles and game universe. You should read and understand everything in there. Then, you'll need at least one or two more hours to read your first scenario. Unless you are on holidays, several days will pass between the moment you get your RPG and the moment you play your first game session.

### **How long does a game session last?**

Complex question that often makes newbies flee when they hear that it might last "years". Which isn't exactly true. In fact, to tell a single story, you will need between one and three sessions. A game session usually lasts between 4 and 6 hours. A good rhythm is to play a game session every week or two. It may seem long and/or intensive, but in fact the time flies by when you are involved in a good story. Now, several stories may or may not follow each other successively. When they do, and that they involve the same main characters played by the same players, it is called a Campaign. This is what may last years, if the gaming group chooses so.