

# How to RPG

## by Jason Campbell

*A Guide For Those New to D&D  
and Other Roleplaying Games*

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# Part one: How to Play Role Playing Games (aka RPGs)

## Why would you play RPGs? (what is an RPG?)

You play RPGs to have fun with your friends. This is the goal: to have fun. RPGs rely on players' creativity. You're creating as you play, and your creations might affect what your friends create, which in turns gives you more ideas to create other things.

An RPG is a game where you play as a character, in the way actors do on stage. Unlike in a board or card game, in which you make a decision based on what you would do to win the game, in a RPG you make decisions based on what you imagine your character would do, which may or may not be the same. In an RPG the goal of all the players (besides having fun) is to create an interesting story together.

There's no winner in an RPG. Characters can succeed in their goals, they can live or die, but at the end of the game session there's no winner declared among the players.

## **How do you play?**

In most RPGs one of the players assumes the role of the referee. Depending on the game, the referee is referred to as the Game Master, Dungeon Master, Keeper or other terms. Each of the other players plays the role of a single character in the story of the game. The referee interprets the rules as well as creating the scenario outside of the players' characters and playing the roles of all the other people and creatures in the world.

Most RPGs use dice (or cards, or other randomizers) to determine the results of the character's actions. The dice make the game exciting as the players and the referee don't know exactly how the story will unfold, as the results of many actions are determined only when the dice stop rolling.

# Part Two: but wait - there's more!

## What About the Rules?

There are many RPGs, from the first published one - Dungeons & Dragons - through the hundreds that exist today. All of these games have their own rules. So why aren't we getting into that? Because that's not how you play a RPG and it's not why you play an RPG. You can learn the rules in many other books, from playing with someone who knows the rules, or by watching a video of others playing the game. So what if you don't know every rule or you don't know how the rules apply to something that happens in your game? We just rely on what we talked about in the first section - make sure you're having fun using creativity. As a basic procedure, when you aren't sure what the rule is that applies to a situation, the referee makes a decision about how the situation will be resolved in the current session, with the agreement that before the next game, you'll be able to read and discuss the best way to use the rules in similar situations. If you are, then it's good!

## One Shots and Campaigns

Role playing games can take many different paths depending on the preferences of the people at your table. Games typically fall into two categories: one shots or campaigns. A one shot means that the story of the game will only take one session, usually 3-4 hours. At the end of that session the characters might never be played again. A campaign is a game where the story continues from session to session for as long as the players decide. The story pauses when the

session time agreed on is reached, and then the next game session picks up where the previous one left off. Some campaigns are played for a set number of sessions that the players agreed on, others go on for many years. Neither of these is better than the other, it's just decided by the preference of the players.

## For Players: Making characters

In an RPG you're playing the game by imagining what your character would do. You're playing a role just as an actor does on stage. Of course you don't need to use a specific accent or dress up as the character, you're just pretending. In a one shot you might choose from pre-made characters, to save time that would be spent in creating a character. For a campaign you might need to make a character in advance or at the first game session.

The rules of the game you're playing will tell you what choices are available. This might include what profession your character has (wizard, space ranger, investigative reporter, etc) or what skills and powers the character has available. Other aspects of the character might be determined by rolling dice. It's important to remember that your character doesn't need to be good at everything, you'll have fun as long as your character is interesting. That means that if die rolls say that your character is very strong but not as charismatic, that doesn't mean you have a "bad" charisma ability score. You can have fun playing a strong brute who's not that intelligent, a persuasive conniver who isn't great in physical contests, or an intelligent braggart who is unintentionally clumsy - they're all interesting.

Before any of these choices are made, you should decide who your character is - what drives your character? This could be drawn from relationships like family bonds or life long goals. You don't have to write an extensive biography

of your character, but have a few words or phrases in mind to describe them and figure out why they are that way.

The best way to do this is in two parts:

## **How the character would be described by others**

Your character might be described as shy, brash, a strong leader or a take charge type of person. These attributes might be accurate or not, it's about how the character is perceived based on their actions.

## **Why is your character that way?**

This gets into their motivations. Are they perceived as shy because they prefer to analyze a situation from every angle? Are they seen as brash because they grew up with many advantages and always assume they're right? Are they seen as a leader because they cherish actions over contemplation? Are they a take charge type because they had a close relative die young, so unconsciously they feel driven to accomplish things as soon as possible? Once you decide why your character thinks and acts as they do, it will be easier to decide what choices your character would make as far as profession, skills training, and the like. Your character is someone who thinks and acts a certain way, and secondarily they are a collection of skills and abilities and numbers. In this way your character could be adapted to any rule set.

# **For Referees: Making worlds and adventures**

Making worlds sounds imposing, because it is. You live on one world and even if you're a traveler, there's still so much of the world you don't know about and haven't experienced. How are you supposed to create one with only your imag-

ination? Don't. You don't need to create an entire planet, galaxy or vast realm. You only need to create enough of a setting for the players in your game to have fun for a few hours. There are two ways to keep this from being overwhelming:

Limit your creation to what the players are likely to encounter in a few hours

In a fantasy or modern game they'll likely stay close to a single town or small area for the whole session. Just create the basics of that town that you'll need for the game: a tavern, mall or meeting spot, a few important people in that town and an interesting event or two. You can make it feel like the game takes place in a complete world by mentioning a war in a far off country, a famous city far away, or famous people from other places. But don't bother planning these things out until your players show interest in exploring these things, then you can add more detail.

Limit your creation to bullet points that can be used wherever or whenever you need them

If you're running a science fiction game and the characters have a space ship allowing them to go anywhere in the galaxy, you don't need to prepare an entire galaxy and everything in it. Instead have a short list of a few places they might explore, just a name and a sentence or phrase describing what makes that interesting. Then create a few interesting happenings that could occur anywhere. A traveler's transportation breaks down and they request help. Two strangers are having an argument or fight in a public place. A strange visitor arrives but has trouble communicating. You don't have to assign these things to a place on a map, you can add them to the scenario wherever it fits, or adapt them to the scenario to make them fit.

# Credits

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The purpose of *How to RPG* is to explain in simple language what a tabletop role playing game is and how to start playing. This advice is written for people new to role playing games - for those who have heard of TTRPGs and might want to play them, but don't really know what it's all about.

*How to RPG* applies to any role playing game: *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Pathfinder* or any of the thousands of other games available now. Read this to get the idea of what a role playing game is, then move on to a beginning starter set for your preferred system or jump into playing with another game group. Have fun!