

# Uncle Figgy's Guide to Roleplaying for Non-Roleplayers: A Manual for Parents, Friends and Gamers



v 1.0.1

## Introduction

You have a friend at school who tells you she can't go out on Saturday because she's "gaming". You ask her if she means Monopoly or poker or something like that and she tells you that no, she's "roleplaying -- it's sort of like Dungeons and Dragons". You've heard stories about kids worshipping the devil or committing suicide because of games like that, so naturally you're concerned.

Or maybe you're a parent and your twelve-year-old son has just come home from a weekend at his friend's house raving about a neat new game his friend's older brother introduced him to in which there is no board, no cards and very few rules but lots of strange dice. All the action takes place in your imagination, he tells you, and he was playing a priest of the god Essun or something like that and he used spells to kill evil monsters. You've heard of something like this involved with psychopathic killers so you're genuinely concerned about your child.

Or maybe you've been playing roleplaying games (RPGs) for a little while and your parents are asking a lot of questions that you're not prepared to answer.

That is what this Uncle Figgy's Guide is for: To allay your fears about your friend's well-being or your child's mental health, or to help you discuss the nature of RPGs with your family and friends.

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## A Note to Parents

It is easy to understand the concerns you have about new things your children are trying. Is it safe? Is it wholesome? Will it interfere with their education? Such questions are especially important when it comes to roleplaying - a hobby that has been the subject of much misinformation, slanderous attack and urban myth. It is equally essential that you be as well-informed as possible and that you continue honest, open communication with your children. By showing them that you are willing to get involved and learn about their

interests, you let them know that you care for them and worry about them.

If your child has expressed an interest in roleplaying, offer to let a game be played at your house. Once the game begins, ask if you can watch (if you are told that you are not wanted there, you have every right to be concerned -- mature players will agree and probably even offer to let you play!). If you are unhappy with what you have witnessed, talk with your child once the others have all gone home. Ask questions about things you did not understand. Let your child know what you liked and disliked about the game. But accusing without proper knowledge or research into your child's interests will only breed resentment, leading your child to hide his actions and become secretive and spiteful. Since most roleplayers begin when they are just becoming teenagers, proper communication and respect at this critical age are key to maintaining a healthy relationship -- no matter what the interest in question may be.

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## A Note to Gamers

Few hobbies have been so maligned as roleplaying games. Roleplayers have been classified as geeks and nerds at best and devil-worshipping, murderous deviants at worst. It is all too easy, therefore, to become defensive and angry when people begin asking about the hobby of roleplaying.

This defensive stance, however, only lends proof to the accusations leveled against roleplaying. After all, the thinking goes, if you're not doing anything wrong, why are you becoming so elusive? Why are you getting so hostile? What are you hiding? Instead, when asked about your hobby, do your best to be as polite as possible in answering those concerns. Sarcasm only results in more proof as to the perceived social problems of gamers in general.

Just remember that people have no other sources of information on roleplaying games except what they have seen in the media (which is almost always anti-gaming). When they ask you about gaming, they are seeking to know whether what they have heard is real. It is up to you to help them see the actual truth of roleplaying. Instead of showing them anger, secrecy and defensiveness, let them see all that is good and fun about roleplaying. Honest, informed communication is the key to dispelling myth and misinformation.

## Chapter 1

### Roleplaying At Its Simplest

Roleplaying, believe it or not, is a very important part of day-to-day life. Little kids do it when they play cops and robber or cowboys and indians. Actors do it when they are acting. Most adults do it in one way or another in the course of a working day (most people behave much differently at work or on the phone than they do normally -- this *is* a form of roleplaying). Psychologists even use roleplaying as an aid in their profession. Boiled down to their fundamental roots, roleplaying games can best be described as "games of pretend *with rules*". Some may have more rules than others. Some may rely more on "pretend" than others. But almost all of them are just that: Pretend with rules.

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### How RPGs Work



When small children play cops and robbers, one points his fingers at another and shouts, "Bang! Gotcha!". At which point the usual response is "Nuh-uh! You missed me!". Because *pretend* is freeform, there are no rules to determine whether or not the imaginary bullet struck its target. In an RPG, however, there are rules in place to ensure that no such arguments are started (though they sometimes are).

In most cases, there is a number that represents a chance for the imaginary bullet to hit. Dice are rolled (there are exceptions - some games do not use dice) against that number to determine a final result, either the bullet hits or misses. Once that determination is made, the other player may say, "You missed me! Nyah nyah!" or "Argh! You got me!" Of course, no one is really shooting or getting shot at. Roleplaying games take part entirely in the imagination of the people playing the game. The players imagine taking part in a barroom brawl. They imagine what it's like to explore the alien jungle of a different planet. They imagine everything that takes place in the game -- whether they have made those things take place or they have been told that those things are taking place.

## Chapter 2

### Arbitration and Mediation

Unlike the rules of sports or board games, the rules of RPGs are very often fluid and amorphous. Different interpretations of these rules fly fast and furious among players of RPGs (often leaning in favor of the person doing the interpreting). In order to keep the game from degenerating back into the freeform realm of *pretend*, most games call for some form of referee. This facilitator goes by many names -- in TSR's Dungeons and Dragons, the term is "Dungeon Master" or "DM"; in Chaosium's Call of Cthulhu, the preferred word is "Keeper" -- but a generic term (and one that I use throughout this guide) is "Game Master" or "GM". Another term has often been used because of the bite that can be carried by the word "master" and that is "Dice Monitor" (taking us back to "DM"). Personally, I prefer the term Game Master because it is suitably generic and because the GM must surely be "master" of the game in more ways than one.

It is the GM's job to know the rules of the particular RPG being played so that he or she can successfully arbitrate any rules questions that might arise and so that he or she can do so fairly and equitably for all concerned. This way, when one player rolls the dice to determine whether the imaginary bullet strikes its target, the GM is there to make sure that no arguments spring up from the result and to make certain that no cheating is going on because of hard feelings between one player and another.

The job of GMing (or "running" a game) is very demanding; calling for a person who is mature, fair-minded and knowledgeable of the game being played. Consequently, this means that the GM is more than likely going to be the oldest member of a group or (at the very least) the one with the most experience in playing the game. This is why it is not uncommon to find a 16-year-old running a game for a group that ranges from 11 to 16 years of age. (For the most part, it has been my experience that school aged gaming groups tend mostly to be around the same ages -- such as a 12-year-old GM running a game for players that are between 10 and 13, or a 17-year-old GM running a game for players between 14 and 18. This tends to not be the case in the case of: 1) An older GM running games for younger siblings and their friends or including younger siblings in his or her own gaming group [or even a father or uncle who roleplays including his son/daughter or neices/nephews], or 2) Gaming groups made up of adults (18 or over) who may range everywhere from 20 on up.)

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### Cooperative Storytelling

In any RPG, it is also the GM's job to create an environment in which all the pretend takes place. The decision as to what *type* of environment (or genre) is often made by everyone involved (just as children decide as a group on whether or not they'll play "cops and robbers", "cowboys and indians" or "superheroes"). Once that decision is made, however, someone needs to decide on the underlying rules and "feel" behind the chosen genre. For instance, is the group playing "cowboys and indians" before the Civil War or after? Are they playing in Old West California or Texas or are they wandering over the entire range? Are they playing actual historical figures or are they making up new, fictitious characters that have never existed? Or maybe they're playing in a pre-created

world such as in the "Gunsmoke" or "Bonanza" television shows.

The onus of this job also falls on the GM's shoulders. The GM must create the environment -- the imaginary people, places and events -- with which the players pretend to interact. In essence, the GM is creating the outline or plot to a story, and it is through a joint effort of GM and Player that the story is fleshed out. For example, in one particular game, the GM has decided that Black Bart and his gang are going to attempt to rob a train that is hauling a shipment of gold. That is the GM's plot; the skeleton of the GM's story. Whether Black Bart succeeds or not is entirely dependent upon the how the players play the game. If they play poorly, the story has a sad ending -- Black Bart robs the train and makes off with the gold. If the players play well, the story will have a happy ending -- Black Bart is captured and the terrorized townsfolk rejoice.

But it is the actual, cooperative playing of the game that creates the story and its ending.

## Chapter 3

### What the Player Does

If it looks like there's a lot of work involved in being a GM, well, that's because there is! The GM must adjudicate the rules, facilitate game play, mediate arguments, create plots and story outlines that will be entertaining and interesting, and create the environment of the game world. That's why, as I've said, it takes a person who is mature, fair minded and knowledgeable. It also takes a person who enjoys doing all that work, if the GM does not enjoy doing the job, it shows through and the players will not enjoy doing their jobs. But the players are not resting on their hands while the GM does all the work. Far from it. Players must also have a working knowledge of the game system and its rules as well as the variations on the rules that the GM has determined are acceptably fair and just. It is also the job of the players to comport themselves in a mature and responsible manner. After all, just as in *pretend* no one likes the kid who constantly shouts "Nuh-Uh! You missed me!" (In roleplaying, the equivalent is arguing with dice rolls and GM decisions that are contrary to the player's wishes). And while the GM is creating the people, places and events of the world, the players must create the fictitious personae they are going to be playing.

For the most part, RPGs have many different rules for the creation of these persona (called "characters" or "Player Characters (PCs)"). One game may rely on random dice rolls to determine a character's personality and abilities while another requires that a player spend a predetermined amount of "points" to "buy" abilities and personality traits that would make them better than average. Some games combine the two techniques and others may require the characters to be based on pre-created, cookie-cutter-like templates with minor modifications to make them a bit different from other characters based on the same template.



One thing that most of these methods have in common, however, is that they leave the fundamental personality of the character for the player to decide. Is the character a swashbuckler like Erol Flynn or a brute warrior like Conan? Is the character polite or rude? Clean or dirty? Does she speak with a southern drawl or a refined British accent? Rare indeed is the game that forces a player to take on a character with personality traits not chosen by the player (thus, if a player plays a foul-mouthed character who kicks cats and throws rocks at cars it is because the player chose to do so, *not* because the rules of the game said he should). Sometimes, a game may have rules to reflect personality traits chosen by a player for his or her character, but again I must stress that few (if any) games actually *require* or *force* a player to give his or her character personality traits with which the player is uncomfortable. Often, inventing these personality traits requires the player to think of a reason why the character has these particular traits. If a player decides that her character, Saffron the Sorceress, is afraid of boats, the player may decide that Saffron fell off the edge of a ferry as a young child and almost drowned; she has been afraid of boats ever since. This particular incident will usually never have been featured in an actual game, but the player uses it in the game to determine Saffron's actions and motivations should the character ever be required to take a boat ride.

## Chapter 4

### Putting It All Together



In essence, what has happened before the game has even begun is that the GM has created the plot, outline and environment for a play, and the players have created the characters that will be in that play. Once the game begins, the GM makes certain that the plot and environment run smoothly, and the Players step in as actors acting out the part of their characters. The GM acts as the play's director, but only by directing the actions of those things he or she has created; and each player acts as the director of his or her own character -- determining (like an actor who asks "what is my motivation") by the personality and history already assigned to the character how that character would react when faced with the situations created by the GM. The whole of all the players playing their roles as character and director of that character, and of the GM acting as mediator, facilitator, story-teller, actor and director, becomes the final story.

Once the game has begun, all of the actual game play takes place in the imagination of the players and GM (No one actually gets up and physically acts out the action taking place, although exceptions to this may occur during a particularly exciting moment in the game during which the players might be seen to pantomime actions in much the same way as a boxing fan may throw imaginary punches while watching a match or a music-lover may play an imaginary guitar during a much-loved song). The GM narrates the setting and plays the parts of those fictional people not created by the players (called "NON-Player Characters" or "NPCs"). The players then react to what the GM has described.

***NOTE:** This is one of those rare things that is more difficult in theory than it is in practice. The game is, after all, nothing more than pretend with rules.*

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### An Example Game

This example has the group playing in a modern-day, superhero game. The GM has decided that it is like the comic books in that people don't usually die but the heroes tend to get hit quite a bit with thrown cars. Our players are Brian, Adam, Gwen, Miranda and Joseph. Marcus is the GM. Adam is playing Captain Courage, an upright superhero who believes in truth, justice and the American Way. Brian is playing Lockjaw, a super-strong, super-big fighting machine without much regard for people or property. Miranda is playing Raging Red, a flying superheroine with fire powers. Joseph is playing Darkling, a super-powered ninja. And Gwen is playing Angel, a lesser angel charged with defeating the forces of evil.

**GM:** Okay, everyone, the supervillain known as Rhino has robbed a jewelry store in the mall. The police have him trapped but he has taken hostages. The mayor has called for you and you arrive quickly at the mall. Rhino is standing just outside of the food court. Most of the tables are overturned and some chairs are floating in the fountain. Everyone seems to have gotten away except for a young woman that Rhino is holding. She looks like she has passed out.

**Adam [who has set himself up as the unofficial leader of the group]:** How close is he to the fountain?

**GM:** He's about four or five feet away.

**Miranda:** Four feet away from the fountain!? Is it on? I'm not going anywhere near it! [Miranda had decided when creating her character that Raging Red is afraid of water.]

**Joseph:** Darkling is going to use his Ninja Invisibility skill.

**GM:** Okay, what's his skill level?

**Joseph:** 18

**GM [rolls some dice]:** Okay, you try to blend in with the background.

**Joseph:** Does Rhino see me?

**GM:** It doesn't look like it. [In actuality, the dice roll indicates that Rhino *has* seen Darkling, but Darkling wouldn't know that. Thus Marcus is being purposefully vague.]

**Gwen:** Does the woman look injured?

**GM:** No, she looks like she has fainted from fear.

**Gwen to Adam, acting in character [IC - In Character]:** *"She could be in shock, C.C.! We have to get her out of there!"*

**Brian:** Lockjaw is picking up a table and getting ready to throw it at Rhino. **[IC]** *"Drop the girl you armor-plated idiot!"*

**Gwen [IC]:** *"No!"*

**Adam [IC]:** *"Lockjaw! You fool! Back off!"*

**GM:** Rhino holds the girl in front of him. As he walks toward you he says, *"Out of Rhino's way or Rhino hurt girl."*

**Joseph:** Has he walked by me?

**GM:** Yeah.

**Joseph:** I'm going to jump-kick him in the back.

**Adam [IC]:** Wait!

**GM:** Adam, Captain Courage doesn't know what Darkling is getting ready to do so you can't stop him. Joseph, what's Darkling's Sneaking skill?

**Joseph:** 14, but I get a bonus because he hasn't seen me.

**GM [rolls dice -- Marcus knows that the bonus doesn't count because Rhino is only acting like he hasn't seen Darkling. The roll is failed.]** Okay, you run up behind him. Make a jump-kick roll.

**Joseph [rolls dice]:** I made it! Right between the shoulder-blades!

**GM:** Somehow, Rhino knew you were there, maybe he heard you. He drops the girl just as you leap into the air and he turns around to catch your foot in an armored hand twice the size of your head. You can't dodge because you're already committed.

**Adam [IC]:** *"Quick! While he's distracted!"*

**Gwen:** I'm going to teleport in and grab the girl.

**GM:** No problem. What is everyone else doing?

**Miranda:** I'm readying a flame blast but I'm not going to fire until Angel and the girl are clear.

**Adam:** Once Angel gets the girl out of there, I'm going in swinging.

**Brian:** I'm throwing the table.

**Gwen:** No! You might hit me or the girl!

**Joseph:** Or me!

**GM:** This is all happening at the same time. Angel teleports in to grab the girl while Red hovers above them with a fireball at the ready and Captain Courage cracks his knuckles.

As the two of you watch, Lockjaw hurls the table with all his strength! Quick, Angel! What are you doing!?

**Gwen:** I'm going to dodge the table.

**GM:** To do that, you'll have to leave the girl.

**Gwen:** Shoot! Okay, I'm going to use my wings as a shield and hope they're strong enough to block the hit!

**GM:** Brian, make an attack roll for Lockjaw.

**Brian [rolls dice]:** Look at that roll! Made it with plenty to spare!

**GM:** Maybe it's Angel's divine luck, but the table flies over her head and hits Rhino right in the back. Rhino stumbles under the strength of the blow and loses his grip on Darkling, tossing him into the fountain. Water splashes everywhere.

**Joseph:** Ouch!

**Miranda:** I'm glad I wasn't down there.

**Gwen:** I'm teleporting the girl out to the paramedics.

**Adam:** I'm going to shoulder-tackle Rhino while he's off-balance.

**Miranda:** Wait! I can't blast him if you're in there!

**Brian:** I'm picking up another table.

Thus, the plot and outline of the play (that a supervillain was trapped by the police in a shopping mall) is fleshed out by the actions of both players and GM as they make their own choices and react to the choices made by the others. That is the heart of roleplaying. Please note, however, that while the players may be saying such things as "I am going to..." or "I will use my...", they do not mean that they are actually *physically* performing these actions. Nor do they actually believe that they are the ones capable of doing such things. All of the players know that the game is make-believe.

## Chapter 5

### Roleplaying and Maturity

As you can see by the sample game, it takes quite a bit of imagination to roleplay. It also takes a large dose of maturity. The mature individual accepts the bad things in the game as easily as they rejoice in the good. But an immature gamer can't quite make the distinction between the game and reality. The immature player could be likened to the young child who wants to fly like Superman or who believes that hitting someone in the head with a hammer (ala The Three Stooges) won't cause serious injury. The immature gamer often can't understand the difference between a fictional character doing something they dislike and a real person doing something they dislike. The immature gamer will often get quite angry with a fellow player or even the GM for what he considers acting "against him", never once realizing that it is only a game. (This same type of person will probably get mad when losing *any* game.)

Maturity is a quality that isn't easy categorized. Some 17-year-olds I know are much more mature than some 40-year-olds. And there are some 21-year-olds with whom I would not wish to play because of their poor attitudes. A good rule of thumb is to see how angry or upset a player gets with a game. The mature player, who will probably get very excited during exciting moments of the game, will realize that an RPG is only a game and will not get terribly upset if something happens to his or her character. If, on the other hand, the player begins shouting, cursing or even crying when something bad happens to their character (or if they take it personally when one person's character insults or injures theirs), maybe they aren't quite ready yet for roleplaying.

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### Roleplaying and Escapism

In all the time I've been roleplaying (since 1982), I have only met four people who probably should *not* have been playing RPGs. All three of the them came from broken homes with parents who had severe mental and emotional problems of their own. One of them was an active drug user and alcoholic. But it was not the roleplaying that made them this way. One of these players actually stopped roleplaying for a time because he felt he had become unable to distinguish between roleplaying and reality. All four of them were using roleplaying (and other things) as a way of hiding from their problems and surroundings.

It is important to realize that this type of individual might easily get lost in other forms of entertainment or escapism. The woman who spends all her time reading romance novels (much to the detriment of her home life) or the man who goes fishing to the point where he ignores his family and the problems his absence is causing. The alcoholic or drug addict. All are examples of people striving to escape from an uncomfortable/disturbing situation by latching onto an external source that soon comes to define their very existence. Some minor escapism can be fine, but all forms of escapism are dangerous when taken to the extremes they usually are taken to by the troubled individual seeking to escape reality. Roleplaying is no exception.

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## Roleplaying and Time & Money

Many people might point to the amounts of time or money spent roleplaying as an indication that roleplaying has "taken over". But would the same accusation be made of a model railroad enthusiast? Like model railroading, roleplaying is a hobby. Some dabble in it (having a train or two they take out every now and then) and others have entire basements filled with model railroads of every shape and size. And just like the model railroad enthusiast must be responsible enough to know when it is and is not the proper time for his or her hobby, so must the roleplayer. Again, it goes back to the question of maturity. The mature gamer spends what time and money he can afford on the hobby, while the immature gamer spends more than he can easily afford -- often getting himself into trouble in the process (much as a young child can spend five dollars at the arcade and then need to borrow money for a can of soda).

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## Roleplaying and Personality

I don't know of any game (if there are any) that forces a player to give their character a personality with which they are uncomfortable. But players often choose personality traits for their character that reflect deeply on the subconscious of the player himself. If a player always chooses to play evil, bloodthirsty characters, this may be a sign that he seeks power and control in his real life (power and control that he feels may have been unfairly kept from him). But, contrary to any other ideas or opinions, it is not the character or game that is making the player feel this way -- he felt this way before he even started playing.



One person with whom I have dealt always played characters that were quite bloodthirsty and got upset whenever things did not go their way. Outside of the games, this player was a control freak with quite a temper and a huge superiority complex; like his characters, he threw amazing tantrums when he didn't get his way (and this is a college-graduate I'm talking about). On the other side of the coin, another player I knew so disliked confrontation that she would not discuss things such as politics or religion because of the arguments they might have caused. Consequently, the characters she chose to play were always the "goodest" of the good who would risk all to help everyone.

But the player was not made "good" because of the characters she played, nor was the other player made a jerk because of the characters he played. Instead, their characters were flawless mirrors held up to their own personalities. Personalities that had existed long before these people began to roleplay.

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## Roleplaying and The Occult

This issue is not as sticky as it has been made out to be. In fact, it's very simple: If you follow a religion/system of belief that holds that it is wrong to discuss or consider such things as magic, psychic abilities, other religions, mythology, ghosts, dragons or demons and devils, then you will find most roleplaying to be satanic. However, there are many types of RPGs that don't deal with such subjects. Old West roleplaying, for instance.

There are also many biblical roleplaying games in which players take on the roles of biblical heroes.

If you do *not* believe that such things are inherently wrong, then you will find that roleplaying holds no link to occultism or "devil-worship". Some cultists may play roleplaying games, but not all roleplaying game players are cultists.

Contrary to popular belief, roleplaying games do not "teach" anyone about the occult. Some may feature or discuss the mythologies or religions of other cultures, but none will teach anyone how to become a priest or priestess of these religions or mythologies. A roleplaying game set in the tales of the Arabian Nights, for instance, will not teach anyone how to become a Muslim. It has been my experience that most roleplayers were interested in mythology (usually Greek, Roman or Egyptian) *before* they became involved in roleplaying.

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## Roleplaying and Violence

Roleplaying games evolved from a hobby called "Wargaming" -- a highly respected hobby among many of the rich and nobility throughout history (chess is actually a form of wargaming). In Wargaming, highly detailed sets were constructed in miniature of famous battlegrounds. Two players (wargamers), acting as generals of the respective sides involved in the battle attempted to either:



1. Recreate the battle as closely as possible, or
2. Refight the battle using different military strategies to arrive at a different outcome.

For instance, two wargamers might decide to refight the battle of Gettysburg. After constructing as accurate and detailed a set as possible, painted miniatures would be used to represent the cavalry, infantry and artillery of both the Union and Confederate soldiers. Details such as the weather at the time of the battle would be taken into account and both players would strategize and maneuver their "troops" to get the best possible outcome. Fantasy Wargaming was an offshoot of standard wargaming and it wasn't long before someone decided that he would rather play one of the soldiers instead of one of the generals commanding all of the soldiers. Thus, the early roleplaying games were born. Because of their roots, however, they were based heavily on the combat that is featured in wargaming. As the years have gone by, some roleplaying games have evolved beyond that "heroic combat" model into a game where (just as in real life) combat is deadly and to be avoided at all costs.

Whatever the game, most R-rated movies and home video games are more bloodily violent than the average roleplaying game. Possibly, video games could be considered worse than roleplaying games as the player of a video game sees no repercussions to the death of an animated character -- one needs only hit a button and start again where they left off. In roleplaying, however, it takes time for a character to grow; time in which the player gets to know that character (like a novelist who gets to know her favorite protagonist better and better with each book). Players don't like to lose their characters, which leads the mature player to avoid combat and seek nonviolent solutions to the problems presented during a game.

## Chapter 6

### Case Studies

To combat the notion that all gamers are either; 1) Satanists, 2) Psychopaths, or 3) Socially inept, unemployed geeks; I present this list of those gamers I have known over the years and with whom I have kept in contact. I have given only initials to protect the innocent. Let's start with me:

- **D.C.** - I am a writer/artist/editor/web designer. I am very happily married (since January, 1993). I have acted on stage and performed stand-up comedy. I am a Buddhist. I have been roleplaying since 1982.
- **J.S.** - A data-entry operator. Single. Uncertain religious affiliation.
- **M.H.** - An artist working for a retail chain. Single. Uncertain religious affiliation.
- **J.F.** - A cartoonist and graphic-artist who is a department manager for an airline. Engaged. Christian.
- **G.C.** - Employed by USDA. Married. Buddhist.
- **M.S.** - Military veteran. US Postal worker. Married. Two children.
- **T.E.** - Web designer. Single. Uncertain religious affiliation.
- **D.L.** - IT professional. Single. Christian.

This list is only of those people with whom I have roleplayed and kept in contact with over many years of playing. All are gainfully employed. None are drug-users or devil-worshippers. None of them have ever committed suicide or killed anyone. As far as I know, none have ever even had any brushes with the law (outside of traffic tickets). The "uncertain religious affiliation" listed with some of them means that I am not sure about their beliefs. At least two of them are what I would call "quiet" Christians in that they go to church and read the Bible, but don't preach or proselytize

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### Roleplaying Types

These are but the most general of the roleplaying types (or "genres") out there today. Most games fit into one of these types (some might fit more loosely than others) although some may combine elements. The game Shadowrun, for instance is a combination of Fantasy and Cyberpunk.

**Fantasy** - Roleplaying in an imaginary world that is usually a blend of Earth's own Western-European Dark Ages and Renaissance (often with some Greek and/or Roman mythology thrown in). Characterized by sword wielding characters and magic-users who are charged with saving the world from some overwhelming and ancient evil.

**Horror** - Roleplaying in an imaginary world in which exist terrible creatures straight out of the horror movies. Characters are often normal people trying to

stop the horror from overtaking an unsuspecting populace. Usually set in a time-period ranging from the 1890's to Modern-Day.

**Supers** - Roleplaying in the four-color-comics world of bigger-than-life heroes with special powers. Usually set in the present. Characters are superheroes who need to stop the evil mastermind from taking over the world.

**Space** - Roleplaying in the "final-frontier". Often set in the far future. Characters are spacefarers (human, alien or robotic) who generally are "exploring strange new worlds" (ala Star Trek). Or they may be overwhelmed heroes going up against an evil empire (ala Star Wars).

**Cyberpunk** - Roleplaying in an imaginary world where life is cheap, huge corporations run the governments and all money is credit. Set in the near future. Characters are humans who are usually enhanced by the addition of cybernetics (bionics - such as in the television show The Six Million Dollar Man). Some characters strive to make the world a better place, which causes them to butt heads against the evil corporations. Some characters just want to survive.

**Old West** - Roleplaying in the historical world of cowboys and indians. Can be set in any of the "pioneer" era (early-middle to late 19th century) but usually post-Civil War. Characters are generally lawmen trying to bring in those desperate desperadoes.

**Military** - Roleplaying in one of the many wars of the human world. Usually set in one of the more modern conflicts (World War II, Korea or Vietnam) but can be others. Characters are soldiers trying to accomplish missions and follow orders in the face of the enemy.

**Post-Holocaust** - Not as common as it used to be. Roleplaying in the world of post-nuclear-disaster. Usually set in the far future after the radiation has had time to die down. Characters can be humans, mutants (animals, humans or even plants), cyborgs or robots who are usually charged with exploring the ruins of ancient cities (such as what's left of Chicago or New York).

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## Glossary of Gaming Terms

Like mechanics, engineers or computer technicians, listening to gamers talk can be like listening to a totally different language. To better understand what you might be hearing, I have included this listing of common gaming terms. Not all game systems will use all of these terms, and some game systems may add words to the vocabulary, but this glossary should help in understanding at least a little of what's being said.

**Adventure** - One particular "episode" of a roleplaying campaign. Adventures may take more than one **gaming session** to complete.

**Adventurers** - In fantasy roleplaying, a collective name used to refer to a group of **Player Characters**. Also called Adventuring Party or just Party (as in, "the party sets up camp for the night").



**Attributes** - See **Stats**.

**Campaign** - A collection of **adventures** that often have a common goal. Campaigns can last for quite some time.

**Campaign World** - See **Game World**.

**Character** - Any imaginary person in a **game world**. Most often refers to **Player Characters** but can also refer to **Non-Player Characters**.

**Character Points** - See **XP**.

**Con** - Convention. Either a **gaming** convention or Science-Fiction convention with organized gaming events.

**Dice** - Used to introduce a random element into a game so that not all successes or failures are assured. Come in many different sizes, shapes and colors. Often named with the letter "d" before a number (such as d4, d6, d20, etc.) with the "d" being pronounced "dee". Types are Four-Sided (Four-Siders, d4); Six-Sided (Six-Siders, d6) that are the usual cubes that come in a standard board-game; Eight-Sided (Eight-Siders, d8); 10-Sided that can be used to generate a random number from 1 to 10, or from 1 to 100 by rolling the die twice - once for tens and once for ones (10-Siders, Percentile Dice, d10 or even d100); 12-Sided (12-Siders, d12); 20-Sided (20-Siders, d20); and even 30- or 100-Sided dice (Which aren't commonly used). Some games use all of the above dice while some use only standard Six-Siders.



**Die** - Singular of **Dice**. You would roll only one die or you would roll three dice.

**DM** - Dungeon Master or Dice Monitor, also called Keeper, Referee, Game Master, Storyteller, etc. The person (or persons, sometimes the responsibility is shared) in charge of arbiting the rules and maintaining the continuity of the game and game world.

**Dungeon** - In gaming history, just that: A dungeon beneath a castle that was many levels deep, stocked with evil monsters, and that often led into natural caverns. As **gaming** matured, dungeons came to be any building that the **Player Characters** needed to explore. Some games no longer use the term as the dungeons used in old games were seen as ludicrously unrealistic.

**Dungeon Crawl** - A derogatory term used by some **gamers** to refer to games that they consider nothing more than a slog through some form of structure filled with monsters to be killed and treasure to be taken.

**Experience** - See **XP**.

**Experience Points** - See **XP**.

**Game World** - The fictional world in which the game is played. Also called a Campaign World.

**Gamer** - A person who enjoys the roleplaying hobby.

**Gaming** - Another name for roleplaying.

**Gaming Session** - One session of roleplaying. Commonly about four to six hours although they can be as little as two hours or as much as 10.

**Gaming System** - Or just System. Any particular brand of roleplaying game. Different systems usually have different rules, different goals and a different setting.

**GM** - Game Master. See **DM**.

**Hack and Slash** - A derogatory term used by some **gamers** to refer to games in which there is little roleplaying but quite a bit of "kill or be killed". Such games often are looked down upon because they have almost no mental challenge.



**HP** - Hit Points. Also called Life, Life Points, Health and many others. A measure of how much physical injury a **character** can take before dying.

**IC** - In Character. Things that a player says that are meant for a **character** to say in the game.

**Level** - Often used in two different ways. The first is a measure of **character** ability used in some games - a first-level character is much weaker than a fourth-level character. Characters gain levels through the accumulation of **Experience**. The second usage describes different floors of a building or **dungeon**. Hence, the first-level of a dungeon may be only the basement of a castle while the fourth-level may be some hundred feet below the ground. Often, higher levels in a dungeon (which actually means "lower" in the dungeon) are more difficult than the lower levels.

**Monty Haul** - A derogatory term used by some **gamers** to refer to games in which very much reward is given for very little effort. Named after the host of "Let's Make A Deal".

**Munchkin** - A derogatory term used by some **gamers** to refer to players who are more involved with the combat and personal-power aspects of gaming. Most Munchkins enjoy the **Monty Haul** or **Hack and Slash** styles of gaming.

**Non-Player Character** - See **NPC**.

**NPC** - Non-Player Character. Any fictional person created and played by the **GM** as opposed to a player. See **PC**.

**OOC** - Out Of Character. Things that a player says that are not meant for a **character** to say in the game. Such as asking if anyone wants to order pizza.



**PC** - Player Character. Any fictional person created and played by a player instead of the **GM**. See **NPC**.

**Player** - Any person involved in a roleplaying game who is not **running** the game. It is possible for a person to be a player in one game and be the **GM** of another.

**Player Character** - See **PC**.

**Running** - Acting as **Game Master**. As in "Who's running tonight?"

**Setting** - The genre and sometimes the locale of a roleplaying game. Such as "the game is set in Late 19th-Century Texas".

**Stats** - Character Statistics. Also called Attributes. Numerical rating of physical and mental abilities of a character or creature. Stats often include such things as Strength (the physical prowess of a character); Dexterity or Agility (the speed and limberness of a character); IQ or Intelligence (the mental prowess of a character); Constitution, Stamina or Health (the character's ability to withstand injury and illness); and sometimes many others depending on the game in question.

**XP** - Experience Points. Also called Character Points (CP) or just Experience. Historically, XP were only awarded for any creatures overcome (read "killed") during an **adventure** or **gaming session**. Now, however, with more of an emphasis on roleplaying and less on combat, XP are awarded more for skill at roleplaying and obstacles overcome whether they be physical or mental. In most games, XP are used to represent improvement of the skills and talents used by a **character** during the game. The **Game Master** awards all XP.

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## For More Information

For more information about roleplaying, I recommend the following Web site:

[Dracopolitics](#)

(<http://www.personal.unt.edu/~jl0007/draco.htm>)

This Web site features links to sites with information both for and against roleplaying. An excellent way to research all the sides of the argument and decide for yourself.

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