



WHAT IS A ROLE PLAYING GAME?

A role playing game is at its heart just a more advanced version of playing pretend when you were a child, or a different take on shared storytelling like you might do around a campfire. The difference is, there are rules in place to adjudicate situations that are otherwise unclear. Everyone remembers playing cops and robbers as kids, and the argument takes place where one kid yells, "I shot ya!" and the other responds, "Nuh-uh! I dodged!" or, "Nuh-uh! I got body armor!"

Role playing games offer rules to determine whether or not you shot the bad guy, and whether or not he's wearing armor (and what effect that armor has).

A role playing game, or RPG for short, needs at least two players to work properly, though more are preferable, with anywhere between five to seven being generally considered optimal. The roles and responsibilities of each player at the table are as follows.

Player Characters

Every player except one will control a single character in the overarching story. These Player Characters, or PCs, will consist of statistics on a piece of paper that determine how strong, fast, smart, willful, and tough they are in addition to the probability that they can do things like hit with a sword, fire a gun, pick a lock, etc. As a player, you can have your PC try anything you want in the context of the story, within their listed physical and mental limits.

The Game Master

The remaining player is called the Game Master, or GM. That player controls everything in the entire game world (and indeed the game universe) that's not one of the PCs. That means the weather on any given day, what the local DJ says on the radio, the policies of the government, the actions

of secret societies, and even the acts of God in the game.

The GM also controls all the characters that aren't PCs. These are called non-player characters, or NPCs. They're the bartender at your favorite watering hole, the delivery guy that shows up at your door, the science teacher at the high school, and even the monsters you have to fight.

The GM's Responsibilities

The core job of the GM is to create the world around your players and give them conflict and challenges to overcome. That doesn't mean that the GM is the enemy of the PCs. In fact, the real job of the Game Master is to ensure that everyone at the table has a great time.

The GM should challenge your characters, give them a sense of danger and of living in a thriving, vibrant world, but shouldn't get mad or frustrated when the PCs manage to pull off an awesome feat. In fact, that means the game is going right!

When it comes to creating adventures, the GM can either buy pre-written episodes (which we hope to produce on a regular basis for **Night Shift**) or make up their own. If you get to know the system well enough, you'll be able to use story ideas and even pre-published modules from any number of games, converting them easily to this game for use with your heroes. Some guidelines on creating adventures will be found in **Chapter Four: Earth After Dark**.

The Ongoing Game

As your game progresses, the GM will award experience points that the players will use to advance to higher levels of power and proficiency, getting gradually better at all the things they do. They in turn will garner notoriety and experience within the game world, tackling ever greater challenges, and even, sometimes, beating back the forces of darkness to avert the Apocalypse itself...at least, until the next one comes along!

How Do I Win?

There's no winning or losing an RPG. Technically, I suppose, you could lose if your character dies, but even then you get to just make a new character and jump right back into the story. There may even be ways for your deceased character to come back from the dead. After all, it happens in movies and TV, so why not in the game?

The rewards of playing an RPG are the experience of telling an epic, ongoing tale, and surviving against the challenges the GM throws your way as long as possible. This is a cooperative game that only ends when the players all decide it's time to bring the story to a close.

Throughout the game, your huge story called a campaign or series will be broken up into smaller stories called adventures, modules, or episodes. Each will have a beginning, middle, and ending unto itself. Episodes may or may not play a part in the greater story, but they give you a sense of accomplishment, completion, and closure as well as continuation.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Our game consists of four players, a GM and 3 PCs. The GM is Tony and the players are: Sarah, who is running a Chosen One (a powerful character built to fight evil monsters); Nick, who is playing a Survivor (a normal person who has seen enough to gain survival skills against the forces of darkness), and Aly, who is playing a Witch (an actual spellcasting powerhouse).

Let's join them as they approach a nest of vampires they've tracked to the city's slums.

Tony (GM): You approach the rundown, abandoned tenement in the low rent district. Even though it's mid-afternoon, the streets in this area of town are deserted. Fortunately for you, it's a sunny day, though the tenement is all boarded up.

Sarah (Chosen One): No approach like the direct approach! I throw open the door and stride in, bathed in sunlight.

Tony: You grab the door but it doesn't budge. It's been locked from the inside.

Nick: Saw that coming! I just picked up a nifty set of lockpicks online. I've been wanting to try this out.

Tony: Okay, you try to pick the lock. What's your percentage?

Nick (checks his sheet): Says my lock picking is only 30%. Ugh. Well, might as well give it a go. (throws dice). Crap! 43.

Tony: That's over your percentage chance, so you can't find the tumblers. The lock remains secure.

Nick: Can I try again?

Tony: Not in this case. The lock is just beyond your ability right now.

Aly: I step forward and crack my knuckles. I got this. I cast my *open* spell.

Tony: Make your casting check.

Aly: Let's see...I have a base 75% chance, and that's a first level spell, which reduces it by 5. So 70%. (throws dice). Yeah! 50! That means it goes off right away!

Tony: There's an audible click, and the door swings open.

Nick: Why didn't you lead with that?

Aly: I wanted you to feel like you were being useful.

Tony: So what now?

Sarah: I move in, ready for a fight, but staying in the sunlight.

Tony: Okay, you move in. (he throws a die behind his screen, checking to see if what he's got in store surprises Sarah. He rolls 1d6 and gets a 2, indicating surprise). You're utterly shocked when something dives right at you through the shaft of light, yowling in pain as it does so.

(He rolls an attack roll for the vampire; the result is a 15. Adding the vampire's Vitality Dice and Sarah's Defense Value to the roll, the vampire beats its target number and hits) The body knocks you into the shadows. You take (rolls a d6)...3 points of damage.

Sarah: Ow! That hurt, fang-boy! Hope that was your best shot, because it's gonna be your last.

Tony: Four other vampires step out from the shadows. It's time to roll for initiative to see who goes first. Everyone throw a d6.

...and the game progresses from there.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jason Vey has been writing stories as long as he can remember, from superheroes to swords and sorcery to space ships to Gothic horror. Telling tales that evoke emotion in other people is his passion. To date, he has published one novel, which is currently out of print but he hopes will be back in print soon! He is working on a few other novels as he finds time between the busy schedule he keeps at his day job as a Senior Web Content Writer, and as a game designer.

Jason cites George Lucas, Robert E. Howard, Gene Roddenberry, Stan Lee, and the heavy metal band Iron Maiden as the core elements that made him the geek he is today. In fact, his earliest memory is seeing the original Star Wars (before it was called *A New Hope*) in the theater when he was three years old.

He has been gaming since the age of five, where he experienced *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* the year it debuted. Jason has played and run more gaming systems than he can count, and has contributed books, articles, and source material to such companies as Palladium, Eden Studios, Misfit Studios, Goodman Games, and others. His current home is Troll Lord Games, where he is the sole author (currently) and line developer for *Amazing Adventures* and the line devel-

oper for the TLG 5e line, as well as a contributor to a number of Castles & Crusades products, including the Castle Keeper's Guide and the World of Ahrde.

Jason has celebrated his 29th birthday way too many times over, and lives in Pittsburgh, PA with his wife Julie and two furry feline children, Seamus and Finnegan. He spends too much time getting irritated with social media, watching Star Wars, Star Trek, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or playing guitar and bass in his living room. One of his favorite things to do is attend conventions, cosplay, and meet fans.

Timothy S. Brannan, like Jason, has been gaming and writing forever. He started gaming in the last part of 1979 when he borrowed a friend's *AD&D Monster Manual* and never looked back. He started his very first Witch character class soon after and began publishing them online starting in 1999.

For reading he started out in fantasy, moved over to dark fantasy, and finally to horror where he has remained for years. Citing H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Stephen King, and Christopher Golden among his favorites. In truth there are far more than can be mentioned here.

He has developed game material for Eden Studios, Misfit Studios, Wizards of the Coast, Green Ronin and more. Currently he splits his time with his own label, *The Other Side Publishing*, and his day job where he develops college curriculum for many schools.

Tim lives in the suburbs of Chicago with his wife Natalie, two fantastic sons, Liam and Connor, and for reason he has not figured out, three rabbits, Amy, Rory and Simon. He participates in the October Horror Movie Marathon every October and writes compulsively on his blog, *The Other Side*.

