

Don't Just Role Play, MMORPG It!

When role playing games were first introduced in the mid-1970s, they had a relatively small market, just small groups of high school students meeting in the cafeteria with pencils and dice in hand. Today, with the increased popularity of computers, participation in role-playing games has exploded with literally millions of people all over the world and from all walks of life enjoying the excitement of RPG's.

Role Playing Game Basics

Simply put, an RPG is any game where players take the roles of fictional characters and organize to tell a story together. Of course, this is an admittedly broad definition. Nonetheless, it captures the idea that storytelling is what role playing games are really all about.

Not surprisingly, given how broad the above definition is, and the natural flexibility of RPG's, there are many different types of games covering a host of genres. The very first role-playing games centered around fantasy stories with wizards and dragons, knights and elves roaming across of mythical landscape. They quickly expanded to include science fiction stories with aliens and ray guns. Today, RPG's centered around historical situations, espionage, military actions, and horror can be found.

Different Role Playing Games

There are three broad types of role playing game: traditional RPG's, live action RPG's, and computer RPG's.

In traditional role-playing games, participants sit around a table and act out the story verbally, with one person taking on a role similar to a narrator. Usually dice are used to determine the outcome of specific actions.

Taking the game away from the tabletop and into the wider world, many adherents believe that the best way to really inhabit another character is to get up and try to be that person. Thus the development of live action role-playing games, some with rules as strict as traditional role-playing games, but most with a more flexible structure. Whereas traditional role-playing games can be thought of as story telling, live action role-playing games more closely resemble theater.

Role-playing games made the jump to computers relatively early. At first, however, computer role-playing games just tried to simulate traditional role-playing games; in a sense, the computer was just used to make things easier for the players. With the development of network technology, computers allowed participants to play with each other regardless of physical distance. Live action role-playing gamers have also used computers to help develop a flexible rule-free style of play.

Role Playing Games and MMORPGs

The increasing popularity of massive multiplayer online role playing games, commonly known as MMORPGs, has been the most significant development in role playing games in the last decade. Today it is estimated that as many as 15 million people worldwide are playing MMORPGs. In MMORPGs, participants, as in all other role-playing games, take on the role of a character. What makes MMORPGs significant, however, is that thousands of participants can interact in a virtual universe, a universe that keeps going whether an individual user is in the system or not. Like traditional role-playing games, MMORPGs are situated in a variety of universes, from fantasy to science fiction.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

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