

I have been a fan of the Dungeons and Dragons roleplaying game since I was a teenager. It is hard for me to believe that it has been over twenty years since I was first exposed to the game that would become the passion of a lifetime. My first experience with D&D was a 1st Edition book called Oriental Adventures written by E. Gary Gygax and David "Zeb" Cook. I still

remember the first time I saw that book, orange spine and all, sitting on the floor at my friend's house. I was immediately enthralled by the book's unforgettable cover art, a masterpiece of steel and stealth set in an breathtaking ethereal scene by fantasy artist Jeff Easley. And what was

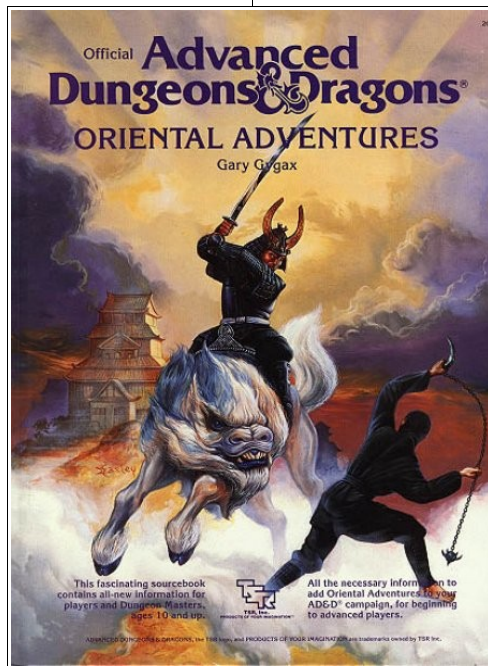
inside the book was just as engrossing. It wasn't long before I had my own copies of the Player's Handbook, the Dungeon Master's Guide, and the Monstrous Compendiums for the 2nd Edition of the D&D roleplaying game, yet it was Oriental Adventures that hooked me for life.

Tabletop roleplaying games (also known as pen-and-paper roleplaying games), like Dungeons and Dragons, are not only an enjoyable pastime but are also a creative outlet for both young and old. Such games inspire the participates to think and learn creatively. Tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) teach a lifetime of creative skills

including acting, art, history, mathematics, reading/writing, and storytelling.

First and foremost, however, tabletop roleplaying games are games. The stories that are created using pen-and-paper roleplaying games are not set in the real world.

There are some games that are set on 'an Earth', but it is (almost always) an alternate Earth of fantasy or science fiction (such as the urban fantasy/cyberpunk game known as Shadowrun [[www.catalystgamelabs.com/shadowrun/](http://www.catalystgamelabs.com/shadowrun/)]). More often, a tabletop roleplaying game's setting is



completely fictional. Think of this setting as being the place of origin for the characters created by the players and the Game Master (or GM). The players create the heroes while the GM creates almost everything else. Together, they work together to create a world for the player characters (or PCs) to explore and sometimes conquer. This world may be a unique creation (designed by the GM) or it may be based on a published fictional game world designed specifically for the tabletop roleplaying game being used by the players and the GM.

For example, the current version (4th Edition) of the Dungeons and Dragons roleplaying game (published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.) currently offers two campaign settings (or worlds) for use with the game: Eberron and the Forgotten Realms. A group of players may choose to use one campaign setting over the other or they might choose to create unique characters

for both worlds and alternate play between the two settings from week to week (or month to month). Each pen-and-paper roleplaying game often has a default world that can be used as the backdrop for the stories that the players and GM cooperatively create. For example, the tabletop roleplaying game known as the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game (published by Paizo Publishing



LLC.) has a default world that is known as Pathfinder Chronicles ([www.paizo.com/pathfinder/pathfinderChronicles](http://www.paizo.com/pathfinder/pathfinderChronicles)) — a unique and detailed campaign setting that offers additional game rules and background material created specifically for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.

However, as noted above, the world used as the game's backdrop is often a unique construct created by the Game Master. It is a time honored tradition amongst GMs to attempt to create what is known as a homebrewed world. I, myself, have

created two unique worlds (called Time of Ages



*Kulan Web Logo*

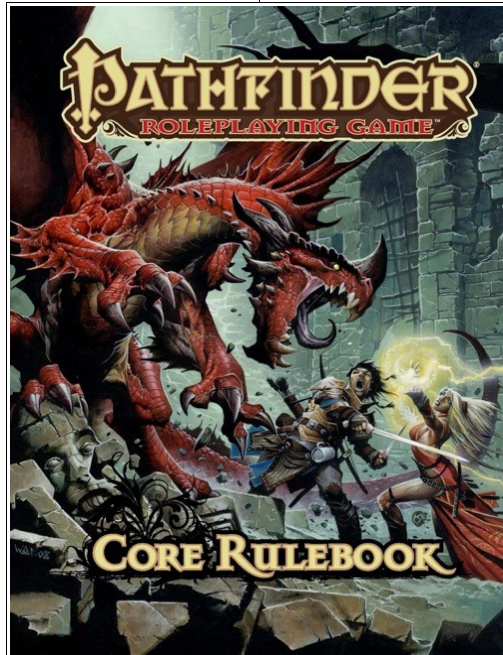
and World of Kulan) for Dungeons and Dragons, and I am in the process of creating a third world

(called Tarras) for the 4th Edition of the D&D roleplaying game. Note that a homebrewed world is rarely little more than a collection of hand-

written notes and a few pencil-drawn maps — just enough to allow the GM to make sense of everything that has occurred during past game sessions. However, for other Game Masters, like myself, designing the fictional world becomes as much of a pastime as playing the game

itself. The GM becomes an inventor of such game elements as new rules, fictional characters & places, and plots to challenge the players' imagination and reasoning. The other players often build upon these new designs during game play.

As a result, tabletop roleplaying games lead directly to it participants learning such creative skills such as storytelling, writing, and drawing. Game Masters must be able to spin a tale of adventure in an interesting manner. A great story goes a long way to making the fictional game world feel real to the players. It allows them to see



themselves as the characters they have created, interacting with the imaginary constructs of a fantasy or science fiction world created by the GM. A series of imaginative adventures often inspires players to write chronicles of their player character's exploits or draw

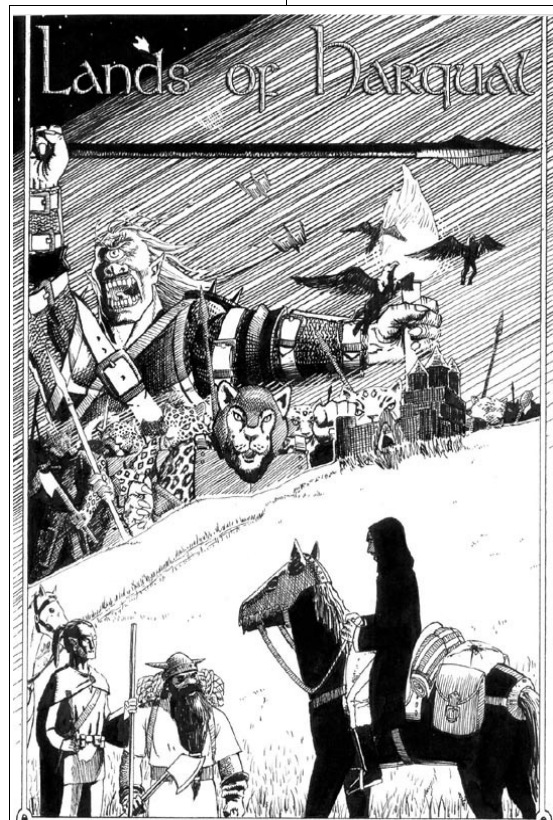
pictures of their PC. In fact, there are printable character sheets available from roleplaying game design companies, such as Wizards of the Coast, that often include sections for a character's written biography and hand-drawn portrait. (I have included the current 4th Edition D&D character

sheet as an example.) An artistically talented GM or player might take such a creative endeavor one step farther and draw a full color illustration of the entire group of players' characters or even a memorable locale in the game world, as he or she visualizes it.

Pen-and-paper roleplaying games can also enhance the participants ability to perform feats of imagination such as acting and improvising as well as enhancing their ability to socialize. The Game Master does more than tell a story he or she has written. The GM must be an entertainer as well. A good GM will speak in differing voices for

different non-player characters (or NPCs) and engage the players to act out their character's actions rather than simply state them. And when the players diverge from the storyline that the GM

has planned out, he or she must be able to improvise new story elements on the spot. The story within the game can change every time a player makes a decision that the GM didn't initially anticipate; therefore, it is vital that the GM be creative enough to 'think on his feet.'



'Lands of Harqual' for World of Kulan (by Daniel Schenström)

Dungeons and Dragons and other tabletop roleplaying games are social games that can bring very different people together to form a unique group dynamic. There is camaraderie and a sense of fun. Tabletop roleplaying games can be said to be the ultimate examples of structured *worldplay*, a term noted in Runco's *Creativity*

– *Theories and Themes:*

*Research, Development, and Practice* (p. 295). Playing Dungeons and Dragons definitely takes the participants into an alternate world of fantasy with



imagined landscapes and companion characters. It is playfulness at its best.

The worldplay of tabletop roleplaying games often leads to careers in the creative arts as well. All one has to do is look through the selection of pen-and-paper roleplaying books available in book, comic, and hobby stores to see that the creation of a single book is a major undertaking that requires many individuals with artistic talent. Each book can be thought to be a work of art. A book's cover is often graced with a full color illustration while its interior contains black & white (or more rarely,

color) illustrations. Detailed maps are also a common element of a tabletop roleplaying book as are other artistic touches such as stylized borders. All of these elements require talented artists and cartographers who often freelance from one project to another. Add to this a team of

writers, editors, and support staff, dedicated to the art of roleplaying game design, and you have a career path unlike any other. It is a career that I wish to pursue as have many other like-minded gamers before me — Erik Mona who is now the Publisher of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game; Mike Mearls who is the architect of a pen-and-

paper roleplaying game known as Iron Heroes and an important member of the final development team for D&D 4th Edition; and Darrin Drader who has designed TTRPG books for D&D 3rd Edition and d20 Modern as well as his own science fiction campaign setting known as Reign of



Discordia.

Tabletop roleplaying games teach more than time-honored artistic abilities, however; pen-and-paper roleplaying games often teach the game's participants about more mainstream book learning

methods, such as culture, history, and mathematics, in creative ways. The game rules used as the foundation for tabletop roleplaying games tend to be based on mathematical equations; although, there are TTRPGs that rely more on storytelling than mathematics such as the Storytelling game system from White Wolf ([www.white-wolf.com](http://www.white-wolf.com)). Regardless, most tabletop

roleplaying games give the participants the ability to experience both types of learning. For example, Dungeons and Dragons can be said to be both quantitative and qualitative since there are aspects of the game that are defined by numerology and there are aspects of it that are defined by artistic ability.

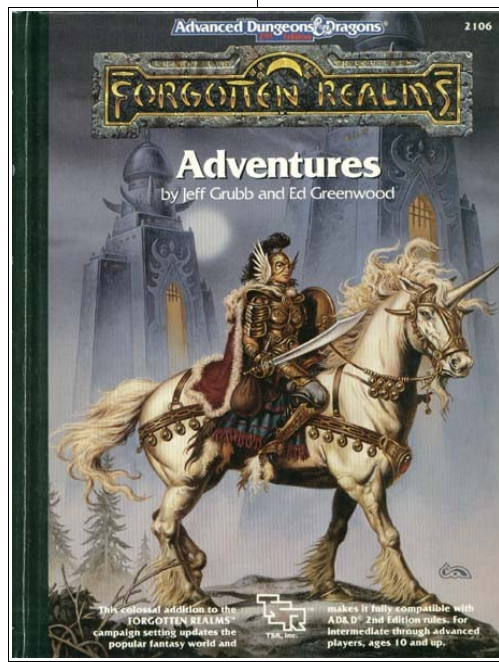
It is important to note that the rules of tabletop roleplaying games are rarely considered static. The Game Master has the right to change the rules to fit the style of game the group wants to play.

Therefore, the GM is the game's judge as well as its narrator. He or she arbitrates over the games rules while allowing the players the freedom to 'break the rules' when it suits the story being constructed. The GM must be able to interpret the situation in the game and rule on the actions being performed by the players. The mathematical game rules are the framework that the GM and

players must use, but they are free to modify the game to suit their personalities. A common axiom amongst roleplayers is as follows: *if you don't like a rule, change it. It's your game.*

Tabletop roleplaying games are often based on real world

cultures and history. The original worlds of Dungeons and Dragons were loosely based on European medieval culture but where the magic, monsters, and gods of myth are real. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that GMs and players would want to understand the backdrop of a game world

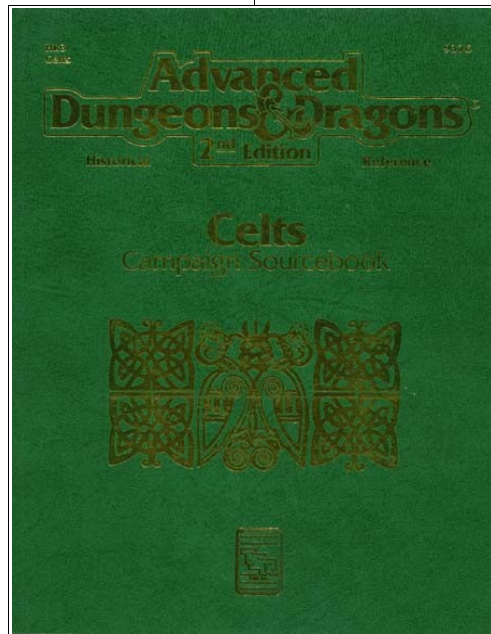


by studying the real world cultures and histories on which its fictional setting is based. I can speak to this from personal experience. In my early years, I became a student of Celtic, Egyptian, Greek, and Norse history and mythology as a result of my exposure to D&D. I devoured any available books in my home and in my school on the subject matter. Often I sat at the foot of my

father's bed asking him question after question about ancient religions and medieval society as he knew it from his own studies in university. (My father was a minister for the United Church of Canada; he is now retired.) Now, as an adult, I continue my lifelong learning of culture and ancient

history. My bookshelf contains such works as Frank Delaney's *The Celts*, H.M.D Parker's *The Roman Legions*, Jonathan Clements' *The Vikings*, Georges Roux's *Ancient Iraq*, Nigel Davies' *The Ancient Kingdoms of Peru*, and Paul Chiasson's *The Island of Seven Cities*.

In conclusion, let me leave you with the following: I owe my passion for artistry, joy of writing, love of history, and ambition of writing & storytelling to Dungeons and Dragons as well as to the other tabletop roleplaying games that I have played and studied. I can think of no better argument than that for how pen-and-paper roleplaying games



inspire its participants to be creative while learning at the same time. Thus, Game Masters and players are inventive whether they are designing new roleplaying game elements or improvising the mannerisms of a favorite character at the game table. They learn to use

their imaginations through the cooperative storytelling of the game while striving to entertain their fellows. Roleplayers master useful social and mathematical skills that are key components of playing roleplaying games. They are often inspired to create art & fiction based on worldplay and

become game designers for the tabletop roleplaying game industry. And finally, gamers immerse themselves in the many cultures and histories that have inspired the fictional worlds of classic pen-and-paper roleplaying games such as Dungeons and Dragons — a knowledge that often leads to an inquiring mind and a need for creativity in day-to-day life.

**Fin** 