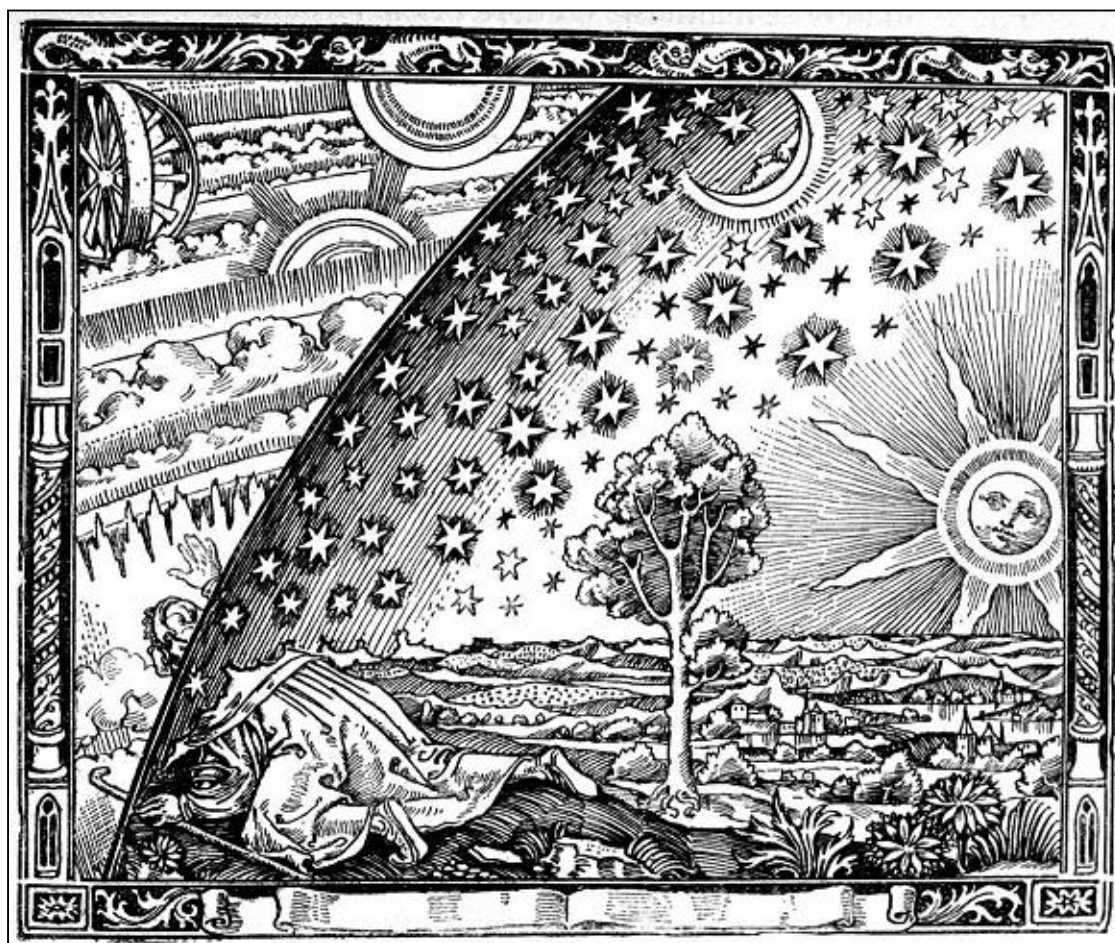


# FARSIGHT GAMES

# ODDS

The Tabletop Roleplaying E-Magazine

Issue 8 – May 2009



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# ODDS

Issue 8  
May 2009

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**Front cover:** Camille Flammarion, L'Atmosphere: Météorologie Populaire (Paris, 1888)

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## EDITORIAL

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Things have been quiet at Farsight Games recently. This is due to the fact that busy days are here.

I'm working on a simple percentile based fantasy roleplaying system that uses a level system for advancement. I'm trying to make it generic and simple and have it available for both PDF download and POD. It requires playtesting and some trimming, but I'm pleased with what I have at the moment. I'm not chalking up a release date just yet – everything I do for Farsight Games is part time so I try not to set deadlines.

The League Of Seven, my first PDF publication for sale, is available now from [www.farsightgames.com](http://www.farsightgames.com) - the 129 page PDF can be downloaded from Lulu for just £1.00. It's a science fiction campaign setting that uses the SKETCH system but can be easily used with any other RPG mechanics the GM wants. It's a very simple document with minimal artwork so it's easy to download and even easier to print.

I'm hoping to run some SKETCH Games at the UK Games Expo in Birmingham at the beginning of June set in the STORMLAND setting, so if you're around look me up. Because of this event and as I'm away on holiday in May I've decided to give ODDS ezine a miss for that month. The good news is that the next issue should contain some UK Games Expo goodness, with a review and report on the convention, so with a bit of luck that'll be a bigger issue than normal.

Now, down to an important issue - ODDS ezine. It appears that I'm coming to the bottom of my well of articles and essays. Without fresh material, which I very much doubt I'll be able to supply due to other demands, ODDS will have to end around issue twelve unless it gets more contributions. So I'm asking the gaming community for help - if you have any articles about tabletop RPGs then send them to me. It doesn't matter if they've been printed before or if they've never been printed or if you've rushed to complete them, ODDS is all about giving old and unused articles a home. Without more articles I'll have to close ODDS down and that would be a shame. Scour your hard drives - the future of ODDS depends on it!

Keep on rollin'

JONATHAN HICKS

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# The JOHNN FOUR interview

*Johnn Four of [www.roleplayingtips.com](http://www.roleplayingtips.com) took the time out to answer some questions for ODDS...*

**Johnn, welcome to ODDS ezine. Thanks for taking the time out for this interview. First of all, can I get a bit of a biography of Johnn Four? What do you do other than spend time on RPGs?**

Thanks Jonathan. I work at the Alberta Motor Association. I'm a big hockey fan - go Oilers! When I'm not playing RPGs I'm playing board and video games. I also started a new blog, Campaign Mastery, so I guess I like to write too.

**What got you started in the RPG hobby in the first place?**

A friend received the Red Box set of D&D for Christmas in 1980. He gave the books to me to read, and so I became DM. Before that, though, I played once at school. The teacher let a student try to DM the whole class. The experiment resulted in chaos, but nobody complained. Something I've never mentioned in other interviews before is that, after that first exposure, I couldn't remember the name of the game, so I invented my own based on Stampede Wrestling. Getting those Red Box books was like fulfilling a quest. Aha! This was that cool game I played!

**Do you game much, and what are your favourite games?**

RPG-wise these days I have a D&D 4E campaign on the go called Carnus. The PCs are grogs serving a powerful Lord of the Slums, and they've managed to let priests of Orcus open a permanent rift to another plane. They are currently questing for parts of a key that will open a gate to a demi-plane where knowledge of how to close the gate is said to lie.

I'm also questing for a sci-fi RPG to play. Something involving spaceships, hardcore sci-fi without the math, aliens are ok but not required, and a thrilling setting. Have any recommendations? *(Yep. If you like D&D try and get a copy of Buck Rogers XXVc, or try Altermity or D6 Space - Ed)*

I also play a lot of board games. My current favourite is Twilight Imperium, but can only get victims around a table for that once or twice a year because it takes so long to play. Settlers of Catan, Puerto Rico, Tigris and Euphrates, Modern Art, and Aladdin's Dragons are other faves.

**What's your own personal RPG collection like - huge or small?**

It's pretty sizeable. I went nuts on eBay when I got a decent job in the 90s, then D&D 3E came along and I turned pay days into glory days.

**[www.roleplayingtips.com](http://www.roleplayingtips.com) has been around for a very long time and is incredibly popular. Tell us more about it - what got that project started?**

Two friends and I got together to think about starting an online RPG project. GM advice became the winning theme, but the project never got off the ground. I came across a site called marketingtips.com, and while the content was a hard-sell for an online course, the domain gave me an Aha! moment. November 1999 saw the first issue unleashed upon a couple friends and my hotmail account.

**What do you see happening with [www.roleplayingtips.com](http://www.roleplayingtips.com) in the future? Have you ever considered taking some of the best articles and putting them together in a published book?**

I would love to make all the content that is buried in the archives organized, categorized, and accessible to gamers. There are roughly 6000 tips in over 430 back issues.

I have WordPress installed at [www.roleplayingtips.com](http://www.roleplayingtips.com) and almost ready to go to for data entry - tips pasted in, tagged, and categorized. I just never have the time to devote to this project. I've thought of asking for volunteers to do data entry, but I'm not sure if that would be a fun thing for people to do. It would introduce you to a lot of GMing advice in the process though!

I have thought of putting some of the articles and tips I have written into a book. Someday. Someday!

**You've written published material for roleplaying games - feel free to plug your work and add some links here! - so tell us more about these projects.**

Heh. I wrote for Dragon Magazine for a couple of years, starting with issue #384. I wrote an article for Knights of the Dinner Table and a couple of d20 books. A few years ago I wrote NPC Essentials, the definitive guide for crafting awesome NPCs. With John Simcoe, I've recently co-authored GM Mastery: Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants, and GM Mastery: Adventure Essentials: Holidays

\* Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

How to design, map, and GM fresh encounters for RPG's most popular locales. Includes campaign and NPC advice as well, plus several generators and tables:

[http://roleplayingtips.rpgnow.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=51416](http://roleplayingtips.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=51416)

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**As a writer, what do you look for in RPGs? Do you like your game rulebooks thick, hundreds of pages long with the work done for you, with plenty of detail, narrative and material - or do you prefer them short and trim, with enough material to run a game with your own input?**

Hmmm, a tricky question. The thin rulebooks for Dread and My Life With Master seem to be the perfect length. The mega-volume of Ptolus is awesome. I also like the core books for almost all the D&D versions. So, can I weasel out with a tricky answer by saying that length should exactly serve the game and reader needs?

**Here's a question I ask most of my guests - the RPG industry has had its ups and downs but from what I gather it's maintaining a certain level of popularity right now. What do you see happening to tabletop RPGs in the future? Will they still be popular, or do you think other mediums such as online RPGs and console games will dominate?**

I like a lot of the small press RPGs coming out these days with specific stories to tell and compact rules that have a lot of design thought behind them to create different types of fun. Unfortunately, I have not found a way

to carve out time to play the great games out there like Dogs in the Vineyard, My Life With Master, Burning Wheel, and others - these are just the games I ear-marked for play years ago, and a ton of new games have been released since then.

I see tabletop RPGs continue to serve gamer needs long into the future. Computers, new ideas, and new tools will affect some groups, but the nature of the hobby is such that it allows an infinite variety of storytelling. Play, just the way you want.

**What else have you got planned for your gaming future?**

I have a couple shelves of games specially called out as "must play before I die." I've also ordered several molds from Hirst Arts to experiment with making my own terrain for minis. I'm building a new homebrew world for my 4E campaign, in which the city of Carnus is the current major gaming locale. As mentioned, I've got the official Roleplaying Tips blog, [www.CampaignMastery.com](http://www.CampaignMastery.com), started up with Roleplaying Tips contributor Mike Bourke.

**Thanks for doing this interview, John, and all the best.**

Have more fun at every game!

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# Return of the ‘ing

*That’s roleplay-‘ing to you and me, but how do you get your head around coming back to gaming after a long break? **Mark Newbold** opens the sliding hatch to his brain and lets you peek inside for answers, but beware of the echo-echo-echo-echo-echo...*

The very first time I roleplayed, beyond directing my Star Wars and Action Man figures, was back in 1984 when I joined a roleplaying group at school alongside Farsight Games director Jonathan Hicks. Back then we played D&D and had a blast. My character was called Taskmaster and we did all the classic D&D moves. That gave us a taste for more, and when the Star Wars RPG came along in 1987 Jonathan bought the first edition rules and we were away.

Now the time is fast approaching for me to take dice in hand, shake, pray and roll and see what happens. It’s been an age since I last played a game, pretended to be someone else for a couple of hours and just let rip in another universe and frankly I can’t wait.

But along with that anticipation there are also twinges of nervousness.

From 1987 until the mid 1990’s a group of us roleplayed regularly, at least once a week, and in that time built a whole universe of characters and locations that were intimately familiar to all the gamers. There was a shorthand, a way of describing things that meant the gamers and the GM could rattle the game through in a very fast time, and that made for an exciting and very fluid environment that could swap GM’s for different scenarios and keep things fresh.

And, given that we often played the same characters we knew the group

dynamics, how each character would interact with the others, how far to ‘push it’ with certain characters and what liberties you could take with others.

But now, looking down the barrel of another scenario outside of that ‘comfort zone’ I’m wondering if I have the gaming ability to cope. It will almost be like going back to 1984 and starting again.

To explain, while I have gamed a lot of sessions I would never presume to consider myself an experienced gamer. I know just enough about the rules to get through a game without hampering the pace, know when to pipe up when needed and can mix and match in different groups and situations. But – and I’m sure there are many readers who can identify with this – I’ve played one character for a long time. *A looong* time. So to step into new shoes and not inadvertently channel my old character is a daunting task.

It helps that I’m in the hands of a vastly experienced GM in Jonathan, who I know will give the group the time to adapt and settle into their roles. It also helps that, initially at least, we will be playing the D-6 system, with which I am familiar. But I also expect other systems to come into play as we progress. Certainly the SKETCH system at some juncture, and when other GM’s replace Jonathan for different scenarios then likely the Wizards D20 system, which I have yet to play at any great length.



So how do I get myself in the right frame of mind to start this new game? Well, first I need to break down what's going on in my head, and how to tackle it. In what I consider a very snappy manner, I consider these the Three E's.

### EMOTIONS

I'm nervous and excited at the same time. It's like watching West Bromwich Albion play Manchester United. You hope for the impossible, but you're not surprised when your team gets put to the sword. This feels kind of the same, because we set such a high watermark of quality, I know we'll all be disappointed if we don't at least approach that level of gaming.

But why do I feel these emotions?

Well, excitement at getting round a table again with friends, and getting back into some of the old habits (chat before a game, the recap and intro, the onion rings and bottle of cola) and the exhilaration in the midst of a great game when you are itching for it to be your turn. It's always a gamble, those dice can love you or hate you, but that's the whole point of roleplay. Make the right decisions and you're a hero, but if the dice are against you, you can end up looking like a chump. Similarly, you can make some appalling decisions (like, for example, opting to disarm a nuclear bomb on a totally deserted world when all you need to do is get on the ship to escape and failing your rolls, therefore dying a horrible but instantaneous death) and sometimes get away with it.

The nervousness comes from the horrible thought of sitting at the table, looking at the guys but just not feeling the vibe. We might get there, start playing and just not have 'it' anymore.

Which brings me to the next point.

### EXPECTATION

Back in the day (said Grandad) we used to game weekly. Jonathan and the other guys often played 2 or 3 sessions a week, and on top of that Jonathan was GMing games for other groups. That engendered a very smooth machine in terms of gaming and sessions. We lived, ate and breathed gaming.

But that was over a decade ago. Life moves on. We were all in our mid 20's back then. Now we're all married or divorced (that's a roleplay scenario all in itself) or parents. Life changes, and so do we. I can't help but think of those saddo's who said their childhood was raped by the Star Wars prequels. Those films could NEVER live up to the originals, not even if Lucas had got Spielberg, Jackson and Scorsese to direct them. Some things become practically untouchable and the years of discussing them, remembering them and – vitally - ignoring the not-so-good moments make them legendary.

And the gaming situation is just the same. We played hundreds of sessions over those years, but the law of averages means that while there were some classics in there, there were also some duffers.

But this new game will have only the classics to be measured against. Can we do it? Can we, like Mickey Rourke, resurrect what was so great about that era and resurrect it in 2009?

Which, in a seamless link, bring us to our final point.

## EXECUTION

While there is a huge onus on us gamers to get into the right frame of mind, there is also a weight on the GM to set the scene and marshal the game correctly.

Gamers can be egotistical and say that they are the stars of the show, which of course they are, in their own mind. But the GM is the real boss of the game. They are producer, director and production designer all rolled into one, and if there is a final destination for you to get to, be it in story or geographical terms, while they will often let you traverse that journey in your own way, rest assured that most of the time you will end up at point B, even if you have to go from point C to Z to get there.

The GM controls the pacing and mood of the game, determines what perils and pitfalls you will encounter and will often make rolls behind the screen. I know in previous scenarios that my character died, as did all of my fellow gamers. But in certain circumstances this doesn't serve the story or the game, and so the GM had the latitude to make that judgement call.

Of course, the gamers have to bring their game as well, and the unit needs to work together to make the whole situation work but the keystone is the GM, and the gamers need to support him in order to make the whole session work.

Bottom line – don't piss off your GM. Do what I did and buy him an apple every session.

So, what do I do next? Simple. Don't overthink it.

It's 2009, and we're not 16 any more. Of course the game will be different. We all have different experiences to draw upon, as well as 20 years of RPG experience. It would be nuts to think the game will be just like it was back in 1992, because it won't.

I just need to take those dice, let lady luck determine the numbers, trust in my GM and let rip.

I just wish I was starting NOW!

---

*Mark Newbold is the Webmaster of infamous Star wars fansite [www.lightsabre.co.uk](http://www.lightsabre.co.uk)*

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# FUN IN GAMES

*An article that asks the question:  
'Who gets the most enjoyment out of a roleplaying session?'*

There are three sides in every roleplaying game. The first side is the source of the reality, the Gamesmaster who creates and presents the setting for the players to interact with. The second side is the players, who interact with the GM's creations and try to overcome the obstacles and threats set for them.

Thirdly, there is the group side – where both GM and players combine their talents of storytelling and roleplaying to create a reality with both substance and soul. The suspension of disbelief is paramount to succeed in any roleplaying game and experiencing that is the mark of a good session.

That's the theory, at any rate. It can't be said that, even at the end of a lengthy campaign, *everyone* finishes with a smile on his or her face. The players may have failed several key missions; the GM may have botched several key moments with the wrong information or given away too much detail of the plot. A player may have actually lost their character; the GM may have lost an important Non-Player Character too early in the campaign. Can any GM or player honestly say that their game went 100 percent according to plan? It's doubtful.

But it's not really how well everyone did that makes a game – it's how much enjoyment they got out of it that counts. You may have lost your character, you may have lost the plot, but if you come out of it the other side with a sense of satisfaction then surely

the game, with all its problems and pitfalls, was worth it.

So we come to our main point – *who gets the most enjoyment out of a roleplaying session?*

There are many sources of fun that can be derived from a roleplaying game. Accomplishment, victory, pride in a character, advancement of self and many more feelings can be experienced during and after a campaign. But who, after the last die has been rolled and the last line been said, comes out with the most joy?

Here are several examples of possible feelings a roleplayer may have after finishing a game, with the differences between what the player and the GM may get out of it.

## A SENSE OF VICTORY

**Players:** It's obvious that, after fighting the forces of evil and casting down the bad guy/evil establishment the players are going to feel as though all their efforts, be they successful or not, were well worth it. Weeks of chasing, investigating and conflict all come to a head in an intended showdown that wraps the plot and ends the game. Accomplishing this, even if the opposition are simply delayed or upset in their plans, gives the player a sense of success. A satisfied smile is a welcome moment, with all the in-game rewards the victory brings. Players get a lot of enjoyment out of this.

**GM:** This is a difficult one for the GM. Basically, if the GM is victorious then that means that the players have failed or been wiped out – that doesn't make for a good game. A GM sitting back with a smile on his face when he sees the last PC (Player Character) bite the dust may be pleasing for them, but the players will feel as though all their efforts were for nought. The idea is for the GM to gain satisfaction from seeing the players beam with pride at their accomplishments and provide a good, challenging game for friends who share the hobby.

### **REWARDS**

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**Players:** After all their ministrations and effort the players expect some kind of reward for their PC's, in the form of experience points so that their characters can improve in skill or in-game rewards, such as money or new equipment, to aid the PC's in their quest to better themselves. It could be said that the players should be rewarded enough with the fact that they succeeded; after all, it's not as if the money they earn as PC's is real money, is it? The reward should be in the gaming experience, not the additions to the character sheet. It could also be argued that, in true gaming tradition, that the PC's should be rewarded with items because it is within the game's own reality that they should, and that money and equipment will help improve the PC's and help their position in the game. This is a source of pride for the players when they can show what they have earned with their efforts. All that is fair enough, but simply playing the game to reap the rewards makes for shallow gaming, and will soon turn the game into a set of rules and not a believable setting.

**GM:** Unless the players are paying rent to use the GM's gaming table then there is very little for the GM to get from the rewards that are handed out. A GM's reward is seeing the players pleased with their success and the benefits they reap. It makes the whole campaign worth it.

### **SURVIVAL**

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**Players:** There may be a time when the odds are so horribly stacked against the PC's, through fault of their own or overkill from the GM, that simply getting out alive is enough to please the players. Losing well-developed PC's can be quite distressing and being placed in a situation where they get out by the skin of their teeth can get a lot of sighs of relief from the players. Although it may sound a little strange (after all, if the PC's have only just escaped with their lives then surely something must have gone wrong?) it is not necessarily so. Winning the day but only just getting away as the mothership explodes/bad guy's base erupts/starship crashes to the ground can be as tense as actually fighting the final battle and makes for a great ending. A feeling of just getting through it all, added to the sense of victory, can be a great feeling.

**GM:** Well, this is something the GM will never get. They play so many of the NPC's in the game that being upset or pleased when one is taken down or fails isn't really something that is going to happen. Their characters getting out by the skin of their teeth and saving the day isn't an option, either. It's up to the players and their PC's to save the day; it's the very purpose of the game. The GM can derive pleasure from the fact that their players are happy with the outcome of the session and knowing their work was worth it.

## TELLING A GOOD STORY

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**Players:** It's sometimes assumed that the players are simply at the table to pit their PC's against the trials and tribulations the GM has designed for them. Not so. The idea of a wargame is such a thing – the idea of a roleplaying game is for the players to interact with a story the GM has designed. If, after all the PC's have been through, even if most or all of them have been killed or removed from play, the players can honestly sit and say 'that was a damn good story' then there is a certain amount of enjoyment to be had from that. In fact, looking back on the adventures of a character, be they the final battle or one of the conflicts during the campaign, can bring smiles to the faces of the players.

**GM:** It's the same old story, I'm afraid. The GM will gain satisfaction that they designed a good game (sometimes, unfortunately, before the game is even run) but the true test of their design comes in the reaction of the players. If they appear surly or non-committal to the task at hand then the design has died in production. If the players respond well and enjoy taking part in the game to help tell a story, then it's a job well done. The GM can gain satisfaction from a job well done, especially when, a few weeks or months down the line, a player says 'do you remember when...?' and refers to the game in question.

## ROLEPLAYING WELL

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**Players:** Finally, we come to the true purpose of a roleplaying game. As a player, the knowledge that a PC has been created, built, nurtured and played well is a source of great accomplishment and pride, and what's more there is a sense of deserving rewards and advancements when the

PC has been portrayed the way it was designed within the parameters of the game. All players are improvisational actors at heart and being given rewards for their ability to bring the character to life will always be welcome. Extra points for solving a puzzle or defeating a bad guy is something every player is capable of earning, but gaining extra points for playing a character well is even more of a source of fun.

**GM:** If the players are improvisational actors, then the GM is a schizophrenic improvisational actor. With all the NPC's they have to portray to keep the story flowing they are required to make sure each one has their quirk or signature to be recognisable and make sure the players react to them well. If the players do react to them well, be they help or hindrance, then the GM knows that the character has been well portrayed and they gain satisfaction from this.

So, what does all this tell you? Well, the enjoyment that is shared out in a campaign depends upon the reaction to the game by the players, the game being the GM's responsibility to create and present. Now, this may sound as though it's all up to the GM to provide an evenings entertainment and it's all their fault/doing that the game failed/succeeded but that's not it at all. That would put far too much pressure on the GM to get things right.

The final word is this – the players get the enjoyment from taking part in a well-designed game that they can express their desires within, be it for gaming, victory or rewards. The GM plays the game to see the players enjoy their creations and react to their words. If the players wanted to please the GM they'd be led about by the nose, lose

one PC after another and lose interest. If the GM wanted to get continuous enjoyment out of providing linear adventures, killing of PC's at regular intervals because they see the game as a form of competition then they'll lose players.

It is up to every player and GM to inject something into a roleplay session – the GM cannot assume the players will carry the game when they are waiting for a cue from the GM, and vice versa. Only a team effort from every angle will create stimulating enjoyable and, yes, fun games that will be remembered.

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# Jonathan Hicks's Top Ten Roleplaying Games

or

## What I Learned About Roleplaying From The Stuff I Bought

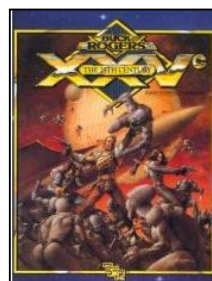
I've played a lot of roleplaying games over the last 25 years – in fact, before I culled my collection, I owned 31 different RPG systems and had either played in or GM'd more than twenty. In all that time there were several games and game systems that really jumped out at me and told me 'this is the way you should do things'.

So, here are my favourite games and how they influenced me as a player and a GM, counting down from 10 to 1.

### Number 10:

#### **Buck Rogers XXVc**

It kicks botty. I didn't really like the AD&D system but it had been modified to suit this game, and in Buck Rogers I could blast about the cosmos on top of a nuclear missile and rain laser death on genetically engineered freaks. This game reflected my love for the 1930s Buster Crabbe serials, like Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers, whilst at the same time giving me a rich campaign setting to play in. It didn't influence me or change my perception of RPGs. I just wanted to blow shit up with my rocket pistol, and after years of gaming in gritty settings and getting serious it was nice to just jump in a spaceship and fire off some missiles. It reminded me that games could be fun.

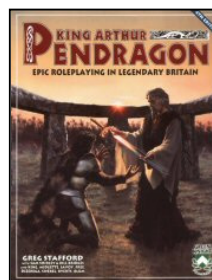


### Number 9:

#### **Pendragon**

I never played it. I never even created a character for it. But Pendragon gave me such a wealth of information and a wonderful way of playing a game, of feeling that you were not just playing a game but creating a saga, that I mined it for ideas and information for years. Many of my fantasy games were influenced by Pendragon's way of doing things and the idea that your actions influenced your character was exciting and fun to use. I used that idea to document three successive generations of a single player character's family in a WFRP game that lasted over three years of playing time – the father, the daughter and the granddaughter, all played by the same player. To be truthful, the player never knew the father was of the same bloodline, and we never fully finished the campaign to find the truth.

I'm sure if he reads this he'll have a few questions now.

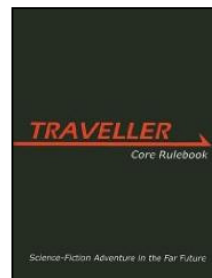




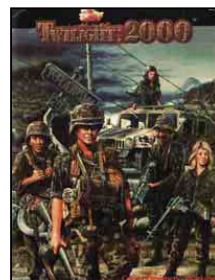
**Number 8:****Traveller**

Like many others gamers this was my first science fiction roleplaying game. I also dabbled in Star Frontiers but Traveller was the first sci-fi game that told me that I didn't have to create yet another first-level elf.

As with Runequest I never really played Traveller. I was involved in several games of a long-running campaign but I never settled into a regular routine. I was playing D&D at the time and Traveller was just a curiosity. I had never considered RPGs as anything but a fantasy game so it was intriguing to play in a science fiction setting. Although my only long running sci-fi campaign would be Star Wars, Traveller let me know that my love for science fiction wasn't being ignored by the hobby I was beginning to enjoy.

**Number 7:****Twilight: 2000**

I remember buying this because it was so very different to all the RPGs I had purchased before. My other games were either fantasy or sci-fi, so to find a game set in the modern world with no magic, monsters or spaceships was peculiar. I was already on a military drive (I was playing a lot of MechWarrior at the time) and so I picked the game up. Although the system was so-so and the character creation and combat system were overly complicated, the feeling of reality the game invoked was startling. Nuclear wars, devastated nations, a world clinging to life. It was still fiction but it all felt possible, and that was the appeal. I only ever got two campaigns out of it but they were gritty and dark. Twilight: 2000 taught me that games didn't just need to be about clashing swords, flaming spells and faster-than-light travel; they could also be much more than that.

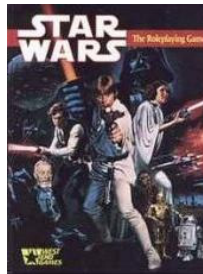
**Number 6:****Dungeons and Dragons (Basic)**

This is what got me started, way back in 1984. It's not a great game but it does exactly what it needs to do to get new blood into the hobby. Sometimes, when I see the huge number of pages in new RPGs or the fact that you have to purchase multiple books to enjoy a system, I wonder why it is that publishers don't target new players with the simplicity of a cut-down version of their game. This is what Basic D&D was, a simple game that eased new players into the hobby and introduced them to the world of RPGs. I moved on pretty quickly from Basic D&D to Advanced, but soon after that I stopped playing D&D altogether. There was something about Advanced, in all its incarnations, which turned me off it. It just didn't seem to have the magic or feel of Basic D&D and all that sense of wonder was lost in charts and tables, rules and regulations.

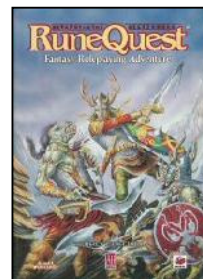


**Number 5:****Star Wars (D6)**

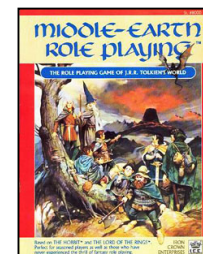
Star Wars was my second most-played game. It was also the largest group I played with - consisting of six players and a GM at its peak - and the games went from running around defying the Empire to designing an entire region of space for our characters to explore and adventure in (the fruits of which can be seen at [www.lightsabre.co.uk](http://www.lightsabre.co.uk)). It was, by far, the largest campaign setting I designed and it grew even larger with additions from the players and other GMs. So why does it not appear higher on my list? Well it is a great game. I like the easy, fast system and the original rulebooks are wonderful to read. I bought the game as a massive Star Wars fan and it reinvigorated my love for roleplaying. It introduced me to large group games and inspired me to create some crazy stuff. Amongst all this, though, I can't truly say it changed my attitude to RPGs at all. It definitely got me involved with and taught me how to run large group games, but ultimately it was just that I loved the Star Wars universe and here was a game that allowed me to play in it.

**Number 4:****Runequest**

Interestingly, I only ever played Runequest twice, both times as GM. I never played it as a player. The reason why I have it on my list is because it showed me that there were games out there other than D&D that could give me more options as to what I could do with a character, and the fact that I didn't have to 'level up' to improve my abilities and that my skills could be influenced by gameplay. Runequest, and I'm talking about the mid-eighties Games Workshop release, was an excellent game and had plenty of long-term playing appeal. I'm upset that I never got to play in a full campaign.

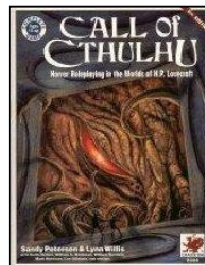
**Number 3:****Middle Earth Role Play (MERP)**

One of the first fully fleshed out characters I ever created and played was done with this game. I had never really designed characters that I became attached to or regarded as anything other than a set of numbers on a page but MERP taught me that a lot of detail on a character sheet could be interpreted into an interesting, motivated character with goals and ideals. It's not the best system out there, and I dislike its parent Rolemaster for all its complexities, but MERP opened my eyes to another level of roleplaying I had never experienced, that of playing a character who's past and present influences decisions, and that I was actually required to play a role, as the name of the hobby suggests.



**Number 2:****Call Of Cthulhu**

I had never read H P Lovecraft until I played this game and it introduced me to a vivid and somewhat disturbing world. Not only does it invoke great atmosphere it's a great example of how rules can suit a setting down to the ground. To me, playing Call Of Cthulhu is a bit like getting with friends and experimenting with an ouija board, or sneakily watching a late-night scary film when you should be asleep, and then being kept awake most of the night by the fearful images and 'could-it-be-real' thoughts that wander through your mind in the small hours. Personally, I'd forget all the Cthulhu Now, Delta Green and CthulhuTech stuff – stick with the early twentieth century period and experience proper horror.

**Number 1:****Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (1<sup>st</sup> Edition)**

The original rulebook was a mighty tome and had absolutely everything you needed to run a game in Warhammer's Old World – character creation, careers, a full magic system, histories, location details, a bestiary, even charts and tables on insanity, phobias and random magical items. This one book alone was enough to keep a gaming candle burning for years, and indeed it did. I ran WFRP games for years and in all that time I could simply refer to the rulebook for everything I needed, even inspiration for new games and adventures. I bought some supplements, sure, but they were never used. In time the adventures, campaigns and extras I gathered were sold but I never parted with the main solid rulebook, which has been on my shelf for over twenty years and still gets some use.



To me, WFRP is what a RPG rulebook should be – it contains every detail you need to run a succesful campaign, and it's atmospheric and a pretty good read to boot. I love the system and I even like the idea and implementation of careers.

With more than 8 years of continuous campaigning with many, many player characters, and delving into the Old World's history and possible futures, WFRP is, by far, my game of choice.

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