***Introduction to TTRPG’s***

If you’re reading this, then either you or someone who wants to hang out with you are interested in playing a Table-Top Role-Playing Game (often abbreviated to “Table-Top RPG” or just “TTRPG”), such as Dungeons and Dragons, Pathfinder, Cyberpunk, or something similar to them. If you’ve ever felt intimidated by those games or thought to yourself that those games sound way too complicated for you, you wouldn’t be alone in that.

But this website is designed and intended to combat that feeling by explaining exactly what all of those game systems have in common, and showing you exactly how simple they truly are on a fundamental level.

Table-Top RPG’s, much like other sub-categories of RPG, tend to revolve around the “3 Pillars of Role-Playing,” which are Combat, Socialization, and Exploration. Some RPG’s (most commonly in video games) may forgo the Combat pillar, but the ones who succeed without it are much rarer, and must lean heavily on the Exploration and/or Socialization pillars as a result, a la Sherlock Holmes or Animal Crossing.

The Combat pillar focuses on how violent interactions between characters are resolved.

The Socialization pillar focuses on how non-violent interactions between characters are resolved.

The Exploration pillar focuses on how characters interact with the surrounding game-world.

***Vocabulary: “System” vs “Game”***

It’s also important to note that, specifically for ***Table-Top*** RPG’s, the term “Game” does not refer to “Dungeons and Dragons”, or “Pathfinder”, etc. In the greater context of the TTRPG community, those are referred to as “Systems” because they are merely theme-focused rule-systems that outline how the players interact with the fictional world the game takes place in. So what ***does*** the word “Game” mean in the context of a TTRPG? Generally, it refers to a specific storyline, being run by a specific Game Master (fancy term for “Main Storyteller and Rules Referee”; sometimes also called a “Dungeon Master”), and usually on a specific day of the week. The system used is largely considered to be mostly irrelevant to the identity of the game, and some games have been known to transition from one system to another in the middle of the story for any reason or none at all (as long as the players all agree to the change, of course), such as the first campaign of the famous “Critical Role” campaign switching from Pathfinder to 5th-edition Dungeons and Dragons when they transitioned from being a podcast to being a Twitch stream. For example, if your friend Daniel is running a heist storyline in one of the Cyberpunk rule systems (and its associated theme) every Monday, most of the players would refer to it either as “Daniel’s heist game” or “Daniel’s Monday game”.

***Exploration and Socialization***

Exploration and Socialization are the pillars of a TTRPG that are much less rules-oriented and much more oriented around the actual “Role-Play” part of being a Table-Top Role-Playing Game. As described on our Home Page, the Socialization pillar focuses on how non-violent interactions between characters are resolved, and the Exploration pillar focuses on how characters interact with the surrounding game-world.

As discussed in our page on the rule disparity between Combat and these two pillars, it’s common to assume that, because Exploration and Socialization have fewer rules governing them, that they are less important. As we mention in that article, that is not the actual reason for the rules disparity (the actual reasons being subjectivity, and the need for some semblance of balance due to the competitive nature of combat), and the pillars that the players and their Game Master are most interested in are the pillars that should be emphasized the most. Players should work with their Game Master ahead of time to discuss the kind of stories they want to experience as their characters.

As for the pillars themselves and what they entail, they are both very subjective and depend on the creativity of both the players and the Game Master, but most systems give the characters access to certain skills that can be used to improve their chances of success when interacting with certain characters and elements of the game-world.

For example, the Socialization pillar entails the rules around things like the ability to persuade a crime lord into selling you some information, or wow a crowd with a fantastic musical performance, or perhaps trick a guard into thinking you’re ***not*** the intruder they’re looking for and he went ***that*** way.

Likewise, the Exploration pillar would entail the rules of interacting with the non-character elements of the world, such as the ability to stay on course when trekking through a jungle, or search a room for a secret passage or other clues, or perhaps you’re trying to craft something with some tools, spare materials, wit, and luck.

***Why does Combat have so many Rules? Is it more important?***

It’s an astoundingly common trait of TTRPG’s that the rules of combat make up a large portion of the rules in most Systems. Some players and Game Masters interpret this fact to mean that combat is the most important part of most TTRPG, and, while we don’t blame them for thinking that, we do think they’re being a bit short-sighted to assume that the pillar with the most rules attached to it is the pillar with the most importance attached to it.

In our perspective, the actual reason the rules of combat tend to be so in-depth is twofold. It is partly because combat is the pillar where one player’s accomplishments can be directly compared to another’s in an apples-to-apples fashion, and therefore each player wants and expects to be able to contribute positively to a combat encounter, and they are often disappointed if they are unable to contribute as much as other players. As a result, most rule systems endeavor to give most characters some way of contributing to a combat encounter that is both thematic and fair. The other notable reason that TTRPG’s tend to emphasize the rules of Combat over the rules of Exploration and Socialization is that Combat is drastically more objective than the other two pillars, and objective topics are much easier to write rules for than subjective topics, as most people in the field of Law will tell you.

So no, Combat is not more important in the rules systems of TTRPG’s. It ***can*** however be ***made*** more important if the Game Master chooses to emphasize it in line with their and their players’ own interests and preferences for the game.

***Combat***

As described previously on our Home Page, the Combat pillar focuses on how violent interactions between characters are resolved. Typically, this is the most complex portion of the rules in each system. We cover that subject more in-depth in our article about why combat has so many rules and if the other pillars are less important as a result of the imbalance of rules. Each pillar is, as always, only as important to the game as it is to its players. In other words, the Game Master should only emphasize the combat pillar if that’s what they and the players want.

That being said, so far we haven’t actually talked about what combat is like in a TTRPG. Generally, most rule systems separate combat into turns, where every creature gets its own turn, and some combination of game mechanics and/or dice rolls determine the order of whose turn happens when in the combat encounter. Usually each character has the opportunity to move, attack (sometimes multiple times per turn), and potentially do one other predefined thing in addition to those. The rules about how to determine whether the attacks hit or miss are usually rather straightforward, as are the rules regarding the damage and other potential effects of the attack if it does successfully hit its target.

That being said, many systems implement and/or explain these combat steps so clearly that it’s usually hard to ***mis***understand the flow of combat in those systems.

***Magic (or Sufficiently Advanced Technology)***

[To Be Filled Later]