

1 Introduction

To write an ethnography requires a large knowledge and a bit of empathy for the culture or subculture on which the writer focuses.

The following paper tries to fulfil those demands. It describes the subculture of role players, takes a look at their habits, rituals and behaviour during their meetings.

It is difficult to describe the topic in its entirety, since it is a phenomenon which expands over at least three decades, fascinating millions of people all over the world. This is, as far as I know, the first attempt to describe the language of the subculture as a cultural phenomenon without rating it.

Unfortunately, the topic is too wide, so that I was not able to do justice to every existing system and every niche. I had to focus my attention on a rather small section, and I decided to focus especially on Pen & Paper role playing games, their players and last, but not least, their language.

Since this is a linguistic paper, I concentrated a lot of my attention on conversations during role playing sessions, and on role playing games-immanent media, such as role books and handouts.

But it was also necessary to have a quick glance on the history of role playing games, on the sociological backgrounds of role players, on their religions, philosophy, ways of life, their educational level and their hopes and dreams, or this would not have been an ethnography at all.

Right in this moment, role playing games, especially Massive Multi-Player Online Role Playing Games like World of Warcraft, are on everyone's lips. People say that children are addicted to their games. Parents fear that their children might forget the difference between reality and game, that they might lose their own personality by taking over another. Movies like 'Mazes and Monsters' or comics like 'Dark Dungeons' added fuel to the flames of fear.

I hope that I can take some fears away by helping to understand a subculture that has its own way of talking, its own subjects and often a quite weird appeal. Perhaps I can show that role playing games are no way of Satan to seduce children to worship him, and no danger to life and limb.