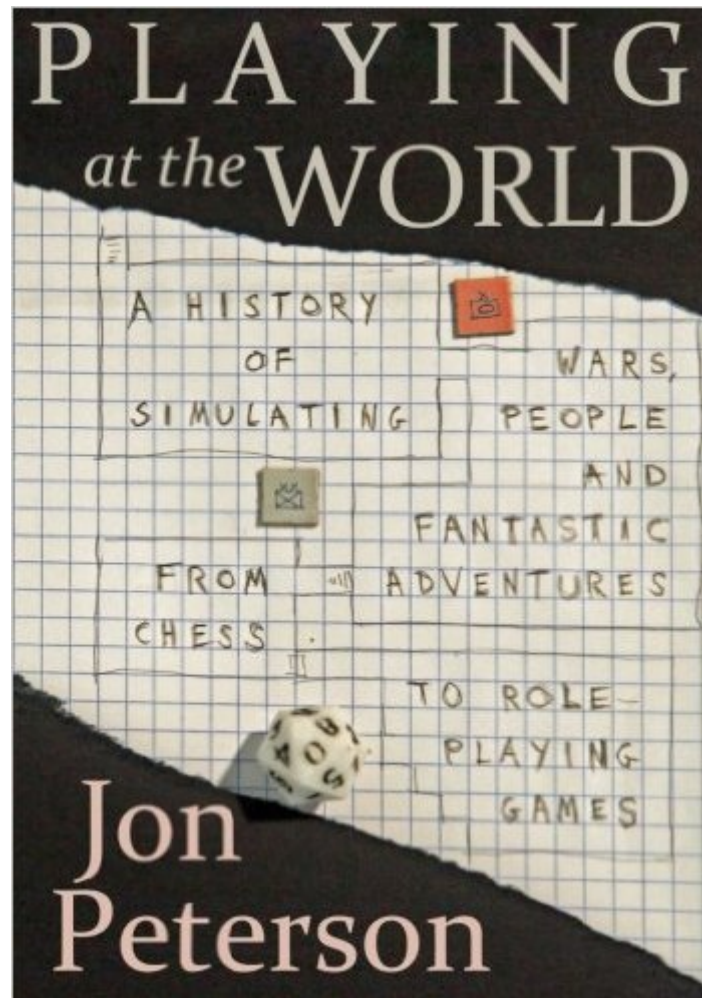


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# Playing At The World



## Synopsis

Explore the conceptual origins of wargames and role-playing games in this unprecedented history of simulating the real and the impossible. From a vast survey of primary sources ranging from eighteenth-century strategists to modern hobbyists, *Playing at the World* distills the story of how gamers first decided fictional battles with boards and dice, and how they moved from simulating wars to simulating people. The invention of role-playing games serves as a touchstone for exploring the ways that the literary concept of character, the lure of fantastic adventure and the principles of gaming combined into the signature cultural innovation of the late twentieth century.

## Book Information

Paperback: 720 pages

Publisher: Unreason Press; 2nd edition (August 1, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0615642047

ISBN-13: 978-0615642048

Product Dimensions: 7 x 1.6 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (35 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #97,769 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #41 in [Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Gaming > Dungeons & Dragons](#) #92 in [Books > Science & Math > Mathematics > History](#)

## Customer Reviews

Full disclosure: The author and I have been friends since 1995; we met when I was in college. I had the pleasure of reading an early draft as well as the final version of the book. I cannot recommend this book highly enough to anyone who is interested in how modern board games, role playing games, and computer games came to be. The book traces the evolution of three separate ideas over centuries -- playing a role, games of chance, and fantastical fiction -- and shows how they crystallized into *Dungeons and Dragons* in the 1970s. It's easy to underestimate the significance of this event: it is the progenitor of all role playing games today and therefore modern video games such as *World of Warcraft*, *Halo*, board games such as *Descent*, and card games such as *Magic: The Gathering*. To me, the most fascinating aspect of *Playing at the World* is how it answers questions I'd never thought of, despite playing D&D since I was 7, questions which in retrospect are puzzling. Why are Clerics called Clerics? Why does the Magic-User spell list include Dimension

Door and Mirror Image? Why do Thieves have the particular set of skills they do, and why is there Thieves' Cant? Why Hit Dice, Hit Points, and a d20? All of these details suggested a world which the early books only peripherally explained. Why is there an omnipotent Dungeon Master? By comprehensively examining the fantasy literature and the history of chance in gaming and wargames, the book is able to show the origins of each of these ideas and how they were combined in Dungeons and Dragons.

At 720 pages in length and weighing enough to use in case of zombie apocalypse as a bludgeoning tool, *Playing at the World* is an immense book. It is filled with the history that examines how Dungeons and Dragons came to be, the strategy games that came before, and the utter lasting effect that all of these play experiences have on our media today. The author goes into every facet in incredible depth with the most minute of details being brought to light. This is both the book's greatest asset and its weakest. To those seeking the origins of their favorite role playing game and want to know every little detail than this combination of knowledge will be an utter godsend. However, to those approaching from the outside in with an interest in the topic and the need to read a good book will be intimidated and put off by the sheer amount of content and its delivery. When *Playing at the World* grabs your interest it truly does with intriguing and little known facts that give us glimpses into the foundation of some of our favorite works. There are answers in this book to questions you didn't even know you wanted the answer to: until you read the question that is. Intriguing things like the naming of various classes, the idea of hit points and twenty sided dice, where the dungeon master steps in, what truly came before Dungeons and Dragons and who created it and why? All of these are answered in detail leaving no stone unturned. The amount of research alone that went into this book alone is impressive, but collecting it and combining it into a decently written book is downright awesome. However, as I stated before the entry fee into such a glimpse into the history of our gaming culture is a high one indeed.

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