

# A Unified Model for Role Playing – Part I

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Version: 0.1

Status: Public Draft for comments

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# Change Log

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- 28/01/2008: First Version, Exposure draft
- 30/01/2008: Corrections and consolidation
- 08/02/2008: Expansion of activity and process sections
- 10/02/2008: Introduction and Objectives Added.
- 15/02/2008: Minor corrections to Introduction and Objectives. Game section added. 'Role' and 'Play' section added. Minor corrections to "Process" section. Minor correction to System section.
- 20/02/2008: Introduction expanded. System section better explained. Purposes section with a few corrections. Minor fixes in Process section. Version added on cover. License and Thanks section Added.



# Introduction and Objectives

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- Why a Unified Model?
  - To describe most (all?) forms of role-playing with a unique model
  - To better map and relate some particular forms of role-playing
  - To clarify the role-playing term and better define the 'game' suffix in role-playing games
  - To incorporate and expand current models into a unique one



# Introduction and Objectives

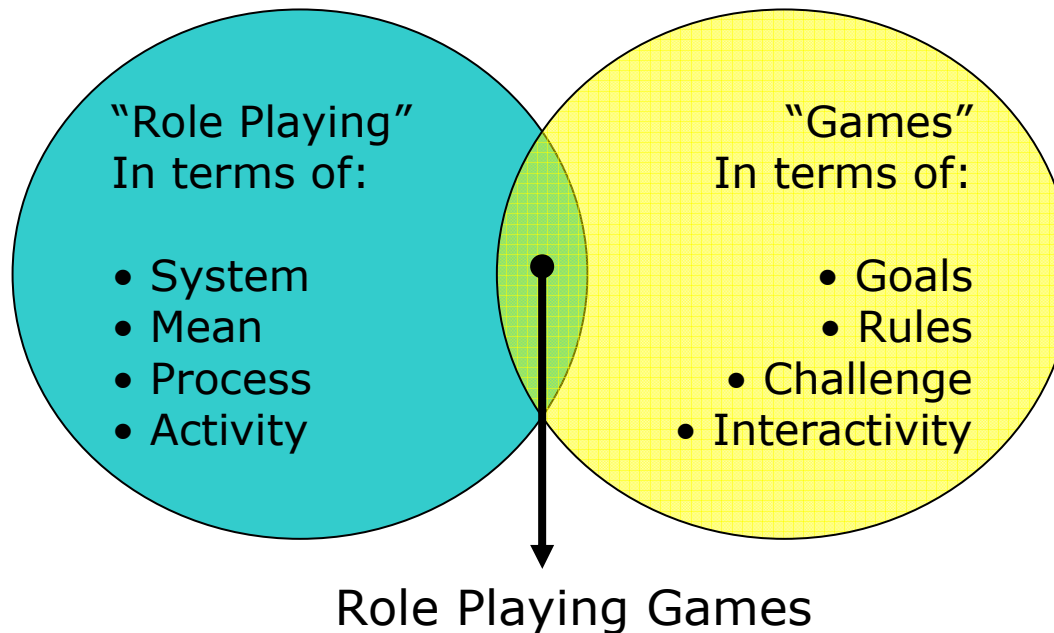
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- Model is presented in two parts:
  - Part I (this file)
    - Basic definitions and key concepts, where all elements needed to apply the model are presented and described.
    - What “game” means in the RPG acronym?
      - I will not say what a ‘game’ is, but only what the role-playing use from the “game” in order to obtain a “role playing game”
  - Part II
    - Applications of the model (tabletop RPG, live RPG, narrativist games, chamber games, mud, interactive fiction, MMORPG...)
    - Mapping of current RPG theories onto the model (Threefold, G-N-S, Process Model, ...)

# Introduction and Objectives

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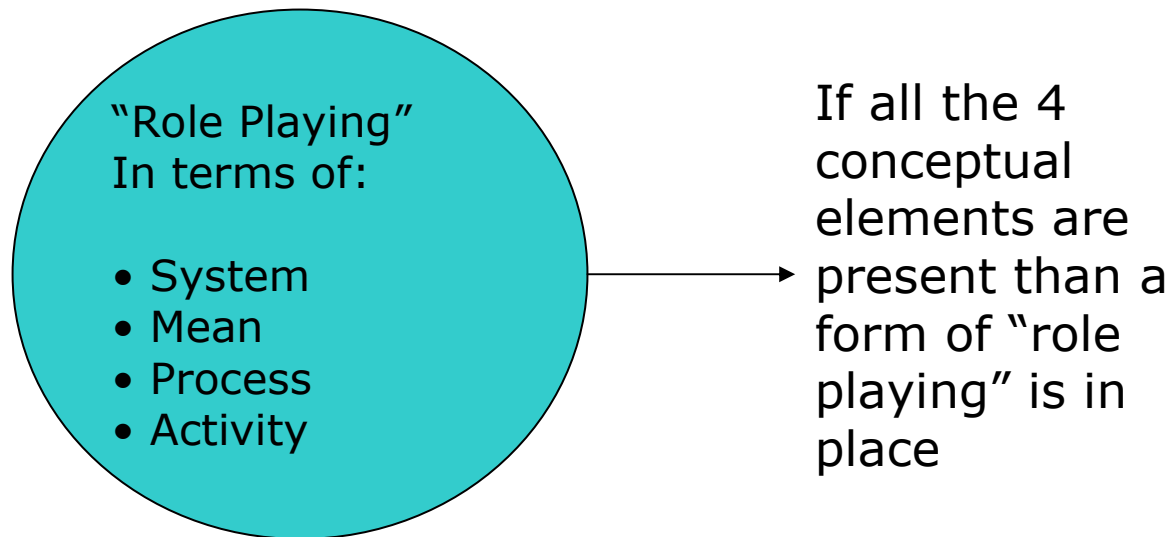
- Sequence of arguments and model definition:



# Introduction and Objectives

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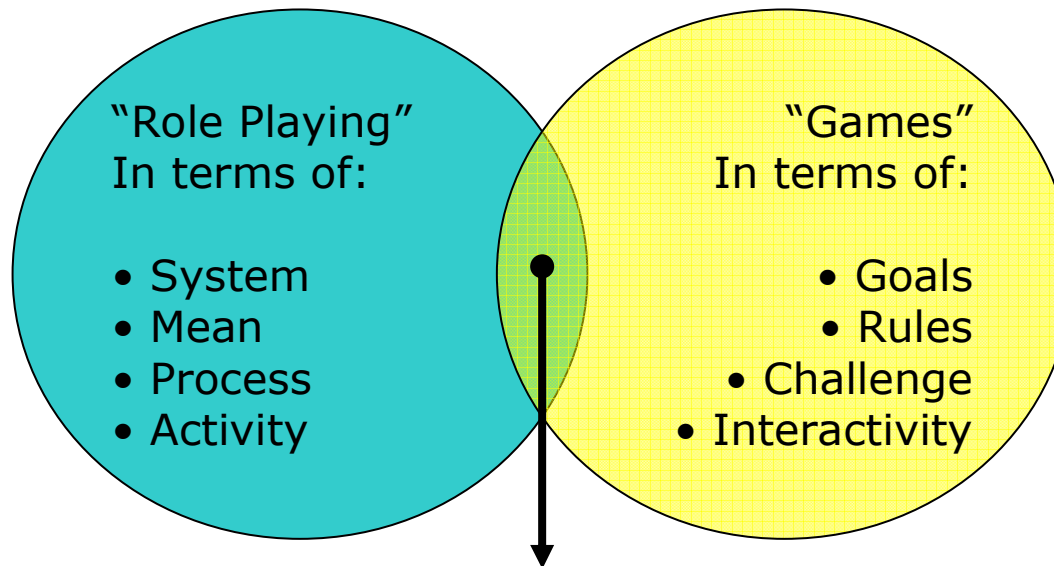
- Sequence of arguments and model definition:



# Introduction and Objectives

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- Sequence of arguments and model definition:



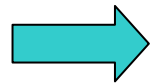
Role Playing Games satisfy the "Role Playing" criteria and "Games" criteria



# Part I

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- Basic Definitions and Key Concepts



- Definition of Role-Playing

- Definition of Role-Playing System

- Purposes in Role-Playing

- The Process of Role-Playing

- Activity

- 'Role', 'Play', Interactors and Interactions in Role-playing

- The meaning of 'game' in RPG acronym





# Definition

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- Role-playing may be defined as:
  - A **system** described in terms of components and their relationships
  - A **mean** to reach one or more purposes
  - A **process** that takes one or more input and produces one or more output
  - An **activity** in which at least one of the agents is human and plays a 'role'. By default, there's no intended (or paying) audience except for the players.



## Definition (cont.)

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- **System** concept is a description of role-playing components
- **Mean** will explore the role-playing in terms of its purposes
- **Process** will identify set of common actions within role-playing 'actors'
- **Activity** will explore the concept of agents and interactivity in role-playing



# Definition (cont.)

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- **Assumptions and Definitions**

- **Role-Playing:**

- Is an activity in which at least one of the agents is human and plays a 'role'.
    - In-Game and Out-of-Game tasks and actions may be represented through processes and sub-processes.
    - Always has an Out-Of-Game purpose.
    - Has a system describable in terms of an architecture

- **Role-Playing Form**

- Is one of the possible role-play architectures within a system
    - A Role-Playing Form is always describable in terms of its system, purposes, process and activity



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# The System

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- A group of independent but **interrelated elements** comprising a unified whole
- A procedure or process for obtaining an objective
- From: <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/system>



# The System (cont.)

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- **A set of interacting or interdependent entities**
  - I'll call such entities the **components** of a role-playing system.
- **A set of relationships**
  - **Relationships** are established between the components of role-playing system.
- **Man-made systems normally have a certain purpose, set of objectives**
  - A role-playing system must be arranged in order to have a purpose, an objective.
    - *Note: Objectives of a role-playing system are different from the objectives of role-playing considered as a mean*



## The System (cont.)

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- Role-Playing system is then described by:
  - Components
    - The single **physical and logical elements** and sub-elements that are used for role-playing
  - Architecture
    - The **physical and logical relationships** between the components

SYSTEM = COMPONENTS + ARCHITECTURE



# RPG System

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- **Definition: A role-playing system is the set of components and relationships between them (the architecture)**
  - Some of the (sub)components and instantiable relationships are usually explicit (i.e. game manuals, explicit rules, dice to be used, action resolution, ...). These are improperly called 'system'. They are, actually, a subsystem.
- Different forms of role-playing may have a different architecture but the same components or same architecture but different components.
- Certain configuration of RPG systems are preferred to others, in order to reach specific purposes
  - Tabletop configuration is different than LARP configuration





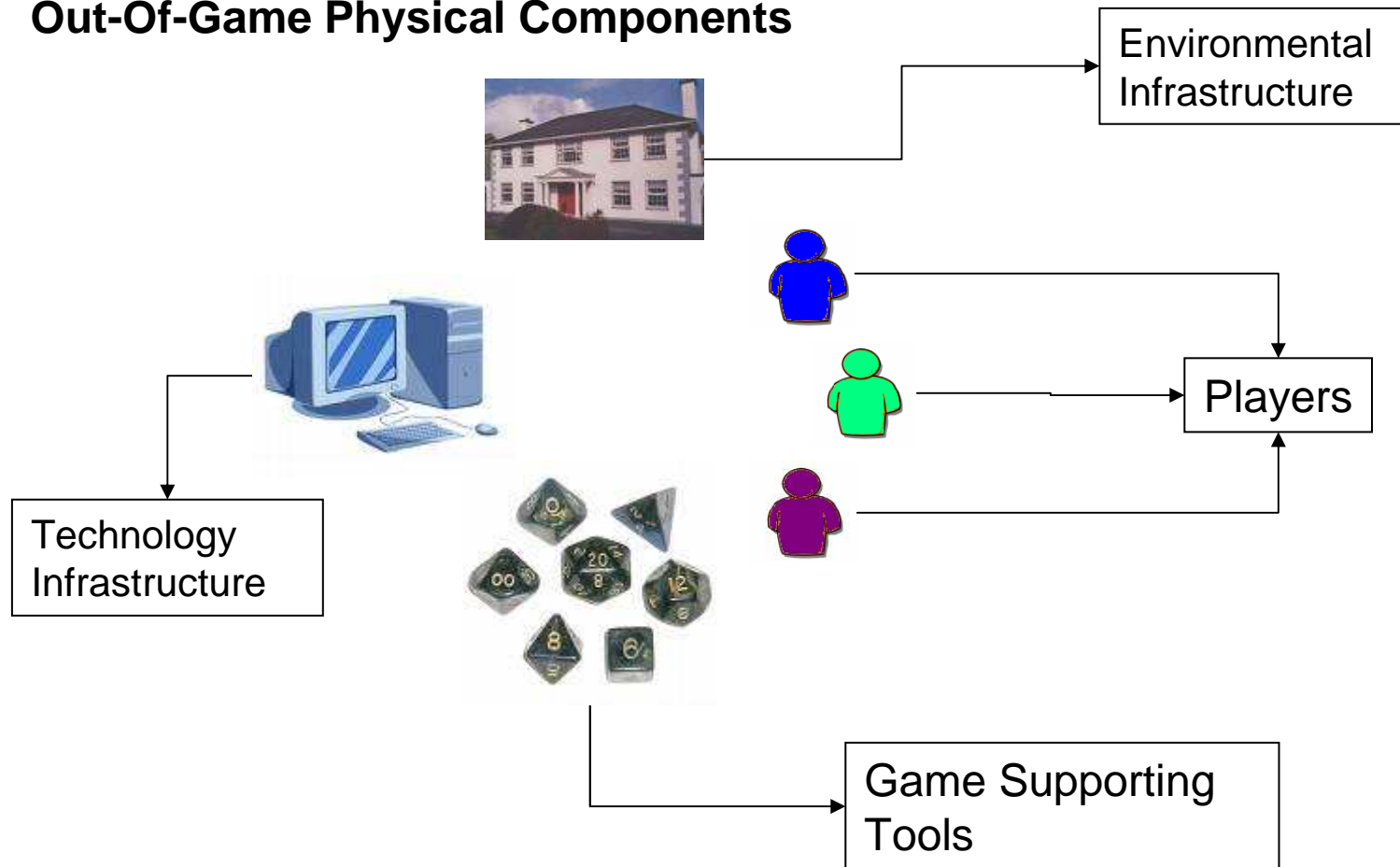
# The System (cont.)

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- **The Components** are divided into out-of-game and in-game components and between physical and logical components
  - **Out-Of-Game**
    - **Physical**
      - **Real Players, Technology Infrastructure, Enviromental Infrastructure, Game Supporting Tools, Personal Real Space, Shared Real Space**
  - **In-Game**
    - **Logical**
      - **Playing Characters, Non-Playing Characters, Personal Imaginary Space, Shared Imaginary Space**

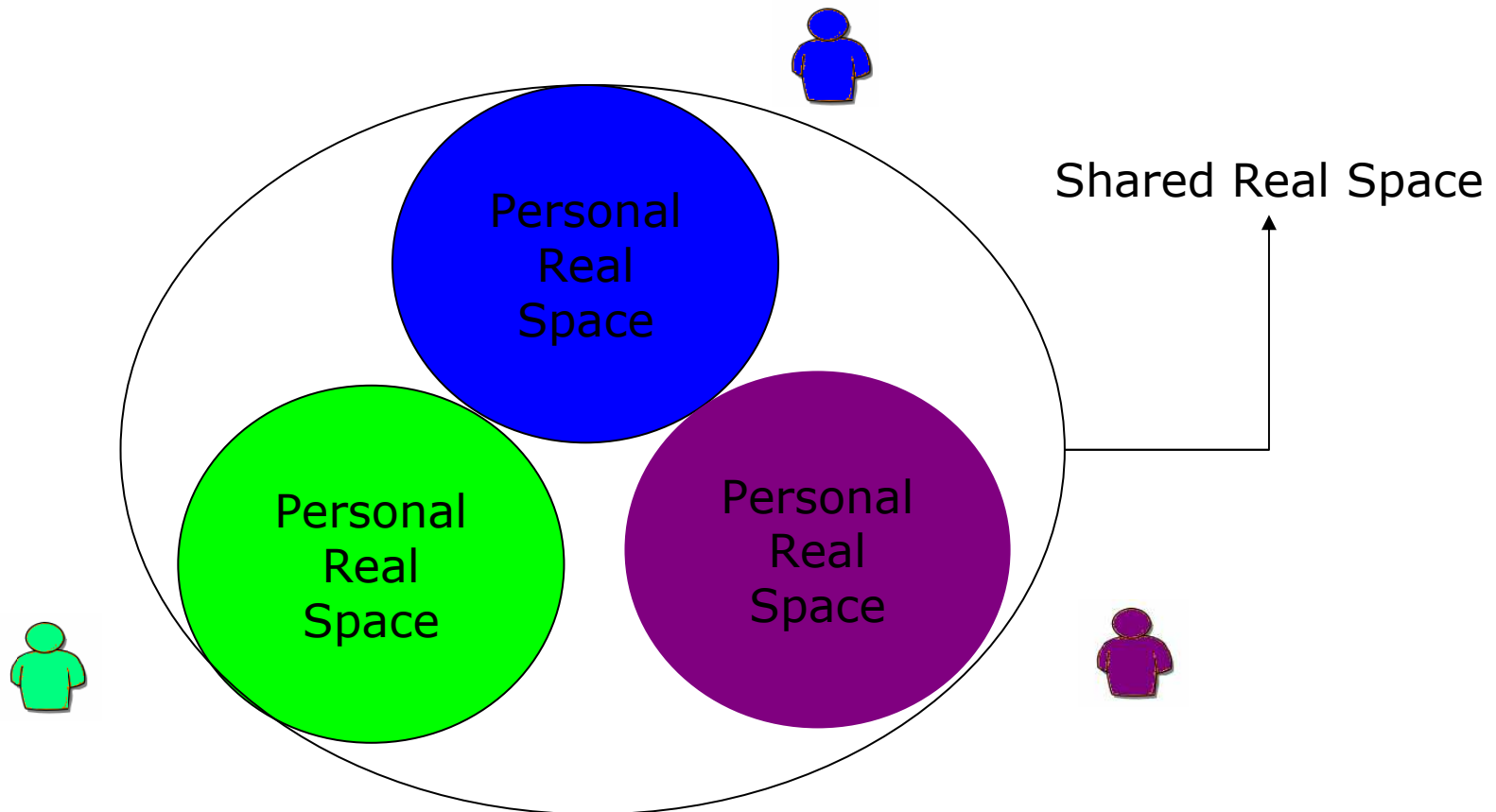
# The System (cont.)

## Out-Of-Game Physical Components



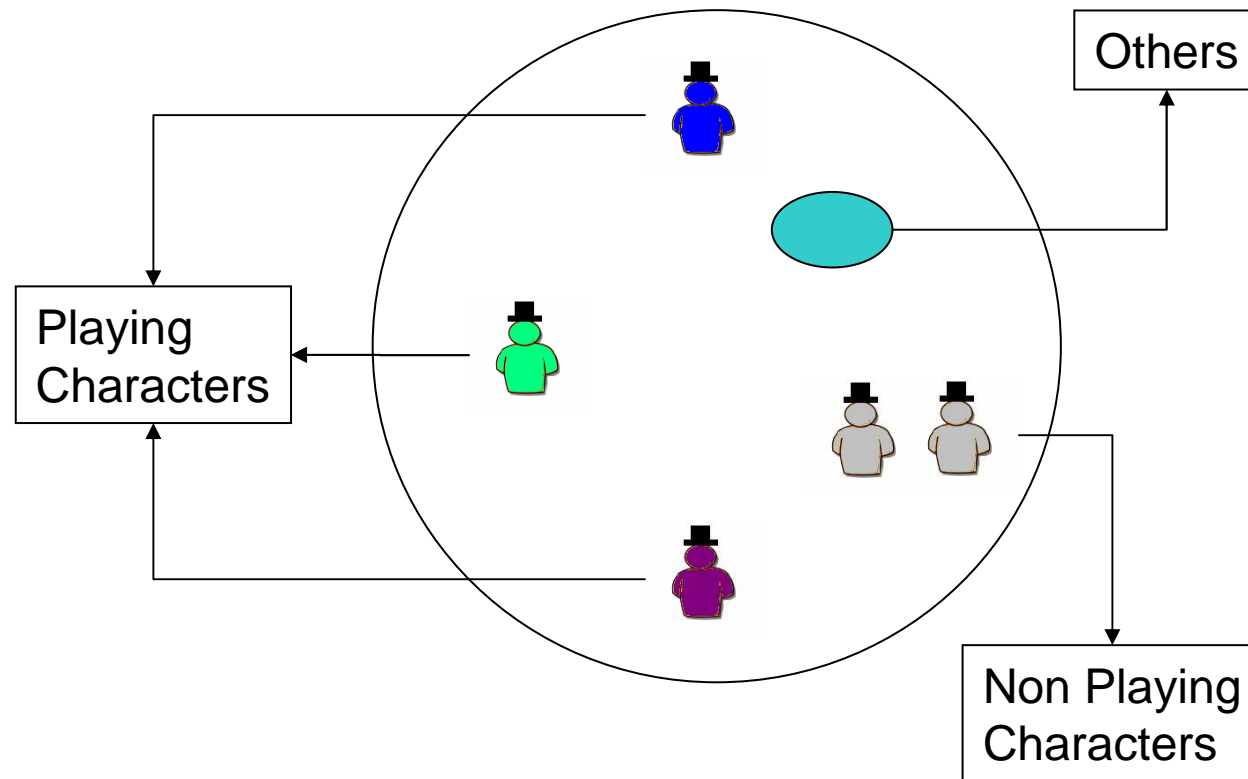
# The System (cont.)

## Out-Of-Game Physical Components



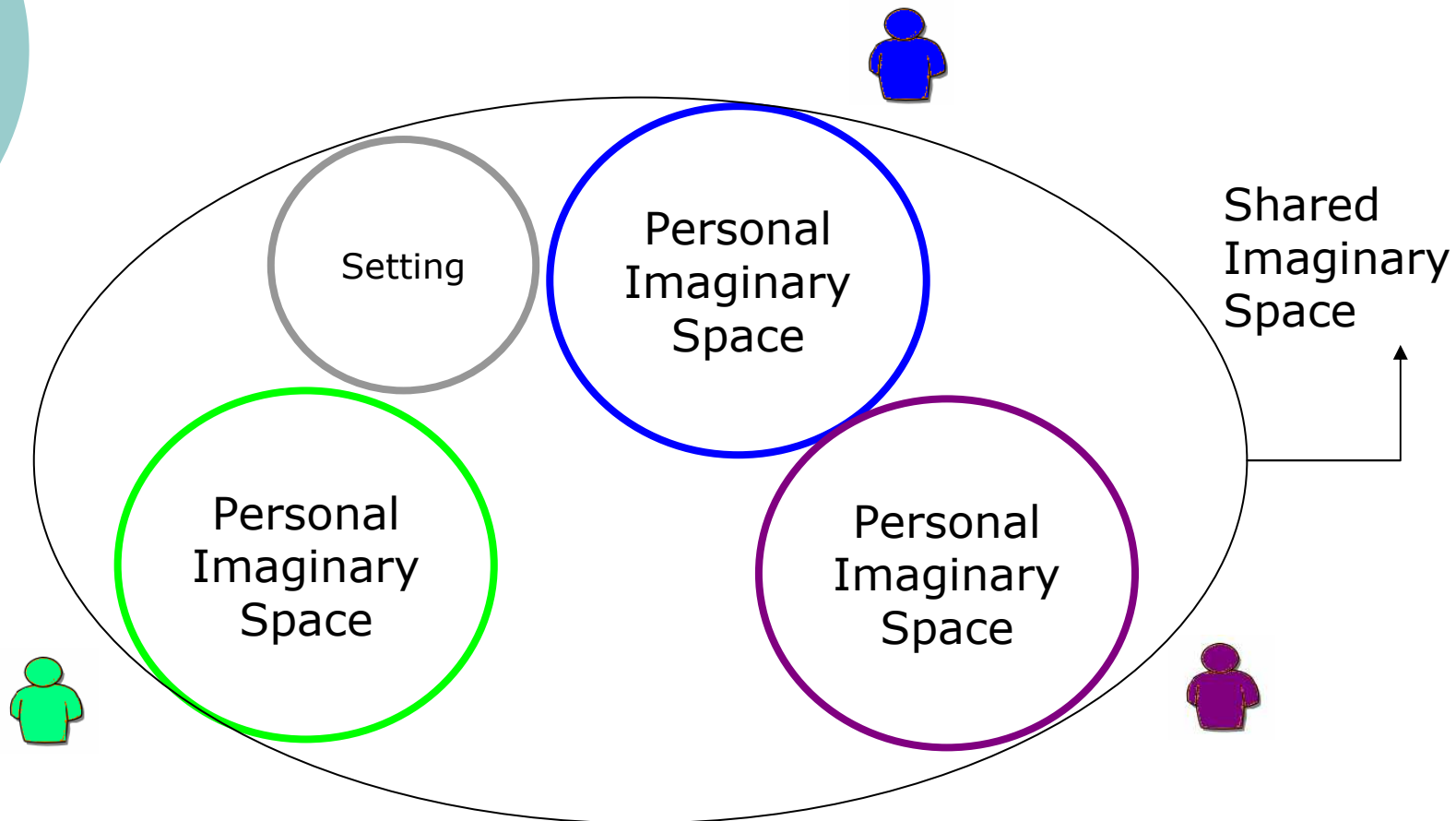
# The System (cont.)

## In-Game Logical Components



# The System (cont.)

## In-Game Logical Components





# The System (cont.)

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## Basic elements and definitions

- **Environmental Infrastructure (OOG)**: the infrastructure used to host the players, if the players share the same locations
- **Game Supporting tools (OOG)**: any tool that is functional to the proper conduction of the game session (i.e. dice, manuals, character sheets...)
- **Personal Real Space (OOG)**: the personal physical space that enables a player to properly play a role-playing session
- **Players (OOG)**: the physical players of a role-playing session (at least one human, computers)
- **Shared Real Space (OOG)**: the common space shared between the players (i.e. a room, a LAN, ...)
- **Technology Infrastructure (OOG)**: the infrastructure used to manage the game session, if the players are not in the same room



# The System (cont.)

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## Basic elements and definitions

- **Playing Characters (IG)**: the in-game characters moved or controlled by the players.
- **Non Playing characters (IG)**: the in-game characters moved or controlled by other than the players (narrator, or a computer)
- **Others (IG)**: other elements functional for the in-game world, such as locations, events, objects and so on.
- **Personal Imaginary Space (IG)**: the personal imaginative area in which the player imagines the in-game actions and elaborate the outcoming of the game session.
- **Shared Imaginary Space (IG)**: the imaginative area in which common and agreed actions and events and other characteristics are shared between players.
  - **Setting (IG)**: provides author information about the Shared Imaginary Space for the players. Its existence is independent to the game session and is shared between SISs of multiple players



## The System (cont.)

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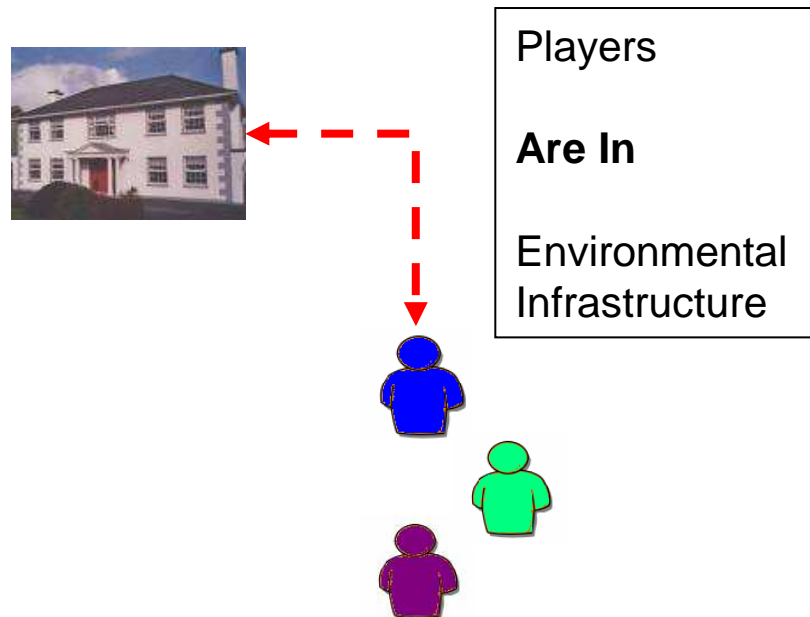
- **The Relationships** connects physically or logically two or more components:
  - **In-Game Relationships** establish a relation between at least two In-Game components
  - **Out-Of-Game Relationships** establish a relation between at least two Out-Of-Game components
  - **Meta-Game Relationships** establish a relation between at least one In-Game component and one Out-Of Game component or viceversa



# The System (cont.)

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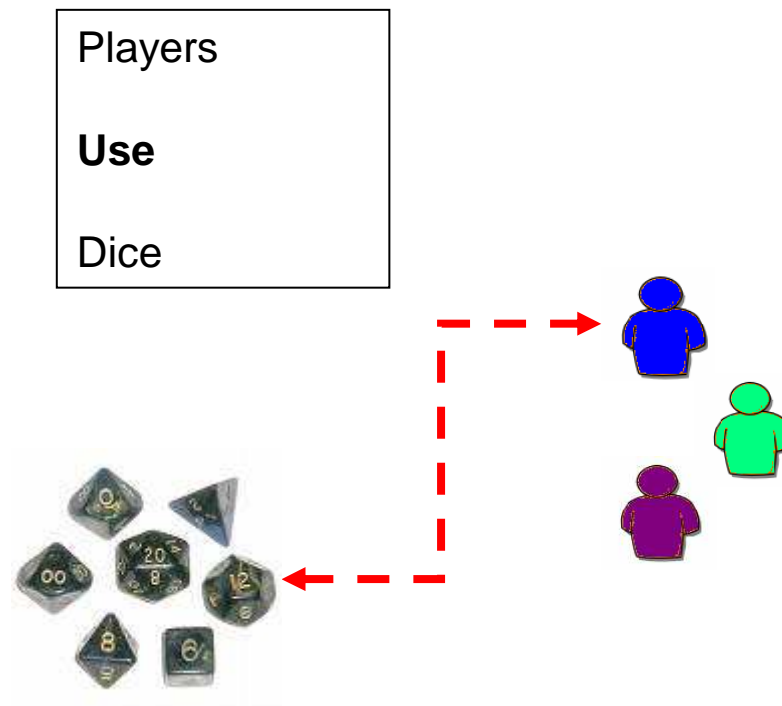
## Example of Out-Of-Game relationship



# The System (cont.)

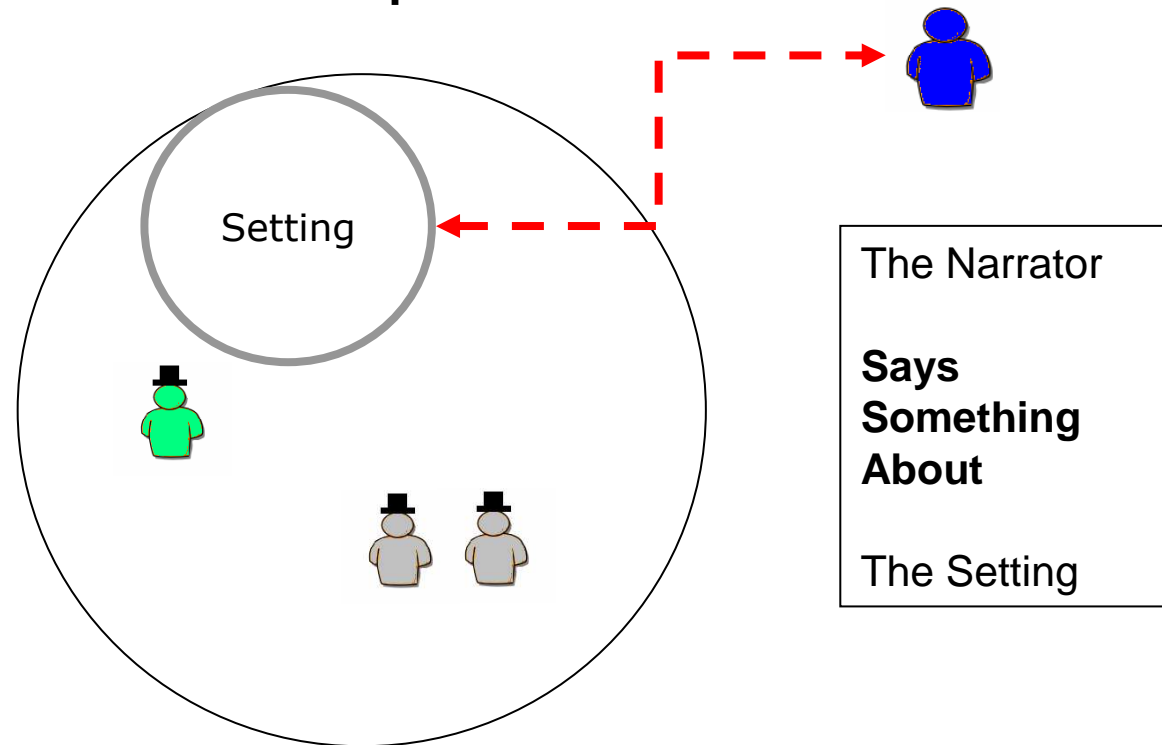
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## Example of Out-Of-Game relationship



# The System (cont.)

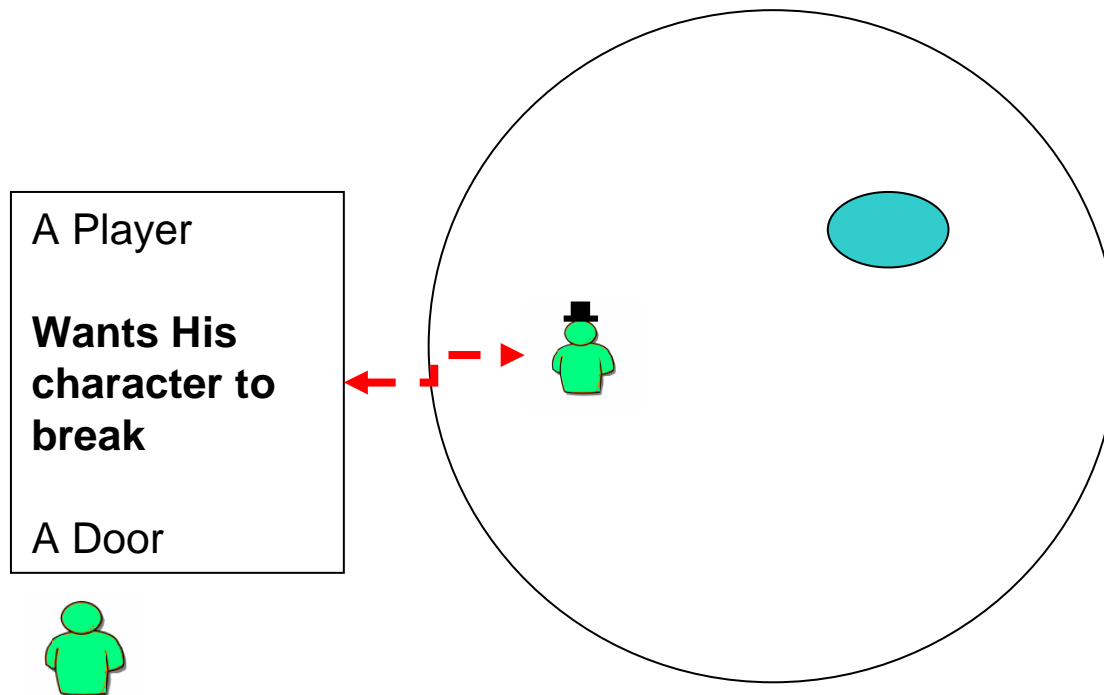
## Example of Meta-Game relationship



# The System (cont.)

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## Example of Meta-Game relationship



# The System (cont.)

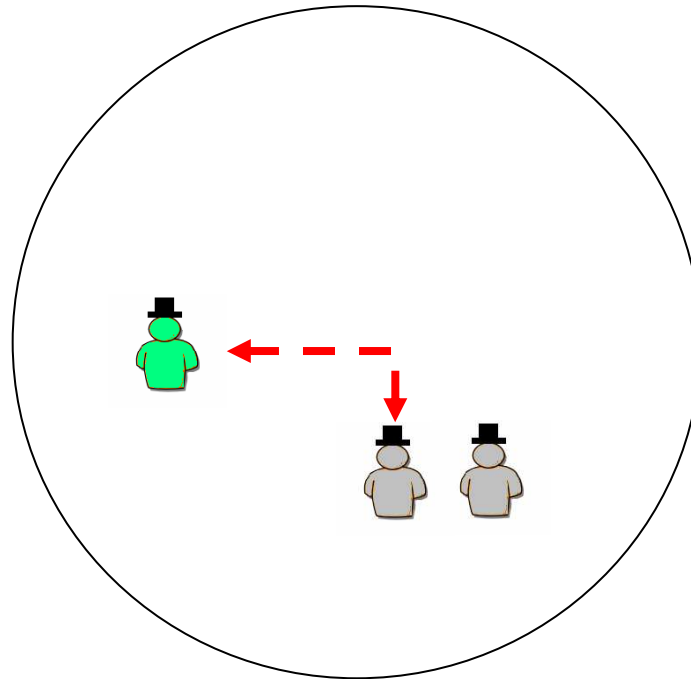
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## Example of In-Game relationship

A Playing  
Character

**Talks With**

A Non Playing  
Character

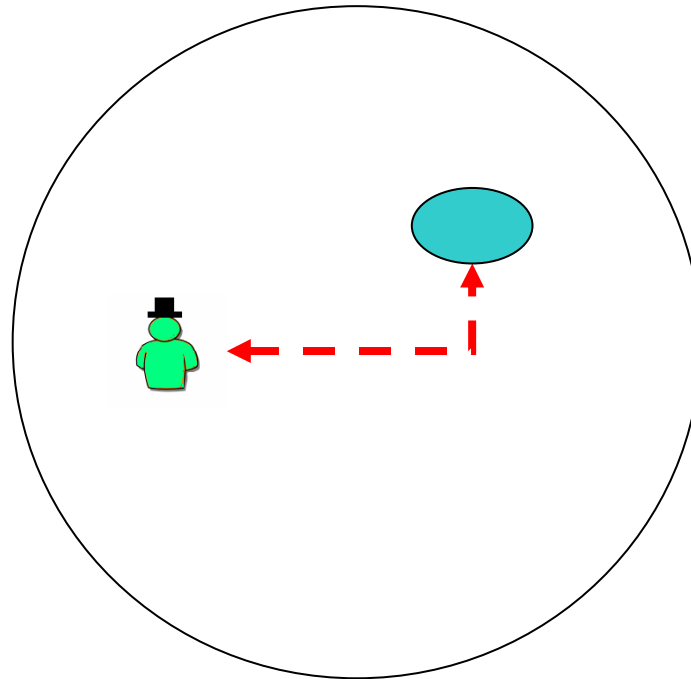


# The System (cont.)

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## Example of In-Game relationship

A Playing  
Character  
**Examines**  
A Door





# Part I

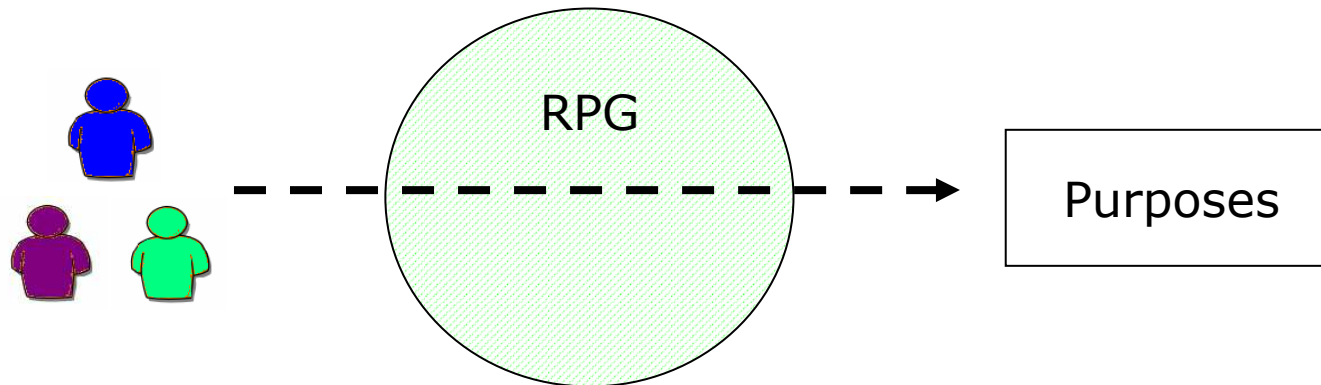
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  - The meaning of 'game' in RPG acronym

# A mean to reach one or more purposes

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- Why do players role-play?







# A mean to reach one or more purposes

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- Purposes include the “cui prodest” concept
  - If purposes are not so explicit the “who gains maximum benefit” approach must be taken into consideration
- Agreement of purposes is preferable before the role-playing session
- Purposes are intangible and always have a reflection in the Out-Of-Game world
- Purposes are different from the objectives of the system
- Different forms of role-playing uses (mostly) different systems to achieve different purposes



# A mean to reach one or more purposes

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- Purposes may be divided in narrational and social purposes, **both** reachable during a game session. To achieve it role-playing “as a mean” uses different techniques according to the system
- **Narrational purposes:** the maximum benefit is oriented to the ‘story’ by considering its aesthetics parameters.
  - Aesthetics is commonly perceived as the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetics>)
  - Such aesthetic parameters may be:
    - Internal to the players group
    - External to the players group



# A mean to reach one or more purposes


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- **Social purposes:** the maximum benefit is oriented to the players. The following list may be not exhaustive:
  - Educational purposes
  - Emotional purposes
  - Relational purposes
  - Selfish purposes, in which the benefit may be confined at single player/character level
  - Therapeutic purposes
  - Fun purposes



# Part I

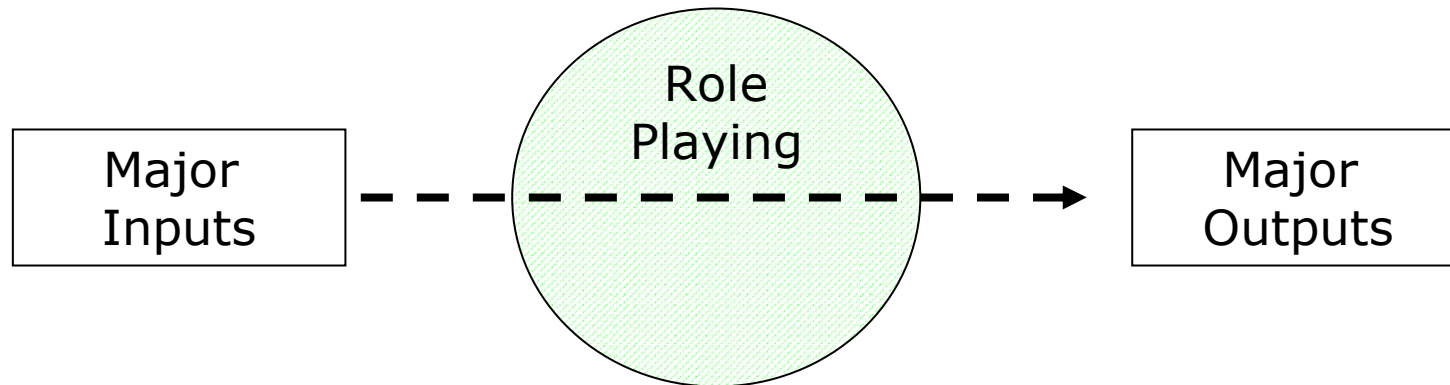
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A process that produces one or more output

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- The Role-Playing as a Process





# A process that produces one or more output

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- Role-playing process may be decomposed in sub-processes and each of them have a sequence of activities that have tangible input and tangible output. Example of (sub)processes:
  - Sub-Process to determine the result of an action
  - Sub-Process to determine if an action is legal or not
  - Sub-Process to start up the game

Subprocesses will be explored in detail analyzing the form on role-playing configuration



## A process that produces one or more output

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- Major tangible inputs are the Out-Of-Game Components
- Major tangible outputs are 'modified' or new Out-Of-Game' components such as:
  - "Satisfied players"
  - Game Chronicles
  - Game Recordings
  - Written Story (Actual Play)



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# An activity in which at least one of the agents is human and plays a 'role'

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- What 'role' means
  - A role (sometimes spelled rôle) or a social role is a set of connected behaviors, rights and obligations as conceptualized by actors in a social situation. It is mostly defined as an expected behavior in a given individual social status and social position.
  - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role>
- For the purposes of this model the 'role' is:
  - An expected behaviour of the players that interprets one or more playing characters or elements in the Imaginary Space
    - Expected behaviour may come in two cases:
      - Differences between the real player and the playing character he/she has to play
      - Differences between the real player and the fictional situation he/she has to face



# An activity in which at least one of the agents is human and plays a 'role'

---

## ○ What 'play' means


- A dramatic performance, as on the stage.
- Exercise or activity for amusement or recreation.
- The manner or style of playing or of doing something.
- An act or instance of playing or of doing something
  
- From (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/play>)



## An activity in which at least one of the agents is human and plays a 'role'

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- Role-playing does not need to be 'social'
  - One single player may role-play, with the proper surrounding system
- Role-playing needs "Agents" that generate, or interpret, narrative or actions
  - At least one Agent must be a human living
- Active "Agents" of role-playing may be non-humans such as books or computers
  - In Gamebook, the Narrative Agent is a book
  - In MUD, one Narrative agent is a Computer



# An activity in which at least one of the agents is human and plays a 'role'

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- There are three levels of interaction:
  - Interactions between out-of-game components
  - Cross-Game Interactions
  - Interactions between in-game components
- Interactions between agents may occur through:
  - Sounds
  - Body Language
  - Signs
  - Strings of Text
  - Direct action on out-of-game components
- Interactions are instantiated through system relationships



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- The meaning of 'game' in RPG acronym



# The meaning of 'game' in RPG acronym

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- A game is a **structured or semi-structured activity**, usually undertaken for enjoyment and sometimes also used as an educational tool. Games are generally distinct from work, which is usually carried out for remuneration, and from art, which is more concerned with the expression of ideas. However, the distinction is not clear-cut, and many games are also considered to be work or art.
- Key components of games are **goals, rules, challenge**, and **interactivity**. Games generally involve mental or physical stimulation, and often both. Many games help develop practical skills, serve as a form of exercise, or otherwise perform an **educational, simulational** or **psychological** role.
- From: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game>



# The meaning of 'game' in RPG acronym

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- Role-Playing Games are a subset of Games
- The 'Game' in role-play refers to two aspects:
  - The State:
    - There must be a 'winning' state that defines who wins or who lose in-game
    - Short- Mid- or Long- Term winning goals must be identified
  - The type of play in order to reach the winning state:
    - Competition
    - Cooperation
- Difference between "Role Playing Form" and "Role Playing Game"
  - A "Role Playing Form" DOES NOT impose a winning state (more or less explicit/identifiable)
  - A "Role Playing Game" DOES impose a winning state (more or less explicit/identifiable)



# Part I - Summary

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- Part I introduced and described basic definitions for role-playing and key concepts to be used by Part II
- The following main concepts have been defined:
  - System
  - Mean
  - Purpose
  - Activity
  - Game





# Part I - Appendix

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- Thanks to:

- ...

# Part I - License

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