



Triangle Theory of Interactive Drama

simulation vs drama vs gaming
[crosspollination]

by

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On the rec.games.frp.advocacy newsgroup, a lot of thought has gone into creating a model of roleplaying technique in which three main areas of concern are identified - simulation, drama, and gaming - and placed at the corners of a triangle. The model, which is described at the end of this post, seems to have been of great use to them in their roleplaying and in their discussion of games.

This fascinated me, but since I don't do as much tabletop as I would like to and I probably do more live-action than is good for me, I thought I'd raise the subject of how the model could be of use to live-action roleplayers.

For example, I have seen major divisions in LRP clubs that I think at least in part could be attributable to differing perspectives as to where the game should lie within the triangle. So one question would be - are there any good arguments for favouring one position over another?

It also seems that, at least for tabletop games, it is very useful if all members acknowledge and agree upon the general proclinations of the game within the triangle. Do any clubs out there make their position explicitly known? (This is similar to, but not quite the same as,



advertising a game as 'realistic and gritty' or 'heroic' etc.) Can a game really cope with players of any and all stances simultaneously?

Since the NPC's and monsters (when they exist) are all played by different people rather than a single GM, would it be best if they all agreed upon a particular style of roleplaying from the outset even if the PC's don't? For example, it might be easier to run a game if all 'monsters' were strictly simulationist, and maybe just a few important NPC's were particularly dramatist. (That could even be a systematic way of distinguishing between monsters and NPC's...)

To clarify, say you're playing a bandit whose posse have just made the mistake of ambushing a party of PC's. Your comrades have been slain - what do you do? And why?

- A simulationist idea might be "Hmm, I've already assumed that I'm a very normal bandit, and normal bandits in this game aren't very brave. So I'll run away."
- A dramatist idea might be "I can give the players a better feel for the tone of this encounter if I talk to them. So, even though it's a stupid idea, I'll surrender."
- A gamist idea might be "If I run away or keep fighting, this encounter will be quite boring. So I'll pretend to run away and sneak round the back and attack the healers."

Of course, a great many other motives could be dreamt up for the same stances.

In most games, every monster will have their own opinion on this. While diversity is all well and good, I can't help but wonder if a more unified approach would lead to more 'effective' encounters?

I'm sure there's plenty more to discuss on this topic but that's up to you.

More info on the '*triangle*'

The best place to look would be on rec.games.frp.advocacy, but here's my attempt at a summary. (I'm sure there's an article on the web about this but I can't find it)

The Simulationist stance is concerned with maximum fidelity to the game world. In-character is absolutely in-character, and adherence to the rules is absolute (in spirit at least if the written rules are inadequate in modelling the world).

The game is all about finding out what would happen in a particular set of circumstances - any other considerations would spoil the simulation.

The Dramatist stance is concerned with telling a good story. The result of the characters' interaction should be a scene of great horror or humour or passion or wonder. If this means tampering with the rules or the logic or the setting or even a bit of ret-conning, then so be it.

The game is a work of art, unsullied by petty considerations like rules.

The Gamist stance is concerned with presenting a challenging game to all players. It is important to get the balance right, and also to reward those who do well. It's all a bit of fun when you get down to it.

The game is a sport, and everything else is window dressing.

Of course, most people fall somewhere between these three extremes, adopting a bit of all three philosophies, but even within this majority there is a wide range of differences in degree.

No doubt all the r.g.f.advocacy regulars will now tell me how I've got it wrong... remember it's a crosspost, people.

Anyway, I hope this sparks off an interesting thread.

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Editor's Note: Sandy Petersen gives a worthwhile overview of styles and perspectives of players in relationship to approaches to the interactive drama in his excellent introduction to Nexus, the first volume in the Play This Book series published by Chaosium. - B.D.P.

