RPG History: From Dungeons & Dragons to AI Characters

Name Date Class

Reading

1 In a role-playing game, or RPG, you do not just control a hero. You become one. You make choices, your character grows stronger, and the story changes around you. Since the 1970s, the **genre** has moved from kitchen tables to home computers, game consoles, online worlds, and phones. Its history is also a story of borrowing: designers in one country have taken ideas from another and **adapted** them for new players.

2 The starting point is usually **credited** to Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), which Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published in the United States in January 1974. It grew out of wargames, in which players moved model soldiers across a table. D&D replaced armies with single characters. One player, the Dungeon Master, described the world, and dice decided whether a sword hit its target. The first **print run** of 1,000 copies, sold for 10 dollars each, took about ten months to sell out. D&D was not the only game of its kind, but it became the model that most later RPGs followed.

3 Computer programmers were among the first fans. Around 1981, two American games for the Apple II computer, Wizardry and Ultima, turned the tabletop rules into software. The computer **took over** the Dungeon Master's job. It calculated every attack and kept track of each character's **statistics**, such as strength and health. These games were difficult, and they were played mainly by computer **enthusiasts**.

4 Japan changed that. In 1983, the designer Yuji Horii visited a computer show in San Francisco and discovered Wizardry. He wanted to bring the experience to people who had never played an RPG, so he **simplified** it. Dragon Quest, released in 1986 for Nintendo's Famicom console, replaced complicated keyboard commands with simple menus and added a clear story and characters drawn by the manga artist Akira Toriyama. It sold more than two million copies in Japan. Together with Final Fantasy, which appeared in 1987, it created a **template** for what are now called Japanese RPGs.

5 The next big change came from South Korea. In 1998, the company NCSoft **launched** Lineage, an online RPG in which thousands of players shared one world, formed groups, and fought over castles. Much of its early growth happened in PC bangs, the internet cafés that were spreading quickly across the country at the time. According to NCSoft, Lineage reached one million members within 15 months, and the company later reported more than three million **subscribers**, most of them in Korea. That was years before World of Warcraft, released in 2004, made online RPGs a mass hobby in the West.

6 The borrowing has continued. Baldur's Gate 3, made by Larian Studios in Belgium and released in 2023, uses the fifth-edition rules of D&D, so a 1974 tabletop game still shapes one of the most successful RPGs of the decade. It won Game of the Year at The Game Awards in 2023, and in late 2025 Larian's founder, Swen Vincke, told Bloomberg that its sales had **surpassed** 20 million copies. Two years after Baldur's Gate 3, a small French studio, Sandfall Interactive, won the same award with Clair Obscur: Expedition 33, a game inspired by classic Japanese RPGs. The studio has said that it sold five million copies in its first five months.

7 The future of RPGs may depend on artificial intelligence. In 2019, the American developer Nick Walton released AI Dungeon, a text game in which players type any action and a language model writes what happens next, doing the Dungeon Master's job. Some companies now hope to create characters that can hold real conversations. Many game makers are **skeptical**, however. In a 2026 survey by the Game Developers Conference, 52 percent of the more than 2,300 industry workers who answered said **generative AI** was having a negative impact on the industry, up from 18 percent two years earlier. Just over half of the **respondents** were based in the United States, so the result may not reflect the whole world. Vincke has said that Larian's next Divinity game will contain no AI-generated content. What nobody has tested yet is whether players want characters who can say anything, or stories that a person has written.

Vocabulary Matching

Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1	**genre**	_____	**A**	changed something to suit a new use
2	**adapted**	_____	**B**	doubtful that something is true or good
3	**credited**	_____	**C**	AI that creates new text, images, or sound
4	**print run**	_____	**D**	a pattern that others copy
5	**took over**	_____	**E**	made something easier to understand or use
6	**statistics**	_____	**F**	people who answer a survey or question
7	**enthusiasts**	_____	**G**	started doing a job someone else did before
8	**simplified**	_____	**H**	named as the source or cause of something
9	**template**	_____	**I**	people who are very interested in a hobby
10	**launched**	_____	**J**	people who pay regularly to use a service
11	**subscribers**	_____	**K**	went above a particular amount or level
12	**surpassed**	_____	**L**	the number of copies printed at one time
13	**skeptical**	_____	**M**	numbers that describe a character's abilities
14	**generative AI**	_____	**N**	a type of art, film, music, or game
15	**respondents**	_____	**O**	started selling or offering a product

Fill in the Blank

Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.

adapted	**credited**	**enthusiasts**	**genre**	**launched**	**print run**	**respondents**	**simplified**	**skeptical**
statistics	**subscribers**	**surpassed**	**template**	**took over**				

1 Jazz is a music _____ that began in the United States.

2 The town _____ its old train station for use as a library.

3 The idea for the festival is _____ to a group of local students.

4 The publisher planned a first _____ of 20,000 copies.

5 When the captain was injured, the vice-captain _____ for the rest of the match.

6 Players compared their heroes' _____ before choosing a team.

7 Bird _____ traveled from all over the country to see the rare eagle.

8 The app _____ the sign-up process to just two steps.

9 Her first essay became a _____ for the rest of the class.

10 The airline _____ a new route between Busan and Hanoi.

11 The podcast now has more than a million _____ .

12 By noon, the number of visitors had _____ last year's total.

13 Many voters were _____ about the politician's promises.

14 Only a few survey _____ said they had never played a video game.

Comprehension Questions

Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.

1 What makes a role-playing game different from simply controlling a hero, according to the first paragraph?

2 Who created Dungeons & Dragons, when was it published, and what kind of game did it grow out of?

3 What did the Dungeon Master and the dice do in D&D?

4 How did Wizardry and Ultima change the way people played RPGs?

5 Why did Yuji Horii simplify the RPG, and what changes did Dragon Quest make?

6 What role did PC bangs play in the success of Lineage?

7 How do Baldur's Gate 3 and Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 show that the borrowing between countries has continued?

8 What is AI Dungeon, and why does the writer mention it in a paragraph about the future?

9 The writer points out a limit of the GDC survey. What is it, and why is it important when reading survey results?

IELTS-Style Questions

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Dragon Quest sold more copies in Japan than Final Fantasy."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that D&D was the only role-playing game of the 1970s."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer end with a question about whether players want characters who can say anything or stories that a person has written? Is the aim to predict the future, to criticize AI, or something else?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.

1 **T / F** Dungeons & Dragons was first published in the United States in 1974.

2 **T / F** The first print run of D&D sold out within a week.

3 **T / F** Wizardry and Ultima were first made for Nintendo consoles.

4 **T / F** Akira Toriyama drew the characters for Dragon Quest.

5 **T / F** Final Fantasy appeared before Dragon Quest.

6 **T / F** Lineage was released before World of Warcraft.

7 **T / F** Larian Studios is based in Belgium.

8 **T / F** Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 was made by a large American company.

9 **T / F** In the 2026 GDC survey, fewer developers had a negative view of generative AI than two years earlier.

10 **T / F** Vincke said Larian's next Divinity game will contain no AI-generated content.

Discussion Questions

Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.

1 Have you ever played a role-playing game, on a table, a computer, a console, or a phone? Which one do you remember best?

2 What kind of character do you usually choose in games: a fighter, a magic user, a healer, or something else? Why?

3 Which game genres are most popular among people you know? Why do you think that is?

4 Did you or your friends ever play games in PC bangs, internet cafes, or arcades? What was the atmosphere like?

5 Would you rather play an RPG alone with a strong story or online with thousands of other players? Explain your choice.

6 D&D needs a group of people sitting at one table. What can face-to-face games offer that online games cannot?

7 Dragon Quest succeeded by making RPGs simpler. Is it good for games, apps, or school subjects to be simplified for beginners, or does something important get lost?

8 The reading shows ideas moving from the US to Japan, Korea, Belgium, and France. Can you think of other examples, such as food, music, or films, where a borrowed idea became something new?

9 Some online games earn money from monthly subscriptions, and others are free but sell items inside the game. Which model do you think is fairer to players?

10 Would you enjoy talking to a game character controlled by generative AI? What would you ask it?

11 Why might game artists, writers, and designers be more worried about generative AI than business executives?

12 Larian says its next game will contain no AI-generated content. Should games tell players when AI has been used to make them?

13 Many people believe games can teach useful skills, such as teamwork or planning. Which skills, if any, have you learned from games?

14 In 20 years, do you think the most popular RPGs will be written by people, by AI, or by a mix of both? What would be gained and lost?

Language Focus: Past Simple and Present Perfect

The past simple describes finished events at a stated or understood time in the past (published in 1974, visited in 1983). The present perfect (has or have plus a past participle) connects the past to the present, often with since, yet, or no time at all.

In the reading:

- "Since the 1970s, the genre **has moved** from kitchen tables to home computers, game consoles, online worlds, and phones."
- "…which Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson **published** in the United States in January 1974."
- "In 1983, the designer Yuji Horii **visited** a computer show in San Francisco and **discovered** Wizardry."

Practice: Choose the correct form of the verb and explain why: *"NCSoft (launch) Lineage in 1998. Since then, the series (grow) to include several mobile games."*

Activities and speed challenge
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Notes