Role-play Management System

By

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Abstract

The Role-play Management System is a CMS like web application that will make it easy to role-play online and also make it easy to create role-plays and make them feel unique. Regular users will be sent to landing page when they log in that has the information tailored to that specific user, including characters, and information about the characters. This will include the role-plays the characters are in and other information. Narrators will land on a similar page but it will also show the role-plays they are currently narrating.
Role-play Management System

1 Project Description and Intended Use

1.1 Definition of Problem

There are many story tellers all over the world and all of them benefit from using their imagination. Who hasn’t heard of the example of a starting story being told down a line of people only to be radically different by the time it reaches the last person. Story tellers use their creativity to create imagery in your mind that allows you to be right in the story. Stories allow us to learn about other cultures through metaphors or directly. It also inspires creativity, people who tell stories often are able to paint vivid pictures with practice because they are able know what works and what doesn’t work.

Creativity is vital throughout the world. The next new thing always comes from someone being creative either by thinking up something new entirely or taking old ideas and breathing new life into them. The world is built on creativity but most of the generation today is being taught on a career based curriculum or just simply given something that has already been imagined for them such as movies, video games, or tv shows. A way we can get everyone back into using their imagination is by role-play but in the state it is now there is no way anyone would go that route.

Role-play in its current state is too hard to get into and even more difficult to start. There are several guides and sites that help with this process but if a role-play does not hit it off right away or someone is told by others that are not up to a certain standard then they get discouraged and stop role-playing. Several issues make it hard to jump into role-playing.
1.1.1 Forums

The problem with forums are that they usually span about 60 pages when a role-
play gets really going and just seeing it going to 60 pages can be discouraging. On
forums each post usually has a picture of the person posting and each post is done inside
a block that also usually ends with a signature. This can really rack up the page count and
make a role-play seem a lot longer than it is. The longer the role-play the more extra
space is being used up. Chats are different because they do not have much space in
between posts.

1.1.2 Chats

Though chats do not have as many pages as forums they suffer from a different
problem, there is no backlog and for ones that do keep a back log they can go on for what
seems forever. People do attempt to explain what is going on to you but they may leave
out some important details trying to break it down so someone can get in the action
quicker or have forgotten themselves. Sometimes older role-players will not even help
out.

1.1.3 Elitism

Elitism is another barrier to getting into role-plays. Elitism is pretty bad amongst
the older role-players. Role-players afflicted with elitism do not help out newer role-
players because they think it is a waste of time and most starting role-players have a hard
time making posts up to the more experienced role-players standards. An example is how
many casual role-players just write a sentence or two while the more elite role-players
prefer to write paragraphs or multi-paragraph posts. Some even know they display this
activity and have confessed to it (Top Ten Reasons Roleplay is Gone, 2007).
1.1.4 Location

Getting into role-play can is also hard because role-plays are scattered all around the internet and it can be hard to find a role-play to get into. Even in places that have centralized this there are many role-plays that tackle the same subject that are not grouped together and it can be hard to tell which role-plays are which because they all look the same. Sometimes websites become too specific and they slowly fade away due to less interest in the small group that role-plays there (Top Ten Reasons Roleplay is Gone, 2007).

1.2 Description of Solution

The role-play management system will combat all of the problems that current role-play websites are facing. It will do this by providing tools for people to create role-plays that people can get into easily. Tools will also be provided for beginners so that they can make an easy transition into role-plays and also get help role-playing as well.

1.2.1 Forums

Post will be made similar to the chat format using only names, an icon, and text. The role-play will also be split into chapters and volumes, like a book, so that they are more easily managed. This list of volumes and chapters will be under the role-play and will have button next to it to slide out starting with the volume level collapsed.

1.2.2 Chats

While this will be like chat’s taking up minimum space it will have a backlog and be categorized so you won’t have the same problem that you would have otherwise if you looked in a long text file that made up the chat. You also won’t have to depend on
someone to give you the gist of things because there will be a feature available to the
users running the role-plays so they can highlight key events as the role-play goes on and
later use these key events to create a summary. There will be one for the entire role-play,
summaries for volumes and chapters will be optional. Both will be changed to make
presentation simpler as suggested by Lindsey in an e-mail interview.

1.2.3 Elitism

   Elitism will be addressed with tools that foster a sense of community. One of the
tools will be a mentor tool that will have a window open where two people can
communicate while the newer role-player will be role-playing. The mentor will give the
other role-playing advice on role-playing as they make posts. To encourage use of this
feature there will be some type of reward but what this is still to be determined.

1.2.4 Location

   This website will be bringing in role-plays from different websites by building an
API so that other websites can have their role-play listed on the website and also get
access to the tools that the website we have. The website will also allow for role-plays to
be created and maintained on the site and will also use tools that will give the person
running the role-play the ability to completely customize the layout, making it easier for
the user to realize which role-play they are taking part in. All similar role-plays taking
place on the same subject will be placed in the same “world” so people will be able to
find something on the same subject matter.
1.2.5 Users

Users are the people that will be using the website. For this website there will be five users. These users include, Guest, Role-player, Narrator, Role-play Owner, and Website Admin.

1.2.5.1 Guest

Guest is a user that is not signed into the website or does not have an account. After the user signs into the website or creates an account and signs in they at least get role-player status. This user should have experience creating accounts on other websites as well as navigating other websites. Guests will be able to view the content of the website but they will not be able to create anything.

1.2.5.2 Role-player

Role-player is the bare-minimum authorized user. They have the ability to create characters and join role-plays, as well as the ability to edit their characters and delete them. They will have to had some experience of inputting text, creating content, and browsing the website. They will need training on the mentor system, which is going to be intuitive, and can be broken down into three groups, experts, intermediate, and novices. A rating system will be used to differentiate between role-players.

1.2.5.3 Narrator

The narrator has the same privileges as a role-player but also has the ability to control the people in a role-play and they push the story in the right direction so that other players do not get off track. The Narrator’s panel for posting will look different from the role-players so that they can use their extra functionality. Their text will also appear
differently in the post to show their post is more part of the story than a character doing an action. The will have to had the same experience as a role-player but will also need some story telling experience, which they can get on the job, and will also need experience working with moderator panels.

### 1.2.5.4 Role-play Owner

The role-play owner is the person that appoints the narrator to the head of the role-play as well as creates the role-play itself. These people will vary from people just owning a role-play to a person who owns a different website. The will have all the moderator privileges and extra privileges specific to the role-play owner, such as banning a narrator. Role-play Owner’s will be able to customize role-plays to fit the mood and setting of it. They will need some design experience as well as admin experience and experience creating content.

### 1.2.5.5 Website Admin

The website admin will have control over the whole website and will have a panel that lets them create worlds, role-plays, characters, and design role-plays. The will have to be familiar with user account control and also using an admin panel as well as a moderator panel. They must also have experience creating content.

### 2 Design Protocols

The design of the site was based primarily off a template that was received through a free website though most of the lists and registration forms where added through the use of the CSS. The website has a navigation that is simple starting with the Genre and working its way down to role-plays.
2.1.1 Database Protocol

Figure 1 is a database diagram for the role-play management system. The tables in Figure 1 are Entities are User, Character, Roleplay, CSS_Property, Module, World, and Role. The Associative tables are Role_User, Roleplay_Character, Roleplay_Module and Roleplay_World. It shows how tables feed into each other and the columns of each table, as well as the primary and foreign keys. Multiplicity is also show between the tables. The database was written with the mysqli class in PHP where to make dynamic calls to the database I used help from a StackOverflow question (MySQLI binding params using call_user_func_array, 2009).

Figure 1. Database Design
2.1.2 Use-Case Diagram

The three roles shown here are Administrator, Roleplayer, and Role-play manager. Administrator has the most Use-Cases while Roleplayer has the least. Roleplay manager has some roles that are inbetween.

![Use Case Diagram](image)

**Figure 2. Use Case Diagram**
2.2 Interface

The interface changes depending on what the person is doing at the time. For instance the interface for browsing the website is different than the interface for posting in a role-play.

2.2.1 Browsing

The browsing interface is full of lists containing role-plays, characters, and worlds. The list changes depending on what links are clicked and they whittle down depending on what is chosen. Looking at characters on the main page vs looking at characters on the role-play pages will give the user two different lists because one is more specific.

2.2.2 Posting

At the top of each role-play’s posting system is the current title of the chapter that the role-play is following. There is a pane to put where a posts and the posts of others will be shown. At the bottom of where the posts are updating is a box for putting in the post, which updates the posts window in real time. A send button is next to that so a person can send their post using the button.

2.2.3 Editing

Editing a role-play is done with a manager module on the side of the role-play after logging in as a role-play manager. There are two ways a manager can update the role-play from this module, they can either update the look and feel of the role-play or they can edit the story of the role-play.
The ColorPicker used to change the colors was retrieved from (Implement). The Draggable elements were created using JQuery with help from their example website (Draggable, 2010). The Dialog elements that pop-up for both the add a module and the color changer were made from the JQuery UI Dialog element and was helped along by examples on the JQuery website (Dialog, 2010).

2.2.4 Color Scheme

The color scheme of the website is white with a grayish text that represent the simplicity of the website so that when role-play managers edit their role-play they are able to easily change the look and feel using the options available to them. The base design actually comes from a template that I got from Table Templates (DarkBG Template), which I modified for the current look.

2.3 Hardware

Windows 7 Laptop – The site was created using a Windows 7 Ultimate Laptop using WAMP to run an apache server on Windows.

2.4 Software

- Apache 2.2.17 – This is the web server being utilized for my project. It is actually ran in a package called WAMP which stands for Windows Apache MySQL PHP.
- PHP 5.3.0 – PHP is the server side language that this will be written in and also the type of parser that will be decoding the code.
- JQuery – JQuery is a javascript library that makes it easy to do cool effects and also makes it easy to manipulate dom elements in the page. Will be used to help make cool effects on some of the pages.
ColorPicker – This is a JQuery plugin that I used to change the colors of various elements in the layout manager.

Flex – Flex has been called Flash for Developers. It allows you to use markup to make nice flash applications. This was used in the posting system for the website.

AMFPHP - This was used to communicate between PHP and Flash using AMF protocol. I was able to figure out how to use this technology using Effortless Flex 4 Development by Larry Ullman.

2.5 Security

2.5.1 Cross-Site Scripting

Cross Site Scripting (XSS) Flaws are currently the most popular security problems in modern web applications. This security flaw is easy to execute but hard to detect and stop. (Selvamani, Duraisamy, & Kanna, 2010) To reduce the impact of Cross-Site Scripting I have added in a bunch of server-side security, which actually took a bit to write. The main premise of this system revolves around the user and roles.

2.5.2 Session Hi-jacking

Session hi-jacking is when a user session is compromised by someone pretending to be them. The security grabs the userId and the session id from the user and uses the information to check against the IP Address, if it is different from before they are forced to log back in. This method was inspired by a script written at DevShed (Tsachev, 2004).

2.5.3 SQL Injection

“SQL injection attacks are one of the topmost threats for applications written for the web (Bisht, Madhusudan, & Venkatakrishnan, 2010).” This statement says a lot about
how important protection against SQL Injection is. SQL injection can be done through user input where they cancel a string out and put how they want a query to finish, which gives them information that is not meant for people outside of web developers to see. The Role-Play Manage System protects against this by using prepared statements which make anything in the queries parameterized instead of putting them straight in the queries.

3 Objectives of Project

3.1 Guest will login into the system
1. Guest will create an account
2. Guest will login into the website using credentials

3.2 Role-play manager will edit role-play
1. Role-play manager will login into account
2. Role-play manager will pick role-play to edit
3. Role-play manager will click on tools
4. Role-play manager will hit save.

3.3 Role-player will post a message
1. Role-player will login into account
2. Role-player will choose a role-play
3. Role-player will choose a character
4. Role-player will submit message to posting system
5. Message will be displayed to user and others in the role-play
3.4 **Narrator will narrate role-play**

1. Narrator will login.
2. Narrator will select specified role-play
3. Narrator will choose Narrator role
4. Narrator will post a message
5. Text will display italicized to show difference between player and Narrator.

3.5 **Guest will navigate website**

1. Guest will click on a link
2. Guest will be taken to another page.

3.6 **User will browse books**

1. User will go to role-play
2. User will click a volume
3. User will click a chapter
4. Volume and chapter summaries as well as posts will be displayed to user.

3.7 **Narrator/Role-play Manager will insert a summary**

1. Narrator/Role-play Manager will sign in.
2. Narrator/Role-play Manager will go to role-play.
3. Narrator/Role-play Manager will click volume add button.
4. Narrator/Role-play Manager will click summary add button.
5. Narrator/Role-play Manager will enter summary information into either volume or summary.
6. Narrator/Role-play Manager will save changes.

7. The Volume/Summary will be updated and shown to the users.

4 Project Planning

4.1 Project Timeline

Figure 3 shows what was to be accomplished Winter quarter. While the chat was not up and running a massive amount of classes and forms on the site were completed. The reason for the push back of the chat was necessary to incorporate unfamiliar technologies do to the demand of the role-players that were being consulted. Another drawback of doing the chat Winter quarter is that all the classes that it relied on would have not been ready and would have caused a major change in the way it worked currently, so doing it Winter quarter would have resulted in unnecessary changes in the future.

![Gantt Chart Winter Quarter](image)

**Figure 3. Gantt Chart Winter Quarter**

Figure 4 shows what I expected to be completed by the end of Spring Quarter. Most of the functionality is there except the simple navigation and the search box which I have to fully working by the end of the Quarter.
4.2 Project Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain Name Registration for launch domain and development domain.</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Hosting for 9 months</td>
<td>$130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Proof of Design

My design was built mostly on complaints I heard from modern role-players and how we could address some of the issues. Other things were built using standards that were established across the web.

5.1 Registering

The Register link appears on the first page and is only accessible if the user is not logged
into the system. To register a user just clicks the register link before being taken to the registration form on the next page.

Figure 5. Register Button

Figure 6. Registration Form
On the next page the user inserts both their email and password twice to confirm both of them since if either one is wrong they are in trouble. After both credentials have been put in the system twice they can hit the enter button or click Register button to finally register.

Figure 7. Registration with Information

After words the user is returned to the front page where they can take advantage of the logon system.
5.2 Login System

The login system is what is usually seen when you login to a website. The login is located at the top and to login a username and password is entered into the fields.
Once the information has been inserted and pressing enter or pressing the login button the e-mail that was used to login along with links to get more information about your account and to logout appear at the top of the page.

**Figure 10. Home Logged In**

### 5.3 Adding a Character

To add a character to their profile a user first has to login then go then click the profile link that appears as a result.
After the user is on their profile page they just click the add character link at the end of the list of characters.

**Figure 11. Add a Character Link**
The user then will be brought to the first page of a three page series so that they may add a character. The first page is the basic information of the character, name, age and gender. The user then clicks the next button to get to the description page.

![Figure 12. Add a Character Page 1](image)

The next page is the description page and gives more information about the character including hair color, eye color, height, weight and even gives box for a physical description of the character so the person can put other features that are not given a proper field such as tattoos and clothing into the physical description. The user inputs this information and presses the next button.
Figure 13. Add a Character Page 2

The next page is to streamline the process of adding a character to a role-play. Here you pick a role-play and then add additional information about your character to that role-play including a race and background story specific to the role-play. This can be skipped or the user can added the information and click next.
5.4 Adding a Role-play

The user starts at the profile and if they are a role-play manager they will see a link that says “Add a Roleplay” after clicking the link they will then be sent to the page that allows them to add information to their role-play.
Figure 15. Add a Role-play Link

On the next page the user enters the title of the role-play the world it takes place in and the initial place in which the role-play will take place. This is also the time to give the role-play a background story. After the information has been entered the user hits enter or clicks the Add Roleplay button.
5.5 Chatting

To chat a user has to select a role-play and then they will click the chat link which will automatically launch them into the chat application and if they have any characters a list of characters will be displayed. The user will not be able to join if they have no previously registered a character.
### Figure 17. Chat Link

After the user is on the chat page they have to select a character and then hit the select button to confirm their selection. After that they are introduced to the chat system which lets the person make posts to the role-play using the character they selected.
Figure 18 Choose a Character

While at the window for the posting system the user only has to enter text at the bottom of the chat and click the Submit button and wait for the post window to update with their post.

Figure 19. Posting to System
5.6 Reading the Books

The user must first be in a role-play to get to that role-plays specific book. After that the user only has to click the book link to go the book page of the role-play. Once there the user will be introduced to the book. The first page is always the first volume of the role-play, which is a title page.

![Figure 20. Volume Page](image)

After that the user is free to explore the book using the arrows provided on either side of the page. This will allow the user to get more information about the role-play. Including chapters that have been added to the role-play.
5.7 Adding a Volume

If the user is a role-play manager and is in one of their own role-plays they will see a manager module on the side that gives them links to additional functionality in the role-play. One of the links is labeled “Story” and when clicked takes the user to a screen that shows the volumes and chapters.
Figure 22. Story Link

After the user gets to the story page they will be confronted with an option that says add to volume, where they click a + symbol to go to the next page where they may add the volume.

Figure 23. Add a Volume Link
The next screen the user is introduced to is the Volume screen where they can add a volume name, objective and overarching story for the Volume. After putting in the information and hitting submit they are then taken back to the story page.

![Add Volume Form](image)

**Figure 24. Add Volume Form**

### 5.8 Add a Chapter

Starting from the Manager’s story link the user can add a chapter by clicking the plus link next to the Add a Chapter text.
Figure 25. Add a Chapter Link

On the next page the user is introduced to a page similar to the add a chapter page that allows them to give a name, objective and background story for the chapter. Both objective and background story usually have something to do with the overarching objective and background story for the volume.
Figure 26. Add a Chapter Form

After pressing the submit button the user is then returned to the Manager’s story page to see that the chapter was added to the volume specified.
5.9 Add a Race

The user must start in a role-play they manage so that the manage module pops up on the side and they click the Races link in the manage module, which takes them to the page that allows them to add races to the role-play.
Figure 28. Add a Race Link

After that the role-play manager is taken to a page that allows them to pick a race assigned to the world they are in as well as a background for the race in the role-play.
Figure 29. Add a Race Form

The user is then returned to the role-play page to see that the race was indeed added to their role-play.

Figure 30. Added Race
5.10 Change the Layout Color

The user must be a manager of the role-play they are in to see the manage module and then click the Layout link to be taken to the layout page with modules.

![Figure 31. Layout Link](image)

The user will then click on the canvas button which will open the color chooser.
Figure 32. Color Chooser Initial

After the color chooser has opened a user will pick an element to affect.
Figure 33 Color Chooser Affected Area

The user is then able to select the color from the color picker that appears and see the updates live as they choose the color. The will then click the save changes button and then actual save button next to the canvas button.
Figure 34. Color Changer Live Update

5.11 Adding a Module

The user must be a role-play manager and be on the layout page of the role-play. Where the plus sign is the user must click it and a module list will then pop-up.
Figure 35. Add a Module Form

The user then inserts the information including the title that will show up over the module, the type of module and then the subject of the module as well as the number of entries before clicking, add module. The user then clicks the floppy disk icon to save the changes and will need to navigate back to the role-play page to see the changes have been made.

6 Testing

6.1 The Login System

The users did not have much to say about the login system. They liked the ability to login at the top and didn’t get to see any of the security to comment on that.

6.2 The Registration System

The users had no problems filling out the registration form but felt the link to get there should have been closer to the login module where it is usually seen. They also felt once they got there and put in the information that it should have went to a success page because they had no way of knowing if the registration worked or not.
6.3 Posting System

The users liked the simplicity of the posting system but said they missed the traditional feel of original chats as well as the ability to switch between role-plays on the fly from the chats that they used to go to but they did like the fact that everything was kept.

6.4 Layout Manager

The users liked the ability the layout manager gave them but did not like the fact that the buttons that launched the tools gave no visual feedback and they had a hard time figuring out when the changes were saved, so a good solution in that case would to be to add a function to the save button that goes back to the role-play after they click save.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

I wish I could have did more for this project but I kept getting pressed more and more for time and I couldn’t get everything done that I wanted to. This is a great project and one I hope to extend in the future using my own free time and one I am also hoping will launch my company that will be reliant on traffic for money.

This project also taught me a lot and helped me learn a lot about time management and project management. In the future I will not book so much time that I have trouble keeping up with what’s going on. I book a bunch of my time and now know that I would have done better had I given myself more time for my project.

For anyone looking to do a project this big in the future, if you do not have a bunch of time to spend on a huge project, do not pick such a big project in the first place,
stick to a solid small one that shows off your technical skills but does not require over 10 hours a week.

7.1 Recommendations

My recommendation for someone that tries to do this in the future is to not wait till the last quarter to do testing because it will help you find out things about your project or give you suggestions that will make your project more valuable in the end. My proposed way to do a project is to create a feature and test that feature to near perfection before moving on.

Another recommendation is to find a designer if you have no business being in design in the first place. I struggled until spring quarter to find a design I would like and I still haven’t found it. Don’t be afraid to ask for help on your project and have a designer help you out. Not only will your site look better but it’ll also make it easier for your users to navigate.
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