

Japan and TRPGs

Darron Yi
Mark Brown

Early Tabletalk RPGs

Late 1980s and Early 1990s:

- First ever Tabletalk RPGs (TRPGs) *Roads to Lord* (1984) by Naoto Kadokura and published by Tsukada Hobby
- Western TRPGs were imported into Japan (*Dungeons and Dragons* created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and published by Shinwa in 1985)
- Release of *Sword World* (1989) and *Record of Lodoss War* (1989) by Group SNE

Early 2000s:

- *Double Cross* (2001) by Game Field and Fujimi Shobo
- *Call of Cthulhu* (2004) by Hobby Japan



Why Did TRPGs Fail?

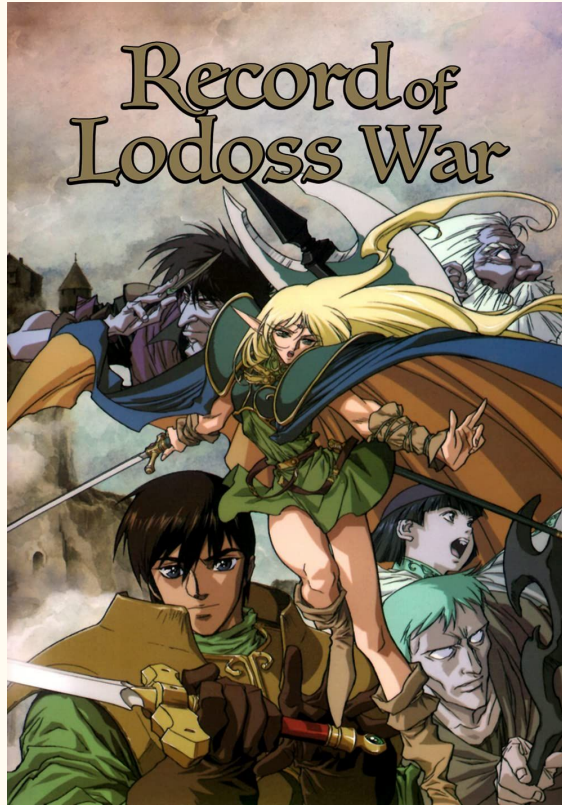
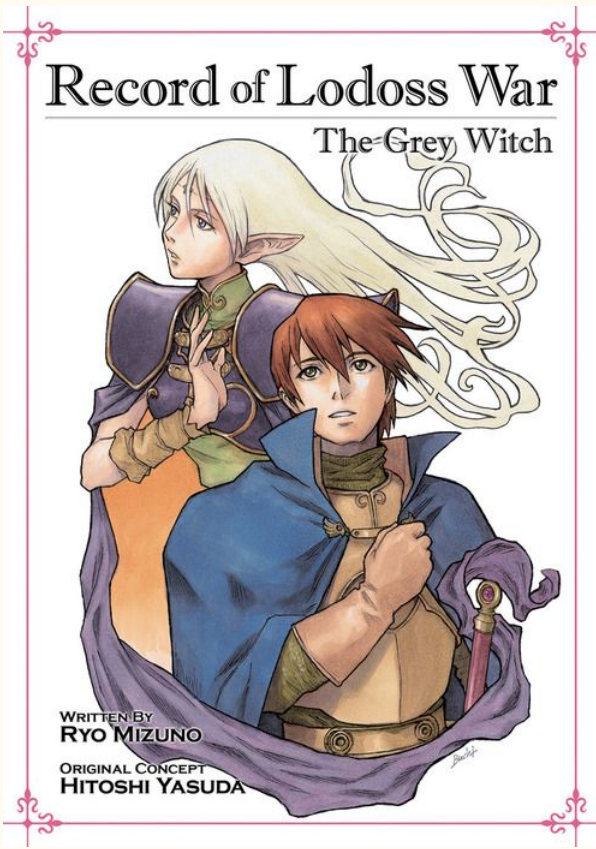
- There were many reasons why TRPGs failed in Japan as compared to their Western origins
- Reasons:
 - Complicated system (multi-sided dice are harder to come by in Japan)
 - Emphasis on multi-session campaigns
 - Large hardback textbooks
 - Busy Japanese lifestyle
 - Preference of other forms of RPG media
- These factors in the early 90s and early 2000s caused TRPGs in Japan to become the niche pass time it is now

Rising from the Ashes

- *Dungeons and Dragons* failed in Japan because of these factors as well as the closing of Shinwa
- TRPGs seemed to be dying Japan
- Group SNE was founded in 1987
- *Record of Lodoss War* was released which opened the gateway
- The popularity of this was unprecedented in this time

Replays and the Success of *Record of Lodoss War*

- *Record of Lodoss War* was a replay
- Serialized in the magazine *Comptiq*
- Objectively more successful than TRPGs
- Replays are transcripts of the sessions that were played in person
- Conveyed the events that took place and made it easy to access as it was similar to fantasy light-novels which were popular
- Dungeon Master Ryo Mizuno started to adapt the series into novels, manga, anime, and even games



Record of Lodoss War Mediums

Sword World Tactics

- After the release of *Record of Lodoss War*, Group SNE gained massive popularity
- Developed their own system called *Sword World* that made it more popular
- Advantages:
 - Emphasis on “one-shots”
 - Characters were the focus
 - D6 based system
 - Small, novel size books
- Group SNE understood their target audience and played to their strengths

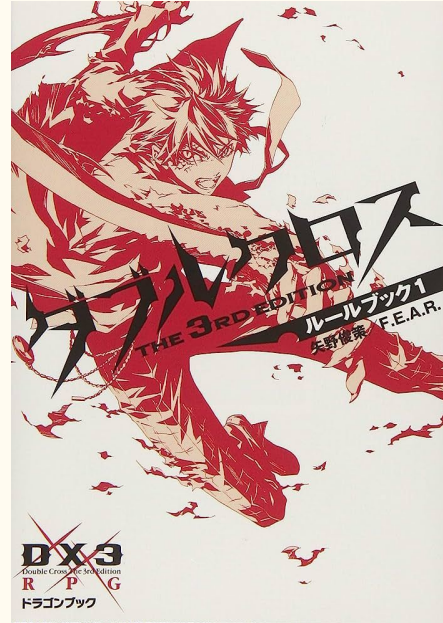


Different Strategies

- Dragon Magazine by Kadokawa Shoten (1988)
- Each “player” was given a unique id
- Players would submit stories as the world was revealed to the public
- Promoted connecting individuals through different mediums
- Hōrai Gakuen no Boken (The Adventure of Hōrai Highschool) by Yüentai (1990)
- This system was a play-by-mail system that took place in Hōrai Highschool
- Players who payed the membership were able to attend Hōrai Highschool
- Players would mail in their actions and receive a report
- They created the world and their own storylines within the school
- Helped connect people throughout all of Japan

The Current State of TRPGs in Japan

- Structured systems common
- Common Act-Scene system
- Ex. Act 1
 - Scene 1
 - Scene 2
- Act 2, etc.
- Unique characters, but basic story set-ups
 - Stories designed for easy “one-shots”
- Often played in game, manga, and internet cafes



The Cultural Effects, or Lack Thereof

- Generally based in Metropolitan areas
- Rulebooks are generally only sold in specialty hobby stores, or recently on online marketplaces
- Considered a niche hobby
- Japanese TRPGs only recently translated into English, compared to the reverse
- Community efforts in translation



Is it a part of Japan's “Soft Power?”

- No, not really.
- Too small and niche in Japan
 - Almost unheard of in areas outside of Metropolitan areas
- Replays rather than TRPGs could possibly be used
 - Replays have attracted the light novel community
- Often derivative of other mediums that could be used as “Soft Power”

Any Questions?

Comments?

Concerns?