



FORUM



"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments.

For some time, we have been collecting letters from gamers concerning the attacks being made upon role-playing in general (and the D&D® and AD&D® games in particular) that charge such games with being harmful to gamers. These letters address the specific prejudices that gamers encounter and suggest ways to overcome that prejudice. We welcome further letters from our readers on this topic.

People who say that evil PCs aren't disruptive don't know what they're talking about. There used to be three gaming groups at our school: my own, a friend's, and one consisting of evil PCs. The DM of the evil PC group is rumored to be a satanist. I don't know if it's true, but it would seem to fit him. He could be best described as a troublemaker, the kind of guy who makes the teacher's life difficult. Most people don't like him, but he has attracted a small group that revolves around him. They play often, always using evil characters.

The school staff was basically out to get this DM. He had participated in such stunts as stealing phosphorous from the school lab and insulting a visiting priest. The staff was desperate to find some way to punish this DM. If the staff gave him lines or detention, he ignored them. If they suspended him, he stayed home, keeping his entire group with him. As a last resort, the staff banned D&D games at our school.

I remember when the vice principal came to me and my friend and explained that role-playing games were now banned in our school. We both protested, but to no avail. Playing D&D games was against the rules.

The sad thing is that this rule didn't really affect the person it was meant to punish. The evil-PC DM just played at home. The people it really affected were those in my group and my friend's group. I now play with only two players, sometimes three. Most of my friends simply live too far away to play often.

I don't even really mind playing RPGs in a sort of evil way if it's done right. I myself sometimes play [West End Games'] PARANOIA® game. But these guys [in the evil-PC group] were running around killing each other's characters and assassinating the king. That kind of stuff just gets a beginning player upset. So why do they do it? It seems pointless to me.

That DM I was talking about graduates this year. I just hope D&D games are allowed back into our school.

Tony Pace
Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

If you haven't heard any attacks on fantasy role-playing games lately, you just haven't been listening in the right places. Several "snake-oil peddler" groups are traveling across rural and

small town America, holding "seminars on satanism" for local police departments and the general public. Our games are called satanist recruiting devices, and coyote scavengings are described as occult ceremonies. The TV "evangelists" are still attacking games when they aren't engaged in off-air immorality that gets them more headlines. The attack has even crossed the Atlantic with the recent involvement of the Cambridgeshire county council.

Yet in this country gamer defense has been disjointed, occasional, and almost totally ineffective. While several people have tried to counter these charges, they have been working almost on their own, with no way to exchange information with others working on the problem, and they generally are denied media access.

For instance, how many are aware that Dr. James A. Mercy, head of the intentional injuries team at the Centers for Disease Control and probably the top authority on suicide in the nation, has stated that he knows of no evidence linking game playing with suicide? How many have checked the claim of the head of one of the top antigame organizations that he is a member of the faculty of a major medical school? I did and was told that at one time they gave an honorary appointment to the clinical faculty to any local doctor requesting it, but when the current school head took the job, the custom was abolished and the doctor in question had no classroom duties. Using honorary credentials is like doing surgery with an honorary medical degree.

I have these documents because I am currently writing a book on the subject. My main emphasis is on the theological angle (I am an ordained United Methodist minister) and the lack of media access for gamers. I particularly need a copy of Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons's *Law Enforcement Primer on Fantasy Role-Playing Games*; answers to specific questions about the unsuccessful suit by B.A.D.D.'s founder against the Hanover County (VA) school system on September 17, 1984; and any accounts of how these games have helped players. A game-playing law-enforcement officer could get the free (to police only) *Primer*, a player with access to the Hanover County courthouse could check the court record, and many players have accounts of how games have helped them improve math grades, deal with introversion, etc. The only problem is, how does anyone know these resources exist or that someone needs information that you have?

We don't need an organization. Organizations have a tendency to become more concerned with their own power than in the cause for which they were originally organized. What we do need is an informal network of those conducting serious research into this problem. All researchers I know of have their own special fields of expertise and emphasis, as properly they should have. This is an advantage and should not be repressed by "reports by committee" from a static organization. Still, there is hardly a need for each one to write to the same source to get the same information when it can be circulated among the network.

Since our side is based on the truth, we have no need for secretly distributed material like the *Primer*. By insisting on at least three independent sources of information, we can avoid the danger of agents provocateurs or of just plain

honest error. I am willing to serve as a clearing-house in the initial stages, but ultimately each of us can put newcomers in touch with the pertinent sources and even that small degree of organization will no longer be needed.

Any who are interested can send me full particulars with an SASE, and in a couple of months I will let you know what turns up.

Paul Cardwell, Jr.
111 E. 5th Street
Bonham TX 75418

I recently read something interesting I thought you might like to be aware of next time one of you appears on *Donahue* or something, arguing about the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game vs. teen suicide and whatnot. It is often cited that a certain ardent player of D&D games has committed suicide, and it is suspected that the game had something to do with the young man's death. I'm sure you understand what I'm talking about.

Anyway, I recently read a popular-reading mathematics book, *Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and Its Consequences*. On page 126, the author discusses this issue from a purely statistical standpoint. He writes about an article he read that stated that 28 teenagers who played the game had killed themselves. I have read similar articles, and I'm sure you know of many more.

The statistics always seem unsettling until you realize, as the author (John Allen Paulos) points out, that three million copies of the game have been sold; furthermore, the annual suicide rate of teenagers is 12 per 100,000. Given that three million game sets were sold, and following the average suicide rate of 12 per 100,000, you would expect 360 D&D game players to have committed suicide (12 X 30).

You could thus create an argument that playing D&D games *lowers* the suicide rate — I doubt those advocating banning D&D games would agree, but it's worth a shot.

You might want to pop into a library to check out the book yourself; it's useful in learning how to see through certain fallacious arguments you're often faced with.

Robert W. Heym
New Orleans LA

I have been playing role-playing games for the last 10 or 12 years, and that is why I am writing this letter. For the last few years we have seen [religious] fundamentalism grow. I have nothing against fundamentalism and have several friends who are fundamentalists, but I am opposed to the school of thought that regards role-playing games as satanic. I do not wish to see role-playing games banned; I don't think any of us do. That is why I am suggesting that we get organized.

Right now there is no organization that I know of that represents gamers as a whole. As far as I know there is no organization that is opposing all of the things that the fundamentalists are saying about role-playing games. Part of this is probably due to lack of interest or because people don't know what to do. There's also the fact that many gamers are below voting age and thus cannot legally do anything. I am asking for you to help me change this.

Many of you will think that I am overreacting. I don't believe that I am. . . . Almost two years

ago, a friend and I joined a fundamentalist church; we were both "born again." I left the church when they began slamming role-playing games, but only because I had been playing role-playing games since the fourth grade. My friend was not as fortunate. Shortly before we joined this church, he had inherited all of the D&D modules from his older brother. At the church's prodding, he burned them, all of them.

We need to get organized today; tomorrow may be too late. I don't endorse violence, I endorse education. We have to show people that we are not a threat, that we are not a bunch of suicidal/satanic maniacs. We're different, yes, and we should be damn proud that we're different. I'm not saying that we should become part of the mainstream, but I think that we'd better get organized somehow or the mainstream may drown us.

Michael Shigetani
Tacoma WA

I'd like to thank Bryan A. Walker for his comments in DRAGON issue #145. I'm sure many more people are interested in the future of role-playing games rather than such topics as how many spells a 1st-level mage gets or what harpy babies look like. Many of us are concerned about the fate of our favorite pastime, the RPG. I can't begin to count the number of articles and stories I've heard on TV or read in magazines and newspapers in which the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is blamed for murders, suicides, and satanism. Groups such as BADD (Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons) point the finger at RPGs for everything that goes wrong with kids today. They say such things as murder, rape, and satanic rituals are used and encouraged in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. I can't believe it.

I've been playing RPGs since I was 11. That's a young age to start, but in the five years I've played I haven't seen anything to give D&D games a bad reputation. A D&D game is more like a fairy tale than some evil satanic toy. Knights in shining armor kill evil dragons and pious clerics banish evil priests. Maybe something could be said if we played the parts of the dragon and the evil priest, but we don't. Role-playing games are usually for good-oriented characters. The AD&D 2nd Edition game didn't get rid of the assassin class for nothing.

I have to say that I've never seen anything bad come of playing D&D games. I play just about every weekend and holiday, not to mention just about every day during the summer. I also listen to heavy metal music and enjoy going to heavy metal concerts and clubs. Most of the people I associate with have played RPGs at one time or another, and usually I have taught these people to play. I have a superficial interest in the occult, and I spend quite a bit of time reading fantasy novels. According to some people, these signs would mean I'm a satanic freak. Yet I was born a Catholic, I am still a Catholic, I attend church every Sunday, and I don't smoke or do drugs.

Lenny Valure
Port Chester NY

Often I have seen letters proving that D&D games are not linked to satanism or the ideas associated with it. But what good does it do to show D&D game players what their game is really about when they already know? I'm sure all of you reading this know that RPGs, including the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, aren't about Satan worship. I know this and so do my friends. Most of the people who have written in about this subject have good points to make in defense of RPGs. Again, what good does this do?

I can list several points in favor of role-playing. A psychologist (from Hawaii I think) wrote that he used D&D games to help his patients. Many letters have been written about how role-playing has helped the writers' handicapped friends. And Douglas J. Hutchinson points out in issue #146 that RPGs help develop linguistic and social skills. I have a point of my own. In high school I was required to take a Greek mythology class. In that class, we discussed half the creatures in the *Monster Manual*, creatures that were a very much a part of the Greeks' mythology. The "cult threat" (that is blown very much out of proportion anyway) must be much worse than estimated if our schools are teaching our children about satanic creatures. Also, many people opposed to RPGs have a difficult time showing how TSR's TOP SECRET® game and other nonfantasy RPGs are satanic like their more "hellish" fantasy counterparts. But what good does it do to tell you?

Here is my suggestion: Why not attempt to get an article showing what role-playing is really about in a major magazine, such as *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, etc.? I know there are many free-lance writers who read DRAGON Magazine, and I ask those of you to consider writing such an article.

Why should such a thing be done? It would show many people what these games are about, people who have heard only the opposed side in this debate. I knew many people who used to play D&D games but weren't allowed to continue playing because their parents were told [that gaming] was satanic and caused its players to commit suicide. Maybe [a pro-gaming] article would show parents the truth. I cannot be sure about anyone else, but I have found a lot in role-playing, and I want to share it with people, show them all the fun in it.

And finally a few words for Mr. Shawn DeMers (in issue #132, thanks to Mr. Michael Drake for mentioning it). Tell your friends of the thousands of "satanists" who have made the books of the DRAGONLANCE® saga best sellers. People will assume almost anything. Many people do not realize that [Salman Rushdie's] *Satanic Verses* is a novel and not a satanic bible.

Please consider my suggestion.

Dayle Johnson
Dickinson MD

Congratulations on the editorial in DRAGON issue #151. I couldn't agree more. TSR and D&D games make good targets because they're successful. Someone once advised that if a person wanted to ensure his own fame, he should assassinate someone famous—then, whenever the [dead person's] name is mentioned, his would be, too. (I've forgotten who gave the advice. A 19th century anarchist, I think.) Anyone with a bent toward controversy who wants to make a name for himself can do no better than to select someone like [TSR] to attack. Justification? Who worries about that?

Your point on being "a little careless about the way in which you select and edit your data" is excellent. I would only chide you on being too nice about it. You know as well as I do that most of the people we're talking about are very deliberate about how they select and edit their data. No accidents are involved. They (let them remain mercifully unnamed) decide what they want to prove, then accumulate the facts that will make their point. But I suppose you couldn't actually say that in print.

Remember the story of Balder from Nordic mythology? If only one creature in all the world said "no," he could not be brought back to life. The gods searched all the earth—and, yes, they

found one creature who said "no." If we never do any new creative work until we're certain that no one in the world could possibly be hurt or offended by it, we'll soon find ourselves in the position of never doing anything new at all—because there's always going to be *someone* who's put at risk . . . or who claims to be.

If the people who want to create a "risk free" world ever win, we're all doomed. So the best we can do is just to keep on keeping on, doing what we know is right and not let the carping bother us. That, I'm delighted to see, you already know. Well done!

Craig H. Barrett
Canon City CO

I am writing to tell you how angry I am about the misconceptions so many people have about role-playing games, and the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game in particular. More and more I hear people say they don't want to play D&D games because they will commit suicide or something like that. If those people would play a role-playing game, they probably wouldn't think the way they do.

I have been playing D&D games for about eight years, and I know people who have been playing for longer than that. Nobody I have ever known has done anything bad because of the game. I even understand that there is a group in the next town that plays for two or three days at a time and none of them have ever done anything bad because of the game. I think that a person who flips "because of the game" had something wrong with his head already.

Jason Aljets
Harvey ND

I have been enjoying your magazine since issue #109. All of the articles and artwork make your magazine great, but I have a problem. When trying to get new members into my gaming group, parents seem to protest. They believe that the D&D game is satanic and will cause their children to go out and kill people. This fear has been blown out of proportion by programs such as *20/20* and *60 Minutes*. This keeps my friends from playing. Please, if possible, send me some information or articles on good aspects of role-playing. Thank you for anything that you can send me. And please keep up the great work in DRAGON Magazine.

C. P. Bates
Chester SC

The controversy goes on and on: Is the D&D game hazardous to our children? As the mother of an about-to-be sixteen-year-old enthusiast, I would like to go on record on the game's behalf.

Three years ago, my son (then twelve) bought the Basic set. He is an only child, so I began to play with him. Together we entered a world of incredible wonder and excitement. Our only problem was that we had trouble finding others to share it with. (That, of course, is the fly in every serious DM's ointment and has nothing to do with this letter.) Eventually, we found two more players. It was with a great deal of sorrow that we were forced to disband our little group recently when one of the members moved out of town. But hope is within reach: We have recently received the backing of our local library. So a new campaign lies ahead.

If there is any danger in the role-playing genre, it is that it is addictive. Handled properly, it is blessed relief from boredom and stress, and it is definitely preferable to an afternoon of Jason, Freddy, heroin, and cocaine. One need only use some sense.

On the positive side, the situations presented

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in the game often allow young adults to sample life hazards and learn to deal with them intelligently. All of us make judgment errors in our youth. D&D and AD&D games allow those judgments to be made safely. When several players are involved, it teaches valuable lessons in teamwork. But most of all, it is fun.

My son has grown to young manhood, and I have become perhaps a better parent because of these games. I feel genuinely sorry for those parents who have so near at hand the means to bridge the gap between themselves and their children, yet fail to use it.

Gerri Balyard
Canton OH

This is the first letter that I have submitted to you. I hope it is published. I have been playing role-playing games for over six years now, and am nineteen years of age. I play AD&D, FASA's BATTLETECH®, and the MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ games mostly, but have played almost every role-playing system out. I also am a Christian and go to church. The above information is necessary to understand the comments and statements that I am about to make.

I have come under attack from Christians in my church and others at my public school about my interest in AD&D games and other role-playing games in general. I have listened to their comments. They range from "Oh, no! You play *that* game? Why, you're a Satan worshiper!" to "What good are role-playing games anyway?" Well, frankly, I'm fed up with it!

First of all, just because someone plays a game that involves make-believe creatures such as spirits or ghouls doesn't make one a Satan worshiper. I consider myself to be a good Christian in general and think that the accusation is totally biased. Many Christians tend to shut out anything that has even a hint of "evil" in it. They never examine something, scrutinize it, try to find good in something. As a church-goer, I am told always to find the good in everything and to try and look at both sides of an issue, to not be biased, but this is what's happening to AD&D games in the church community.

Second: "What good are they?" The AD&D game and the MARVEL SUPER HEROES game (the latter in particular) teach good morals such as mercy, bravery, intelligence, and teamwork. What is wrong with that? In AD&D games, a character of lawful-good alignment, such as a cavalier, would set a good example as an honest and brave person. There is more to AD&D games than dice, books, and killing weird-looking monsters. There's character interaction and the main plot of the quest, in which players must act good; that makes a good game. I think the church people have passed over those facts.

In closing, I'd like to say that it's the DM who sets the tone of the game. As DM, I usually take out "questionable" material such as demon lords, false gods, etc. It's the DM's campaign that should be questioned, not the AD&D game itself. The responsibility lies there. And to all who read this, always find the good in things, look at both viewpoints of everything, and don't shut your minds to new things. After all, was not Jesus himself killed because of his viewpoints?

Dan Pryor
Phillipsville CA