

LETTERS

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LD, United Kingdom.

Every two weeks?

Dear Dragon:

I am writing in hopes of getting your magazine to go at least bi-monthly. Once a month is just not enough! I really like your articles, fiction section, computer and book reviews, everything about your magazine. But once I read the month's issue, I have to wait a whole three weeks to get more of this great magazine. I know you have enough on your hands already, but I just like this magazine too much to get it just once a month. So please, please, please go bi-monthly at least.

Jonah S. Ewell
No address given

Yours is exactly the kind of letter we love to receive here, but if we tried to put this magazine out once every two weeks, we would have to be taken to the Great Lakes Home for Self-Lobotomized Editors within the first two issues (I think you meant bi-weekly or semi-monthly instead of bi-monthly, but I've heard the term "bi-monthly" used for either meaning.) You should seriously think about subscribing to DUNGEON® Adventures, which would give you more than enough material to keep you going. See our subscription cards in this issue.

Overseas notes

Dear Dragon:

With the exception of a couple of issues, you've done a great job of entertaining and informing us gamers who are overseas serving the military. It hurts to see all the great stuff coming out that we won't see for another year (e.g., the AD&D® 2nd Edition Player's Handbook will probably be in the Stars & Stripes bookstore in September 1992).

I have a few questions for you:

1. whatever happened to the "Daily Planet" (DC™ HEROES game) Gaming Supplement?
2. Why don't you have the World Gamers Guide? I'm here on the 662nd plane of the Abyss (actually at Giebelstadt AAF in Germany, same difference), and I need to do some gaming!
3. When is the next Best of DRAGON Magazine Anthology?
4. Are there plans to republish the Finieous Fingers Treasury (oh please, please, grovel, grovel, licking your boots, beg, beg)?

Michael S. Webster
APO NY

1. The "Daily Planet" supplement was actually an advertisement series from Mayfair Games, supporting its licensed DC HEROES game. There

are no plans at present to start the series again.

2. We discontinued "The World Gamers Guide" feature in DRAGON Magazine with issue #131. The magazine's increased distribution worldwide was responsible; we were simply getting too many entries to publish, and the space devoted to the feature was not benefiting the majority of our readers. We still encourage gamers the world over to organize gaming groups, set up conventions, and use the resources of their local game and hobby stores.

3. We made mention in issue #133's "Letters" column that an anthology would be released in early 1989, but the anthology was dropped from the production schedule. We have no further anthologies planned for now, though some anthology types have been discussed. What would you like to see if we did decide to publish an anthology of material from DRAGON Magazine? Write now and tell us.

4. We have no plans to reprint The Finieous Treasury, the collected graphic adventures of Finieous Fingers the thief and his friends, that was released by TSR, Inc. in 1981. Finieous left DRAGON Magazine years ago for another gaming magazine that is no longer published. However, the new adventures of Finieous, Fred, and Charly now appear in Space Gamer magazine, published by 3W, Inc. (4070 West Street, Cambria CA 93428).

Back to BBSs

Dear Dragon:

After reading Roger Moore's editorial in issue #146 ("R.I.P.: RPGs?"), I thought of another use for computers on the subject of RPGs. For those with modems, there is always the option of BBSs [bulletin board systems]. Many BBSs have ongoing RPGs, usually run by the users. I myself call a number of BBSs that have RPGs to play, and one BBS is devoted completely to RPGs.

While computer games are excellent (and getting better) for the gamer, BBSs provide a way to play your favorite game and get the human contact that makes the game fun.

Aaron Goldblatt
Fort Worth TX

The BBS games that I've seen work more like play-by-mail (PBM) games, but they do introduce interaction with real people. Some on-line computer services offer real-time role-playing games, like the CompuServe® Information Service's Island of Kesmai fantasy game (see "Kesmai and Beyond," in issue #149) and licensed SNIPER™ World War II computer game (see "The Game Wizards," in issue #148).

For what it's worth, TSR, Inc. has no objection if gamers wish to play TSR's games on-line through BBSs. However, such use cannot be made for profit; no one can charge other players to play in a TSR game. I recall seeing one BBS system that was completely devoted to the AD&D® Oriental Adventures system; another—the "Illuminati" BBS—is operated by Steve Jackson Games in Austin, Tex. (512-447-4449, 24 hours, 300/1200/2400 baud).

Laying the blame

In mid-September, there was a news article about a 17-year old student in McKee, Ky., who took 11 high-school classmates hostage. He was armed with a shotgun and two revolvers. The student eventually surrendered to state police officers. No one was injured.

As officials sorted through the student's belongings while negotiating with him just before his surrender, they discovered a book that the authorities think formed the basis for the student's hostage taking. Any guesses as to what that book was?

If you were afraid it was a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rule book, you were wrong. It was Stephen King's *Rage*, a novel about a teenager who takes other students hostage before being shot by police. The McKee student had not seen his real father since he was four years old; during the hostage ordeal, he consistently demanded that he be able to see his father. The main character in King's novel had serious problems with his own father. It seems reasonable to guess that the McKee student identified greatly with the situation in the novel—and he was unfortunately upset enough about his life to do something radical about it.

The question is: Was the book responsible for the student's actions?

I've never read a Stephen King novel, though a friend once told me I resemble one of the characters in *Christine* (he wouldn't say which one; I assume it wasn't the car). Given the circumstances described in the paper, I find it very difficult to believe that the book was in any way responsible for the student's actions. If someone is extremely upset, mentally disturbed, or very immature, almost anything can set him off.

The McKee student is hardly alone. All of you should recall John Hinckley, Jr., who shot and wounded the President of the United States in 1982 for reasons that had reportedly something to do with seeing the movie *Taxi Driver* a great many times. He was found to be insane, as everyone knows, and no one blamed the movie for his actions. A great many other people had seen it, and it hadn't caused them to shoot other people.

You might also remember the teenager in Florida who went on trial some years ago for the murder of an elderly

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Editorial

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woman; his lawyer claimed that the influence of the TV series *Kojak* was responsible. The claim was rejected, and the defendant was found guilty.

You could create a list with any number of similar cases, and you could add to it the few incidents that are claimed to have been spawned by role-playing games. For example, a 19-year-old student in Asheville, Ala., apparently planned a convenience-store robbery with two friends while playing an espionage RPG. A store clerk was shot to death during the actual hold-up in May 1985. The murderer was sentenced to prison for life without parole. Do you believe that the game could be at fault? Do you believe that the student would have been fine if he'd never seen the game?

We're only scratching the surface of the issue here, of course. Several claims have been made that RPGs cause suicidal behavior, but these claims tend to fall apart under close examination as the evidence is so fragmentary and loose. You could make a great case that good grades are harmful, if you use the same set of standards that anti-RPG people often use in selecting their own evidence. That McKee student was noted in the newspaper to be a "straight-A student" (*Milwaukee Journal*, September 19, 1989; page 5A). The student who shot the store clerk was a "high school honor student" (*Milwaukee Journal*, no date available). At a student-relations meeting I attended in high school, the story was told of a student who shot himself to death on a baseball diamond; in his hand he clutched a letter of acceptance from a university and a copy of his high-school transcript (another all-A student).

You could also make an interesting case that religious beliefs cause antisocial and criminal behavior, but I've already done that in a previous editorial, in DRAGON® issue #134. (Besides, we have Jim Bakker, who provides overkill on the issue.)

I think good grades and religious feeling are fine things. But if you play with the statistics and are a little careless about the way in which you select and edit your data, you can "prove" good grades and religion (and RPGs) are as bad as anything else. This kind of "evidence" selection is how all the hoopla over the Bermuda Triangle got underway a few years ago. Most of the ships that were claimed to have been mysteriously lost there actually vanished during major storms at sea—all mention of which was dropped in later accounts of the same incidents.

The vast majority of people reading this editorial are, I assume, gamers who are as angry as I am about the way in which RPGs are treated by a few well-meaning but uninformed people in education, social services, and the media. Games are not alone in this abuse, as movies and records

also draw fire at times for their perceived effects on those who enjoy them. Various school boards and libraries across America have gained a certain infamy for banning books like *The Wizard of Oz*, *Huckleberry Finn*, or Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* for being bad influences on students. I'm surprised that more students don't support such book bannings, as it would certainly reduce the amount of homework that would be assigned.

There will always be incidents like those described in this article. If you eliminated every possible game, book, record, or movie that was connected with a bad incident, none would be left. The presence of these recreations is not the issue. Finding ways to identify and help those people with serious mental and emotional problems is the real issue.

How should you react to accusations that RPGs are bad for you? In my opinion, here are the two best things you can do:

1. Examine the evidence with a critical and discriminating eye. Take time to think about what you read or hear on the news. Does the reporting sound reasonable, or does it leave you wondering if a lot of hype and paranoia are being used? Do you actually believe the rationales given for why certain events took place? Can you find more information on the topic that will let you make an informed decision

about the matter? Don't let others do your thinking for you.

2. Be reasonable. If you are a teenager and live with your parents, you will have to accept their decisions (and your school's) on whether or not they will let you play RPGs. But if you are given a chance to discuss the issue, make sure you are informed—and be on your best behavior when you discuss it. People are always more impressed when they are confronted with someone who shows all the signs of being mature and responsible as well as being well informed.

If you are looking for material in support of gaming, you might want to read two other articles on this topic: Tracy Hickman's "The Ethics of Fantasy," from special edition #1 of GPI's GATEWAYSTM Magazine; and Frank Mentzer's "Squeaky Wheels," from POLYHEDRON™ Newszine #26. Both are worth the trouble to find.

As for me, if I really believed that RPGs were harmful, I would not be writing this editorial. I will do what I can to see that they stick around for a long time to come.

Use your head. And enjoy life.



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