



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. Please note that the opinions expressed in this column (as in all previous "Forum" columns) do not necessarily reflect the views of TSR, Inc.).

I am one of a seemingly small minority, the Christian gamer. As such, I have to applaud and comment on your "Letters" column and editorial in issue #125. It was an even-handed treatment of parental concerns, while at the same time a valid scratching of the head at the kind of

people who would condemn the *entire* game because there have been a few goofy players. But still, let me say a few things about the light and dark sides of AD&D games:

I learned to play the AD&D game in college, eight years ago. At once the game struck me as being an amazing adventure, a storybook of valiant deeds that could last a thousand lifetimes, a chance to do in a passing evening epic quests that spanned the planes. I was fortunate in that my fellow *players* were all neutral good. Later, when I began to DM and teach the game to others, I made sure that evil characters met an untimely death, and that whatever the adventure, great deeds would be done. I had quickly found that evil characters bug down the game with petty greed at the party's expense. We hung together. In my world, Good always wins.

We ask why people fear fantasy role-playing games. It's partly because the average guy in the street's had his imagination stomped out of him at an early age, and so thinks a "game without a board" is really weird. Unfortunately, it is more than that. It's the few actual oddballs that have gone off gaming's deep end and met with trouble (including a few suicides). As gamers, we know role-playing is like any tool: It does what you do with it, and a few people have indeed given the whole field a bad name. But I'd like to say this about *responsible* DMing:

I'm a Christian and an adult. The AD&D game, as a game for adults, is terrific. Adults already have decided what is good and bad, and how they will live their lives. But when TSR watered down the AD&D game to the paperback book level and started selling it to preteens is where I think the trouble began. Kids do role-model; it's proven. And in "Monty Haul" dungeons where the DM is an adolescent who hates the world, *evil* wins. That is why parents, right or wrong, fear D&D games. It's because when it is run badly, it can feed hate rather than drain it away. It's rather like being a Jedi Knight; as a DM, I feel that if I introduce the AD&D game to anyone under the age of 18, I should show the glory of the game, the valiant hero we all should be, not the cowardly assassin who slinks in the night. (The assassin is an NPC and lives a very short time in my world.)

The other bad side of the AD&D game stems from the few actual magic flaws engineered in by its designers. I'm not the narrow-minded fellow who thinks that a cleric *character* praying to his deity is the same as a *player* "worshipping idols," as some nongaming people would believe (although all PC clerics in my world are neutral-good Jehovahans). But there is elemental evil in the real world. It's a joke to most gamers. But it's a short step from a pentagram inscribed in the *Dungeon Masters Guide* to messing around with tarot cards, Ouija boards, and



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Darkness. "My magic-user casts a sleep spell," works just fine. When you get into specifics like symbology and actual arcane markings, you *are* playing with fire, as the barriers between ourselves and Satan are there for a reason.

The AD&D game is just a game. It's fun, like all FRPGs. But when it glorifies darkness, greed, or hate, or when it is used as a tool to *escape* our troubles rather than just to let off steam, it runs the risk of harming people. I wouldn't give a loaded gun or a bottle of scotch to a child and tell him to "go have fun." Likewise, if I pass the AD&D game on to another person, it should be as a glorious adventure, a chance to be a hero. In the Bible, good triumphs over evil; in a good game, the same thing happens. If you want to play in a campaign with backstabbing and secrecy are viewed as useful skills, play West End Games' PARANOIA game, where everyone knows that the mayhem is a joke, not something on which to build young lives.

Andrew Bartness
Cincinnati OH

This letter is in response to your editorial featured in the June 1988 issue of DRAGON Magazine. The underlying theme of your editorial (in my opinion) was that of personal choice. There is another issue that I believe you need to stress when you deal with the issue of role-playing versus no role-playing. The issue is on *legal rights*.

Everyone has the right to his own opinion. Almost all role-players who hear people talk negatively about role-playing get heated up and try to convince these people that role-playing is not evil and that it can be beneficial. Role-players are doing the same thing that the oppo-

sition is doing. They begin to preach about the good aspects of role-playing just as the opposition [preaches about the bad aspects]. Yet both sides seem to forget that it is our legal right either to play the game (it has not been outlawed) or to preach against it. This right is guaranteed by the Constitution in the Bill of Rights. The opposition has every right to try to get the different role-playing games banned, just as role-players and advocates of this hobby have the right to try and make sure the opposition does not get what it wants. Most people, especially those of the opposition, believe that their side is correct and that no one is going to change their minds, and it bothers me that a lot of role-players get this same attitude.

This letter is a reminder to the role-players of the world that those people have a right to try and keep us from playing, just like we have a right to stop them, but it is also to remind those of the role-playing establishment not to get pig headed and see only one way, that makes us as bad as them.

I would like to mention the fact that the people that are trying to stop role-playing have a philosophy similar to that of those that have tried (and are *still* trying) to stop rock and roll.

Robert B. Lührman
Griffin GA

The greatest threat facing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game today comes from certain organizations that claim that D&D games have a harmful effect on their players. These organizations (typically parents' associations, school boards, and religious groups) make numerous allegations against the D&D game, ranging from accusing it of glorifying violence to blaming it

for the suicides of several teenage players. These organizations feel that the only solution is to ban or outlaw the game.

TSR has responded to these allegations through a number of means. The means most familiar to readers of DRAGON Magazine is a series of editorials, the first one appearing some months ago. But this is not sufficient. It is time that someone take a long and organized look at the charges against the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game in order to refute them and prove the innocence of this game.

By far the most serious accusation against the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is the charge that the D&D game has caused the suicides of several teenage players across the United States. To disprove this claim requires a brief examination of the phenomenon of teenage suicide.

Statistically, suicide is the number-two killer of those 15 to 24, second only to vehicular accidents. It is thought that half of all teenagers have contemplated, planned, or attempted suicide.

Suicide is the result of extreme amounts of stress. This stress can be caused by a number of sources: pressure to perform in school, peer pressure to conform or to use alcohol and drugs, pressure in the home due to parental divorce or unemployment, etc. Stress manifests itself in feelings of confusion, frustration, and helplessness. People undergoing such stress see themselves as sliding into a hopeless pit of depression. A lucky few reach out to friends or family for help, but most cannot stop the inexorable slide and turn to escapes like alcohol and drugs. These escapes, while providing no real solution, at least allow them to temporarily forget their problems.

Unfortunately, drugs and alcohol are very

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popular—but better escapes exist. Consider for example a role-playing game like the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. It allows a player to take on a new persona, to control a character with mighty abilities and without the player's own worries and limitations. It allows a player to adventure in a fantastical world where gold, magic, dragons, and fair maidens are commonplace. In short, role-playing games provide a temporary escape from the realities and frustrations of everyday life.

Unfortunately, retreating to such an escape only postpones a player's problems and does nothing to alleviate them. Victims of stress who try to escape their problems rather than solve them soon discover that such escapes are artificial and temporary. This realization sends them spiraling further down into their pits of depression until they finally seek the One Permanent Escape that will irrevocably solve all their problems.

Thus, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is being made into a convenient scapegoat. It is particularly ridiculous to claim that a game could cause the suicides of its players. Suicide is the result of stress, and, if anything, the D&D game helps reduce stress by providing a temporary escape from the frustrations of everyday life.

Another popular allegation is that the D&D game glorifies violence. Critics claim that D&D games, like many television shows, teach that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems. The critics contend that a typical adventure consists simply of the characters slaughtering everything they meet. The players never see the consequences of their actions, and if a character is killed, his player just rolls up a new one and dives back into the fight.

It must be admitted that some campaigns are like this. But this is the fault of the DM and the players, not the game. Good DMs and players never make these kinds of mistakes. Firstly, most DMs realize the importance of interactive character generation. The more detail the player gets to input, the more he sees the character as his own and so the more he cherishes that character. Few players are willing to risk favorite characters in combat if they can think their way out of a problem. Secondly, good DMs try to create adventures that emphasize thinking and problem-solving rather than allowing characters to simply fight their ways past every obstacle.

Currently a popular topic in "Forum" is whether playing evil characters is justifiable. Many players feel it is not. They argue that playing evil characters is wrong because such characters habitually perform such acts as assassination and torture.

However, another group (including a number of psychologists) has recently come out in favor of evil campaigns. Their reasoning relates back to the problem of stress and the pent-up feelings of frustration and anger that stress creates. It is important that such pent-up emotions find some outlet, and one of the easiest ways to alleviate them is through physical violence. The anger is transferred to the target, and the person feels relieved. Unfortunately, hitting things tends to be very destructive, so psychologists are seeking more constructive ways of relieving stress and tension. Fantasy games are a perfect constructive outlet. With every imaginary blow, players drain very real anger and tension into imaginary foes. This is particularly true of evil campaigns in which characters can carry out violent acts on hapless orcs, which is much better than having the players carry out those acts on teachers, bosses, parents, etc.

Religious groups frequently criticize the D&D

game, saying that it is sacrilegious and it promotes devil-worshipping. Of course, this is silly. Their arguments are based on the fact that among the thousands of pages of gaming material can be found such things as maps of the planes of Hell and lists of the powers of demons and devils. But just because players use such material during an adventure doesn't mean they believe it is true. The D&D game is a fantasy game, and most players have no trouble differentiating between it and reality.

Clearly, it can be concluded that, when properly run, the D&D game is an innocent game that has no harmful influence on its players. Any apparent ill effects are the result of some other factor such as stress. In fact, the D&D game can have a beneficial effect on its players because it provides not only a temporary escape from the stress and frustration of life, but also an outlet for pent-up anger and tension.

As a final note, it must be realized that most of the people who criticize the D&D game have never actually played the game. It is a sad fact in this age of education and enlightenment that ignorant beliefs and hearsay can cause so much damage. Rather than naively banning D&D games, why don't the critics try playing it first? Most gaming clubs would be happy to put on demonstrations, and some of these critics just might realize what they've been missing.

Gord Coleman
Nepean, Ontario

I am writing in regard to Alex Martin's letter in issue #152 and Wesley Crowell's letter in issue #155. I understand and agree fully with both of these letters. Parents seem to think that the D&D game is a horrible game. I have talked with my parents several times on this matter. They think that the D&D game has no morals. Well, it does: It teaches that Good forever rules over Evil. I'm an experienced DM, and I know about this kind of stuff.

I have read the book *Mazes and Monsters*, and I say that the author had no idea what she was talking about. I also read a nonfiction book entitled *Dungeon Master*. The same thing happened to the kid in this story as *Mazes and Monsters*, there was one difference: The kid in *Dungeon Master* was on drugs *before* he ever heard of the D&D game.

I can understand Michael Natale's position in his letter in issue #152. A friend of mine thought she knew everything about the D&D game and said it was devil worship. This same person and her mother also believed a story in *The National Enquirer* that said a six-year-old gave birth to a two-headed baby! That just shows that parents shouldn't be worried about us D&D game players.

This is what I did to make my parents see what the D&D game really is. I am running a DRAGONLANCE® saga campaign right now, so I read stories from *DRAGONLANCE Tales* (*Heart of Goldmoon*, *Silver and Steel*, *From the Yearning for War*; and *War's Ending*) to them. They trusted me and my judgment after that.

Thanks to Margaret Weis, Tracy Hickman, and all of the people who made the DRAGONLANCE saga. Even 50-year-old parents love it! And by the way, I'm only 13 years old, but that doesn't mean that parents shouldn't listen to us kids. If they would listen and *believe* us every once in a while, I think some things (such as the D&D game) could be explained more easily:

Marian Lynn Lucas
Angleton TX