

## FACTS AND FICTIONS ABOUT THE *WORLD OF DARKNESS* AND OTHER ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

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Role-playing games like *Vampire: The Requiem* have been around for over thirty years now. Yet, there are still many people who know little about them - or worse - believe the rumors and legends that they are a dangerous activity that can lead to terrible things.

**What are role playing games like *The World of Darkness*?** Many people use terms like *interactive fiction* and *organized make-believe* to describe what a role-playing game is, but these don't really paint a complete picture.

Think of some of your favorite board games that you like to play, now or when you were younger - popular games like *Monopoly*, *Battleship*, *Clue*, *Stratego*, or *Risk*. Now try to imagine playing one of those games while stepping into the role of a shrewd businessperson, a Navy captain, a master detective, or Army General. Now, instead of just rolling dice, drawing cards, and moving pieces around the board, you're acting out that role, interacting with the other players who are doing the same thing, and creating a story as well as playing a game.

A role-playing game lies somewhere between there and the games of pretend that many of us played as children. They are an organized form of make-believe or play-acting, with rules for what a character can and cannot do, and a referee (often called a game master or storyteller) to help interpret and enforce those rules and set the stage for the characters to play on.

The *World of Darkness* is a series of games that allow roleplaying different types of supernatural characters – vampires, werewolves, mages, faerie, and more – in a modern-day setting. This sort of setting is often called *urban fantasy*, and it can be found in a lot of today's young adult fiction.

**What's with all of the funny dice?** In most role-playing games, dice are used to generate random numbers to resolve certain events (such as whether a character can climb a slippery wall, or if an attempt to fast talk a guard will work). These dice come in an array of shapes and sizes; a common set of dice includes 4-, 6-, 8-, 10-, 12-, and 20-sided dice. Some RPGs use a complete set of these dice, while others may only use one particular kind (such as *World of Darkness*, which only uses 10-sided dice). In others, dice are replaced with other randomizers such as cards, or in some cases, removed altogether in what is often called a "diceless" system.



**Do you have to run around in a goofy costume to play these games?** Not really. RPGs are usually played in a comfortable area with a table where everyone can relax while they play and have somewhere to put their books, notes, and dice. There is a "sister" hobby to RPGs called Live Action Role Playing (or LARP for short) where players dress and interact with each other as their characters – sort of like being in an improvisational play. These are also a lot of fun, and many *World of Darkness* players enjoy playing a LARP version of the game.

**Aren't there tons of rulebooks and a million complex rules to these games?** Again, not really. Many people see the large amount of books – some of them very thick - that are available for a role-playing game and assume that every page is filled with rules. The truth is, most of the material found in any RPG book is background material for the setting – the characters, locations, and history of the game world in which it is played. The backgrounds of many RPGs are more detailed than those of the average sci-fi or fantasy movie or television series, and this can make the books very enjoyable to read.

**How did these games get such a bad reputation?**

It all started in 1979 with the original role-playing game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and the disappearance of a young college student named James Dallas Egbert. During the investigation of his disappearance, the private eye hired to the case discovered that Egbert was running away from some very serious problems, and to protect the reputation of the Egbert family, allowed the press to believe that he was hiding in the steam tunnels beneath the dormitory and playing *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Since that time, many crimes or tragedies involving an RPG player have been 'blamed' on the games – even in cases when the *victim* of a crime was a gamer. When the *Vampire: The Masquerade* RPG (the first of the *World of Darkness* games) came along in 1991, it attracted the same kind of negative attention, and was incorrectly connected to a few crimes, including the Wendorf murders and the Columbine massacre.

For more information on these cases and the misconceptions about RPGs, visit [theescapist.com/basic\\_gaming\\_faq.htm](http://theescapist.com/basic_gaming_faq.htm)

**What sort of RPGs are available besides *World of Darkness* games?** There are many different types for different tastes: RPGs based on heroic fantasy, superheroes, spy or action heroes, historical periods, popular movies and TV shows, and even cartoons.

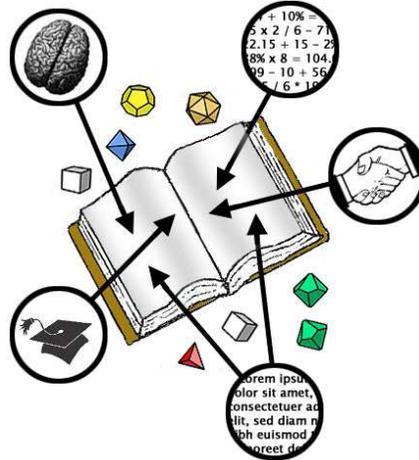
**Are there any benefits to playing role-playing games?** There are many, and a thorough discussion of them would never fit on this single page.

But to summarize: role-playing games...

- ▶ are a social activity
- ▶ help to build basic math skills
- ▶ promote literacy and build vocabulary

- ▶ promote teamwork, problem solving, and resource management.
- ▶ help develop spatial-temporal reasoning, or “thinking in pictures,” by encouraging players to visualize a situation with their imagination
- ▶ improve improvisational ability and acting skills

Games set in historical or contemporary settings can build knowledge and interest in history and world cultures, and many players hone their artistic and creative skills by drawing pictures of their characters or mapping out locations and floorplans for buildings. Educators can use RPGs as a tool for teaching history, geography, world cultures, science, or most any other subject they can imagine.



terms, doesn't it? This is one of the reasons why this type of setting is so popular in modern young adult fiction and in role-playing games.

Role-playing games allow a player to explore a world in a different persona. They give a certain sense of control that many people enjoy and feel that they do not have over their own lives - a feeling many teens cope with as they approach adulthood.

Any activity has the potential to go too far, which is why parental involvement is always important. Please stay alert and involved in all activities that your teen participates in, and if possible, find a way to participate yourself.

**What studies have been done about them?** There have been a few, but not nearly as many as there should be. Some of the more favorable studies include:

- ▶ Abeyta, Suzanne & Forest, James (1991). Relationship of Role-Playing Games to Self-Reported Criminal Behaviour. *Psychological Reports*, 69, 1187-1192. Gamers are lower in criminal tendencies than rest of population.
- ▶ Simón, Armando (October 1987). Emotional stability pertaining to the game of Dungeons & Dragons. *Psychology in the Schools*, pp 329-332. A clinical psychologist uses the Cattell 16 PF test to show gamers are perfectly normal emotionally, comparing new and veteran gamers.
- ▶ Zayas, Luis H. and Lewis, Bradford H. (1986, Spring). Fantasy role-playing for mutual aid in children's group: a case illustration. *Social Work with Groups*, 53-66. A study of the use of RPG in treating disruptive-behavior problems by the cooperation required in playing.

As for the unfavorable studies on RPGs - there are none. When someone mentions studies that show role-players to be violent or dangerous, you should always ask for specifics on them. Don't expect to get an answer, however. More information on RPG-related studies can be found at [www.rpgstudies.net](http://www.rpgstudies.net)

**What about the dark themes found in RPGs like *World of Darkness*? Isn't that harmful for young people?**

There is no denying that these games are dark-themed, just like the literature that they are inspired by – from gothic horror like *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* to the modern horror and urban fantasy stories that dominate the best-sellers lists today.

These games explore the consequences of being an outsider to humanity, and the individual's choice to attempt to fit in, remain unseen, or rage against society altogether. Sounds a bit like being a teen when you put in those

**YOUNG ADULT MODERN HORROR / URBAN FANTASY BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**FAERIES / FAE** - *Tithe*, *Valiant* and *Ironside* (Modern Faerie Tales) by Holly Black, *Wicked Lovely Series* by Melissa Marr, *Wings* by Aprilynne Pike, *Ballad* and *Lament* by Maggie Stiefvater, *Hallowmere Series* by Tiffany Trent

**HUNTERS / SLAYERS**: *Mortal Instruments Series* by Cassandra Clare, *Maggie Quinn: Girl Vs. Evil Series* by Rosemary Clement-Moore, *Ghost Huntress Series* by Marley Gibson

**MAGES / MAGIC POWERS**: *Sorceress* by Celia Rees, *Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel Series* by Michael Scott, *Balefire Series* by Cate Tiernan, *Sweep Series* by Cate Tiernan

**VAMPIRES**: *The Morganville Vampires Series* by Rachel Caine, *House of Night Series* by P.C. Cast & Kristin Cast, *Blue Bloods Series* by Melissa De La Cruz, *Vampire Academy Series* by Richelle Mead, *Vampire Kisses Series* by Ellen Schreiber, *Cirque Du Freak* by Dareen Shan, *Vampire Diaries Series* by L. J. Smith

**WEREWOLVES / SHAPESHIFTERS**: *Hawksong* by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes, *Dingo* by Charles DeLint, *Shiver* by Maggie Stiefvater

**UNDEAD / ZOMBIES**: *You Are So Undead To Me* by Stacy Jay, *Forest of Hands And Teeth* by Carrie Ryan, *Generation Dead Series* by Daniel Waters

**MISCELLANEOUS (More Than One Kind Of Supernatural Being)**: *Twilight Series* by Stephenie Meyer, *Demonata Series* by Darren Shan, *Nightworld Series* by L.J. Smith

Some of the information on this page has been taken from the FAQ files of *The Escapist* – [www.theescapist.com](http://www.theescapist.com).



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