

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.

Two years ago, we presented a three-part series in "Forum" on the attacks being made upon role-playing games and our readers' reactions to the situation (issues #160-162). We continue our look at the problem with this column. Interested readers may also consult the editorials in issues #125, 134, 151, 158, and 171 for further commentary.

I have just finished reading the "Forum" of DRAGON issue #160. This whole "Forum" was based on the so-called bad influence and bad publicity that the DUNGEON & DRAGONS® game has received. I feel that it is about time I write and express my thoughts on this issue.

First, let me introduce myself and give you my background. I am currently a high-school graduate, soon to be going to Johns Hopkins University to major in computer science. I have been playing D&D® and AD&D® games since I was about 10. My brother introduced me to the game. He is now working on his Masters degree in biomedical engineering at the University of Southern California. In high school, I was on the soccer and track teams and in numerous school organizations. My grades have all been very good (hence being accepted to Johns Hopkins), and I like to read a lot, especially science fiction.

Not only do I play AD&D games a lot, I also listen to rock music like a regular teenager. I listen to many groups such as Led Zeppelin, Metallica, Rush, and Jimi Hendrix. To me, my family, and my friends, I am a normal person with diverse interests, not some freak who is going to kill others, or a manic depressive who is going to commit suicide. Though I cannot honestly say I am a devout Roman Catholic like my father, I still believe there is a God and certainly do not practice satanism or human sacrifice.

I hope that by reading this introduction, you, the reader, see that I am a normal person with regular problems like everyone else, none caused by AD&D games (or the music I listen to, or the books I read, or my friends). I feel that I have a bright future ahead of me that could not have been without my experience with D&D

and AD&D games.

Since I was young when I started playing, it was difficult for me. Yet I learned a lot, from the vocabulary in all the various handbooks to calculating to see if I hit a monster. Let me tell you it wasn't easy, because my brother made me do it all. I did the basic stuff, as well as thinking of strategies, puzzling through hints, and taking chances to keep my characters alive, and I still had fun in the game.

Later, I became a DM and found that to be even harder. Here you virtually have to write a book, but still allow for all the diverse decisions the PCs make. It works not only on your imagination but on your reasoning abilities. One has to make sure all the different factors of the game are balanced. Most of all, I had to make sure my brother had fun while I had fun. Looking back now, I see that it also brought my brother and I closer together (whether he realizes this or not).

Now, on to other things about the games not specifically concerning me. In the "Forum" letters I read, the people mentioned "experts" who had figures or cases that proved that D&D and AD&D games were a bad influence. Well, I think that is a big crock. One person quoted another magazine to say D&D games makes kids have no interest in school, become careless with their homework, and bypass eating, among other things. The same happens to adults [it was said], but they ignore work and family. I hate to break it to you folks, but doesn't watching football do similar things? The father and his friends sit around the TV, drink beer, and ignore others (except to yell to the wife to get some more beer). I'm not saying that every family is like that (mine isn't) nor that all families have problems like that, but some do, just like some people who play D&D and AD&D games do. You can't blame it on the game, just as you can't blame things on sports, beer, music, or the books we read. The problem is the people; they need help and love from family and friends. That is the answer to any problem.

I've tried to say a lot in as short a space as possible. I have no idea if this letter will be published anywhere, but I had to have my say. If any of it is confusing, do some research on the subject. I first learned how to research from creating my own campaign, way before I learned it in school. Anyway, I hope whoever reads this is not insulted and will try to see things from all angles. Thank you for your time and for your greater understanding about role-playing games, not just the D&D and AD&D games.

Ralph deGennaro
Canton NY

Although I live in Australia, I have been a dedicated AD&D player for nine years now. I see very few, if any, letters from fellow Australians published in your excellent magazine. However, after reading the "Forum" of issue #160, I felt the need to express our viewpoint on attacks made on our game.

We tend to follow your news a great deal. Whenever you experience a media "earthquake," we experience the aftershock. Our combined media have created immense ill-will within the community against role-players. We have been slammed by church officials and called satanists and devil-worshippers. Propaganda-drenched critics suggest that we are suicidal and a menace to society. As a result, in many areas we rarely admit to playing AD&D games for fear of the backlash.

I cannot see the basis for these slanderous assaults. Our AD&D game sessions consist of seven or eight guys and girls getting together and having a great time. There is no devil-worshipping, no physical violence, and absolutely no hint of suicidal mania. The AD&D game is as about as threatening to society and the individual as a friendly game of cards or snooker.

It is a sad state of affairs indeed when leading media spokespeople and church officials have the audacity to attack an enjoyable and safe pastime publicly. Have these people nothing better to do with their time and influence than jump at ghosts that do not even exist?

Shane F. Cameron
Carlingford, NSW, Australia

I have been playing role-playing games for four years now and have loved every minute of it. About two years ago, a friend and I would play every week for about two hours. I don't go to church and I'm not very religious, but he was. One day, he told me he did not want to play. When I asked him why not, he started telling me about how the games have to do with satanism. He told me that his aunt brought a video tape that explained that people who play DUNGEON & DRAGONS games worship the devil, drink blood, and do all kinds of sick stuff like that. He said his aunt took the tape home, so I never got to see it. I have heard people talk about that before, but I can't believe people could think that about a game.

I lost a good friend two years ago, and I will never find anyone like him again, so I am writing to DRAGON Magazine to ask what to say to these kinds of people.

John McCord
No address given

A trip to the local supermarket may not be expected to have infuriating results, but mine did. While passing through the frozen foods section, I encountered a turntable rack upon which were several magazines and romance novels. Among these, however, was a copy of a book, a supposed "expose" of satanism, entitled *Devil on the Run*. The book connected witchcraft and black magic with teen suicide, and D&D, AD&D, and other fantasy role-playing games to witchcraft and black magic!

Why can't this man and others like him look for the real causes of teen suicide, which is a very definite problem today, instead of blaming dark magic, which doesn't even exist, and FRPGs, which have been proven to be more helpful than detrimental?

Third, linking teen suicide to witchcraft is unfounded, and linking D&D games to witchcraft is, too. D&D games, the third link on a nonexistent chain, shouldn't be connected to this nonsense, but it is. The author of that book probably knew less than nothing about role-playing. . . . What's wrong with society? Aaargh!
Brian Phillips
Ponca City OK

As a player, parent, and preacher, I feel qualified to speak from three different viewpoints on the "demons" controversy in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. [See "The Game Wizards" in issue #154 and the editorial in issue #1.57 for details.]

As a player, I believe that demons should remain available for those who want to use them. The Dungeon Master and players should decide on the inclusion of demons. Participants should observe the rule that modern religious beliefs are to be avoided and remember that the purpose of the D&D game is to have fun, not offend people. Remember that some people believe that demons are real and feel that including them in a game trivializes a serious and dangerous subject at the very least. However, I do not believe that having demons available in D&D games is any more dangerous than having them in Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Marlowe's *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*.

As a parent, I can understand the concerns of angry moms and dads. Stories about satanic cult groups would be enough to scare anyone. Newspaper accounts usually mention that someone in these cults played AD&D games as if the game were a contributing factor to violence and crime. Also, movies and TV shows inspired by the tragic story of James Dallas Egbert make fantasy role-playing games look like a highway to hell. Some people, either by ignorance or on purpose, like to play up this imagined connection between D&D games and the destruction of the young. The controversy reminds me of Dr. Frederick Wetham's charge that comic books caused juvenile delinquency. D&D game players need to keep this in mind when defending or presenting the game. Parents also have a responsibility to inform themselves accurately about D&D games before they begin to evaluate the game. Children do not like being criticized and accused of things that are just not true. The worst problem I heard connected with D&D games is that kids get obsessed with the game to the exclusion of all else. However, I have noticed that a similar obsession with sports is called "school spirit" and is never a source of concern. Besides, if a person starts to live in a fantasy world, the problem is usually with his reality.

The big problem with a lot of families is that parents take too little time and interest in their children. It's easier to blame AD&D games [for

problems] than to get involved with their families. Also, John Warwick Montgomery said fundamentalists tend to have a generally negative reaction to "the world-separate from it! These kinds of reactions usually produce the very evils they try to stop. Ignoring drugs and illicit sex leaves children uninformed and vulnerable to these very temptations (*Principalities and Powers*, page 158). Actually our family has found D&D games to be a better source of entertainment and togetherness than an evening watching TV

Also, I have found that fundamentalists are very inconsistent when they try to root paganism out of their lives. One friend told me that he would never let his son play D&D games because he did not want his son to end up like the kid in Rona Jaffe's *Mazes and Monsters*. Knowing my friend to be a sports fanatic, I decided to have a little fun and said, "Then you should not let him play Little League. After all, you don't want him to end up like Pete Rose, do you?"

Another friend told me that D&D games should be outlawed because 95 people have died in the last decade playing them. I asked him if he believed soccer should be outlawed because 95 people were killed in one afternoon at a soccer game in Sheffield, England, last year. I also told him about the pagan origins of soccer. In ancient Egypt, ball games were played as a religious ritual, the round ball representing the sun god. Also, soccer, rugby, and football originated from a game English boys played in 1050 A.D. They kicked around a cow bladder they pretended was the severed head of a Viking, their worst enemy. I pointed out the part severed heads played in Attic mythology, like the tathlum, or in Norse mythology, like Mimir's head. My friend was not at all amused when I suggested he march on the athletic field of our local Christian college with a placard reading, "Soccer is satanic!"

Still another friend said that the D&D game was dangerous because merely playing the game could involve the occult spirits behind the wizards spells. I replied that to really be safe he should give up sports. The pagan Greeks organized sports to honor the Olympian gods. Also, each sport had its own patron god, like Castor and Pollux, the patron gods of boxing. Now, if you live in Indiana you know that the state religion is basketball, also known as Hoosier Hysteria. When someone goes on about the occult in D&D games, I point out that basketball is very similar to the Mayan game of *tlachtli*. The twin heroes Hunahpu and Xbalanque defeated the Lords of the Underworld at *tlachtli* and gained great power over the gods by their victory. When my friend tried to ridicule the idea that demons were behind basketball, I replied that it was no more silly than his belief that demons were behind D&D games. I guess their forms of pagan entertainment are okay, but mine are all wrong.

As a preacher, I am concerned not so much about D&D games as I am about the willingness of Christians to accept all this kookishness about Satan. Someone who claims to be an ex-satanist priest has an automatic audience in some Christian circles. As a result of this preaching about how the Church of Satan is going to take over the world, some people have attempted suicide and even tried to make suicide pacts with their families. When some serious research exposed one man's history of mental instability and fraudulent claims, this ex-high priest of the Devil said that this showed how powerful the Church of Satan was, that they could even reach into the Pentagon and FBI and alter his history. A lot of people unquestioningly accept-

ed this explanation! This sort of gullibility is more dangerous than D&D games are supposed to be.

I would suggest that TSR expand its line of modules and produce games that would interest Christians. The works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis are respected by many Christians and have been turned into role-playing games by I.C.E. TSR could develop modules based on other Christian characters and literature. For example, Solomon Kane, the puritan adventurer, could easily be incorporated into role-playing games. Also, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* could become a new game series. Steven Lawhead's *Dragon King* series is a modern example of Christian fantasy. Any Dungeon Master could develop the above examples into exciting fantasy adventures. If TSR added these kinds of games to its present line, it could convince some Christians that D&D games are not a tool of the Devil and reach a new audience.

William Michael Kelly
Winona Lake IN

[Editor's note: In 1984, *Adventure Learning Systems, Inc.* produced the *DRAGONRAID* game, a Christian-oriented role-playing game. In a phone conversation with a representative from that company I learned that the game was generally unsuccessful in combating the image of RPGs held by those who already opposed those games. The game is now out of print.]

I am 14 years old and have played AD&D games for a few years and have DM'ed occasionally. I would like to congratulate DRAGON Magazine for being superb, but that is not the reason why I wrote to "Forum." I wrote this letter because I'm disgusted by the narrow-mindedness of the people of my town and church concerning AD&D or any other role-playing games. People condemn players and call them satanists, people who have never seen this game played but have heard rumors of death or demonic possession supposedly caused by role-playing. I try to defend the AD&D game by explaining how it is played, but it is like speaking to a brick wall. They honestly don't want to hear. I've invited them to attend a gaming session to observe, but they don't want to get involved. I think that they themselves are afraid. The public library won't carry role-playing books because another library that carried such materials was picketed.

What I want to know is this: Why is it that when these people hear about the AD&D game, they think "occult"? What makes them believe that it is satanic? I could understand this concern if a person confused the game with reality or became obsessed, but that person would have had problems to begin with. Why can't they see that this game is merely entertainment, no more harmful than dreaming or story-telling? What can I say to them? What happened to give such a good hobby such an awful reputation?

I'd really like to see an article on how people came up with such ridiculous tales about deaths supposedly caused by AD&D games and about how to deal with such people. If anything, I could show the article to my parents. Then perhaps they'd understand that role-playing is not corrupting me.

Casey Leah Williams
Vienna WV

I recently saw a segment of the *700 Club* that dismayed and outraged me. In this particular segment, the host was interviewing a young man who had just become a Christian. This young man had been an avid player of the

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He blamed the game for causing him to think about killing his parents and giving him a megalomaniacal complex. The program went on to condemn role-playing and the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game for warping the minds of those who got involved in these activities, and the show also accused D&D games of being an introduction into the occult. I do not begrudge the fact that this person gave up role-playing, or even the fact that this person chose to become a Christian. That was his right. What outrages me is the fact that he chose to blame role-playing, and specifically the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, for all his problems. Role-playing games per se do not cause suicides or other personality problems. Nor does this harmless pastime serve as an introduction into the occult. The people who have these problems are going to have these problems regardless of whether they get involved in role-playing.

I have been role-playing for 10 years, with the vast majority of this time spent as a DM for the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. I have a job, am a 4.0 student at a fine college, and am not into the occult. I have encountered dozens of fellow role-players of many ages and races and both sexes. Some were good role-players, and some were bad. They all have one thing in common: Not one of them ever performed aberrant acts because of their involvement in role-playing. There are some that are involved in the occult, but they were into the occult before they began role-playing.

Role-playing is a harmless pastime that can be shared by people from all walks of life. Role-playing does not promote the occult or encourage aberrant behavior in real life. Those who get carried away with these games do so because they choose to. Role-playing games, like anything else, can be abused if not used properly. It is time that the role-playing community stood up and spoke out against this type of defamation. If not, the next target may be you or I instead of the harmless game we enjoy.

Walter Roberts
Georgetown SC

[From a letter dated December 7, 1990:] While sitting in Saudi Arabia as part of Operation Desert Shield, I have been reading with interest the ongoing debate involving role-playing games and certain religious fringe groups. I'd like to express my views on the subject and give some advice on how to handle people who would degrade our hobby.

I am a veteran DM and player with over 10 years of gaming experience, and I am a devout Southern Baptist. I have never felt my faith being questioned when I play (and I've played all alignments and character classes, including assassins). This is easy to do when you play for pure pleasure and keep in mind that role-playing games are games. I think that part of the problem with these religious groups is that they refuse to believe that the AD&D game is a game just like Parker Brothers' MONOPOLY game, chess, or basketball. They really don't understand the idea of a game played in the imaginations of its players, a game that doesn't end and in which everyone "wins!"

I am the only person in my six-member family (including both parents) to graduate from high school, and the only person in my family to graduate from college. I have AD&D games to thank for much of that. I was introduced to gaming when I was 16, when my friends and I discovered the AD&D game. At the time, I was a fairly withdrawn underachiever. Through gaming, I learned that any obstacle can be

overcome through some very simple principles: teamwork, faith in friends, faith in your own abilities, perseverance, and dedication. These principles were buried behind piles of discarded soda cans and empty potato chip bags, and I learned them while surrounded by loyal friends who faced creatures that would make Arnold Schwarzenegger run in fear. In the meantime, my "normal" peers spent their weekends getting drunk, getting high, and taking part in other "normal" activities. By playing this "dangerous" game, my friends and I became adults. Our parents worried about us, and our high-school principal and teachers feared for our sanity, just like what is happening to many of you today.

What became of my group? The paladin is now a professional Army officer and veteran of the Panama invasion. The fighter/magic-user owns his own business. The ranger is now a successful attorney. We're well-adjusted adults who learned that nothing is impossible once you've kicked the snot out of the demi-lich Acererak from [the AD&D module] *The Tomb of Horrors*.

Finally, I'd like my fellow gamers to not judge these [critics] too harshly. Most Christians are well-meaning, open-minded people. Many just do not have the facts about RPGs and are led to believe (wrongly) that RPGs are more than a form of entertainment. If you can rationally explain your reasons for gaming and present RPGs to them in the light of commonly known games, you will find most of them accept gaming as entertainment. Explain it to your minister or school principal. Prove to them that gaming makes you a better person. Who knows? You might find a new player or two in the process!

ILT Bob MacKey
Somewhere in Saudi Arabia

I'm not an avid reader of DRAGON Magazine, but when I see an interesting one, I pick it up. Anyway, I've been playing the AD&D game for three years now, and I'm growing quite disturbed by the number of people who "bash" RPGs. My husband is stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, and most of our good friends are gamers. The Army is probably one of the most demanding employers around, and many active duty personnel (especially single soldiers far away from home) engage in RPGs. It gives them a chance to get away and forget about their problems. When my husband goes to the field for months at a time, he takes his dice. It puts him at ease for a little while.

What I'm trying to say is that people need to vent their frustrations and get away from them. Gaming gives you a chance to be what you've always wanted to be but never had the guts to really try. There are bad apples in every bunch. We're not all crazy and suicidal! I personally can't seem to play anything but paladins. I'd like to be that good and understanding myself. But it's hard to be lawful in a world so chaotic. So, parents (I'm one myself), play it with your kids. Don't knock it till you've tried it. I'll play with my daughter, and I hope she is better for the experience.

Tammy Coppa
Fort Lewis WA

I am a gun owner, role-playing gamer, sometimes war gamer, reader of *Playboy* and other magazines banned from 7-11, science-fiction reader, and a Christian. Sound unlikely? Well, I think that most people do not fit neatly into the categories and groupings pollsters and politicians play to.

YOU are now experiencing a little of the reality of the fight I and my friends have been waging

for years in defense of our constitutional rights. Your problem (and mine) is that our enemies, and even some of our supposed "friends," are separating the Bill of Rights into acceptable and unacceptable rights instead of reading it as it was written-as an indivisible whole (suggested reading: *The Federalist Papers and the Anti-Federalist Papers*).

I would say that writing letters to the editors of your local newspaper is perhaps the best way to gain favorable attention. There are, of course, certain guidelines that should be followed. The following is a rephrased and shortened version of a letter to the editor written by David B. Kopel, appearing in the September 14, 1990, issue of *Gun Week*:

1. K.I.S.S.-Keep It Simple, 'Sam. Short letters are more likely to be published; 100 words or less is a good guide. One or two ideas can be communicated, being about as much as the average reader can grasp while on his coffee break.

2. Type-Good idea, especially if your handwriting is like mine.

3. Use clarity-Express your opinion in a forceful manner. This is where we should shine.

4. Avoid prejudice-Don't show any sort of prejudice. If you *do* have extreme opinions, *don't* put them into writing, as it might come back to haunt you. Don't make personal attacks on opponents. We're fighting the sin, not the sinners.

5. Concentrate-Emphasize the positive. Don't wander all over the map with side issues.

6. Use diplomacy-A talent or skill in some game systems, diplomacy is essential in the real world. If a news story makes an erroneous statement, offer to "clarify" a point. Don't be stamped into a blazing attack on a person or group.

7. Single out-Send your letter to one local paper at a time. Editors like to have an exclusive, so put a P.S. at the bottom making that point. Wait about 10-12 days, and if they haven't used it by then, you may feel free to send your message elsewhere.

8. Patience-If you have your letter published, wait at least a month before sending another one. "Letters to the editor" columns are a community forum; other people have a right to be heard.

9. Telephone-Your telephone number and address should appear at the top of your letter, so the paper may call to confirm your letter before printing.

10. Use a hook-You should have some sort of local or national news story to respond to. Choose something that is current to grab the readers' interest.

When I read the article referred to above, then saw the "Forum" for issue #161, I decided that I had to do something to put my money where my mouth is about role-playing games. If these guidelines help even one gamer get a letter published, I will feel that I have been of service to the hobby as a whole.

Whether you like guns or not, you have to admit that the gun owners of the U.S. have become a very powerful political force. I believe that gamers are going to have to adapt to the changing situation and adopt some of the former's tactics. Become an issue-oriented voter if you can vote, and be a persuasive letter-writer (if you can't vote yet). The battle is unending, expensive, and political. It's a dirty business, but if we don't fight for what we believe in, we deserve to lose it.

Curry A. Mosher
Wellsboro PA