

GAMES, GAMERS, & GAMING

Why Games?

By Liz Danforth



Twenty-five years ago, librarians met gamers at the castle gates with pitchforks and torches, not sure exactly what to think about these loud, rowdy college kids declaring they were delving into dungeons to kill dragons—and, yes, it was mainly college kids back then. Most of us gamers, however, grew up into normal, productive citizens, had families and kids of our own (whom we let play more games), and the gaming hobby grew like Topsy. Computer games flourished, becoming ever-more complex and graphically beautiful; console video games exploded into must-haves for every household with teens; and now the Wii brings it all home.

Bilingual in games and libraries

I am a lifelong gamer, from family games like Yahtzee to various role-playing games (RPGs) and computer games; nowadays, I mostly play the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft. I have been surprised and delighted by the wave of change that has allowed me to conjoin the two things I love best: libraries and gaming. For nearly 30 years, I've led a double life as an independent illustrator, writer, editor, and game developer as well as a part-time paralibrarian.

Newly armed with my MLS, I've over the last year been working with the American Library Association on its million-dollar grant-funded Libraries, Literacy, and Gaming project. Together with a dozen other "gaming experts," I'm endeavoring to address the potential of gaming to improve literacy skills and develop a model "toolbox" for gaming in libraries. By the time you read this, ten libraries will have been selected to receive \$5000 each to help them develop unique, literacy-based gaming programs. I love librarianship, and I love gaming, and I am a passionate advocate for both, together and separately.

Like peas in a pod

Beyond simply fitting the library mission to provide for our constituents' recre-

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ational and entertainment needs, I believe games sync unexpectedly well with our focus on literacy. Consider, for example, all the game-based novels (e.g., Eric Nylund's "Halo" series), comics (e.g., *Street Fighter*), and manga (Tokyopop's "The Sunwell Trilogy" for World of Warcraft) currently out there. Think of the countless games based in and expanding on literary settings (e.g., the RPG Call of Cthulhu, which expands on H.P. Lovecraft's story of the same name). Think, too, of the many best-selling authors who learned their craft writing for games (e.g., R.A. Salvatore, Michael A. Stackpole) as well as the numerous established authors who also write for game worlds (e.g., Christie Golden, Kevin J. Anderson).

Further, social games enhance community and connectivity. Yes, you can play against the AI (the "artificial intelligence" of the game program), but gamers often play alongside and against family, friends, and other online players. "Massively multiplayer" gamers share virtual space with thousands of others like themselves, and numerous of these gamers have attested that they often use such games to stay in daily contact with real-life friends and family who might live elsewhere. In many cases, games do more to connect than to isolate, just as libraries these days are more and more about making connections.

We owe it to our patrons

Just as we offer programs tailored to patrons interested in art, gardening, film, or any other hobby, we should be offering events tailored to gamers' interests. A large and multifaceted portion of the population play games today (see "Not Just for Boys Anymore," *LJ* 11/15/08), and we ignore them at our peril. If you're one of the engaged gamers (I prefer that term over so many others we hear), then you already understand.

If you don't play games, that's fine—not every hobby is for every person, nor should it be. Just take the time to examine the phenomenon the same way you would research any subject in which your patrons show interest. Can you do readers' advisory on sports you don't follow, religions whose beliefs you don't share, auto repair you wouldn't understand if it bit you? Of course you can.

Collection development librarians especially should keep an eye out for game-related materials that, once gamers know you carry it, will circulate like mad. (The bean counters will like that!) It'll also help if you let gamers know they are welcome in your doors, with staff and administration alike taking gaming and gaming events seriously.

Take the fun seriously, too, and eagerly and proudly be a part of this aspect of today's and tomorrow's worlds—game on!

NEXT ISSUE MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

Columnist/librarian **Matthew Moyer** (popular media dept., Jacksonville PL, FL) surveys popular albums and defining moments in the history of every conceivable music genre, one genre at a time. As Moyer puts it, he loses his hearing so you won't have to. **NEXT UP: Raggae** (Read his blog at www.libraryjournal.com)



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