Fantasy Role-Playing Games

A high school student one day asked her teacher what she thought of fantasy role-playing (FRP) games. With a smile, the teacher said she would enjoy playing because it would allow her to use her imagination. The student was also told that her creative and analytical abilities, as well as her mathematical skills, would be enhanced by playing this game.

Another teacher, overhearing the conversation, could not in good conscience allow this student to play what he perceived to be an evil game. He decided to interrupt and give his opinion (which was really a tirade) about the game's occultic content. The student could do nothing but stand there and watch two teachers she respected argue, but in the end she was left with her original question.

Are all **Fantasy Role-Playing games**, including Dungeons and Dragons,® good? Some, like the first teacher, are convinced they are harmless excursions into fantasy on the same level as a Tolkien novel. Others are equally convinced that such games are evil and demonic. Or are **Fantasy Role-Playing games** perhaps a mixture of grays?

Answering the student's question is not as easy as one might expect, regardless of one's initial persuasion. In the real world there are usually two or more sides to an issue, and **Fantasy Role-Playing games** are no exception. To categorically declare that all **Fantasy Role-Playing games** are "evil" and "of the devil" would be simplistic and erroneous. But to accept all of them uncritically as "good" or "harmless" would also be simplistic and erroneous — and could lead to some undesirable consequences. How can a person make an intelligent assessment of these games?

In critically examining **Fantasy Role-Playing games**, at least four basic areas should be considered: (1) the role of fantasy, (2) morality, (3) escapism, and (4) occultism. Collectively, these should determine the conclusion about any FRP game.

In the first and third areas (fantasy and escapism), there is possibility for either good or evil, for benefit or harm. This is largely determined by content, duration, and motive.

In the second and fourth areas (morality and occultism), there is less room for possibilities. In those two areas, from a Christian perspective, anything that denies biblical morality or supports occultism could not be considered spiritually healthy. In fact, it is potentially harmful to the individual as well as to society.

In this article we will look at the first area: fantasy.

Fantasy Role-Playing Games: Fantasy- Creative or Destructive?

It should be understood from the outset that there is nothing wrong with fantasy, per se.

Fantasy, in its essence, is an imaginative departure from the world and the created order of things as we know it. It plays an important part in our lives. Who can doubt that a child's imagination in play, even in role playing, is a positive component of his social and intellectual development? It also exerts an important psychological role in the life of an adolescent or adult, whether it be daydreaming about a fishing trip or vacation, stretching the boundaries of one's imagination and talented creativity in the arts and literature, or some escapist relaxation. Everyone has experienced enjoyment in — and positive use of — his imagination and fantasies at one time or another.

Fantasy is actually a part of God's creation, in the sense that God created man with imagination and the ability to fantasize. Support for this can be derived from the biblical doctrine of the image of God.

As Elliot Miller of the Christian Research Institute explains: "A defense can be made in favor of such an exercise of the imagination on the grounds that man is created in the image of God, and thus, like God, is creative. Because man is not God, he cannot create things out of nothing. However, because he is like God, he can create objects in the real world (such as a home, an automobile, or a computer) by utilizing raw material out of God's creation.

"Another aspect of man's creativity is his ability, by his imagination, to create secondary worlds where things are different than in the primary world. Though he does not have the power to bring these worlds into actual substance, if he succeeds at achieving what J.R.R. Tolkien has termed 'an inner consistency of reality,' others may, through their imaginations, attain a state of 'secondary belief,' where they are able to perceive and appreciate the invented reality."

But fantasy is not justified in itself. Just because fantasy in general is part of God's creation, no specific fantasy is necessarily right or good. As with many other things in God's creation, there are good and bad uses. Unfortunately, even "good" fantasy can be corrupted by overindulgence (e.g., when a person enters a fantasy world to escape from responsibilities in the everyday world). There is also a distorted and destructive use (e.g., the fantasizing of sexual exploits or extreme violence toward someone.)

Determining a good use of fantasy from a bad use is at the heart of the controversy today with **Fantasy Role-Playing games**. Proponents of Dungeons and Dragons,® in their attempt to establish that this game constitutes a legitimate use of fantasy, have created parallels between it and certain Christian fantasy writings. Then they say (either explicitly or by implication), "If one accepts the fantasy works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and others as a good and right use of fantasy, one should also accept D&D."

Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a letter to the editor of *Christianity Today*, in which an Episcopalian minister defends his endorsement of Dungeons and Dragons®: "It may be too much to suggest that any given game is the 'creative enactment of a Tolkien fantasy,' But by the same token, D&D derives its force and attraction by the same dynamic typical of great literature. In D&D, we are literally drawn into the battle between good and evil, order and chaos. If the characters and situations become enthralling, how does this differ from reading a Tolkien story, or one of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, or L'Engles' *A Wrinkle in Time*?"

On the surface, this argument appears to have some credibility, for there is at least something of a parallel between certain fantasy games and certain Christian fiction (e.g., Tolkien). That such works as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Lewis' space trilogy, and the novels of Charles Williams require the existence of good and evil, intense adventures, the experience of fantasy environments and worlds, and mythological beings cannot be denied. Several of those works have elements different from (and thus, inevitably, sometimes contrary to) the world as God made it. Some have incorporated magic and sorcery into their fantasy and, on occasion, portrayed the magic and spells in a fashion contrary to the Bible.

Fantasy Role-Playing Games- Discerning the World View

But although there are some common elements, there are also some great differences, which proponents of **Fantasy Role-Playing games** either ignore or rationalize away. Christian fantasy works by Tolkien, Lewis, and others are accepted and considered to be a good use of fantasy because they offer a reflection of an essentially Christian world view.

As Elliot Miller explains: "In wholesome fantasy we will find that its creator will have infused into his 'universe' an inherent morality, which parallels that of the actual universe, as explained in the Bible.

"Though in a fantasy world there may be such a thing as 'good magic,' though there may be talking beasts and mythic creatures, in back of it all there must still be (whether revealed explicitly or alluded to implicitly) a supreme being who provides a basis for authentic morality. Absolute morality can only be sustained in a theistic universe, a universe governed by a transcendent holy God. In such a world, good and evil are consistent and final for all creatures of conscience, rather than fluctuating according to the differing mores of the creatures themselves. As Tolkien's hero Aragorn affirms in *The Two Towers* (p.50), "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men.""

Though the creators of Dungeons and Dragons® may have borrowed many aspects from Tolkien's "middle earth," one part they did not consider was the overall setting in which everything took place and from which everything derived its ultimate meaning — Tolkien's Christian world view. As a result, the game's world view does not represent the moral universe God created. In place of the creator God, its universe is governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. Moreover, its universe is not infused with an absolute, inherent morality. The more thoroughly one investigates the writings of Tolkien, Lewis, and others and compares them to **Fantasy Role-Playing games**, the more one will see that there are not only crucial differences in the theological and moral perspectives but also in the context and motives of their respective inventors. Furthermore, there are important differences in the kind and extent of participation required in each (e.g., the cultivation of fantasy in the participatory amoral milieu of Dungeons and Dragons® versus the passive moral universe of Tolkien).

Fantasy Role-Playing Games- What's in the Heart?

In conclusion, neither fantasy nor fantasy role playing is wrong in and of itself. When carried out within the context of the Christian world view, it can serve as a useful and creative activity. We are creatures made in the image of an imaginative God, and we should consider it a privilege to possess and exercise this precious gift of imagination. But we must also realize our obligation before God to use this gift in a wholesome way, and to guard against any misuse.

Discerning the difference between a wholesome use and misuse begins with the question, "To what end or for what purpose (is the imagination) being exercised in a particular direction?" This certainly appears to be the question Jesus had in mind in His Sermon on the Mount when He stated, "Every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

If Jesus taught that lust is tantamount to adultery (which God condemns — see Deuteronomy 5:18, 22:13-27), would He approve of the deliberate cultivation and enjoyment of fantasy regarding other things that God condemns? Obviously not. To fantasize about those things that God has forbidden in His Word (immorality, the occult, the pursuit of other deities — all elements of Dungeons and Dragons®) is tantamount to doing them. This cannot be understood in any other way than a misuse of our God-given imagination.

With the Bible as our guide, this is what we as Christians must guard against "so that [we] may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects" (Colossians 1:10).

Dungeons & Dragons: Two Researchers Look At Fantasy-Role Playing Games

It is not easy to describe the subject of this analysis to anyone who is unfamiliar with it. Dungeons and Dragons ("D&D" to devotees) and the other **Fantasy Role-Playing games** (FRP) like Tunnels and Trolls, RuneQuest, Arduin Grimoire, and Chivalry and Sorcery are unlike any other games on the market.

What makes them different is that **Fantasy Role-Playing games** are shared-fantasy games where the players take on various roles and interact with each other in an adventure in their collective imagination. One player, appointed the Dungeon Master, controls the interplay by making up maps that include monsters, treasures, dungeons, traps, and magical devices. The other players assume characters — everything from druids to clerics, fighting men to thieves. The character and special abilities of each player are determined by a roll of the dice. The players then band together and, for better or worse, fight their way through the monsters and dungeons to get as much treasure as they can.

With estimates as high as $60,000,000 for sales of these games this year (1981), the games are spreading like wildfire in the college age, teenage sets, and even with sub-teens. The possibility of a D&D movie in the wings and Mattel's new, heavily promoted electronic D&D game give testimony to the impact FRP is making.

And with this interest in a pastime that only requires some dice and a rule book to get started, there comes controversy — controversy over an ostensibly harmless game that is played in a manner such as the following:

Dungeon Master: You've made your way down the corridor and you come to a door.

Player 1: Should we try it?

Player 2: Sure. I go to the door and pull.

Dungeon Master: The door opens and you are looking in a large, empty, windowless room. Something in the far corner moves.

Player 3: I cast a detect-evil spell.

Dungeon Master: Your spell arouses the creature. You don't really need the spell because now that it's stirring you see it's a green dragon.

Player 2: Quick, let's spike the door shut.

Player 1: What if the dragon is guarding treasure?

Player 2: Well, let's plan our attack first, then go after it.

Dungeon Master: Too late. The dragon is attacking. He's breathing out a cloud of poisonous gas.

Player 2: Oh no!

Player 1: I pull the dwarf out of the way and shut the door.

Player 3: As the door shuts I cast a hold-portal spell. Are we safe? Dungeon Master (rolling the dice): We'll see.

In a world where more and more demands are made on our time and there seems less and less time available to accomplish the tasks at hand, Dungeons & Dragons (and other fantasy role-playing games) is indeed a creature with a voracious appetite. One of the main requirements of the game is time, and lots of it. Gary Gygax, the originator of Dungeons & Dragons, says: the most extensive requirement is time."[1]

As advocates of the game get more involved it has a tendency to become a sort of time eating monster in and of itself. After playing the game with her family, a *New West* magazine researcher noted that, "Good or evil, it becomes a compulsive force in the lives of those who play."[2]

Deanna Sue White is a Dungeons & Dragons enthusiast and the Dungeon Master of an ongoing (4 years) fantasy role-playing campaign called Mistigar. She and a close circle of friends regularly gather to continue the crusade. An Associated Press writer, after interviewing her, wrote that "Mistigar is a world so seductive in its power that Ms. White and her friends rarely leave it behind."[3] In fact, in White's own words, "I tried to stop the world [Mistigar], but it refuses to stop."[4]

What is the problem here? Well, we are exhorted to "walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15, 16). In the light of such words, a fantasy game with a ferocious appetite for time is hardly the wise way to walk. To play one will require a tremendous amount of time, and since no one wants to play badly, perhaps such time consumption would best be exchanged for more profitable pursuits.

Additionally, when such time and effort are invested in fantasy, other problems may follow. As John, a young Dungeons & Dragons player explains, "When I'm in my world, I control my own world order. I can picture it all. The groves and trees. The beauty. I can hear the wind. The world isn't like that. My beliefs, morals, sense of right and wrong are much stronger since playing D&D,' he says. But in comparison, the real world becomes less tenable. 'It's hazardous,' John worries… 'The more time you spend in your fantasy world, the more you want to walk away from the burdensome decisions in life… The more I play D&D the more I want to get away from this world. The whole thing is getting very bad."[5]

What John is struggling with often results in what we could call reality distortion. Apparently, the players often find that the line between what is real and what seems real to them grows fuzzy.

In "Confessions of a Dungeon Master" *(Psychology Today,* Nov. 1980), a veteran Dungeon Master has this to say: "…just as Dungeons and Dragons players sometimes begin to think of their characters as real persons with separate existences of their own, the Dungeon Master sometimes begins to think, 'I wonder what is really beyond the Southern Jungle,' forgetting that he alone has the power to put something there. The make-believe world assumes an eerie-sense of reality."[6]

Another Dungeons & Dragons adherent, a publisher of a fantasy role-playing game enthusiast's magazine, says, "The stuff that makes me nervous is overidentification with characters. I've seen people have fits, yell for fifteen minutes, hurl dice at a grand piano when their character dies."[7] Another observer, a former player who changed his mind about the game, comments on something that happens in the course of the game: "It's when you take the game home with you, when Johnny's mad for a week because you killed his character, that it's an addiction."[8]

The Dungeon Master we referred to earlier also noted that, "when one of these alter egos gets killed, the game player sometimes suffers psychic shock and may go into depression."[9]

How serious can this confusion of reality and fantasy get? Deanna Sue White of the Mistigar campaign describes the game by saying, "Just like real life, right? Reality, this world we live in, is nothing more than something we have all been taught to believe exists. But perhaps there are other worlds — the imagination has many doors — and there are those of us who might decide to agree upon another world, another reality. It might be more fun."[10]

This reality distortion is frightening. A city police department in central Washington asks, "Are you a participant of Fantasy Role Games?" as a standard question. It turns out that, in one instance, two people convicted of firing over three-dozen rounds into passing motor vehicles admitted that they "constantly fantasized killing someone."[11] Other police departments have confirmed "some correlation" between Fantasy Role Playing games and incidents showing up on their police blotter.

So, in Dungeons & Dragons we see a "game" that can actually influence the players in their real life due to distortion of the line between fantasy and reality. This is a subtle deception, but a dangerous one nonetheless (see 2 Cor. 11:3).

Paul exhorts us, saying, "we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). The tone of his words here seems to run contrary to the fruit of Dungeons & Dragons game-playing.

Our fantasies are not to be left to run unbridled to eventually manifest themselves in our lives. By the Spirit, such role-playing should be brought to the Cross and there surrendered to the rule of Christ.

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

— *Brian Onken*

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Over the years I've observed that a good number of people involved in Christian apologetic work have, like myself, read C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and are generally disposed to enjoy and appreciate works of fantasy and medieval mythology. Thus, in spite of charges of "witch-hunting," "legalism," and "Christian fun-spoiling," it seems to me that at least some of the Christian voices that are publicly responding to the Fantasy Role-Playing (FRP) phenomenon are doing so without anterior hostility toward myth and fantasy. I suspect that they would also agree that there can be psychological value in role-playing, as well as creative development of the imagination, and we would not feel it necessary to deny that such benefits can to some extent be experienced through Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) and other **Fantasy Role-Playing games**. To categorically declare that FRP is "of the devil" would be simplistic and unfair.

However, the unanimously negative critiques of D&D and **Fantasy Role-Playing games** that have appeared in the Christian media cannot be ignored. Problems concerning time consumption and reality distortion (such as Brian Onken details), as well as make-believe violence and immorality, have been consistently noted. The secular media has also made much of these.

Another aspect of **Fantasy Role-Playing games** that has generated a good deal of criticism from the body of Christ has been what Cornerstone magazine terms "occultic overtones." In the words of Gary Gygax, co-creator of D&D, "Swords and sorcery best describe what this game is all about… This is a world where monsters; dragons; good and evil; high priests; fierce demons; and even the gods themselves may enter your character's life."[12] Casting of spells, divination, communion with gods and the dead, and resurrection, are all a part of the imaginary activities that players partake in. "Most spells have a verbal component and so must be uttered."[13]

The standard defense FRP advocates give to charges of occultism and witchcraft is that all such elements in the games are made-believe. No one is really seeking to commune with spirits or practice magic. We must agree that there is a fundamental difference between actually attempting to work magic, and only pretending to do so

(this point has not been sufficiently recognized in some of the Christian reviews). However real this distinction may be in the minds of the players, though, I feel no assurance that the spirit world will not respond when it is beckoned.

When I was of high-school age I was extremely skeptical about anything reputedly supernatural. I recall engaging in a mock séance with a group of friends. Our lightheartedness was turned to fear when suddenly the "medium," my best friend, began to convulse, his eyes rolled back in his head, and a strange voice emerged from his throat. For the following two years this young Jew was tormented by spirits. Withdrawing from all social contacts, he haunted graveyards until he was delivered through the power of Jesus Christ.

Though the possibility of actual contact with the satanic realm through role-playing cannot be denied, my greatest concern is that FRP involvement can create a predisposition toward actual occult activity. There are certain needs and desires which draw people to **Fantasy Role-Playing games** in the first place. Many sensitive teenagers and adults continually bombarded with evolutionary theories and naturalistic philosophies, seek through **Fantasy Role-Playing games** an escape from the cold, mechanistic view of the universe which they've been led to believe is "reality." Who wouldn't prefer an adventurous existence in a magical, purposeful world over the complex, impersonal "real world" being pushed on young people by our educational institutions and the media?

The human craving for power is also given an avenue for expression in **Fantasy Role-Playing** games. The role of Dungeon Master has titillated quite a few people with a taste of Absolute Power. Gygax informs the fledgling Dungeon Master: "…as the DM you are to become the Shaper of the Cosmos. It is you who will give form and content to all the universe. You will breathe life into the stillness, giving meaning and purpose to all the actions which are to follow."[14] The various magical abilities that players exercise in these imaginary worlds can also whet their appetites for power. The same young man who is unable to prevent his parents from separating, or to make the cute blonde in his history class notice him, can, through FRP, conquer a kingdom or obtain immense treasure simply by casting a spell.

What happens, then, when the inevitable occurs and this young man is befriended by someone who can introduce him to the occult world? He will discover that practices he has enjoyed in his fantasy world actually go on in the real world. He would like nothing more than to believe that he can divine the future, project his soul outside of his body, perform healings, or cast a spell — and get results. The transition from make-believe sorcery to actual sorcery would not be all that difficult. Once he encounters the real power that exists in the occult world, he will happily accept the magical world view of occultism in place of the naturalism he had absorbed.

The easy susceptibility of **Fantasy Role-Playing games** devotees toward conversion to occultism has not been missed by occult proponents. Phillip Emmens Isaac Bonewits, the only person to receive a B.A. in magic from the University of California, has reportedly written a book entitled *Authentic Thaumaturgy* — *A Professional Occultist on Improving the Realism of Magic Systems in Fantasy Stimulation Games*. **Fantasy Role-Playing games** can indeed condition one for occult involvement who might not otherwise have been such an easy target.

Since the Bible does not allow for any legitimate magic in the real world (Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 13:6-11: Rev. 21:8), the issue of occultic overtones in FRP raises another issue that the body of Christ must face. Is it valid to make a distinction between real magic (which is evil) and imaginary magic (which can be good)? In *Cornerstone's* excellent review of D&D, Gary Gygax is quoted as saying:

"We certainly aren't trying to play witchcraft. Any resemblance between the spells and magic in these books and what is quote unquote 'the real,' and again I don't believe in it, 'stuff,' is purely coincidental, because as far as I know I dreamed up all these things out of my own head."[15]

Gygax's disbelief in the supernatural realm makes his reasoning less than acceptable to the Christian position. But what about Christian works of fantasy that also depict spells and magic in a different light than the Bible portrays them? Can practices that are Scripturally forbidden in the real world be considered acceptable when they are placed in the context of a fairy tale?

When we look hard at the implications of this question, we find that the root issue we are dealing with is whether it is justifiable for us to create imaginary worlds where some things are different than (and thus, inevitably, sometimes contrary to) the real world which has been created by God. Do the likes of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and contemporary authors such as Robert Siegel, have the right (on the level of imagination) to create a universe to some extent different than the one in which we live?

A defense can be made in favor of such an exercise of the imagination on the grounds that man is created in the image of God, and thus, like God, is creative. Because man is not God, he cannot create things out of nothing. However, because he is like God, he can create objects in the real world (such as a home, an automobile, or a computer) by utilizing raw material out of God's creation. Another aspect of man's creativity is his ability, by his imagination, to create secondary worlds where things are different than in the primary world. Though he does not have the power to bring these worlds into actual substance, if he succeeds at achieving what J.R.R. Tolkien has termed "an inner consistency of reality," others may, through their imaginations, attain a state of "secondary belief," where they are able to perceive and appreciate the invented reality. Other than providing an escape from daily routines and pressures (which can be healthy for some and unhealthy for others), what can be the value of such creations? Quite a few merits have been cited by Christian literary critics, but probably the most potent was identified by Tolkien as "eucatastrophe," or the Joy of the Happy Ending. The Christian fairy tale depicts the ultimate victory of good over evil. He insists that it is evangelistic in nature, as it prepares the reader for the gospel. As he explains it:

The Gospels contain…a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels — peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving; "mythical" in their perfection, self-contained significance; and at the same time powerfully symbolic and allegorical; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the "inner consistency of reality." There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.

It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be "primarily" true, its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical or allegorical significance that it had possessed… [The fairy-story] looks forward (or backward; the directions in this regard is unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe. The Christian joy, the GLORIA, is one of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. Because this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men — and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.[16]

Literary critic R.J. Reilly observes:

This is the justification of the fairy story — and thus of the trilogy [i.e., Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*] — that it gives us in small…the joy of the infinite good news…That is the special activity of the fairy-story maker, and one by which he becomes not a writer, but a subcreator of a kind of literature analogous — or more than analogous — to the universe created ex-nihilo [out of nothing] by the divine Creator. In his degree he creates Joy — as God, in the purposeful drama of creation, has created what also gives Joy, the world with the Christian happy ending.[17]

If we will accept the validity of fantasy, we must also make an important qualification. If an invented world is to have lasting value for those who perceive it, its inventor must have a fundamental grasp of the true, spiritual nature of this world. In wholesome fantasy we will find that its creator will have infused into his "universe" an inherent morality, which parallels that of the actual universe, as explained in the Bible.

Though in a fantasy world there may be such a thing as "good" magic, though there may be talking beasts and mythical creatures, in back of it all there must still be (whether reveled explicitly or alluded to implicitly) a supreme being who provides a basis for authentic morality. Absolute morality can only be sustained in a theistic universe: a universe governed by a transcendent, holy God. In such a world good and evil are consistent and final for all creatures of conscience, rather than fluctuating according to the differing mores of the creatures themselves. As Tolkien's hero Aragorn affirms in *The Two Towers* (page 50): "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men."

In The Lord of the Rings, as in the Bible, the paradoxical truths of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are in full play. We read that Bilbo the Hobbit was meant to find the ring of power, and his nephew Frodo was meant to receive it. There is a mysterious purpose and significance to the unfolding of events, and a fulfilling of ancient prophecies.

At the same time, free choice is a significant aspect in the development of the trilogy's conflicts. As critic Patricia Spacks observes:

A theological scheme is implied though not directly stated in *The Lord of the Rings*, and it is of primary importance to the form and meaning of the work. The fact of freedom of the will implies a structured universe, a universe like the Christian one in that only through submission to the Good can be true freedom be attained — willing acceptance of evil involves necessary loss of freedom; a universe like the Christian one, further, in that it includes the possibility of Grace…

In this world, as in the Christian one, the result of repeated choices of good is the spiritual growth of the chooser. Frodo's stature increases markedly in the course of his adventures, and the increase is in the specifically Christian virtues.[18]

In the fantasy of Tolkien, Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, etc., we have, as Edmund Fuller puts it, "other worlds meaningfully related to our own." Through their skills as "sub-creators" these authors afford us the opportunity to momentarily step outside of our own worlds, and, in that unfamiliar setting, we more readily perceive spiritual and moral truth which we then can take back with us and apply to our familiar experience.

On the other hand, the universes created in fantasy role-playing games generally tend to be confused on the issue of morality. Though they have borrowed many aspects of Tolkien's "Middle Earth," the makers of Dungeons and Dragons and other FRP games have not created theistic "universes." Rather, their universes are generally governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. While in a theistic universe, *good* is determined by the attributes of God Himself, in FRP worlds good and evil are presented as equal and opposite impersonal poles, and the gods as well as the creatures may align themselves with either. Since there is no supreme God, and since good does not ultimately triumph over evil, many players eventually find themselves preferring to play evil roles; fewer demands are placed on them that way.

Cornerstone quotes Rett Kipp, a college student who plays **Fantasy Role-Playing games** forty hours a week:

In D&D it's better to be evil. You get more advantages being evil, and it's easier to go on and not have to think of what to do and what not to do. If for some reason you had the idea in your head that you no longer trust someone, if you chop him down from behind — as an evil character there's no penalty for it…"[19]

It would seem that the fantasized violence and immorality that often arise in **Fantasy Role-Playing games** can, to some degree, be attributed to the make-up of the games themselves, which were devised by people who (admittedly, in many cases) are not committed to upholding a Biblical world view. Dave Hargrave, creator of Arduin Grimoire, a popular FRP game, has this to say about the controversial, explicit, violent and sexual aspects of his game:

It's deliberately gruesome. You have to blow a hole through that video shell the kids are enclosed in. They are little zombies. They don't know what pain is. They have never seen a friend taken out in a body bag. They've got to understand that what they do has consequences. The world is sex, it is violence. It's going to destroy most of these kids when they leave TV land.[20]

Thus we see that on the surface there are similarities between Christian fantasy literature and fantasy role-playing games. However, on a deeper level we find critical differences in their underlying theological and moral structures, as well as in the motives of those who have created them.

In spite of the fact that many FRP advocates are also devotees of Tolkien, it is difficult to imagine Tolkien or any other Christian author of fantasy endorsing the Dungeons and Dragons craze.

That we may view fantasy as acceptable in literature does not necessitate that we also view it as acceptable in role-playing games as well. Brian Onken has pointed out a real potential for reality distortion in these games, which far exceeds any possibility for the same in reading fairy tales. Dr. John Holmes, a Dungeon Master, has pointed out in *Psychology Today* that "This 'alternate universe' feel to the world of Dungeons and Dragons is produced by its *social* reality. It has a shared fantasy, not a solitary one…The fantasy has become a reality, a sort of giant *folie* a deux, or shared insanity."[21]

When one is actively playing out the role of a magician in the atmosphere of this "shared insanity," he may very well find that the necessary distinction between the real world and the fantasy world is blurred. Suddenly, magic, which may be okay in a fantasy universe such as Tolkien's, has come uncomfortably close to the real world, where it is always related to the devil. When the elements of an invented universe begin to merge with our real universe, they will inevitably take on the nature of the "real thing," and must at that point be subject to the laws that God has established in the real universe.

If Christians are to engage in **fantasy role-playing games** at all, then they would do well to invent new games, unlike those that are currently on the market. Those games should be structured so as to finish within a reasonable, fixed period of time. They should be designed with a view toward leading the participant to a more creative, Biblical approach to confronting life's challenges, rather than providing him with an illusory escape from having to face them. And, finally, they should not require the role player to aggressively act out (and thus, identify with) any activity (such as violence, immorality, or occultism) that is expressly forbidden in God's Word. — *Elliot Miller*