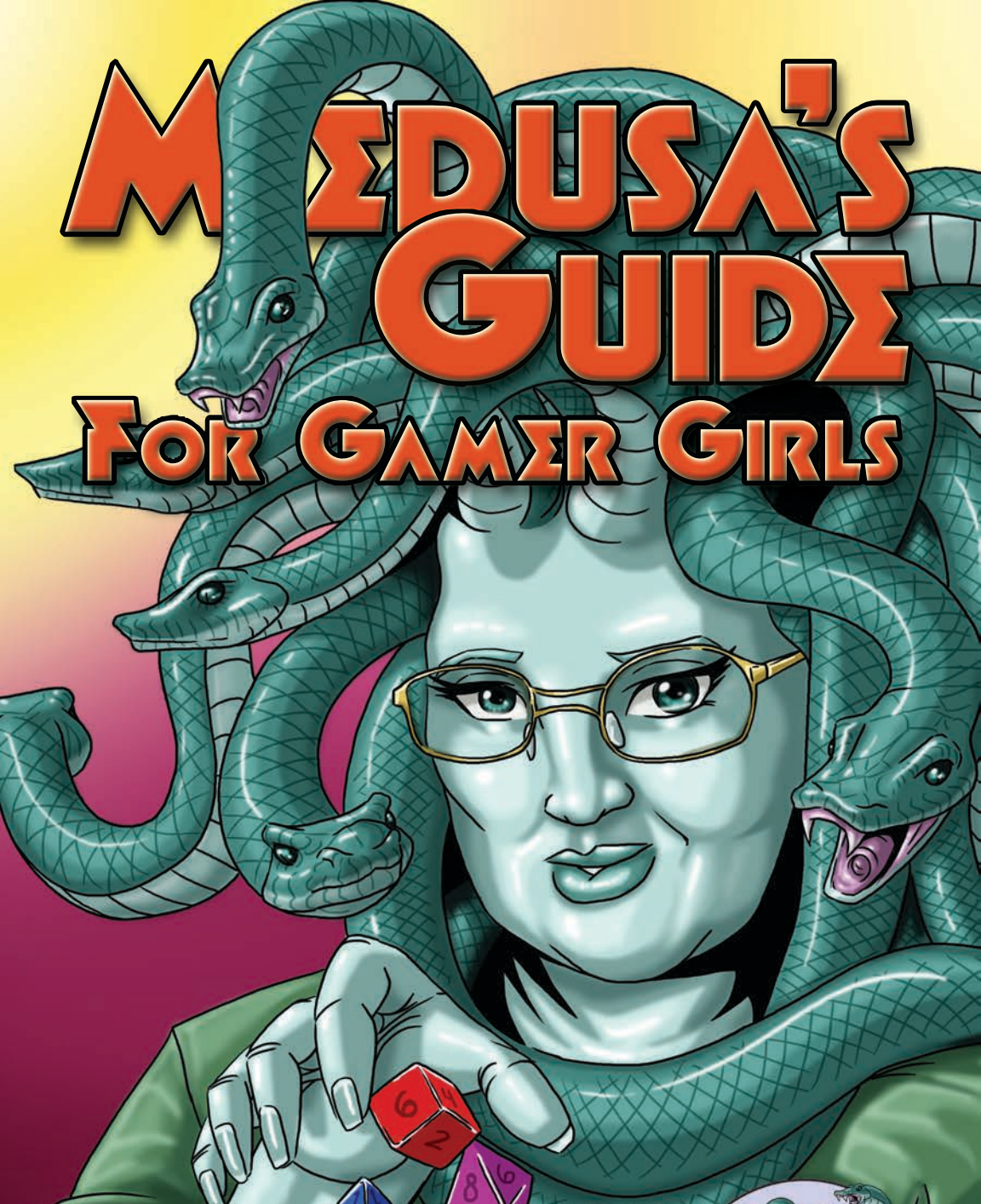


MEDUSA'S GUIDE FOR GAMER GIRLS



GAMING WITH KIDS



Medusa’s Guide for Gamer Girls: Gaming With Kids

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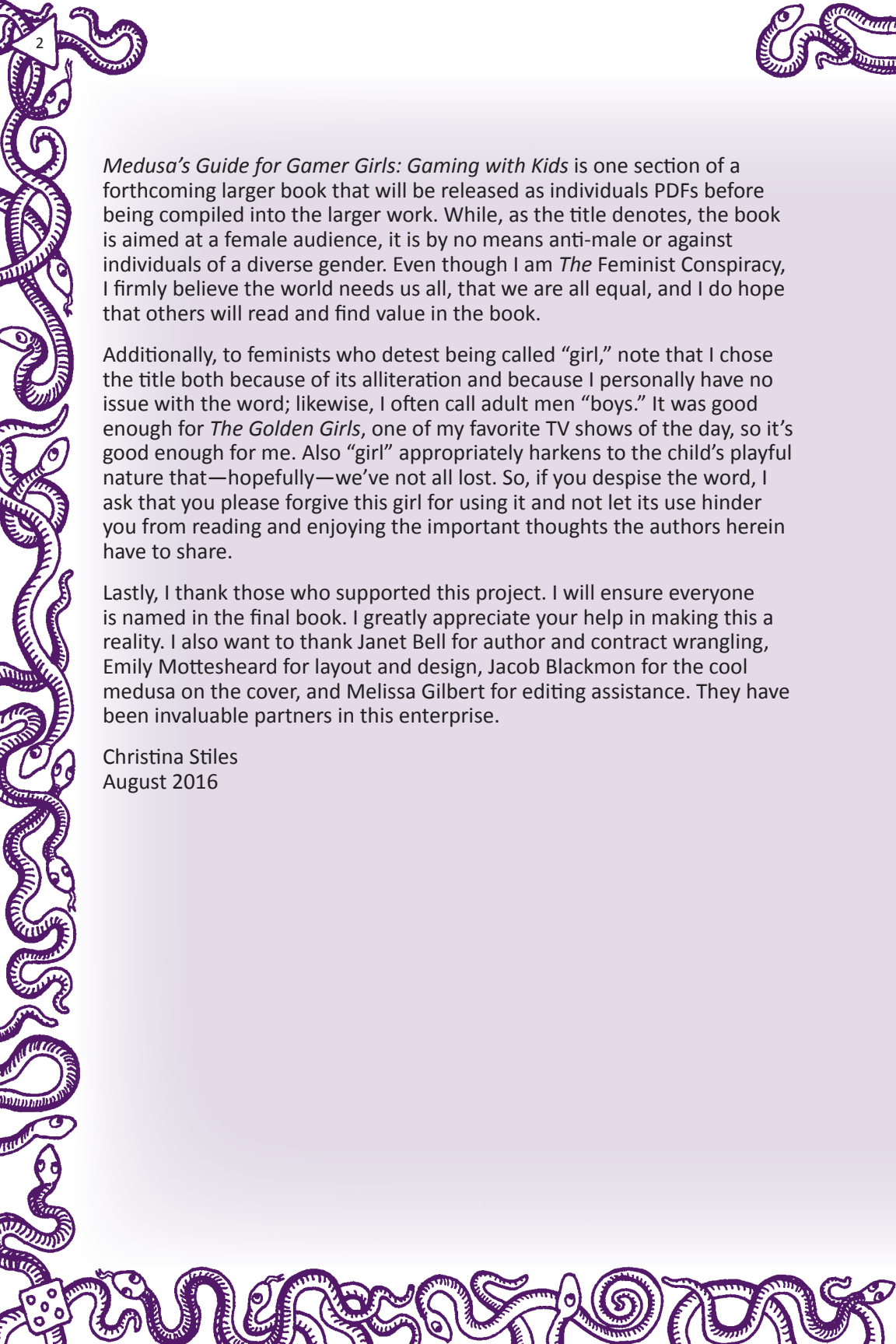
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Medusa's Guide for Gamer Girls: Gaming with Kids is one section of a forthcoming larger book that will be released as individual PDFs before being compiled into the larger work. While, as the title denotes, the book is aimed at a female audience, it is by no means anti-male or against individuals of a diverse gender. Even though I am *The Feminist Conspiracy*, I firmly believe the world needs us all, that we are all equal, and I do hope that others will read and find value in the book.

Additionally, to feminists who detest being called “girl,” note that I chose the title both because of its alliteration and because I personally have no issue with the word; likewise, I often call adult men “boys.” It was good enough for *The Golden Girls*, one of my favorite TV shows of the day, so it’s good enough for me. Also “girl” appropriately harkens to the child’s playful nature that—hopefully—we’ve not all lost. So, if you despise the word, I ask that you please forgive this girl for using it and not let its use hinder you from reading and enjoying the important thoughts the authors herein have to share.

Lastly, I thank those who supported this project. I will ensure everyone is named in the final book. I greatly appreciate your help in making this a reality. I also want to thank Janet Bell for author and contract wrangling, Emily Mottesheard for layout and design, Jacob Blackmon for the cool medusa on the cover, and Melissa Gilbert for editing assistance. They have been invaluable partners in this enterprise.

Christina Stiles
August 2016



Introduction

I was roughly eleven or twelve when my brother introduced me to *Dungeons & Dragons*. Over the years—in addition to providing moments of great fun—the game has had a profound effect on my life. Essentially, being a gamer changed me and made me who I am. It helped me fall in love with fantasy literature, movies, and other media; overcome my shyness; think through my actions; unleash my creativity; and led me to meet many people who have become long-time friends. Most importantly, however, being a gamer steered me to being a writer and editor of gaming material, to being a college teacher of game writing, and to being the catalyst for creation of this book, which is meant to inspire others into entering the hobby—and industry, even. From that shy, introverted, wallflower of a girl, gaming molded me into a mover in this world rather than just an observer of it. To this day, I am passionate about gaming and its benefits; thus, I want to help ensure future generations have the opportunity to enjoy gaming as well. I most especially want gaming open to *everyone*—regardless of experience or gender—to experience what it has to offer.

If there is to be a future in our hobby, there is no doubt that we must inspire more children to play tabletop games and other games. I know many of us “older” gamers have already done our part by passing along our passion to our own children, if we have them, and to our friends’ children, but there is so much more that can be done. For instance, we can do our part to ensure that conventions have kids’ tracks for gaming. I had the pleasure of running a game of *Faery’s Tale*, a children’s game I helped write, at Paizo Con for several young ladies under six years old. It was truly one of the highlights of my game-running experiences. Since then, others have seen to it that there is a growing track for children there, now. I’ve also seen growth in publishers reaching out to the younger generation by developing roleplaying games or adventures targeted to them. This is wonderful, and I hope the trend continues!

In closing, the authors I present herein write about their own experiences in gaming with kids. One, actually, is a kid herself. Throughout the book, I will present several younger authors among the professionals. Even though this publication constitutes their writing debuts, I hope that it will not be their last contributions to the hobby.

Christina Stiles



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GAMER GIRL GREETINGS
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Gaming With Kids

By Bethany Black (A Kid)

I have been going to conventions since I was six, and I have run games since I was nine (as of the writing of this essay, I'm 12), so I've agreed to write this as a sort of "helpful tips" thing. Mostly what I run at conventions is a Warrior Cats game, based on the book series by Erin Hunter.

The Warriors game is a storytelling/adventure game where the players are cats in the Warriors series world, and they go on adventures such as "Save the Kits," a game I've run quite a lot. In the game, you start out with trying to find out a way to get your cat character involved somehow. One of the best parts for them is the end, where they get to "level up" their characters.

I have learned a lot from the time I have spent teaching kids how to play the game and making sure they all have fun while playing. Here are just few things I've learned.

The Dos

- DO keep talking; we need to be kept active.
- DO add interesting plot twists. If I know anything, it's that we like things that keep us on the edge of our seats.
- DO make the ending surprising.
- DO add little extra elements to enhance the story*. I like a story that has specific details; it means the Game Master/Dungeon Master/Storyteller has put a lot of work into their game.
- DO make your game flexible. Young players come up with almost anything and everything. Roll with it.
- DO use your hands when talking. I like to use my hands to illustrate the story.
- DO try to personify the characters in your story.

The Don'ts

- DON'T read exactly from the book or guide. Try to paraphrase it or alter it just a little.
- DON'T stand still. Try to go around the table a little to help point



out things on the character sheet, or just in general move around to describe the action.

- DON'T try to add TOO much detail. We still need to be able to follow along, so don't get so caught up describing one little thing that we forget the plot (Getting just the right amount of detail in a story can be tricky; it may take you a few tries to get this right. Another thing is to keep in mind the age of your players).
- DON'T use really complicated words. Keep your sentences short, sweet, and to-the-point.
- DON'T *accidentally* give them the right way. I have done this before, and it really does take away the ability to choose (which is lots of fun). This is why you need the game to be flexible.
- DON'T make the game too hard or easy. Kids like me want to have challenges, but still have a chance at beating the enemies.

*I personally like elements such as supernatural beings, Wild West settings, fantasy scenarios, the list goes on and on. Just try things that make it more adventurous.

As a little extra note, I would like for you to know that when you run games for kids, the best advice is just to keep us entertained. We like flashy and big. If you add as much as you can to the story and make it full of twists and turns, we'll be sure to love it.

There really isn't much left to say, but I hope you and your players like playing your games. Good luck on creating your games; we can be a very tough crowd. You'll get better at it the more you do it—so go do it!

Bethany Black ran her first convention game at MACE: West in 2010 at age 9 and is now an 9th grader. She Game Masters at all the conventions her family attends to promote getting kids into gaming. She has an essay in *Medusa's Guide to Gaming* (2016). In addition to becoming a budding gaming celebrity and legacy, she is a Duke Talent Identification Program member and Honor student. Bethany has been in films, on stage, and in a commercial, and plays the oboe, piano, and front ensemble for marching band.

10 REASONS WHY KIDS SHOULD PLAY GAMES

By Jodi Black

I go to a lot of conventions (only 7 this year!) and I host a panel at many of them called “Getting Kids Into Gaming”—but the truth is kids love to play. That’s not the hard part, typically. Instead, I focus on the social, behavioral, and cognitive reasons kids should play games, and what types of games might work best with children at certain ages and needs. I have a secret agenda, though. The ultimate goal isn’t really to convince *kids* but to show *adults*—who live in a society where over-commitment and almost continual afterschool activities are the norm—why just sitting down and playing a game will make their kids better people. Once the parents understand that, they may make it the priority it should be instead of thinking of it as a “waste of time.”

Just to put it all out there, I’m not an educator—just a parent who has advocated games for children ever since 1999, when I had one myself (I have 2 now, girls who have their own articles in this book. Mommy is so proud!). I haven’t done any statistical analyses or studied any reports in particular, although I’m surely influenced by something I’ve read over the years.

Even if you don’t have children yourself or think you never will, you can benefit from the tips I offer here. Especially to those adults who find themselves in the “friend zone” of a child—please encourage them to make time for games. They listen to you more than anyone else in their life! But even if all you want is validation for being a gamer, read on.

1. **Better Reading and Language Arts Skills.**
2. **Increased Familiarity With Math Skills.**

These are the “top two” that most people think of as academic reasons to play games. Young to old alike benefit from repetition of basic counting, from rolling a die to moving a token X spaces ahead, or when reading “Go to Jail”—these are all from the classic board game **Monopoly**. I like to suggest very young children play with dice that have pips (dots). I played this way with an 18-month-

old Trinity, while on bedrest pregnant with Bethany, simply rolling the **d6 with pips** on a tray. There aren't many other games you can play in that situation! I'd help her count the pips and celebrate her accomplishments. Imagine our shock and pride when she said her first complete sentence: "I love dice." See? Language *and* Math, before she was even two years old. It gave both my girls a great start.

3. Verbal Confidence.

Rory's Story Cubes are a great present for parents of young children. They come in a small case you can throw into your purse. When blood sugar is low, tempers are mounting, and the restaurant staff is slow, it can redirect that energy into a meaningful and fun activity. I wish we'd had them when my girls were younger!

Using the images on the dice, any child able to talk can engage in cooperative storytelling play. This encourages him to use his words—and trust me, he wants to! It gives him an outlet to ramble on, and for an adult to correct his speech gently: "So, you're saying the elephant took the key to the moon?" This helps him to hone concise speech patterns, which will be a great benefit when your sobbing toddler is trying to explain that he's upset because the TV channel was changed. Later, as he grows up, concise and confident verbal skills help him answer the telephone and later, get a job. Communication is important. Speaking up for yourself is important. It all starts with conversation in general, and nothing starts a conversation better than asking someone to play a game with you.

4. Developing Patience and Trust in an *I* NEED IT NOW World.

One of the first things we learn in game play is to wait our turn. We also learn to break down larger tasks into smaller steps. If your overall goal is to accumulate points, you do so one point at a time—just like reading a long book, or writing a geometry proof. **Candyland** is a classic pre-literacy board game that teaches children this sort of patience. On your turn you draw a card, move to that color space, then wait until your turn again. Later, when playing a **tabletop roleplaying game (RPG)**, the wait time becomes longer. For example, when it's your turn, you say what you're going to do, roll the dice, get feedback from the GM, and make the action happen "in game" by narrating it. It quickly becomes apparent in RPGs that interrupting someone else's action can only make you

wait longer!

When you have a group of friends or relatives play games, it deepens bonds and creates opportunities for shared memories. Building that trust is key to self-confidence and leadership qualities in young and old alike. Ever played **Peek-a-Boo** with an infant or toddler? I think this game teaches trust at a very young age. Once they realize object permanence and that you didn't actually make the object disappear, the same message is sent about the people in their lives: we're here for you. Even when you can't see us.

Many parents find they talk easiest with their teen while driving—both parties are engaged in side by side activity so the situation is less confrontational. The same thing happens in game play. And you won't wreck the car if they tell you they're dating someone! Some conversation-starting games I like are "party" games like **Apples to Apples, Wits and Wagers, Would You Rather...**, or just about any trivia game. The key to a conversation-starting game is downtime between turns and luck over strategy. Try playing them with your teen AND their friends sometime. You'll **really** get to know their friends better, trust me.

This is one of the reasons why our family started a Gaming Club at our middle school. The things they say while picking up the next **Uno** card... enlightening to say the least. This helps now that I'm Co-President of the Parent Organization (like the PTA). I have a good feel for what the kids are thinking because I give them opportunities to talk while gaming and I *listen*.

5. Accepting Setbacks and Moving Forward

This is crucial to developing the type of confidence that kicks in when things go south. Do you have one of those friends who cries "woe is me" one time too many? Maybe they should have played **Ticket to Ride** or **Settlers of Catan** more often.

I realized this recently when Clint, my husband, and I provided a play-by-play breakdown after we played a round of **Ticket to Ride**, a popular board game. I forget who won, but we were pointing out "you screwed me over by doing this." When my plans for completing my ticket got derailed, there wasn't anything that being angry or pouting would help. Instead, I just figured out another way, and quickly.

This section could almost be called "Dealing with Consequences." In

RPGs especially, your character faces consequences for their actions. In a video game, destroying things and being evil is usually how you win. What sort of message does this give kids, I ask you? Sure, it's fun to pretend to be the bad guy every now and then, but in the end you don't want your baby to become a mobster or serial killer, right?

Clint wrote *Necessary Evil*, which uses the *Savage Worlds* roleplaying game system we are most known for. You start the game as a super villain. How cool is that? Let's be bad guys! But the hook is the villains have to work together to rescue Earth from an alien occupation—or else they'll never rule the world! It can be campy and lighthearted. But 90% of those who play through the campaign report their characters end up good guys at the end. Why? The people say thank you for saving them, over and over again. They give you things, like the key to the city. Parents name their children after you. Being a hero... feels good? Let's hope so. We need more heroes than villains in the real world.

6. Team-Building Environments.

When I was in middle and high school, I participated in several team-building youth group events. In the Trust Fall, one person in the team stands on a tree stump and trusts their comrades to catch them. I'm not as afraid of heights as some, but afraid enough! I was humiliated that I had to "fall" from the shortest possible stump. I was a teenager and sobbing in front of the cool kids. It was not a useful team-building exercise for me, just torture.

While most popular games—card, board, video—are played as individuals, there are games where people make teams. *Reverse Charades*, *Cranium*, and *Pictionary* are known for this. And a relatively new idea in board gaming is cooperative game play, where the players are working together to win or lose the game. I've played *Sentinels of the Multiverse*, *Pandemic*, and *Touch of Evil* as cooperative games, and I love them! If you really want a team-building experience, though, try a tabletop RPG. Most any system sets the players against the Game Master (GM), who handles the overall plot, describes the environment, and roleplays all non-player characters (NPCs). Even after just a short convention-length game, I feel like supporting my fellow players.

There are GM-less RPGs out there, too. My daughter Bethany has been GMing the *Warrior Cats Adventure Game* since she was nine

years old at conventions, but the game is actually set up for the players to take turns being the Narrator. If you have older teens, try post world games' **Protocol**. We just started a line using Protocol in Pinnacle Entertainment Group's **Deadlands** setting, called **Tall Tales**.

Finally, a note about gender equality in games: it happens. That seems such a simple thing to say, but the rules of a game are almost never differ based on gender. Whether your team is co-ed or boys vs. girls, the rules are the same for both sides. Few things in life are as level a playing field as within the rules of a game. All the more reason to help your children embrace it: if they see the opposite gender as a team player instead of "other" often enough in game, it becomes a way of life.

If only my youth group could've played **Dungeons & Dragons** instead of that damn Trust Fall.

7. Honing a Competitive Edge—Gently.

One of the most valuable lessons you can learn is how to be a gracious loser. This is one aspect that I think traditional sports have trouble with. Do they even show opposing team members shaking hands after a game anymore, saying "great game"? I don't know when the shift in culture changed from WIN to WIN AT ANY COST, and certainly not every sport or every team does this, but it seems we hear more and more about it. Why did Lance Armstrong cheat? So he could win.

Winning is good. Being committed to our goal helps us keep at it when things get hard and we want to give up. We want to encourage our kids to succeed, and that means winning—better grades, higher scores, more goals. But you have to lose some games, too. It's just how the world works. How do we encourage playing to win and discourage rude behavior when they lose? By giving them experience at losing.

There are games where everyone wins or loses together—see cooperative games in #6 above. If you have a child who is a sore loser, I recommend trying one of those. Or you can team play both sides of **Checkers**—you and the child play a move for one side, then turn the board around and play a move from the other side. That way the pressure is not on her to win or lose, and she sees how you handle losing (which needs to be graciously, by the way).

Calmly concede that you lost. Tell the winner "good game"

or “well played.” If the game itself won, like in *Sentinels of the Multiverse*, discuss the strategies that can be used next time you play. Don’t say anything mean. Don’t make excuses, and don’t blame any players. Help put away the game. Keep a smile on your face, and remember that you had a good time, even if you lost.

8. Challenging Creativity.

There are a lot of games that provide situations for creativity that you just won’t find anywhere else. Roleplaying games are my special favorite for creativity. You are truly only limited by your imagination. But there are also games that involve creative arts such as sketching, sculpting, and even singing: *Pictionary*, *Cranium*, and *Songburst*.

My family developed our own **word association game** to play while waiting at a restaurant (we didn’t have *Rory’s Story Cubes* then). We’d start with a simple word, like “dog.” The person to their left says a word associated with that word, like “collar.” The next person might say “shirt.” You cannot use the same word twice. There are no winners or losers—we just stopped playing when our food arrived. See what kind of game your kids invent. It might actually be fun!

Challenging your creativity forces you to be creative. I worked for a short time with my local Chamber of Commerce on an Innovation Task Force. Our team of professionals from many backgrounds got together to brainstorm solutions for other local businesses: 100 in one hour! Some were completely silly or delved more into science fiction or fantasy, but there were many ideas that were good. It wasn’t our job to figure out “how.” What truly intrigued me, however, was that I came up with new ideas for my own business during the process. I jotted them down on a post-it note, put them in my pocket, and kept on brainstorming for the local restaurant or furniture factory we were there for.

9. Moral/Ethical Development.

Children love the “what if” game. As soon as they can talk, you can play it. No dice required! I gave my kids “what if” situations like “Mommy gets sick while driving?” to teach them how to use the OnStar button or “there was a fire in the hallway?” to practice fire drills at home. You can also ask “What if you found a hundred dollar bill in the parking lot?” and “What if someone at school said mean things?” Teachers and counselors have known for decades that the “What if...?” game helps build moral and ethical development in the

absence of religious instruction.

Once the very young get older, you can offer challenging reading material and talk about it... if you make time. But who wants to discuss the Holocaust during dinner? There aren't many board or card games that explore moral and ethical questions but RPGs are excellent for this. Will you still feel the same way about the elves' situation if you're a dwarf?

My girls came running through the door one day after school, only to groan in agony: they thought their father was home (I had his car while mine was in the shop) and had invited some neighborhood kids over to play *Savage Worlds*. “

‘I’ll run you a game!’ I said. I had never offered this before, so they were a little skeptical—GMing is Daddy’s job—but they agreed.

“So...you’re all adults.” “Yay!”

“You’re all bad guys.” “Yay!”

“You all steal stuff for a living.” “Yay!”

While they made modern-day characters, I printed off a few pages from the Udvar-Hazy Museum of Air and Space near Washington, D.C., where we had visited recently. I ran them through a “kiddie Leverage” game. Their hacker (an NPC) gave them the instructions to break into the museum and steal the Little Stinker airplane, fly it to a nearby airstrip, and give it back to the original owners; because of course the government stole it. That was the simple story I came up with—I really don’t have any reason to believe it’s true. But what would you do if you found out the government did something wrong?

How do you teach children to do the right thing? Try an ethical dilemma in a safe roleplay situation.

10. Critical Thinking Skills.

This is what will set us apart from computers in the future, folks: the best job security is knowing you can’t be replaced by a robot!

Critical thinking means developing strategies and adapting them to the situation as it changes—like in that *Ticket to Ride* example I gave earlier. It’s not simply a matter of calculating the next best route. It involves seeing how many trains your opponent has left,

how many cards they're holding, where it looks like they're going on the board, and whether it's better to try to make the ticket you're holding or whether to draw a new set of tickets—if your chances are good you'll pull a ticket you've already completed which will absorb the loss of the failed ticket. What this means is I used psychological profiling, simple math, probability, and predictions of behavior in a very short time, seconds really. Whew! Just thinking about it makes me winded. And ready to play again!

Other games that specifically challenge critical thinking and strategic planning skills are CCGs, collectible card games like ***Magic: the Gathering*** and ***Pokemon***. I haven't played them yet. I also haven't had the inclination to play a ***video game*** (I spend enough time in front of a screen, thank you, and have the sore neck to prove it). Again, I can tell that there are benefits to playing. I feel like any game is a good idea. Variety is the spice of life—so mix it up. Don't just play one kind of game over and over again. So you have the high score on ***Angry Birds***? Try your luck at ***Fluxx***.

In conclusion, the main reason to encourage kids to play games is because gamers are creative innovators who “think outside the box” and thrive in a competitive environment. They build their brain power one brick at a time, or should I say one game at a time? Chances are they'll be more well-rounded emotionally and psychologically, too, because they've learned patience, trust, and respect for their fellow person.

Kids grow up. Help them to be a person others want to be with. Play more games.

Jodi Black handles marketing and licensing for Pinnacle including social media, retailer relations, and managing other promotions. She is also a multiple award-winning game book editor: *Savage Worlds Deluxe* won a Gold ENnie for Best Game in 2012 and *The Savage World of Solomon Kane* won a Silver ENnie award in 2008 for Best Production Value (both by Pinnacle Entertainment Group), as well as awards with other game companies. To date she has completed more than 30 editing projects in the RPG industry. She is also President of Beautiful Brains Books and Games, which is an online- and convention-based retail store. She is married to Pinnacle Entertainment Group's Savage Worlds Core Rules Brand Manager, Clint Black. She works both sides of the business—publishing and retail—from her desk in the basement “cave,” enabling her to be a stay-at-home mom and übervolunteer in the community. You can contact her at PEGJodi@gmail.com.

GAME TABLES FOR REAL LIFE

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Under Table Clearance: 17"

Inset Game Play Area: 40"x24"

Edges: 4" on all sides

Table Top: 48"x32"



Kitchen

Game Table \$1199

Seats 4 (Chairs and Side Tables available)

Table Height: 30"

Under Table Clearance: 25"

Inset Game Play Area: 38"x38"

Edges: 5" on all sides

Table Top: 48" x 48"



Dining Room

Game Table \$1599

Seats 6 (Chairs and Side Tables available)

Table Height: 30"

Under Table Clearance: 25"

Inset Game Play Area: 32"x50"

Edges: 8" on long sides, 11" on short sides

Table Top: 4'x6' (48"x72")



Tablezilla

Game Table \$2199

Huge! Seats 8

(Chairs and Side Tables available)

Table Height: 30"

Under Table Clearance: 25"

Inset Game Play Area: 36"x74"

Edges: 11" on all sides

Table Top: 58"x96"



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Gamer Dads With Gamer Girls

by Paris Crenshaw with Tatiana and Natasha Crenshaw

I have to admit that I hesitated when Christina Stiles asked me if I would like to contribute to this book. I was deeply honored to be included in the project, and I was excited at the prospect of being able to share my thoughts alongside other great people in the gaming community, but I initially held back because I honestly wasn't sure I had anything to contribute.

Let's be honest. I'm a middle-aged white guy with a wife and two kids plus a dog, three cats, and a fish, as of today. Having served in the U.S. Navy for over eighteen years, I've only reached the point in the last few years where I can make time for freelance writing. I've been very fortunate to work with amazing people and to be able to share my work with the broader community. With that kind of background, I'm not the first person people are going to think of when they imagine an authority on social issues in gaming or anywhere else.

Over the course of my Naval career, I've had the pleasure to serve with people from literally all walks of life. From the lowest enlisted seaman to the most senior admiral, you'd be surprised at the diversity of people's backgrounds in the Navy. I'm fully aware that—despite the copious amounts of diversity, “sensitivity,” and anti-harassment training we get—things aren't exactly perfect in my service or any others'. However, we share a unity of purpose that enables us to make amazing strides in achieving the mutual respect at the heart of real diversity.

But this book isn't about military service. It's about gaming. More specifically, it's about women in gaming. What the heck can I contribute to this discussion? As a Naval officer, not much. But as a father—more specifically, as a father of identical twin girls—maybe I have something to add.

From the moment I knew my wife and I were going to have children, I was excited about the prospect of sharing my joy of gaming with them. When I found out we were having girls (and twins, at that!), the excitement didn't go away, but a tiny bit of fear joined with it. What if they didn't like gaming? Sure, it was possible that a son might not enjoy gaming, either. I knew that. But in some part of my brain, through some experience, discussion, or article I'd come across, I “knew” that fewer girls liked role-playing games. Armed with that “knowledge,” I tried to mentally prepare myself for the possibility that my girls would think I'm just a geeky old guy. (Incidentally, that's kind of how my wife sees me, but she indulges my geekiness.)

My daughters grew up in a house with some obvious signs that a gamer

lived there, so it's fair to say that they have always been influenced by gaming geek culture. When they were old enough, I introduced them to some basic RPGs aimed at younger players, like *Faery's Tale*. They enjoyed them, and I was thrilled to know that my fears had been unfounded. Now, several years later, we still gather around the table for the occasional game of *Pathfinder* or meet up in one of the MMOs that I've found is safe for them to play at their age. They still think their dad's a geek, but they know that they're kind of geeky, too. More importantly, they know that there's nothing wrong with being a geek.

So, with my little girls in mind, I set to work figuring out what lessons our story might have for others. I thought that including them in the process would be helpful, so I asked them to sit down and write a list of things they love about gaming. Basically, I wanted them to think about why girls should play roleplaying games. They focused most of their response on tabletop roleplaying games. Here's what I got.

Tatiana: Ten Things I Love About Being a Gamer Girl

There are fantasy creatures.

You can imagine the graphics however you want.

You can create your own character any way you want.

It gives you something to have in common with some boys.

It is very social.

Players get to work as a team.

It is neat to learn about different tools, armors, and weapons.

There are a lot of different challenges you have to face in the game.

You get to be the voice for your character.

Natasha: What I Like About Gaming

I like being able to act as my character and control what he or she says and does.

I like having the ability to choose whether to be good or bad.

I like having the ability to make items.

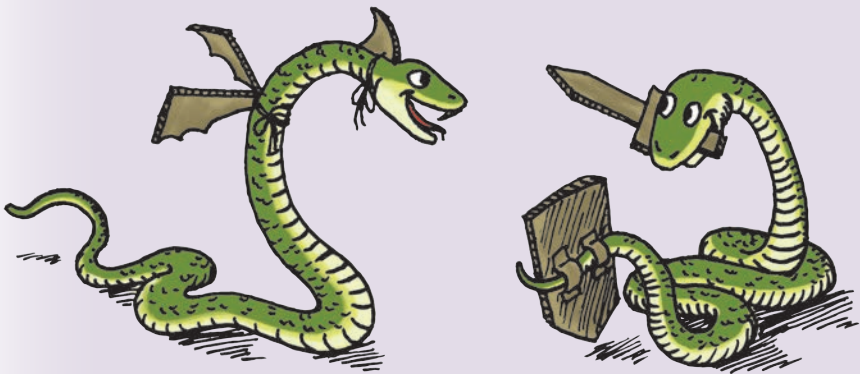
I like being able to fight because it helps me get my anger out.

I think girls should play roleplaying games because it helps their imagination flow and it's a fun thing to do.

I'm not sure what I was expecting, but their answers didn't really point me in the direction of a profound comment on social justice. In fact, they

weren't all that different from the things that I love about roleplaying games. I was stumped. I had to do some thinking. I also had to do some talking with my wife, the person I most admire in all of existence. Still, even with her help and advice, it took a while for my brain to grasp the meaning of the twins' responses to the assignment I gave them.

I thought about how my daughters have grown up fairly free of influences telling them they have to play a certain way, wear a certain style of clothing, or take on any of the behaviors that some would deem "most appropriate" for a girl. They really don't take anything to extremes when it comes to their tastes in clothes, toys, or books. They like what they like, regardless of what kind of gender label it might have on it, and those tastes change with all the mercuriality of a typical twelve-year-old. And so, they have a natural love of gaming, absent of someone telling them that they shouldn't love it.



And there it was. That was my answer. I suddenly realized that the similarity—the fact that my daughters and I are gamers for the same reasons—really is the heart of the issue. For those of us who love gaming, the reasons we love it are all pretty much the same, regardless of gender. The idea that there is some gender-based barrier (or any other kind, for that matter) is mainly one of perception. Some people's perceptions lead them to exclude people, others' perceptions lead them to exclude themselves. I don't know where those perceptions came from, but I'm certain they're wrong. So, the question I'm faced with is how to fix the problem. What is my role in changing a perception that gaming isn't open to everyone?

As a parent, I'm reminded every day how hard it is to change someone's

thinking. It's not realistic for me to expect that anything I write or say is going to suddenly make someone wake up and say, "Oh! You're right, Paris! There *is* a place for women at the gaming table or in that MMO. We *should* craft games that appeal to all genders so that everyone can participate in the joy of a shared experience! What the heck was I thinking?" Sorry. That's not going to happen. But what *can* I do? Who *can* I influence in a substantial way so that they enter situations with the right mindset? Well, there are those two little girls playing in their rooms upstairs.

You see, while I may not be able to change others' minds about what anyone should be allowed or not allowed to do, I can help my daughters grow up in a way that gives them the strength to withstand an onslaught of naysayers. They need to know that, if they wish, they can use their talents to make a contribution to this hobby. And even if they just want to play, they should still expect to find fun and acceptance there, regardless of who they're joining at the table.

No one should exclude them just because they're girls. No one should belittle their choices. No one should presume to know who they are or what they can do before they've taken the time to get to know them.

My job, then, is to make sure they hear that, and that they *keep* hearing it. From me, from their mother, from family, from my friends, and—as much as possible—from *their* friends. They need to know that anyone who tells them differently is not a friend. They need to get this message over and over until they internalize it, until it becomes such an integral part of them that no one can make them question it. Because no matter how much I wish it weren't so, they *will* have to stand up to people who want nothing more than to exert power over them just because they think it's their right to do so. They need to be ready.

I should clarify, though, that I'm not talking about coddling. I am not talking about making my daughters believe that everything they do is perfect and wonderful and that anyone who dislikes something about what they do or say is automatically wrong. They need to know that they are capable of mistakes and that they should always strive to improve themselves. Believing that you are infallible is the surest way to a life of frustration and disappointment.

But there's a huge difference between self-delusion and the true knowledge that you have intrinsic worth. I want my daughters to know that they have inestimable value. With that core conviction, they will have the courage to find what they love, to share that treasure with the world, and to stand up for themselves and others when wrongheadedness rears its ugly head.

To show them that they have a place in the gaming world, I make an effort to point out people I admire in the industry, emphasizing the women who

fill important roles so my daughters are fully aware that there are others who share their enjoyment, creativity, and passion. These are women who are not just sitting on the sidelines taking in whatever products a patriarchal industry is putting out; they are shapers of products and makers of stories with a clear vision of their own designs. They are leaving their own marks in gaming, just as I want my daughters to leave their marks on whatever they choose to undertake in the future.

I make it clear to them that my regular gaming group is made up of both men and women and that I've invited girls to my table since I first started playing the game. I also point them in the direction of games that show women in an empowering way. Although I let them enjoy traditional fairy tales because they are part of a rich literary history—the foundation of the fantasy genre that all three of us most enjoy—I make sure that they understand that the princess in a fairy tale is no more real than the talking birds or unicorns she befriends. The damsel in distress is a character who can be enjoyed without being emulated.

My job as a father is not to shelter my daughters from images or even voices that foster a skewed worldview, but to strengthen their own sense of identity so that they don't let those images alter their perceptions of themselves. Hopefully, with that strong sense, they can then serve as examples to others. The world is full of hurtful things, most of which my daughters will face when they are far away from the protective arms of a father who loves them more than life itself. But girded with the armor of self-worth and self-acceptance, they can venture into any territory and know that they can achieve something wonderful.

Paris Crenshaw was born and raised in Virginia. He attended Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, graduating in 1995 with an Ocean Engineering degree and a commission in the United States Navy. He also has a Master's degree in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School. Paris started gaming in the early '80s with *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Top Secret*, *Boot Hill*, and *Star Frontiers*, and played the 2nd Edition AD&D rules through high school and college. His work with other games systems includes publication in the *Earthdawn Journal*, writing for West End Games' *MasterBook* system, and playtesting the *Deadlands RPG* with Shane Hensley. In 2009, Paris began writing material and doing editing work for the *Wayfinder* fanzine and became the assistant editor-in-chief of *Wayfinder 2013*. He has freelance writing and editing credits in several books from Paizo and third-party publishers, including *Legendary Games* and *Clockwork Gnome Publishing*. Paris currently lives with his family in San Diego, CA, and still serves in the Navy.

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Fun & Facts: Educating with RPGs

By BJ Hensley

For as long as I can remember, I've loved to create. As a child (and still today) I lived with my head in the clouds, forever crafting make-believe realms of magic and myth. I loved to tell stories, to write them down, to share them with friends, and my favorite games always involved imagination. Toys largely collected dust on shelves as I pored over notebooks and novels instead. Writing random stories and crafting make-believe places, I was a builder of imaginary realms.

When I was quite young, I was introduced to a delightful game called *Dungeons and Dragons*. I embraced it and played as frequently as possible. There were so many amazing places to explore, and it was as if I had a wonderfully perfect, never ending, choose-your-own-adventure novel. I amassed quite a collection of characters as the years went on, but I always wanted to expand the lands in which they lived. In game and outside of it, I penned make-believe adventures and my own novels in notebooks, drew elaborate maps of strongholds and areas, and used my characters to build up whole cities designed by me—for no other reason than I could.

Most children have a make-believe friend; I had an entire make-believe community. I probably looked ridiculous chatting with them in the backyard all by myself as I defended my companions from dragons with my trusty sword—stick—or aided them with my “vast magical talent” and a homemade staff. Yes, I had a staff. I took the time to carve “runes” on it. In fifth grade, I made my own wand, which I not only engraved but hollowed out, installed LEDs, and attached a crystal to so it had a “magical glow.” And the week I decided I'd grow up to be a traveling ranger who bartered stories for food, I crafted a bow from a green tree branch and some string pilfered from a drawer. Hand-making all the arrows, however, was enough to make me decide I better just stick to storytelling.

The Imaginarium

As I grew older and had children of my own, I wanted those magical moments of imagination to be a part of their lives as well. I told them interactive bedtime stories, took them on treasure hunts, and taught them to make their own bows from slender green twigs. We played make-believe knights and wizards games at the local park where other random children would gleefully join in. We named our home “The Imaginarium” and embraced imagineering in every way we could.

Meanwhile, I continued to play RPGs, crafting blanket forts beneath the table where the children sat quietly with toys or books as we played. Little

did I know; they were learning to play by absorption. Eventually, typically after much begging on their part, I helped them create characters and invited them to the game. They started out small, their first characters often being something as simple as another player's talking animal companion. But they loved it.

As they grew, the game expanded to their friends and into game groups at schools. We incorporated it into their Cub Scout group while I was a den leader, and I ran a game at the local church. Eventually, I realized something profound. This game that I enjoyed had great potential as not only a family tradition, but as a teaching tool. Children possess a vast imagination that, when encouraged, brightens their lives—and those of everyone around them. I have seen children who hated math happily adding and subtracting to account for the mechanical nature of the game. Those who shun novels are somehow more easily inspired to read the rulebooks or campaign settings lying around the house (and every now and again develop a love for novels in the process). RPGs can be an interactive classroom for problem solving, arithmetic, reading, writing, social skills, and so much more.

For instance, my own children have vast vocabularies they are frequently complimented on. Thanks to RPGs they started school already knowing the basics of math and, in general, had a good head start on education. Of course, they also had a knack for telling stories that made them more difficult to deal with, as they could always craft an amusing anecdote or elaborate excuse for why they weren't doing what they should be doing—but I, at least, found this charming.

As my younger children continued to age, I began using roleplaying more and more to teach—not necessarily always at the table, nor even always with dice—but just using the basic concepts of roleplaying. Sometimes it was for fun: we'd play in the car on long trips where I'd engage them in what amounted to an interactive story. There were no dice rolls, and I, as the storyteller, made all decisions. Eventually, I began using gaming to model proper behavior.

One of my children is autistic and has Oppositional Defiant Disorder; he struggled a good deal in elementary school especially and had many social hurdles to overcome. Though he is extremely smart, his social skills did not come naturally. What started out as simple questions such as, "And how should you have handled that?" evolved into the comfortable format of roleplaying as an explanatory tool. And it worked! In fact, it worked so well and he learned the appropriate social responses so perfectly that our current school informed me I had done him a disservice as he no longer passed the state's particular brand of testing to qualify for an IEP, and they would have to put him in mainstream classes with larger groups of children and far less personal social monitoring.

I struggled with that, fearing the tools I had given my child were harming instead of aiding him. I fought their decision for a time providing his past records of testing and insisting his previous school's plan be adhered

to, but on the other hand, I had always maintained that his “disability,” as the schools termed it, would not be his crutch. I had spent his whole life insisting that he be accountable for his actions, regardless of his conditions. I taught him the appropriate ways to respond, spent countless hours making sure that he fully understood why a reaction was inappropriate, and taught him to empathize with others. So, after a good deal of thought on the matter, I let it go. I canceled the non-school screening appointments, I dropped our appeal, and I sent him to mainstream classes.

And I spent six months cringing every time the phone rang.

But he did brilliantly. Today he is fifteen years old, just spent an entire summer working at a theme park as a lifeguard (he wants to buy his own PS4), and last year, for the first time in his life, he made honor roll. This year he is taking honors classes as a freshman in high school. Can you still tell he’s autistic? If you know what to look for, sure. But the average person never notices. There is no doubt in my mind that this game we all love has the ability to reach far beyond a social gathering at the table and alter the lives of countless children in a profound way.

Founding Playground Adventures

Eventually, my teenagers wanted to run their own games, and I began to search for modules they could play with younger siblings or use to host their own game clubs with friends at school. I found disturbingly little to give them. And I thought, this has to change. And that is when Playground Adventures was born. If I was going to be writing these items for my own and local children, why not write them for ALL the children who might use them?

I can’t go to every community, I can’t be at every school, but I can make sure that the tools are available for others who can be.

We are a small company, but we are growing. We have several regular adventures out there, but the *Fun & Facts* line is closest to my heart. It is designed to educate via role playing games. And children love them. They get to roll dice, play their characters, have a good time, and they learn something new in the process. All of our adventures have arithmetic puzzles or interesting crafts to keep little hands busy, but each of these special ones is focused on specific educational subjects.

We also have what we call *After School Adventures*. This line includes a bit of *Fun & Facts*, but they are designed to be playable, beginning to end, in only a few hours. We take into consideration the attention span of the average child and the busy minds of those with ADHD, and we create adventure shorts that they can complete in the amount of time most children have before they need a “brain break.” Many of our *After School Adventures* also include science experiments, hands-on projects, or other busy work to occupy little hands struggling to sit still.

I believe we have created a series of products that are valuable aids for educating children. We have received an overwhelmingly positive response thus far, and a few schools are even looking into wrapping our materials into grant proposals. It would be amazing if they managed it, but if even just one child has the same experience as my own, it's absolutely worth every hour of work I put into it.

Role playing has affected each of my children in their own way: it has instilled a love for reading in some, a desire to create in others, taught empathy and social skills, and has certainly expanded their vocabulary. It's even made them friends as they played imagination games on the playground fighting dragons or "casting fireballs." Our seven-, nine-, and twelve-year-old are currently working on their own LARP, and instead of playing house or school, they drag out all the RPG books they're allowed and make up games or pretend to be RPG publishers.

And for any who would still cite the old argument that playing RPGs in some way damages our children, or prevents them from making friends and focusing on education, my children still do a plethora of other things. They participate in sports, martial arts, art, journaling, crafting, swimming, camping, and fishing. They don't have a clique, or a stereotype, nor are they defined by their hobbies. Gaming has taught them they can be anything they want to be, and they embrace that. They play football, run track, cheer, participate in band. All three older boys have adorable girlfriends. They have no problem standing up to peer pressure, and they all have friends from every social circle of school. They are not jocks. They are not gamers. They are simply themselves.

And that's exactly who I want them to be.

BJ Hensley is the founder of *Playground Adventures*. She is a fan of family togetherness and dedicated to ensuring that both her own and other families have creative outlets they can share together. When she isn't hard at work furthering the goals of PGA, she can be found working with a variety of other publishing companies as an editor, author, marketing adviser, Kickstarter manager, website/layout designer, and occasional artist/cartographer. Her most recent projects beyond PGA include work for *Adventure a Week*, *Frog God Games*, *Kobold Press*, *Rogue Genius*, *Rite Publishing*, *Legendary Games*, and she is the director of marketing at *Lone Wolf Development*. At home she spends a great deal of time with her family playing games, attending sporting events, and participating in group art projects.

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Playground Adventures



After School Adventures



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Raising A Conscientious Gamer Son

By Monica Marlowe

I grew up reading fantasy and sci-fi books. I wasn't part of any social group because of my nerdy tendencies. As a young adult, gender-based marginalization drove me out of engineering and into biology, a more female-friendly field. Those experiences, which escalated in college, had me doubling down on what I was willing to do to see my own children succeed in a difficult and harsh world.

When my husband Andrew and I decided we wanted to have children, I prayed that my first-born would be healthy, strong, and a girl. I wanted to give every possible advantage to my daughter. According to scientific studies at the time (1, 2), if a daughter was born first, more time and energy would be poured into her than into any subsequent children. Things went well, our first child was a girl, and we named her Kate. We were happy.

Three years later, we knew we were ready for a second child. I prayed for a healthy, strong baby of whichever gender nature willed. We had a son, Thomas. At first Thomas was a bit of an enigma to me. I knew he was smart and clever boy, but what kind of man would he grow up be? With this question, I realized I was not only responsible for raising a strong woman, but also a strong and sensitive man. Only, I didn't have the faintest idea what a "sensitive" man would look like. My husband and brother are both strong, sensitive, kind, and loving men, but how did they get like that? How would I help my son grow into a man who would be kind, caring, strong, protective, supportive, and who I would be proud to call my son?

We have learned a lot as parents the last seven years. Here are some of the things I think worth noting.

It's Never Too Early

It is never too early to start teaching our children, and teaching never stops. Children come into the world without a training manual and with few skills for survival, so everything is taught and learned. A study published by University of California, Riverside, (3) shows that a child's personality is well established by the age of five. Five years isn't much time, so don't wait for what you believe will be the "right" moment.

Thomas is a rambunctious child full of energy and an unflinching love for his sister. They are inseparable. When he was just old enough to walk, he walked up to Kate, pulled her to the ground, and sat on her while they watched television together. She was a kind soul to him; I told him if he were my little brother, I'd have decked him. When they were little, as parents, we let our children lead us in what they found to be acceptable behavior, to a limit. When we heard the words "stop it," "no," "quit it," or screeching, we would step in and remove the offending party, usually Thomas.



We continue this now that they are older by bringing them both in for questioning. We find that sometimes the one raising a fuss is angry because of retaliation for their previous wrongdoing. We teach both children that "no means no" and that it is never acceptable to violate the wishes of another person, even your sibling.

Be Consistent in All Things

In addition, we hold both children, regardless of age and gender, accountable in all disagreements. It is our hope that as they grow up, they will expect and provide equal treatment from those outside our family unit.

We learned that the preschool they went to did not permit the use of the word "stupid." It was considered a "bad" word. What a great idea! So, we decided no name calling in our house. It was surprising how easy that can be if you're just willing to pay attention to your children and intercede with firm verbal correction.

Once Thomas entered elementary school, though, it was a rocky start. One day he used a phrase that implied that being a girl was somehow less than ideal. I caught him in the middle of it, and I asked him what he meant by the comment. I let him puzzle out for himself what it was he was saying and what the implications of that kind of hurtful language meant in the grand scheme of things. Since that one incident, we have never witnessed that kind of degrading talk in our home.

Communication is Key

Thomas has a spectacular temper, which he got from me. He also had a

strong sense of “right” and “wrong” with no space in between. He would become so angry that violence seemed imminent at times. If a child did something he did not like, he would push his way through and make it right. Once in preschool, a child took a toy from a girl, and Thomas pushed the first child back with his round little belly until the toy was returned. I started to fear I was raising an accidental bully. It was then that I realized we needed a language intervention.

Often times we hear people tell their children “use your words,” but emotions aren’t easily put into words, even for articulate adults. When Thomas got angry, we brought him into our space and held him quietly for a while, to help him to calm himself. Then we would gently ask him questions about how he felt. We provided him with the words he needed to help express the differences between anger and frustration and among the other emotions he felt. We felt we had achieved success the day his teacher asked us to come in because our son told her in class that he was so angry he wanted to rip her arms off and beat her with them. Honestly, I laughed when she told me, and I explained to her what a victory that was. I understood her concern, and I brought our meeting thoughts back to Thomas. I did tell him how proud I was that he used his words so well. I still think this was a crowning achievement for a 4-year-old.

Let Them Be Who They Are

Help your children be true to themselves and love them for who they are, not what you wanted them to be.

We never discouraged either of our children from ever liking or doing something because it was a “boy” or “girl” thing. All things are “Kate” and “Thomas” things, if they choose them. Kate dances and Thomas does not, although I have often tried to get him to give it a shot. He loves to watch her dance, and he attends every recital with great anticipation. He’s just not interested himself.

When Thomas was in preschool, he had an “About Myself” sheet to complete. For the “What do you want to be when you grow up?” question, he answered, “A grandma.” Thomas did play dress-up with Kate, and like most collections, our dress-ups were girl clothing, so he was usually the ladybug in the garden. It was a Halloween costume that they both grew into and, sadly, out of. He continues to love ladybugs, and I still buy him ladybug ornaments or stickers. He loves them. They are not “girl” bugs; they are “Thomas’ bugs.” Now he has found Jedi and the Avengers, so they both carry lightsabers and run action sequences, so it’s all relative.

Never Miss Saying “I Love You”

You cannot show your children too much affection. Never pass up an opportunity to say “I love you” and get a hug and kiss.

The first thing new parents (and grandparents and most other human beings) want to do is touch a newborn child. Skin-to-skin contact has been shown to improve the outcomes of premature babies, as well as improving the general health and well-being of all babies and their mothers (4). Research that involved orphaned children who were raised in the absence of regular and meaningful human contact, showed that the children tended to develop mental illnesses and maladaptive behaviors. Coupled with personality set by the age of five years, we see that as parents we must fill all our moments with loving interactions, even if those interactions include educating through a bad situation.

This is not to say that you should “spoil” a child, which occurs through overindulging bad behaviors and allowing the child to be the decision maker without parental limits in place. As a parent, you are the grown up who makes the hard decisions that your child is not equipped to make by themselves, like eating vegetables or not staying up until 2 a.m. You are not being a mean parent for saying “no.” You are being responsible and showing your child that being responsible is what you expect from them. There is a difference between overindulgent and being a loving parent who helps their children to understand the realities of the world.

You can never give too many hugs and kisses and words of encouragement to your children, even when you are not able to provide them with every game system imaginable or toy they come across in a store.

Our bedtime routine involves getting ready for bed at 7 p.m. and then quietly reading, playing, or otherwise winding down until lights out at 9 p.m. During that two-hour window, Andrew and I check on the room to make sure things are going well and get hugs and kisses. Sometimes we hang out and chat about things that happened during the day that didn’t come up in other conversations, or we just goof off. Each and every time we go back, we give hugs and kisses. We probably give three rounds or more, but regardless of the number of times we do, at 9 p.m., Thomas and Kate will come out and ask, “Are you going to kiss us goodnight?” I feel you can never have too many hugs and kisses because one day they’ll stop, so I stockpile them while they’re in abundance.

Teachable Moments in Gaming

Gaming is an extension of life, one that can be used for teachable moments.

Our children are now old enough for more complex interactions. We have played video games and board games with them for many years, but since

Kate was about nine, we started introducing her to role-playing games and brought Thomas along for whatever part of the game was attractive to him.

At first he sat on my lap, rolled my dice and his, although he rarely interacted with his character. He did all the math on the table when possible, except for Kate's math since she did her own. Now that they both show interest in playing, my husband asked them what setting they thought they'd like to play, and the resounding answer was "Avatar, The Legend of Korra," which we watch together as a family on Saturday mornings. The children helped in planning where the game would be set and what kind of characters they would play. We set no limits on their choices, and they chose their ages and what kind of relevant background things they wanted. Some of their choices were surprising, and others were touching. Their decisions showed that our efforts as parents were working. At first they decided not to be related to one another—Thomas originally was an "orphan" of sorts—but he decided that his family was too important to him and that imagining a life without them wasn't desirable, even in a make-believe setting.

Our time role-playing allowed us enormous opportunities to explore difficult conversations with one another without the pain of real experiences. We discussed frightening things like kidnapping (which was the mystery we had to solve), bullying, and gender equality. The first time Andrew portrayed one of the bully bad kids and said something hurtful in character to Thomas, he cried. We had been so careful to keep our interactions positive that it truly came as a shock. The game dissolved quickly into a family discussion about why we don't talk to other people in that way and how painful it is to experience it. Once he understood that "Daddy" wasn't being mean to him, but that the "Bully" was being mean to his character, it allowed us the opportunity as players to learn a little verbal self-defense. I am incredibly proud to say that I taught my son to talk smack at the gaming table. I am certain that he will be able to hold his own if the situation ever called for it.

Pay Attention to Yourself

As a parent, you get to be a role model for your children, but remember you are always "on stage."

Raising conscientious sons does not require special training or behaviors; it requires attention to all people and being a role model of the behaviors you desire in your children. With each passing generation, we see the things in parents' generation that we liked and the things we didn't. Hopefully we can choose to only repeat those behaviors that promote loving, understanding, and acceptance. The most important piece of advice I have is that you can always take a timeout when you've made a bad decision and explain it to your children. They will one day figure out

on their own that you are not perfect. When you acknowledge that no one is perfect and teach them how to make amends for bad decisions or behaviors, you show them that it is okay to be imperfect and how to be responsible for themselves.

Recently, during a live interview that Thomas and I watched remotely, Andrew mentioned my work with Gender Role Playing and briefly explained what we do. Thomas took it all in and asked me in a whisper, "Do you really do all that, Mommy?" His unveiled admiration in that moment was all I needed to know that I was doing the right thing for him, his sister, and the community of gamers I serve.

Our children watch our every movement, and they take it all in, they say the words we thought we said in private, and they mimic the behaviors and actions they've witnessed us doing, even when we thought we were alone. Raising a conscientious child simply means being a conscientious adult.

The sources listed are just starting places for further investigation on the part of the reader. I hope they help you to find deeper understanding of the human condition.

1. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ruled-by-birth-order/?page=1>
2. <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn12102-firstborn-children-are-the-cleverest.html>
3. <http://spp.sagepub.com/content/1/4/327.short>
4. <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/806325>

Monica Marlowe is the 2015 Paizo RPG Superstar. Winning the contest launched her freelance game-designing career. Her winning adventure, "Down the Blighted Path," is available through Paizo. She's publishing additional gaming materials under Marlowe House and through third-party publishers. Monica is also active in the ongoing education in gender, sexual, and racial equality in the gaming community. Driven by a desire to see a more diverse gaming community, Monica has joined the Know Direction network to help encourage all gamers, veteran and new, to find their voices. Monica lives in southwest Ohio with her husband, Andrew, and two children, Kate and Thomas.



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Raising Gaming Girls

Rachel Ventura

I've been a gamer since I was a young child, but not because my parents were gamers; instead, it was my older brother, Reg McReynolds, who got me into gaming. So when I was asked to write on the subject of raising gaming girls in the gaming era, I thought it was a wonderful topic, as not only can I speak from personal experience as a child gamer, but also because I am a mother of twin girls.

Now, there are times when being a mother and a gamer don't always go hand-in-hand. Conventions can be stressful, small pieces can end up in mouths, fragile minis find their way to the floor, and pages get ripped or spit on. But through all the small inconveniences, the joy of sharing this hobby and lifestyle very much outweighs the negative.

Some of my children's earliest memories include cosplay, board games, RPG accessories, storytelling, and more. I was convinced and dedicated to the idea that having children would not keep me from enjoying my hobbies.

So, how did I incorporate our hobbies into their earliest memories? Well, for example, when the girls were only babies, I remember sitting them on our laps while we played *Settlers of Catan*. Although we made sure they didn't get their hands on the small pieces, we did allow them to play with the commodity flip books. They were mesmerized by the colors and motion of the pages; to them it was no different from one of their baby books. Plus, it kept us all equally entertained. It was, at that time, we truly realized how easy it would be to raise gamer girls.

So how does one go about raising a mini-gamer? The best advice I can give is to take baby steps toward integrating everything while still sticking to smart parenting. For example, I followed the rule of thumb of not letting my children watch TV before the age of two, so we took these first few years to introduce them to fantasy books. Although we had plenty of baby books, which we read to them, we also spent twenty minutes at night reading them the Harry Potter books. It was a nice re-read for myself and my husband, and it accomplished the parenting task of reading to our children every night. We continued this for years (reading only a little each night), and it began opening their minds to magic and monsters. Obviously, in the very beginning, they didn't understand everything or anything we read, but it eventually started to create a fantasy world for our youngsters.

So when they were twenty months old, we decided to take a trip to

Universal Theme Parks to enjoy the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The girls, who had never seen the movie, still very much loved the park from all the stories we had read them. Their happy faces and wide eyes so adequately described their amazement and joy at this world of magic. Plus, they loved the Butterbeer. But we didn't stop there. There is an advantage to having girls when it comes to getting them interested in fantasy. That advantage is called "Disney Princesses." There is no bigger advocate for imagination and fantasy for girls than the Disney princess movies. They have magic, magical creatures, magical items, transformations, spell casting, sorcery, enchantment, familiars, combat, intrigue, castles, and dungeons. There are so many great scenarios and lessons you can use from the princess movies, as well as other fantasy movies.

When my twins turned five, they wanted to have a princess party. I could have stuck to the traditional Disney decor, but with princesses comes castles, so I set up a 10'x10' play castle and put out all the dress-up stuff we could muster (by then we had quite a lot—princess dresses, pirate stuff, knights, fairies, and more), and I let the kids just play pretend. They could run around, dress up, swordfight, and storm the castle. In the past, the kids have also had Harry Potter parties that were equally just as fun, but those didn't encourage the kids to use their imagination as much.

Disney and Harry Potter only scratch the surface, though. There are several other books and movies we have introduced to our girls over the years as well. Here are some movies that I feel have really brought out my girls' imagination: *Anastasia*, *Black Cauldron*, *Flight of Dragons*, *How to Train your Dragon*, *Labyrinth*, *Peter Pan*, *Hook*, *The Gruffalo*, *The Guardians of Ga'hoole*, *The Princess Bride*, *The Last Unicorn*, *Lord of the Rings* (for younger children, the first half of the first movie is a good start), *The Hobbit* (start with the cartoon version first, perhaps), *The Goonies* (for older kids), and *Legend*. This is just a small selection of movies. There are many more I hope to introduce to my kids as they age. One movie that stays in my memory from childhood is *Red Sonja*. Although this movie might not have taken home awards, it portrayed a strong female warrior as she battles her way through her adventure. My girls are still a little young for this one, but it is on the list for the future.

So, you might be asking yourself what movies and books have to do with gaming. I really feel that by engaging the imagination, you set the stage for gaming. After all, what is gaming but an escape from what is real, a competition using your strengths, a cooperative adventure, etc.? Books and movies allow us to not only accept fantasy realms, but also cause us to desire them and imagine ourselves in them.

Before the girls were truly old enough to game, I would run quick adventures, mostly while driving in the car. I've had the pleasure of

driving across country now several times with my girls, so I have gotten very good at this type of game. To run a quick adventure for a child who is two or above, you start out by asking them what they would bring on an adventure. When the girls were just starting out, we would each name three items, but as they have gotten older, we each choose up to ten or even twenty. I usually go first to help set the scene. There are two main ways to start. The first way is to set a quick scene for your kids and then ask what they want to bring and then create the story from there. The second way (which can be a bit crazier) is to simply state, "We are going on an adventure. What are you bringing?" Then create an adventure based on the items they have with them. One time they told me they were bringing a sword, a helicopter, and a pony. As I always try to work the items into the story, this particular story proved pretty interesting.

Once they have chosen their items, we begin. From here, I tell them a story that includes all the selected items. Children love stories, and they love to *be in* stories. I generally start out with, "Once upon a time there was a Princess Evie and a Princess Lily..." They get very excited when I talk about the items they have brought with them on the adventure. Sometimes I would pause and say things like, "If only we had brought something to climb up..." And, of course, this would cue one of them to say, "I have rope!" This is great training for their deduction and reasoning skills. As they have gotten older, I have shared the storytelling. First, I let them tell a portion of what happened in the story, but now they can pretty much go from start to stop all on their own. Exercises like these are the beginning of role-playing. Add some dice and a character sheet, and they are ready to go!

Other car games like *20 Questions*, *Eye Spy*, and riddles are not only fun to play, but the games further improve their reasoning skills. They are quick games that help pass the time and train the brain to think like a gamer.

Before I discuss board games, I want to make a quick comment about dice games. If your youngsters do not put dice or other small pieces into their mouth, starting out with dice games is perfect. *Pass the Pigs* is a fantastic game to play with children. We especially enjoy the party version that has cards featuring the position the pigs need to be in. *Dino Hunt Dice* is a spinoff of *Zombie Dice*, and this game teaches strategy and risk. We even will play *Yatzee* with the kids. When we first started, we just focused on the top section. If your child likes building or stacking, try *Animal Upon Animal*.

My children's first official "gamer" card game was a Kickstarter I backed called *Goblins Drool, Fairies Rule*. This is a rhyming card game that my girls really enjoy. I still have to help read the fairy and goblin names to them, but they are learning and memorizing every time we play. The game can be cooperative or competitive, and it has amazing fantasy artwork on each

card. The game also has a few layers that the girls have to think about each time they play a card. As their reading skills improve, card games like this will become easier to play; for younger children, however, the inability to read remains a barrier that must be overcome.

Another great card game is *Fairy Mischief*. Players battle over a gem by using their deck to trump one another in a three-card duel. The gems are determined randomly, and the winner must collect all colors. Duplicate colors and the black gem allow for additional rules that make the game more interesting. As my children have aged, they have found that they really enjoy *Dungeon Busters*. This card game allows bluffing and negotiating while adding a single layer of strategy. In both these games, the shinning plastic gems are a huge draw to keep the girls' attention. A unique but more difficult card game that makes a nice transition into roleplaying games is *Adapt*. Each player must upgrade their guppy into a fish with special abilities and attack dice. Then the attack must meet or exceed the survival (armor class) of the fish to do damage. There is a set of dice that is used to attack as well as track stats. I suggest this game for 7-9 year olds who are ready to begin roleplaying.

In terms of board games, probably the biggest draw to my children wanting to play board games is because they saw me play them. Sometimes the kids would just sit at the table while we played. Sometimes we would let them play with side pieces or help by pulling the next card or tile down. Children love to be included. These small steps go a long way.

Once we entered the world of board games, I certainly had to be cautious about small pieces, but more importantly was finding games that were appropriate to their mental age. I was heartbroken after my first search through games for toddlers when I realized many of them weren't really so much "games" as they were toys. Finding a fun game that is easy for young ones to play is a challenge in itself, but we have located a few gems. So like many others, we started off with *Candyland* and *Shoots and Ladders* (definitely not my favorite games), and we quickly widened the search. When searching for a game, note that the age suggestion on some games can be taken lightly, depending on your children's mental maturity and how the game is played. I have found some games listed for ages 7+ have been games my girls could play at age four or five with an adult's help in reading and explaining certain aspects of the game to them. If you plan to play as a team with another adult, some of these games can be played even earlier. Also, look for games that can be adjusted to be simpler. Is there one component of the game that you can leave out that makes things easier to understand? If so, make that change, and then add in the other rules once the children have the basics.

At our daughters' age, the biggest hurdle we have faced is not so much what game to play but the aspect of winning and losing. Since I have twins,

there isn't the possibility that I can just let my child win. Which one should I let win? Or do we all take turns winning? It really poses a problem. So instead, I try to encourage each of them to use their strengths. I offer aid and instruction where needed, but in the end, one of them usually pulls ahead to truly win (and sometimes I do, too) because each uses the advantage she had. As exciting as winning is, losing is hard for a child; sometimes it is hard for an adult, too, but children really struggle with the idea of loss. It is something that must be taught and discussed, so we practice the basics of being a gracious winner, as well as how to avoid being a sore loser. The important lesson of not just having fun but also learning from our loss is invaluable. Some days are better than others, but I am glad we are tackling this problem at age five and not fifteen.

Here is a list of board games my daughters have enjoyed at this age: *Carcassonne*, *Castle Panic*, *Eye Spy It*, *Kings of Tokyo*, *My Little Pony Monopoly*, *My Little Pony Rainbow Magic*, *Oh Gnome You Don't*, *Race to Treasure*, *Sequence*, *Ticket to Ride*, and *Trouble*. A friend of mine recently suggested *Doodle Dice*, but we have yet to check that one out.

There are other games you can play with your children, too—anywhere and anytime. Games like *Tic Tac Toe*, the dots game, and/or *Hangman*. Games like these are important, too, because they show spontaneity and encourage creative ways to pass the time while waiting for things like food at a restaurant.

My children are no strangers to the gaming world since I work in the industry, and they are surrounded by accessories like dice, minis, buttons, stickers, coloring books, plushies, and more. They even wear *Swords & Wizardry* shirts for nightgowns, and they know that Orcus is the bad guy! But the reason they have these memories is because I've incorporated them into their lives at every chance. The year they were born, I brought home the giant foam dice from Gen Con for them to roll around and play with. I crocheted Cthulhu stuffed animals for them while I was pregnant. There was never a question as to whether I would have gamer children because they don't know any other way of life.

We recently had a playdate, and my daughter Lily said, "Mom, my friend doesn't know how to pretend!" My advice to Lily was she had to show her. It saddens me that some kids are sheltered from using their imagination, but the great news is, it's never too late!

When I backed the *Reaper* Kickstarter, it was truly for my own collection, but when the box was delivered, it was my girls who helped me unwrap all the figures and sort them. They were the ones who were interested in painting them and playing with them. So when Kickstarters like *Dwarven Forge* and *Legendary Realms* ran, I was quick to back them, too, so that my girls had something to use the miniatures with. We don't buy play house

or even with doll houses in this home; we build castles!

My girls attended Paizo Con, their first gaming convention, in 2013 in Redmond, Washington. They absolutely loved painting the free miniatures, and the Reaper ladies were so kind and patient with them. They also had the pleasure of playing in Christina Stiles's *Faery's Tale* game for children. They were stoked that they received their own dice and that their characters had magical powers. They have been to several more Paizo Cons since then and enjoy collecting badge ribbons and buttons. They get excited about signing up for games now, playing in the delve, and testing out new card games like *Pathfinder Adventure Card Game* or *Pathfinder Minchkin*. Their painting skills have improved considerably. Their favorite roleplaying opportunity is playing the goblins in the *We Be Goblins* series.

You'll also notice that conventions are becoming more and more popular for families and children. The main drawback to taking your children to gaming conventions is the time factor. Although it is perfectly acceptable for me to game for 48 hours straight, that isn't true of my children. Be fair to your child when considering taking them with you to conventions. Is someone going to be able to take time away from the con for meal time, nap time, time out, and/or bed time? If the answer is no, then you should probably consider waiting until they are older or bringing along someone who can focus more attention on the needs of your children.

Some alternatives to the big cons though are things like game days or local game stores. My girls attended Gamerati's game day in 2014 where they were able to play some games, as well as hang out in the Lego section. It was a one-day event, and when they were tuckered out, we left and went home. Our local game store, Game Wizard and Blue Sky Hobbies, has open gaming most days and many games to borrow. Check in with your local game store to see what activities they offer. Another place I have found gaming fun is through www.meetup.com. You can even search for kid gaming groups on there.

When game mastering for children, it is important to keep things simple and keep them engaged. Having the children draw trees on the map or dungeon walls is an easy way to include them. Using tactile items like minis and terrain help keep their focus. Funny voices and being animated help tremendously as well. Using pre-generated characters that they can edit will help speed up the game process. Make sure you allow them to change the name, gender, weapon, and equipment so the character resonates more with their idea. Providing drawing or doodle paper is a good idea, too.

The next natural step in the gaming world for me was LARPing and Cosplay. Where better to do that than Ren Faire? These festivals are popping up all over the United States. I've taken my girls quite a few times, and each time we dress up as something different. Pirates, Fairies, Steampunk, Gnomes, and of course, Renaissance—the possibilities really

are endless. Where better to pretend you are in another time in history than the place where eating turkey legs and bread bowls while carrying wooden swords and shields is the norm? For a child this can be a place of magic and wonder. I'll never forget the first time they saw the magical creature puppets move or the performers who juggled fire. After a long exhausting day at the festival, the girls returned home with ideas of make believe and adventure. For days afterward they pretended to sword fight, joust, be fairies, and more.

Another festival the girls have really enjoyed is the Fairy Festival. Of course, we all dressed up like fairies, but they also learned about what it means to be a fairy and how to use magic appropriately. They got to make fairy wands, and they learned about fairy rings. This event was put on by a local park, and they tied the entire event to treating the Earth with love and taking care of plants. We even got to take home little plants to grow at home. So even in some of your other hobbies or activities, you can find ways to introduce the legends found in gaming. When gardening, we take time to discuss the bees and butterflies helping just as much as the fairies and gnomes!

Each year we also try to attend the Scottish Festival in Chicago, since this is my heritage. It is another great opportunity to see sword fighting, as well as the Highland Games. Festivals like this give us the perfect excuse to drag out the kilts and renaissance garb, dress up, and really get into the magic of it all. This is just another example of finding something slightly outside the norm of the gaming world and tying it back to the idea of make believe and fun. Finding unique festivals and gaming opportunities may be easier in larger cities, but even small towns often will host Star Wars Day at the local library or gaming events at your child's school. The important thing is to keep your eyes open for them.

Furthermore, what would cosplay be without some pony action? *My Little Ponies* has become the new gamers litmus test, it seems (well, between that and *Doctor Who*). Although I once prided myself on the fact the girls watched exclusively educational TV programming for years, this was their first truly entertaining TV show. Pinky Pie drives me nuts, but the lessons of friendship and honesty make up for it. Still, I was surprised to see how much cool fantasy and magic were involved in the show. *MLP* definitely has come a long way since I was a child.

My husband has recently been introducing the girls to the world of superheroes. At the age of four, we allowed them to start watching cartoons such as the *Justice League*, *Batman*, and *Star Wars Clone Wars*. Eventually, I plan to introduce them to *Transformers*, *Thundercats*, and, of course, the Marvel movies. We are still a few years away from the *Avengers*.

But superheroes have their place in the gaming world, and girls can get

excited about them just as much as boys. First of all, there's a PRINCESS! Diana, also known as Wonder Woman, has quickly become my girls' new favorite idol. Even though they are huge fans of female characters, they surprisingly like the male ones, too. It helps that their father gets excited about watching the show with them and can answer any questions they may have. I think showing involvement can go a long way toward whether a child has a connection to something or not. The girls really enjoy the TV show *Supergirl* and DC's *Super Hero Girls*. For their seventh birthday, they requested a superhero birthday party. We asked their friends to dress up in their favorite superhero costume, and we had a great turn out from both their male and female friends, who all gifted action heroes to my children.

In short, if you aren't incorporating your hobbies and games into your children's lives, why not? There is so much you can do from the little things to the big. On May 4th, celebrate *Star Wars* day. Read to them each night from your favorite fantasy book before going to bed. Buy some *Lord of the Rings* Legos and start building. Paint some minis—the beholder looks amazing in neon green and hot pink.

Whatever, you do, have fun. Show your child what the world of imagination can open up and how gaming is just a small part of that. Remember to teach the rules of being fair and a good sport but that having fun is always more important than winning. With each step along the way, show them a little more strategy, reasoning, deduction, and adventure.

May the force be with you!

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She started gaming at the age of six when her older brother needed a rogue elf to play in his dungeon. Although her experience at that point mostly involved her searching for shinies, her gaming style did evolve from tabletop to LARPing to card games. Now a mother of twins, strategy and Euro games are much more her style. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics, which she used in her work as an actuary for a few years before moving into marketing. She is a woman of many talents, from training wolves for movies to teaching scrapbooking at GenCon for SPA events. She now resides in Washington State with her twin daughters and dog.

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