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YA 101
What Every YA Librarian
Needs to Know

GAMING
FOR LIBRARIANS *An Introduction*

When trying to figure out how to make libraries more attractive to teens, young adult librarians might ask themselves: "What are teens doing when they aren't at the library?" Part of the answer is likely to be that they're playing games.

I don't mean bridge, **Monopoly**, or **Trivial Pursuit**. The games that teens are playing are far geekier, more imaginative and interesting, and harder to find. Whether it be computer and video games or role-playing and collectible card games, teens are playing and libraries are missing out. Because most librarians are not part of the gaming culture, this article is an introduction, opening a window to that world so that libraries can offer its delights to teens.

For four days in June 2004, I spent my time at Origins, a large gaming convention run by the Game Manufacturer's Association of America (GAMA), playing games with teens and talking to them. Held every summer in Columbus, Ohio, this convention attracts teens from as far away as California and Connecticut. While spending the weekend participating in some of their favorite activities, teens feel part of something larger and more accepting than they might find at home. One day they play a game in which they get to be a vampire, and the next day they have an epic battle with military miniatures.

Games come in many different types, including computer and video games; role-playing games; miniatures; card games with collectible or non-collectible cards; and board games.

✦ Computer and Video Games ✦

Comprising the broadest division of gaming, computer and video games require a device with which to play the game—either a computer or a console. Currently the most popular consoles are the XBox, the Sony PlayStation 2 (PS2), the Nintendo GameCube, and the Nintendo Game Boy Advance (GBA). The popularity of a system can change often, depending on how many games have been released for that system and how good they are.

Video games come in these major genres: action, adventure, driving, puzzle, RPG (role-playing game), simulations, sports, and strategy. In an action video game, the player's goals involve using speed or power to reach the objectives. Fighting games such as **Mortal Combat** or movie tie-ins such as **Spiderman 2** fit the action genre. The adventure genre includes games such as **Zelda**; one plays a character who gains abilities through finding items and completing quests. In driving video games, players race each other to a finish line, often facing obstacles along the racecourse or completing objectives that might involve demolition derbies with other players, as in **Burnout 3: Takedown**. [*Editor's Note: See separate article about a Nintendo driving game tournament on page 450.*] Puzzle games offer the challenge of solving a puzzle that
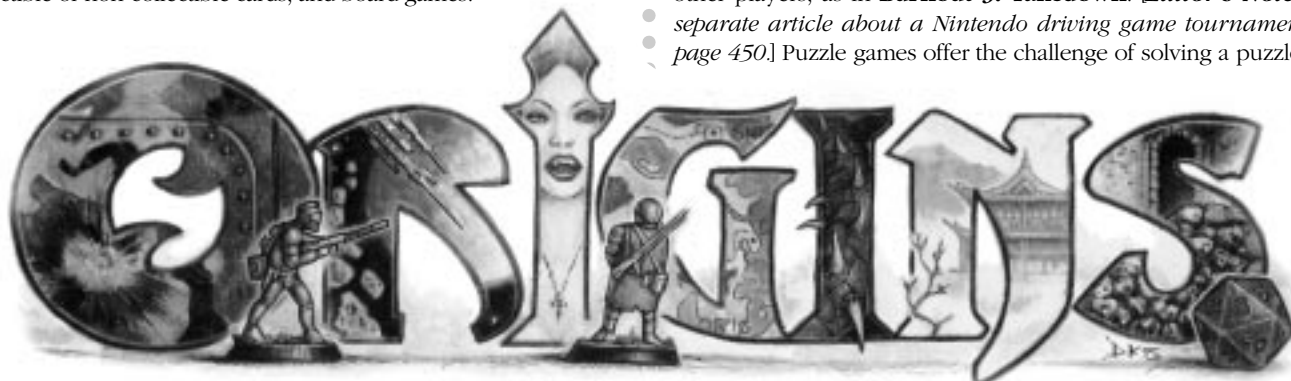
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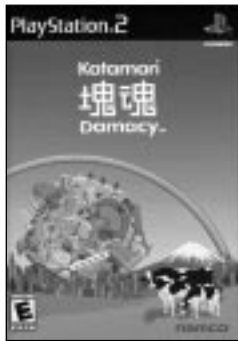
might involve careful placement of pieces, as in the classic **Tetris**; or collecting items, as in the unique Japanese game, **Katamari Damacy**.

Computer role-playing games are similar to adventure games because the goal is to complete a task or quest; however, characters gain abilities through experience, actually changing through those experiences. These RPGs often offer the opportunity to play online in the form of MMORPGs—massive multiplayer online role-playing games—with as many people as the player wants.

Simulation games such as **The Sims** offer players the opportunity to set up situations for their creations and see how they react to those situations—or players might direct their creations' actions. War games can fall in either the simulation or strategy category. Some sports games are similar to simulation games in that players can recreate their favorite sports teams. Games such as **ESPN NFL 2K5** also let players create a "dream team" of their favorite football players.

✦ Role-playing Games ✦

In a non-electronic role-playing game, players use different personas, called characters, who are specifically designed to interact in a world defined by the game and the person who is moderating or running it—the game or dungeon master. Conflicts within the game are usually resolved by rolling dice, using playing card values, or considering the character's statistics alone. The world in which the game is played is usually defined by the book containing the rules, with additions by the game master.

Dungeon & Dragons (**D&D**), the first truly popular role-playing game, has gone through several major rule revisions. (The first role-playing game was **Chainmail**, a set of wargame rules by Gary Gygax, whose combat system spawned **Dungeons & Dragons**.) Its current version uses a D20 combat system in which a twenty-sided die resolves conflicts and decides statistics. This open-source D20 system can be licensed inexpensively to create **D&D** tie-ins or other games. [***Editor's Note:*** *See separate article about* ***Dungeons & Dragons*** *on page 454.*]

✦ Miniature Games ✦

Generally based on a battle for contested territory, miniature games come in three varieties. Metal miniatures are painted by the players, with values assigned by a rulebook; pre-painted "clicks" contain statistics on a plastic wheel attached to the figure's bottom that turns as those statistics change; and cardboard disks have abbreviated statistics printed on the edge. Miniature games can be played in a historical, fantasy, or science fiction setting.

What Types of Games Are Teens Playing?

*CCGs: collectible card games **TCG: trading card games

board games, miniatures, role-playing games, computer games, console video games, card games, *CCGs and **TCGs

This chart illustrates the breakdown of what types of games are played by the forty-eight teens in my survey at the Origins convention; numbers indicate how many teens play each type of game. Only one did not play any games. Thirty-nine said that they use their local library for activities including borrowing books and music CDs, reading magazines, using computers and Internet access, school work, and playing computer games. Almost every teen with whom I spoke indicated that some sort of game support, either a space to play or games to borrow, would get them into the library more frequently. In some cases, gaming options would bring teens who don't ever use the library into the building.

At Origins, I had the opportunity to play a new type of miniature game, the Constructible Strategy Game. Called **Pirates of the Spanish Main**, the game is published and designed by WizKids, who are responsible for some of the most popular clicks games. Players pop puzzle pieces of a ship from a plastic card. They put the ship together and then play out a battle for treasure over a series of small cardboard islands. The ships can then be taken apart and popped back into the cards for ease of storage and transportation.

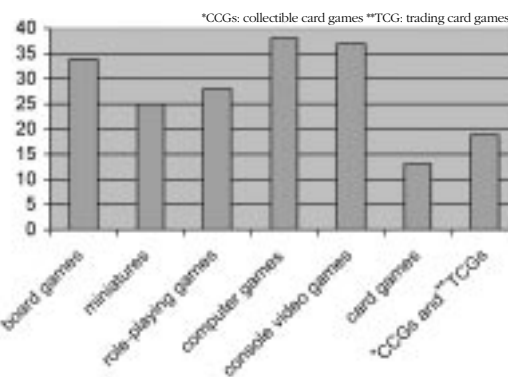### Collectible and Trading ✦ Card Games ✦

The two most well-known examples of collectible or trading card games are **Pokemon** and **Magic: the Gathering**. The player creates a customized deck of cards to play against an opponent who has done the same. Standard rules for the game can be overruled by individual cards if there is a conflict. As in miniature games, much of the strategy of collectible and trading card games comes from how well your deck is constructed to use the game rules to your advantage and overpower your opponent.

An impressive number of card games are playable straight out of the box with no customization. In **Lunch Money** by Atlas Games, players try to beat each other in schoolyard battles, with emphasis on trash-talking—name-calling and insulting your opponent's abilities—to make the game more interesting. **Fluxx** by Looney Labs has shifting goals and rules that constantly change as the game is

Apples to Apples. Out of the Box, 1999. $19.99. 0-9664517-2-4. Party Card Game.

In this word game, a green apple card with an adjective on it is placed in the center of the table. Red apple cards containing nouns are played face down from players' hands. The judge chooses which noun is best described by the adjective; the player with that red apple card wins the green apple card. Encouraging quick planning and decision-making, this great party game lets you play around with the conventional meanings of words.

Carella, C. J., and Christopher Golden. **Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Core Rulebook**. Eden Studios, 2002. 248p. $40. 1-891153-88-9. Index. Role-playing Game.

Based on the popular television series, this game allows teens to step into Buffy's world and play the role of slayers, witches, "white hats," werewolves, or vampires. Frequent quotes and pictures add to the appeal for fans of the show. As a character, Buffy exemplifies integrity and responsibility, providing a model of a strong female who cares for her family, her friends, and the world at large. The game lets teens explore that model. It also captures everything that appeals to me as a huge fan of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer *show, including interpersonal relationships and witty banter.*

Leaton, Scott. **Fairy Meat**. Kenzer and Company, 2000. 32p. $24.88 pb. 6p. paperboard insert game pieces. Miniatures Game.

*Players amass a small band of fairies whose goal is to find, kill, and eat other fairies. Conflicts are resolved using playing cards, and movement of miniatures is measured with a standard ruler. Appropriate for an older teen audience, **Fairy Meat** is another game in which planning and decision-making is key. Its humor also encourages reading for pleasure. Different from most miniature games in presentation and play, the game appeals to those who don't normally play miniatures. I enjoy the way that fairies are presented as vicious, vapid creatures who prefer fighting to flitting.*

Ranallo, Richard, and Scott Leaton. **Starchildren: Velvet Generation**. XIG Games, 2002. 125p. $24.95. 0-9721538-0-2. Index. Role-playing Game.

*When aliens received Earth's radio transmissions, they were transfixed. Unfortunately by the time they arrive, the 1970s glam rock world that they expected has been completely altered. It has become a police state where rock music is outlawed. Players can create humans or aliens who join together in the fight for freedom of expression. **Starchildren**'s entire premise encourages creative activities, especially music. It also builds awareness of equality and social justice as characters make a difference in their society. Not a typical fantasy or science fiction role-playing game, **Starchildren** stands out through its focus on the underground nature of rock and roll and the use of playing cards rather than dice for conflict resolution.*

played. Looney Labs also produces cards that players use for writing new goals or rules to make each game unique to its players. These cards have the same backs and borders as the normal game cards, but the main section is left blank for the players to add their own text.

✦ Board Games ✦

Board games come in an impressive array of styles and subjects. They range from **Settlers of Catan** by Mayfair Games, about resource trading and city building, to **Monkeys on the Moon** by Eight Foot Llama, in which a player's goal is to send happy civilized monkeys from the moon back to earth. Along with role-playing games, board games were among the first in the subculture of gaming that sprang from the strategy wargames of the '60s and '70s. Although board games such as **Monopoly** and **Cranium** are enjoyed by teens, the games played at conventions such as Origins place heavier stress on strategy; one game can take hours to complete. **Risk** is an example of a traditional board game that still enjoys great popularity. Its recent new versions include **Risk 2210 A.D.**, with contested territory in outer space as well as on Earth.

✦ Games as Tie-ins ✦

One thing that works for teens is that many types of games are tied in to some of their favorite franchises. For example, Buffy the Vampire Slayer from the television show has her own video games, board game, collectible card game, and role-playing game. Angel, a character originating in the *Buffy* show who spun off into his own show, also gets his own role-playing game—but no other gaming tie-ins at this point. The creepy and perennially popular Chthulu horror stories by H. P. Lovecraft and others have spawned their own role-playing and card games. WizKids produces Marvel and DC Comics **HeroClix** to tie in with favorite comic book characters. Their Cat Woman miniature (referred to as a mini) looks just like the recent movie version of that character. They also produce **Indy HeroClix** based on independent comic book characters such as Hellboy and Witchblade.

✦ Why Have Games in the Library? ✦

Recently I sat in the back of my library school class and heard people lament the fact that teens are playing video games and not reading. They are missing the point. Gaming often requires reading, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Through gaming, teens are learning in a way that is unfamiliar to most librarians. We penalize teens by not supporting their interest in gaming. Our

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library teen collections must include books that cover the activities that teens care about. Such books will get them reading—if that's our highest goal. We also must consider how to offer the games themselves in the library—what decisions we can make in our collection policies and what activities we can plan to support and encourage gaming.

Of the forty-eight teens with whom I spoke at Origins, only four thought that having games at the library was a bad idea. The other forty-four not only thought that games were a great idea but also observed that having games available would get them into the library more often. Teens are looking for a place to be comfortable with their friends, a place without the material pressures of the mall where they can be themselves while participating in their favorite activities. For many teens, gaming is a top choice.

✦ Bringing Games into the Library ✦

How do you get games into your library? Adding role-playing game books and video game guides to your teen collection is one easy way to start. Your library also can be a place for teens to play their card, board, miniature, and role-playing games. Offering a function room for tournaments or open play is a way to attract teens who have no other place to play except commercial establishments such as coffee shops or game stores.

Your library could also lend video games the way they circulate CDs and DVDs. You could make consoles available for playing within the library. Computer games already appear in some library children's departments but not as often in YA sections. Loading computers with some of the most popular games would certainly bring teen traffic.

The primary goal of a library's YA space is to provide information to teens, in whatever form it is packaged. By overlooking games, librarians ignore a huge segment of the teen population. We can fill teens' gaming needs with just a few simple steps. To make gaming an option in your library, begin by talking to the teens in your community to find out what games they are playing. Then see what you can do to bring those games into the library.

✦ Resources ✦

BOOKS
No library should be without these two role-playing game titles:

Player's Handbook: Core Rulebook I. **Dungeons & Dragons**, Edition 3.5. Wizards of the Coast, 2003. 320p. $29.95. 0-7869288-6-7.
This book is the most popular fantasy role-playing game title.

World of Darkness. White Wolf Publishing, 2004. 222p. 1-58846-484-9. Index.
The handbook for a horror game suitable for older teens, this title is the core around which White Wolf Publishing has recast their entire line of role-playing games.

MAGAZINES
Game Informer. $5.99/issue, $19.98/year. *http://www.gameinformer.com.*
This monthly magazine contains game reviews, articles about games, and interview and opinion features that offer insight into the video game industry.

GMR. Ziff Davis Media, Inc. $4.99/issue, $19.97/year. *http://www.1up.com.*
Coverage includes computer and video games; the magazine is closely tied to EB Games stores.

PC Gamer. The Future Network USA. $7.99/issue, $24.95/year. *http://www.pcgamer.com.*
Dedicated solely to computer games, this magazine includes a CD-ROM every month with demos of upcoming games.

Undefeated. Paizo Publishing. $6/issue, $27.95/year. *http://paizo.com.*
*Covering miniature games and collectible cards, the magazine features game reviews and articles about deck/army construction. Paizo Publishing also produces **Dungeon** and **Dragon** magazines, each dedicated to different aspects of the **Dungeons & Dragons** role-playing game.* [**Editor's Note:** For details, see resources in the **D&D** article on page 456.]

WEB SITES
http://www.thecollectiblelibrarian.com
Heather Wilson's Web site addresses librarians with information on gaming for teens in libraries and reviews of specific role-playing game titles.

http://www.gama.org
This home page of the Game Manufacturers Association, which sponsors Origins International Game Expo, is a good place to discover more information about the game industry.

http://chimera.info/daedalus/index.html
***Daedalus**, a speculative workshop e-zine, is no longer being published, but its archive contains informative articles about role-playing games and gaming theories. It also includes short, playable role-playing games.*

http://www.rpg.net
***RPGnet** is a forum site that also provides valuable reviews of all types of games.*

Heather Wilson is a recent graduate of the Masters in Library and Information Science program at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. She is currently a lending services librarian at the Bunker Hill Community College Library in Charlestown, Massachusetts. A gamer since high school, she worked with teens in her previous incarnation as the manager of a small gaming and comics bookstore in Connecticut. Her Web site at http://www.thecollectiblelibrarian.com *is dedicated to providing librarians with information and reviews of pen-and-paper role-playing games.*