

Women in Gaming by Emily Dresner-Thornber

I'm Crazy For Boy Crazy!

After taking a look at <http://www.boy crazy.com/>, the promotional web site for Decipher's newest collectible card game, I've become **Boy Crazy!** Having a possible 363 cards depicting cute boys between ages 12 to 22, sold in packs of 9, I have to admit - - shamefacedly - - that I am driven to collect them all. With pictures of cute, wide-eyed boys and vital statistics such as astrological signs and preferred type of beet, a hard-core gaming collector just can't pass up this game. I have to buy them off the net quickly, since they're going fast and I heard the kid with Down's Syndrome is going to be worth something on [eBay](http://www.eBay.com).

[Decipher, Inc.](http://www.decipher.com) has already revealed they're working on expansion packs for **Boy Crazy!**, and I can hardly wait. Hopefully, they're going to be adding action cards to make the game more interesting while teaching valuable lessons. There will be those depressingly common and low-powered Lying and Cheating cards. There will be the powerful Marathon Phone Call card, which conveys all the boy information the girls will ever need to know, and played with Lying it becomes a dangerous device. And then there's going to be the Backstabbing card, so we can learn the power of betrayal early on - - but it's a rare, so we have to buy lots and lots of boys before we can start backstabbing our friends.

Maybe, if Decipher has a sharp marketing team, they can buddy up to Wizards of the Coast and start selling **Pokémon Crazy!** cards. There's something disturbing and attractive about unleashing Ricky Martin-esque teenage bohunks out of Pokémon balls to fight random members of 'N Sync in a stadium, using the power of a Pelvic Thrust card to break the empty career of the enemy. Beware the girl who happens to be wielding such dangerously rare cards as "Can Sing," "Can Play An Instrument," or "Isn't Shallow and Pointless." She's dangerous.

Decipher president Cindy Thornburg said, "Every heterosexual girl goes through a stage of development where she becomes aware of boys." Does this mean they're releasing a lesbian expansion for those girls who discover in their development that they're gay? **Girl Crazy!** The collectible card game for girls discovering their emerging interest in girls! We can't *discriminate* here!

I am proud that Decipher has decided to use sex to introduce girls to the wonders of roleplaying games, and are using gaming as a tool to teach young girls (ages 10 and up) that the opposite sex is just an object, all that matters is what you look like, and a girl's role in life is to get a boyfriend. What a wonderful use of the teaching

tool. I hope they introduce this into schools. I can't wait until April when *Boy Crazy!* is released in stores everywhere.

Fetch Daddy's blue fright wig. I must be handsome when I unleash my rage.

Another Objectified Marketing Scheme

For reasons that I can't quite comprehend, gaming companies like Decipher, Inc. realize they need the female quotient to prop up their bottom lines, but they make the blatant assumption that girls are *dumb*. And not normally dumb, but dumb as posts. Clearly, in their estimation, all girls think that math is hard, so they should go shopping. Why not tap into that gauzy pink, air headed mentality and make a mint on it at malls everywhere?

Has the crew over at Decipher, Inc. spent so much time hanging around at *Star Trek* conventions doling out cards sporting Ferengi that they've lost touch? Or are they so afraid of the juggernaut that is Hasbro-supported Wizards of the Coast that they're willing to bend to the lowest common denominator? What's next on the desperation and exploitation train? Porn collectible card games? Should they be appealing to that yet untouched 18-25 year old market? (Well, other than *XXXenophile*, of course - - we're talking about full 256-color with pendulating breasts and the word "nipple" written on the card somewhere.)

It's appalling and insulting. It's crass commercialism in its purest incarnation, pandering to a mindless TV-raised generation who assume girls can't think past their own puberty-induced hormones. Just imagine if warm, fuzzy, and family fun Decipher had bought FASA. We'd be having cybered, pink mini-skirt wearing trolls toting Uzis yelling about Girl Power, and reminders in new prints of *Virtual Realities* that hacking is "bad." If this is the future of gaming, I'm glad I play electric guitar.

Girls aren't dumb, and those who are buying and playing games aren't going to be suckered in by cards with boys of the names of Brandon, Mitch and Chris, even at an age as young as 10 or 11. They're looking for more substance, not less. Girls playing roleplaying games aren't Barbies with perfect breasts and heroin induced waistlines, whose focus in life is buying another bag of bath salts - - and they know it. Those girls are smart, disturbingly creative, and proud. When did the game companies forget this? Maybe they never realized it in the first place, and thus, the market stays untapped.

It Came From The Bookshelf

Some of the gaming companies didn't completely miss the point, and for that, there are real chick gamers. There are better things for a girl's imagination than collectible card games with pictures of boys whoring themselves for attention, and a good gamer usually has them in his home. The common gamer has entire bookshelves filled with games.

Put away copies of *Boy Crazy!* and their ilk. Sit kids, girlfriends, wives, or anyone in grabbing range down to play. It's worth the time spent, and they usually foster memorable first-time gaming experiences. The following games are merely suggestions or guidelines of what to pull off the shelf while burning *Boy Crazy!* in effigy. They were not chosen in any scientific, or sane, manner. Many were chosen on the merits of their cover art alone. It's all entirely subjective, possibly wrong, and

may be harmful if eaten.

Vampire: The Masquerade. With the darkness of night, beauty, angst, death, and spiffy powers, *Vampire* is the most female friendly of all the roleplaying games made today. *Vampire's* primary focus on character development, politics, and roleplaying over treasure hunting and monster killing was revolutionary when it came out, and has spawned legions of followers in both tabletop and LARP form - - not to mention the spin-off games and the mountains of supplementary material.

Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game. War, sex, politics, and family - - this is either an episode of *The Sopranos* or *Amber Diceless*. Based on the books by Roger Zelazny, it's an intense soap opera of a game, complete with strong female role models and powers spanning an entire universe. The game works on a bare framework of a system, and it involves storytelling from every member of the game, not just the game master. It is also open to infinite variants - - including the one where Corwin is really a millionaire snack food magnate with a grudge against Frito-Lay.

Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 2nd Edition. The system is quirky and the game is a little outdated, but *AD&D* is still the king of roleplaying. It smacks of familiarity, complete with dwarves, elves, and dragons, and it can be played in the old "kill the foozle at the end of the dungeon" way, or with world-spanning games of high-stakes politics, or everything in between. Heaps of modules lay ready for almost instant play. Familiar, comfortable, and fun - - like an old pair of underwear, but not.

Big Eyes Small Mouth. The system takes five minutes to learn. Simple, balanced, and *fun*, this game is a must for anyone who enjoys anime or cartoons. It's flexible enough to cover everything from *Akira* to the *Powerpuff Girls*, easy enough to learn the first time playing, and enjoyable enough to come back for more. And it only costs \$15.95 for the entire game.

Star Wars. Who *doesn't* want to fight their way through Stormtroopers while wielding the Force like a large, blunt object? Or making the Kessel run in less than 12 parsecs? The *Star Wars* universe is almost an institution, and the West End Games *D6 System* makes it easy to fight the Empire. Again, the books are going depressingly out of print, but the auction sites foster a lively RPG barter business.

Everway. On the side of the box, under the label of "Visionary Role-playing", is the line: *For ages 13 and up.* *Everway* is one of those rare games where parents who roleplay can, and should, sit down and play this game with their kids and their kid's friends. The heart of *Everway* is pure cooperative story telling and imagination, told through cards, quests, and creativity. The only problem is that the game is very hard to find, but copies can be found for auction on eBay.

But These Were Left Behind . . .

Of course, there are games that should be skipped. They're tempting, they're wild but . . . nah. They're great to collect and fun to read, but there is something just wrong with them. Deeply, intrinsically wrong. Wrong on some Biblical level. Wrong on universe distorting levels. Maybe for her *second* game . . .

Personally, I love them, but there's no accounting for taste.

Human Occupied Landfill (HoL). *HoL* needs to be played drunk, and not drunk on

something good, either. *HoL* practically screams for a bottle of Night Train or Mad Dog 20/20. Maybe it's the skills, like "Tolerate hideous amounts of bloody mutilation and still eat fast foods." Maybe it's Elvis as an example PC. Maybe it's the religious parody. And maybe it's just *HoL*, the gaming equivalent to a lobotomy with scribble art.

Macho Women With Guns. "Hey honey, let's play a game with scantily-clad bondage nuns on Harleys with leather habits and death dealing rosaries!" It's kind of like *HoL*, but with more chicks, more estrogen, and better art. (The guns are about the same size, though.) Blatantly chauvinistic and sexist, it's a great read - - but not a great first game.

Underground. Considering the most memorable detail about the setting of Underground is "Tasty Ghoul," a chain of human-flesh-selling fast-food restaurants (in the form of corpus crispies), this strange cyberpunk, post-societal collapse, superheroes meet Vietnam game is just . . . demented and bizarre. And, unfortunately, it's more of a commentary on American society than it is a roleplaying game. The early material is definitely a fun read, but it's hard to sell mildly psychotic militant pseudo-superheroes as good, clean family fun.

KULT. Remember those episodes of the *700 Club*, where Pat Robertson would extol roleplaying as akin to worshiping Satan? With *KULT*, you might think he had something there. There's a box on the front cover of *KULT 2nd Edition* which states: "We would like to add that this is not a statement about our beliefs, nor a creed which we in any way desire to impart to the reader. It is merely the setting of this role-playing game." This box did not appear in *KULT's* first edition, so one really has to wonder. Sure, it's a game of horror, but *reading* this game gives people nightmares. *Playing* this game, well, no one actually plays *KULT*.

And Those Other Game Thingies

Missing from the above list is a biggie, the universal gaming systems: *GURPS*, *CORPS*, *FUDGE*, *Rifts*, and *The Window*. They're female friendly and they're not at the same time. It depends heavily on the modules used with the system. They're very much like a "One size fits most" kind of game - - there are dozens of settings and worlds which can be plugged in like Lego blocks onto a backdrop of rules, but they might not work for everyone.

Genres such as Westerns or Supers might not work really well when introducing the game to a bunch of female players from *Boy Crazy!* age on up, but Fantasy might really do the trick. A little experimenting is in order with the system, the modules, and the players. The great thing about universal systems is that any mix of genres can be played, depending on the tastes of the players and what they enjoy, which makes roleplaying just that more creative, fun, and addictive.

Next Time

Less ranting, unless Decipher, Inc. wants to put out another cheesy card game. Time for some meat. We're going to go into gender roles in gaming. And the best, and most obvious place to start with gender roles is . . . online.

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