# Oxplore

Is Fantasy Better Than Real Life? – My Thoughts

What is real life without fiction? Throughout centuries, narratives have been told, written, sung and performed, with fantastical stories being passed down for generations. Writers and storytellers would make up their own marvellous and imaginary realms with fictional characters to share their adventures with the rest of the world. Fantasies are a way to explore one's creative interests and escape from the shackles and limitations of the reality one finds themself in; but are they better than real life?

Many people immerse themselves in all kinds of fiction, from movies, video games, novels and so much more. These artistic outlets inspire others to further explore imaginative worlds and encourage their more childish and playful behaviour. The divide between the fantasy and real worlds has even been bridged by modern businesses attempting to recreate them in their own way; places such as Disneyland and Universal Studios offer people to chance to escape their urban realities and get a more tangible experience of the fictional worlds they cherish.

Following on from this recreation of fantastical experiences, Virtual Reality is a very prominent and innovative sector of the modern gaming industry. Ernest Cline's 'Ready Player One' reflects the worlds love of fantasy by successfully exploring the growing divide between the physical world and the virtual. In a reality under siege from climate change and overpopulation, this dystopian setting continuously battles against the utopian 'OASIS' – a shared synthetic environment created to allow players to escape their real lives. Although this hyperbolic setting is established in the future, its core concepts serve as a prediction of what future life on Earth may look like in decades time if we continue this current trajectory with these prominent issues. However, the book ultimately serves to remind the reader that, whilst life inside this virtual paradise was preferable to living in the real world, a game is a game, and that reality is still the "only place where you can find true happiness […] because reality is *real*". This final message from the game's creator serves to advise the protagonist as well as the reader not to hide in the fantasy world forever, no matter how bleak or undesirable reality might be.

Continuing from this, a core problem with alternate realities is that many people can get swept up in these fictional worlds and lose track of their place in reality – although, for some, this may by their intention. Media such as online gaming and Role-Playing Games, also known as RPGs, can quickly engulf the player into becoming attached and heavily invested in their fictional roles. In some cases, gamers may end up changing their thoughts and behaviour in real life to match that of their fictional character. The concept of 'experience-taking' refers to how some players can engage in a narrative and purportedly lose their self-awareness as they adopt a character's perspective.

As referenced in the Oxplore article, gaming satisfies one of basic psychological needs to be in control. By increasing our "intrinsic motivation" to challenge ourselves further, gaming provides a safe place to explore new and interesting challenges, making the fantasy world appear much more rewarding than the realistic one left behind. Similarly, as referenced by the extract on the four different types of gamers, gaming provides the ability to express ourselves in ways not possible to in real life and to be rewarded for our unrestricted decisions made in this alternate reality. Collectively, these factors of satisfying psychological needs alongside an intrinsic motivation to challenge ourselves with new experiences creates the addictive nature of gaming, leading players to prefer the virtual and fantasy worlds over reality.

Linking to this, the ultimately freeing experience that gaming provides brings joy and a sense of escape from the real world to their players, but can also be dangerous or unhealthy if someone becomes too obsessive or invested in these personas, causing them to neglect their lives in reality.

Gaming addiction can quickly destroy a person's social life and can potentially degrade their physical health if they no longer go outside or exercise due to their non-stop commitment to their game. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that all games and similar media are inherently bad for a player, but nonetheless hold potential dangers if used incorrectly or too obsessively. The act of escapism via media such as VR can benefit a person by boosting their creativity and freeing them from certain social issues that would remain in the real world, but can alternatively be problematic if the person wishes never to return to the real world that they left behind.

Another difficult issue when discerning whether fantasy is better than reality is deciding where to draw the line between the two. Sure, fantasy could be classed as something inherently fictional or improbable, such as a made-up realm like Tolkien's Rivendell, or J.K. Rowling's Hogwarts. However, just because those places are fabricated and fictitious, they stemmed from the imaginative minds of real people and were described to the public via reality. In the same way, someone's hopes, dreams and aspirations may not tangibly exist either, but could be considered much more important than reality itself, because they fuel their ambitions and desires, despite not being 'real'. From this perspective, it would be considered wrong to simply write off the fantasy worlds as irrelevant and unconnected to real life.

Furthermore, fiction can shape culture, promote new ideas and portray alternative perspectives to the public. As a reader becomes engulf in the story they read, they become part of the fictional world they are exploring and consequently see many things in a different light than they had before. Stories can also nurture the hopes and dreams of their readers, inspiring them to pursue their desires like the protagonists they read so fondly about; meanwhile reality may only serve to dishearten them instead. The journeys and relationships portrayed in fictional accounts may sometimes be idealistic and objectively unrealistic to achieve in a modern setting, nevertheless provide a way to open a reader's mind as to the wonders of the world, or to inspire them to spark change in a society. Heroines like Katniss Everdeen teach readers a moral standing against corruption and injustice, and quests such as those of the Hobbits in Lord of the Rings teach the value of friendship and camaraderie, and the importance of working together to achieve a common goal. From Harry Potter sparking the more magical sides of our imagination, to Spider-Man teaching us moral righteousness through his message on the value of power and responsibility, the fictional worlds help to shape and craft a better, improved reality, opening minds to different beliefs and perspectives as readers apply the lessons learnt by their favourite characters to their own lives.

Arguably, while it could be perceived that the fantasy world is unrealistic and subsequently an unproductive use of someone's time, it is a safe and enlightening place to express oneself in different ways, as well as exploring the aspects of the world that the boundaries of reality prevent one from doing so. Whether it's immersing yourself into the new world of Virtual Reality, or diving into a new narrative of wonder and magic, these fantastical worlds pose many positives that complement and serve to improve reality – whether they inspire people to pursue new paths or give them an insight into new perspectives and ideas. Overall, it can be believed that whilst one should not get so immersed in the fictional worlds that they forget about the reality they come from, the wonders of fantasies and imagination pose as one of the few true outlets for expressing oneself and fulfilling one's desire for adventure. Nevertheless, though fantasy can be regarded as being better than real life, a good approach is to use inspiration from the fictional worlds to better reality alongside it. There is no definitive reason why the real world must exist utterly divided from the fictional, and consequently we see that elements of the fantasy worlds are crossing the boundaries into becoming a more critical and crucial element of our real lives.