

I D E A S

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DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

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Lister Sinclair

"Toward night, as the sun declined above that tumultuous, darkening ocean, it seemed that a great bank of thunderclouds arose from the West, long and low-lying at first, but surging rapidly skyward with mountainous domes. Ever higher it loomed, revealing the menace of piled cliffs and somber, awful seascapes; but its form changed not in the fashion of clouds. And Yadar knew it at last for an island bulking far aloft in the long-rayed sunset. From it, a shadow was thrown for leagues; and in the shadow, the foam crests flashing upon hidden reefs were white as the bare teeth of death."

Imagine yourself in a world like this—a world of dark, fantastic characters and supernatural forces. On *Ideas* tonight, we'll enter this world, playing the game called "Dungeons and Dragons."

Thomas Radecki

Based upon my own personal examinations in the eight trials I've been involved with, there's just no doubt in my mind—the evidence is really quite impressive—that there's a cause-effect relationship between an involvement in Dungeons and Dragons and an increased tendency towards violence. There's no doubt that this game and similar fantasy role-playing games have caused dozens of murders and suicides that we know of and undoubtedly dozens more that we don't know of.

Joanne Clarke

My friends all know I play D & D, but I know other people, they're afraid to say it because people have this distorted view of what D & D is. People who've never played or who are listening to this guy and they think it's just oh, you know, it's the occult, or they have a really negative image of it. So a lot of people don't talk about playing.

Lister Sinclair

I'm Lister Sinclair. Our program on *Ideas* tonight is itself something of a game, a fantasy directed by Shelley Solmes, who, when she's not trying to sort out good versus evil, is host of the CBC Radio program *Music Ottawa*.

Shelley Solmes

Here's a definition: "Role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons are enjoyable, complex, challenging social

activities. Gamers work together for a common end. There are no winners and no one loses either."

maybe

That's one definition. But this one sounds more familiar: "Role-playing games provide a teaching on demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, Satan-worship, gambling, Jungian psychology, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, demon-summoning, necromantics, divination, and many more teachings brought to you in living colour direct from the pit of Hell."

This isn't me being funny. I'm quoting the Reverend John Torrell of the European-American Evangelistic Crusades. And he's not the only one who says things like this. Sounds like Dungeons and Dragons could be really bad for kids—and even grown-ups. Because it turns out the majority of the more than five million Dungeons and Dragons players are over eighteen.

Tonight you'll meet some of them, men *and* women. We'll sit in on a session and we'll hear the people who, like Reverend Torrell, think Dungeons and Dragons is a very bad idea.

One of those people is Pat Pulling, who started an organization with the acronym BADD, which stands for Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons. She's speaking here at the First Baptist Congregation in Orlando, Florida.

Pat Pulling

To date we have over fifty murders and suicides that have been documented in the media as related to the game of Dungeons and Dragons. We, in our organization, and the National Coalition on Television Violence, chaired by Dr. Thomas Radecki, have others. But because suicide is so sensitive, many of the records *can* not be made available to the public.

Thomas Radecki

I'm Dr. Tom Radecki. I'm a psychiatrist and research director of the National Coalition on Television Violence in the United States and the co-ordinator for the International Coalition Against Violent Entertainment. We first became concerned about Dungeons and Dragons when we noted the considerable violent imagery connected with Dungeons and Dragons material way back in 1983, when we were working on war-toy issues.

We noticed that it was really a type of a fantasy war game. As the deaths began to be reported and began to mount, we saw it as part of our mission in working in the area of violent entertainment to keep track of these, to tabulate these, and, as the information became quite clear, it became more and more evident that there was a causal relationship between many of these deaths and these violent, fantasy role-playing games.

Shelley Solmes

How many deaths do you link to D & D to date?

Thomas Radecki

We have at least a hundred and twenty-five murders and suicides—about one quarter suicide, three quarters murders—that have been linked by police investigations, new reports, family interviews, psychiatric examinations, to various fantasy role-playing games. Of course, Dungeons and Dragons is the most prominent.

Shelley Solmes

Now, you've been called as an expert witness in some murder trials linked to D & D. I wonder if you could give me an example of the type of trial you were involved in.

Thomas Radecki

Well, one trial in Wisconsin: A young man of fifteen years of age planned out ahead of time to steal the family guns and jewellery and to escape with a friend to another state, planned to murder his foster father, whom he actually liked quite a bit, before stealing the car and hitting the road. It really fit very much into a Dungeons and Dragons format: He carried out the murder as planned, did flee. And I was involved in that trial.

Another one, St. Louis: An older man, about twenty-one years of age. He and his friend killed a female companion that they were—their housemate. They actually played Dungeons and Dragons together. They weren't playing Dungeons and Dragons at the moment of the murder but he actually signed his FBI confession, after again stealing belongings, jewellery, and such, and fleeing to another state, signed his FBI confession with his Dungeons and Dragons player's name.

That's what I found in each of the trials that I participated in is that the criminal offences parallel closely to the type of character that they've had in their

various games—everywhere from the type of weapons used, the type of crime committed, things of that type.

Shelley Solmes

For D & D to be detrimental to a person's mental health, wouldn't there have to be something psychologically wrong with that person *prior* to their involvement in the game?

Thomas Radecki

No, no. That's not...true. People learn from what they're being exposed to and people can change. Many times we see people's personalities change dramatically as they get exposed to something quite different. If you want to have a major personality change, one thing that is helpful is to have an immersion in a particular area and Dungeons and Dragons very much lends itself to that because of the many hours required to get into this game and because it is a type of an obsessive type of game that pulls you in, involves you more intimately. And because it is a fantasy role-playing game, you're really putting yourself into the game.

Pat Pulling

You do not just sit down for one hour and play. The game just doesn't end like Parcheesi. Some people have said, "What can possibly be wrong with just a fantasy game? You're sitting around a table, there is nothing real, there are no weapons. How can anyone possibly get into harm or trouble from this?"

[1982]

Well, I too wondered about three years ago how anyone could get so wrapped up in a game that they could commit suicide, or murder, but I only wondered that after my teenage son committed suicide. I said he couldn't possibly have done this because of a game. However, the reason I thought he might have done it because of a game is basically because he said so in his suicide letters of which he left six. We also found what is called a curse in the game—this may be written or it may be spoken. In his case, his curse was written. I began to think about the curse he had received and I said "Nobody would do that." The curse said, "Your soul is mine. I'll choose the time. At my command, you'll reave the land. A follower of evil, a killer of man."

Now, the word *reave* means to plunder, to pillage, to destroy. It's archaic, mediaeval. So I thought that's very interesting. In his suicide letter to us he said that he

could not kill my husband, myself or my daughter, or the world. Therefore he must end his life as he had been so summoned to do.

Shelley Solmes

Sociologist Gary Fine:

Gary Fine

It strikes me that finding any one single cause for a suicide would be very problematic. Most young people who take their own lives have many reasons for doing so. What this debate has typically come down to is a game of moral football in which those people who dislike the game attempt to run up the score to find as many possible suicides as they can, whereas those who defend the game try to block these attempts. It strikes me that every parent should have the right to decide for themselves and to claim for themselves why their child committed suicide. For me to come in and suggest that the parent is really to blame is far too cruel. On the other hand, in terms of making public policy, I think we have to be very careful that we don't take these parental expressions as a grounding for actually banning something that many people enjoy and which may prevent suicides in many cases.

Shelley Solmes

Before we get on with the satanism, the psychoses, the suicides, and the social science, you'll need to know how the game works. Let me introduce you to three Dungeons and Dragons players. Two of them are also game referees called "dungeon masters."

Lorna Toolis

My name is Lorna Toolis. I'm a librarian. I work for the Toronto Public Library as collection head for the Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy. I play what are called "campaign games," which go on for years. We would meet every other week for—I guess we met every other week for three and a half years before we left Edmonton, and I would still be playing if we hadn't.

Shelley Solmes

Can you describe a bit the dynamics? What happens to a group that works together over a number of years, say, two to three years?

Lorna Toolis

Oh, they come to understand each other very well and it becomes much harder for me, as referee, to surprise them. If you become used to what they will do under pressure situations, they start to recognize the unpleasant surprises that are likely to be coming from the direction of the referee. So you're trying to out-think each other more or less constantly.

Andrew Nellis

I'm Andrew Nellis. I'm twenty-four years old and I'm dungeon master as well as a player of role-playing games, and I'm founder and president of the Downtown Gamers Club.

Shelley Solmes

When did you start playing Dungeons and Dragons?

Andrew Nellis

Well, that would be years ago now. I started in grade five in an experimental class at the Ottawa school board, where there was an educational version of a role-playing game used in class for teaching.

Joanne Clarke

My name is Joanne Clarke. I've quite a varied background. I started off in—I did a bachelor of arts in history, I have a B.Ed., a bachelor of education, I've taught high school, and I did a graduate diploma in international development at the University of Ottawa. I'm currently working on a diploma in addiction counselling.

Shelley Solmes

When did you start playing D & D?

Joanne Clarke

I started playing about seven years ago. A friend of mine—I was in university and a friend of mine was going out to play and he asked me if I'd be interested. He thought I might be. So I went with him and I had a ball. It was wonderful. They showed me how to—they told me the intricacies of the game and I started playing that night and I met a lot of great people. I love the camaraderie. The challenge—I love mental games. I love games that stimulate me intellectually, that make me think. It's like puzzles. I love puzzles, trying to figure something out. And you're also trying to think how you can work with your fellow players because you all have

different skills and different abilities, and you have to learn how to work with those different skills and abilities and combine them to overcome obstacles, because the game is built in such a way that one person alone can't survive. You need to rely on your friends and companions within the story.

Shelley Solmes

My introduction to Dungeons and Dragons was at the Dalhousie Community Centre here in Ottawa on a Sunday morning at ten. I'd obviously been reading too much anti-D & D literature because I expected the game would be played in some hushed and darkened cavern by flickering candlelight. What I found instead was a bright, sunny room, about thirty feet long, with the noise of two dozen young men and boys—and one girl—all in high spirits setting up a fantasy war game called *Battletech*.

Across the room was my dungeon master, Andrew Nellis. He was sitting at a low, wooden table, with a few large, comfortable chairs round it. On the floor, and on the chair beside him, were books, and notebooks, and notes, and more books. These would be consulted from time to time during the game. Over the next few minutes, Carl, Eric, and Peter came in to join Andrew at the table.

Referee (Andrew Nellis)

As I remember, you were on the road to Frankfurt, I guess. No, you weren't on the road. I believe you were going cross-country.

Player 1

Cross-country. Sure.

Referee

Here's the map. You're at Weisenheim now. Actually, you're just outside of Weisenheim. You bungled the Weisenheim caper. Want to give up now?

(Protests from players)

Well, don't forget, you've got an injured cleric. The cleric can't cast spells, can't memorize spells...

Shelley Solmes

There are now more than five hundred fantasy role-playing games, but the granddaddy of them is Dungeons and Dragons, first marketed privately back in 1974 in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, by Gary Gygax—a name right out of science fiction, eh? Gygax wrote down and

published the rules that a friend of his, David Arneson, had developed over the years.

Andrew Nellis

And they went to two different cities. They moved away from each other and started two separate groups and they both had the rules, the initial, original rules, and they thought, well, let's see how it develops with the two groups, we'll get back together and see which one is better.

And they found that they were both equally as good but utterly different in concept. One was very simplistic. The rules could be done in a single magazine-size book and play was very quick and dirty, could be learned in a half hour, anybody could do it, but it was very low on detail.

The other game took five large tomes—massive rules, tables coming out of your ears that you have to memorize—and it was very heavy on detail, and it tended to slow down play but it was very descriptive. You could imagine things much better in your mind what was going on. So they published both. It's kind of a misnomer. Basic Dungeons and Dragons and Advanced Dungeons and Dragons are actually two different games. You don't graduate from one to the other.

Shelley Solmes

In both, players sit around a table and play not with chess pieces or toy soldiers, but with imaginary characters they've created. The game is best with no more than six players, plus a dungeon master. Players create their characters partially by choice and partially by the roll of the dice. These dice come in various colours and shapes, from six-sided to hundred-sided. Players roll up their characters at the first session of a game, and games can go on for years.

Players choose the profession and the race of their character, from dwarven to human, and they also choose their sex. In the game I recorded for *Ideas* tonight, one of the young men's characters was a female cleric.

Players use the dice to determine the level of such qualities as intelligence, strength, and charisma. Even a character with low numbers on intelligence or strength can be amusing to play and usually a dungeon master will arrange things so the weak and the stupid are

protected. After the characters are created, they have to be armed and supplied with whatever's appropriate to their station—things like food, magic weapons, and spells. It's up to the dungeon master to provide an interesting game. He verbally directs the characters through the fantasy environment he's created beforehand.

Andrew Nellis

My campaigns tend towards the dramatic. In fact, they tend towards the melodramatic. I'm interested in intrigue, plot twists, sub-plots. My players keep pages and pages of notes on the incredibly intricate plots that I've developed. The story lines are just enormous. The campaign is now more than two years old and I don't expect it to wrap up for years.

Andrew Nellis

...An infinite number of earths connected by an astral plane, which our minds can't comprehend when we see it because it's four-dimensional. So it looks to us like a maze of walls, an infinite maze of walls that you can reach infinite alternate earths. And it's like on a macrocosmic scale, survival of the fittest. So races that discover the astral plane inevitably end up conquering one another and only the strongest survive. So you end up with empires of hundreds of planets. The players have just discovered this.

Now there's beings which live on some of these worlds which can see into the fourth dimension and, if people with fourth dimensions, in four dimensions look at you, you look like a big tub of blood and guts because you're open on another side, that they can look inside you, actually look through you if they want. In other words, you're not a whole person, as far as they're concerned—nothing but an insect. Would you be concerned about turning out the lights and destroying your shadow? I mean it's not life. Yes, that's the way they feel about it. And of course the players, being three-dimensional entities, have a somewhat different view.

Shelley Solmes

The group manoeuvres through the game setting to accomplish a task the dungeon master has set them. Now, they could be searching for a treasure, passing a test of endurance, saving a species, or a world, or even a princess. The group decides collectively what to do,

but characters act according to their own abilities and traits.

The dungeon master sits with a small screen, about eighteen inches high, in front of him on the table. It hides his notes and maps and score tables and even his dice rolls from the other players. His word is final. He alone knows what's in the treasure chest or what black blob is lurking around the next corner.

Referee

That night, you hear a "swooshing" sound and light bathes the interior of the hut.

Player 2

I'll look outside.

Referee

[with an outrageous French accent]

Well, someone taps you on the shoulder. Someone wants to know what you're looking at.

Player 2

Can we see the light outside?

Referee

No, the light came from inside the hut.

Player 2

Oh. (to his companions) Why are you shining a light?

Referee

The "Crimson Dagger" wants to know what you're talking about. (laughter)

Player 2

Okay, so what do you want? (laughter)

Shelley Solmes

How do games end?

Andrew Nellis

Nine times out of ten, games end because of lack of interest, either on the dungeon master's part or the players' part. One time out of ten—and that's probably being generous—it comes to a successful conclusion where the players have successfully finished whatever quest they were set on, they righted all wrongs in the world, nothing is any longer a challenge for their characters and, like a book, everything has been

wrapped up nice and neatly and people just crumple their characters up, toss them in a garbage can and start over again.

Referee [to players]

He has a little device, an artifact actually, that he uses to travel all over the place. Unfortunately, every time it's used, it's such a powerful magic source that all the enemies that you guys have know instantly where he's using it.

Player 3

That's great. So they know that we're here.

Referee

Yeah.

Shelley Solmes

Different people are drawn to different games.

Andrew Nellis

Oh certainly. Some people enjoy what's called in the game jargon as "hack 'n' slash," which is people who do all their thinking at the end of a sword. I enjoy a lot more cerebral game where that kind of activity gets you either killed or tossed into a prison. The players are expected to come up with solutions to problems rather than create more of them.

Joanne Clarke

A game I hate playing and I wouldn't waste my time on is what they call "Hack 'n' Slash." Basically, all that is you want adventure and the first thing you see you fight. And you fight everything. And it's simply a roll of the dice and you try and kill it. To me, it's totally mindless and it's a waste of time. There's no challenge at all in it in terms of thinking.

Whereas the other game is more intellectually stimulating. It's like, when you meet somebody or something, you don't automatically fight it, you try and talk to it, you try and determine things about it by asking questions, by looking around, by observing. And it's great because your dungeon master becomes your eyes. Like, you say "What do I see? What do I hear? Do I smell anything?" But you have to ask in order to get that information. And you put things together and it's great. It's a challenge.

Shelley Solmes

Dr. Radecki has a different interpretation.

Thomas Radecki

In the game you are a war party. That's what it is. You are a war party. You and your friends are venturing into this world that's been created by the dungeon master and the purpose of the game is to seek out enemy, whether they're human or sub-human, and to kill them, or at least to deter them so that you can steal treasure and gain experience points, and wealth. That's the whole purpose of the game.

Shelley Solmes

"No, no, no," says Andrew Nellis.

Andrew Nellis

In fact, Dungeons and Dragons—and other role-playing games indeed—are a learning experience which teaches you problem-solving.

Shelley Solmes

Professor Stanley Fogel at the University of Waterloo:

Stanley Fogel

One could always say that this makes young people realize that the game model for life is not that simplistic football-game model, but a much more complex, a much more ambiguous game model, full of ironies, full of halting, full of losing one's way. That's probably a more realistic mode of gaming. It's very interesting with the whole Pulling crew and their hatred of Dungeons and Dragons, one of the characteristics of the kids they think is going to be ~~that the kids are going to be~~ duped into satanism ^{and} not athletic. Right? The real good model for games is football, where everything is clear, where you tabulate all kinds of statistics, where you go for ten yards and that's it. Well, all of a sudden we've presented a far more elusive game as a better model, or at least I'm trying to make the claim that that elusive model is a better one.

Referee

...You can send them to reconnoitre anywhere you want.

Player 1

We'll hang around and try to find the Black Temple and they'll keep going to Frankfurt and we'll catch up to them later. How about that?

Referee

Okay. So they're going straight for Frankfurt cross-country?

Player 1

No, they'll probably take the road. They wanted to take the road in the first place.

Referee

Oh. And you'll catch up with them in Frankfurt.

Player 1

Yes.

Gary Fine

I'm Gary Fine. I'm professor of sociology at the University of Georgia and head of the sociology department down here.

Shelley Solmes

What kind of people did you find like to play this game?

Gary Fine

The players tend to be fairly bright, politically they are really very diverse. There are some people who are quite devout pacifists, and others who participate in the military in various ways. Some of them call themselves conservatives and about an equal number call themselves liberals. So that's fairly diverse. I would say all these people claim that they have a particularly active imagination. And the game is anywhere from eighty-five to ninety-five per cent male.

Andrew Nellis

One of the reasons that it's young men that play these games is that they feel very little control over their own lives. Now, in Dungeons and Dragons and other role-playing games, you have absolute control. You can do absolutely anything you like in this game. Do whatever you want for one day a week and then go back to your job or your school or your life, or whatever it is, and put up with life.

Gary Fine

The game is derived from a set of male literatures, such as the literatures of mediaeval knights in shining armour and the literature of science fiction, both of which have been over generations almost entirely male. So that's one of the things that's happening, that these games deal with

topics that boys are particularly interested in. The other thing is that this is a male bonding ritual, that males like to play these games together. It is like your male country clubs and private clubs of various kinds. It's a place for men to get together, and talk about male kinds of things.

Andrew Nellis

It just goes to prove that you don't need beer and Monday night football to achieve male bonding.

Shelley Solmes

It's true. [laughing] Lorna Toolis. What kind of woman does it take to successfully integrate into the male-dominated world of gaming?

Lorna Toolis

What an interesting question.

Shelley Solmes

I guess I'm just thinking that there are so few women gamers, percentagewise.

Lorna Toolis

It took me a while to realize there was a problem. I walked in and started playing and we were just setting up a game and there's always a sort of period where you're feeling out and you're looking for people who'll integrate into a group. And our group just happened to integrate fifty-fifty male-female. It wasn't consciously planned as being a different thing.

Shelley Solmes

Have your games always been that kind of a set-up, where there is a balance of gender?

Lorna Toolis

Yes. I mean, half of the people I know are female, and some of them like the game. I became aware later that it was somewhat unusual, but mostly I think it's because normally you don't have any access routes for women into gaming. If you are female and you walk into a gaming room, it's full of these horrid pimply little boys and they all look at you like female germs are going to rub off. Once you get one female gamer, the chances are very good you'll get other female gamers because you provide an access route—introductions.

Joanne Clarke

I've met a lot of women who wanted to play but they've been—another thing is being invited to play. It's the sort of game you really need someone to teach you about. You can't just begin reading and learning. It's very difficult. You need someone who's played at least once or twice and even then it's really difficult. It's a very complicated game: There are lots of rules to remember, there are lots of charts you have to look up.

I mean there's probably twenty women here in Ottawa I've talked to always said, "Oh, I want to play." But they said, "I just don't know anyone who plays or has an ongoing game that I can join." It's almost like the political system here: If you don't have somebody to bring you into the political system ~~that's~~^{as a} female and help you—like the old boys' network—if you don't have that as a woman to help you through, it's hard to get in.

Lorna Toolis

I think over the years, watching the different players, I've become convinced that women go about problem-resolution in a different way. They're less likely to try and sort of kick their way through the door and just go bull-headed for a resolution. They try and think their way around problems. Women tend to be fairly subtle players.

Shelley Solmes

What do you mean by *subtle*? You mean there's not the hack 'n' slash stuff?

Lorna Toolis

Exactly. They're convinced that if they go into hack 'n' slash, they're probably going to lose, and certainly in my games they're usually right because I try and penalize that form of behaviour. So they try and think their way around the problems, much more interested in, first of all, intelligence gathering and then in the sort of circuitous approach to problem-resolution.

Shelley Solmes

I heard from every single player—every single male gamer—that I talked to, that they thought women did not like to make decisions and got confused when faced with too many as in the game. Also that women did not deal with the abstract with the alacrity and love that men do and therefore were really, with a few exceptions, not suited to gaming.

Lorna Toolis

Did they derive this information from a vast number of female players they had gamed with?

[*Solmes laughs.*]

Keep in mind that these people have gone into a more or less all-male society when they're in their early teens and stayed there for what? The next ten years? They haven't a lot of knowledge of women to draw upon when they're generalizing here.

Shelley Solmes

Except maybe the fiction that they've been reading.

Lorna Toolis

If you have fiction in which women are very static and stand around expecting to be rescued, you're not actually reading contemporary fantasy. I wonder if this kind of gamer might have a strong preference for the kind of fiction that Robert Howard was writing back in the thirties and forties.

Shelley Solmes

The Conan stories.

Lorna Toolis

Yes. Because it's not common in modern fantasy to have women sitting there wringing their hands waiting to be rescued. They're expected to cope, like everybody else.

Joanne Clarke

I saw a poster once and it said something like some day our daughters are going to grow up and realize that they were their own knights in shining armour. We can do those things, we don't need to rely on someone else, although we can partner with someone else; but it's our choice and we go as equals. And that's what D & D is all about. It's being your own hero.

Referee

...And the gate rises from the ground and he charges through and it closes behind him.

And—would you roll for initiative, please.

Player 2

Combat! (dice are rolled)

Referee

Okay. Suddenly, pulsing through the window seems to be this eerie, black shape. It looks strangely familiar.

Player 2

Like the one that attacked...

Referee

Like the one that just about killed you of frostbite. Pulsing through the window. What's your initiative?

Player 2

Three.

Referee

Okay. It goes on zero. It's going to get first attack. What's your armour class? Without armour.

Player 2

Without armour?

Referee

You can include your dex, though.

Player 2

Dex is thirteen, so that's—nine.

Referee

Ooooh. AC-nine. It hits you on a six or less.

Joanne Clarke

D & D is structured in such a way that you have to work as a group. Individuals don't survive and, being on your own, you don't survive, so it teaches a lot in terms of you're constantly thinking "Okay, how can I combine my skills with somebody else's?" You know, and you also have to learn to co-operate.

I mean it's the same as being in a group in real life. It's very difficult to come to a consensus on something and you have to learn how to do that because you often have to agree on certain things in D & D, like what direction you're going to go in, what track you're going to take, and so you learn a lot of really good negotiating skills.

Andrew Nellis

Any good games master will prove in a game that no one has ever won by brute force alone. You always need some amount of reasoning, tactics, skill, decision-

making, co-operative abilities. And that's one thing I'd like to stress is that in most games it's everybody against the other players. You're trying to destroy the other people around the table or you're trying to beat them or drive them into bankruptcy, or do other vicious, nasty things to people.

Dungeons and Dragons encourages co-operation among players against a common enemy, which is the creations of the dungeon master.

Shelley Solmes

Yes, well, tell that to Pat Pulling, who sounds like she's speaking in a dungeon, but it's actually the Baptist Church in Orlando.

Pat Pulling

We have another problem with our teenage society now and that is its deepening interest in the occult, not just through games like Dungeons and Dragons but through rock music and through the entertainment that they receive on the television set in the form of movies, occult movies.

The difference in Dungeons and Dragons and the movies and the music is that you *are* the movie. When you watch a movie and the character gets killed or the character is evil, or the character turns into a werewolf, it might frighten you and you might feel a lot emotion about it. But when it happens in this game, it is you. It is participatory, it is *you*, and you are the one who dies, you ~~who~~ are the one who is evil. When at first maybe if you're just playing evil, it's like playing acting, but after a while you may assume that identity.

Joanne Clarke

If somebody in a group were unwell, I think I would pick up on that right away and I wouldn't be playing in the group or I would start to say to that person "I think you need to get some help," just as I would if I went to church and I met somebody who was taking some of the religious doctrine quite seriously and coming up with really perverse ideas on it, I would be saying the same thing to them.

Shelley Solmes

Here's a video for you. It's called *Turmoil in the Toy Box* and it features Pastor Phil Phillips of Dallas, Texas, being interviewed by Gary Greenwald.

Phil Phillips

A couple of years ago, I preached a message for television called Dungeons and Dragons and in it I dealt with the occultic overtones, the witchcraft, the demonism, the spells, that were perpetrated through the game Dungeons and Dragons and we even had newspaper clippings of children that had dropped out, some they thought had even committed suicide because of the game. And even more has come to light since then, and I want to show a clip from Dungeons and Dragons right now, showing the occultic overtones of the game. So here's from the cartoon show that's now come from the game.

[clip from the show] (with No reference to anything occultic)

Shelley Solmes

Meanwhile, back at the church in Orlando, this is Pat Dempsey:

Pat Dempsey

My son Michael entered high school when he was fifteen and a half and he met two young boys who introduced him into the game of D & D, Dungeons and Dragons. And the two friends were later to tell me that they were into demon worship, they were into astral projection, which is an out-of-the-body experience—given only, of course, by the devil. He, prior to his death, was casting spells at his mother. He would go into his room and he stayed in there for several minutes, he came out, we didn't know what he was doing in the room but actually he was conjuring demons for the "power of persuasion." And this is outlined in the Dungeons and Dragons book. Demonology is a very important aspect of Dungeons and Dragons. And he would sit in front of his mother at the backgammon game and he would look at a piece of graph paper which he held. The graph paper I later found was a voodoo inscription, written in his own blood. There were several voodoo inscriptions that we found. And the games started to go over to his favour. He was about fifty-fifty—but after he cast the spells, he won all the games.

Thomas Radecki

Absolutely. These games are primers to the occult. We have many instances here in my own psychiatric practice here in Central Illinois, where young people first get into fantasy role-playing games, Dungeons and Dragons, and then lead into satanism. It's not the only way into satanism. Certainly the satanic bible is another way,

satanic music—a particular sub-culture of heavy-metal music—is another way, or just having friends that are into satanism is yet another way.

But it's quite common. I just admitted a fellow just a couple of hours ago, a fifteen-year-old teenager who's into satanism. It's a problem that's grown up, a subculture that's grown up, I'm sure in Canada as well as here. We see it from time to time.

When you're talking about a rule-playing game, where you go out and kill, it's not surprising that some people are going to go out and kill and that many people who don't go that far are going to become more desensitized. As a matter of fact, it would be surprising if that didn't happen.

Shelley Solmes

Sociologist Gary Fine, author of a book about Dungeons and Dragons called *Shared Fantasy*.

Gary Fine

I do believe that the games are an empty glass which can be filled in any number of ways. When I was doing this research, one of my closest informants was a very devout fundamentalist Christian young man, who eventually left the cities to go to the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and he never saw any contradiction between kids playing these games and his Christian beliefs. In fact, in the games, he was able to act out some of his Christian fantasies.

Phil Phillips

I believe that Dungeons and Dragons is a direct quote from the pit of hell, if you want to call it that. It's a mind-bending game, a mind-changing game. It's involved with all kinds of occult and pagan religion. The players' handbook includes over a hundred and sixty pages of spells to be cast.

Pat Pulling

In this game, it employs the practices of witchcraft, satanism, human sacrifice—such as eating and cooking babies if it just happens to be your god called Tulelach. You will serve him and you will offer to him once a year the cooked babies. And, if the babies cry during the sacrifice, you will consider that a good sign.

Andrew Nellis

This game is based on mythology. It's not based on reality. In this game, they assume Norse gods, Egyptian gods, all manner of mythical gods. In fact, they went to great lengths to avoid offending people by not including any major modern religions in the book which he refers to, *Deities and Demigods*, which in fact has been renamed *Legends and Lore*.

Shelley Solmes

Another book that worries people like Pat Pulling is the *Dungeons Master's Guide*, which has a drawing on the cover that Mrs. Pulling has no doubt represents the devil.

Andrew Nellis

If you actually take the effort to look inside the book, it tells you exactly what this is. It's an *effrete* from Arabian legend.

effrete

Shelley Solmes

An *effrete*—is this a type of demon or spirit, or...?

Andrew Nellis

It's a type of genie, actually. If you believe in genies, I suppose this might be offensive, but it shows an *effrete* being battled by a group of characters. On the back cover, it shows what's called "the elemental plane of fire," with the City of Brass hovering in the background with a lake of burning oil. It has nothing to do with any actual religion or any actual place. It's sheer fantasy.

Shelley Solmes

So it has nothing to do with satanism or the occult.

Andrew Nellis

Of course not.

Shelley Solmes

But what about the dice and the gaming pieces that scream when thrown in the fire?

Gary Greenwald

I have letter after letter where people took the pieces—now, there are sixes involved in the pieces of the game—but they take the pieces of the game, they would throw them in the incinerator or the fireplace and screams would come out because there seemed to be some kind of spiritual forces inhabiting those pieces and

children would drop out of life. They didn't want to study any more.

Phil Phillips

Well, this game affects the most intelligent of our children and the pieces include white witches, wizards, necromancers, the clerics, that type of thing. It includes evil wizards. It's a white versus black witchcraft. The good versus evil is white versus black witchcraft and Anton La Vey, the writer of the satanic bible, says there is no such thing as white witchcraft.

Gary Greenwald

Well, being a satan worshiper, he should know.

Phil Phillips

Yes, he should know that all the power from Satan is going to create evil and havoc. And what it shows is that it shows a good versus evil, that good has about the same equality of power as evil and they come head-on in collision. ^{Well} Where that's not the outline we see in the Bible. We see a good that is all-powerful, that has taken dominion of the world, that created the world. We see Satan who's been defeated.

Gary Greenwald

Absolutely. And that's what we want our children to know that Jesus is greater than Satan.

Stanley Fogel

I'm Dr. Stanley Fogel and, though my area of academic expertise is literature, these days literature studies means cultural studies and so by now I'm an examiner of cultural practices.

I suppose if there's any justification for a professor of literature coming on to talk about cultural context of Dungeons and Dragons, it's that you try to make people resist hyperbolic readings. By polarizing, by saying we have the satanic as opposed to the godly, we've rendered culture incredibly simplistic and incredibly able to be summarized in facile ways.

What happens in a fundamentalist engagement with role-playing is that there are only two roles: the godly and the satanic. And all things flow from that, which seems to me a terrible reduction.

not an outsider where I'm an outcast. It's more that people gravitate towards me because I have something weird to say. But I'm not invited to any parties or that sort of thing.

Andrew Nellis

I was a lousy student at school. I never hung out with the in-crowd. I always wanted to be my own person, that was very important to me. It still is. I've never been one just to go with the crowd.

Shelley Solmes

How do your parents react to playing? Not that I'm assuming everybody has two parents or that both of them are together or still at home or...

Andrew Nellis

Or indeed the same sex. [laugh]

Shelley Solmes

Or even of the same sex or opposite.

Andrew Nellis

My parents are for it. They think it's great that I'm actually learning social skills. That's the way they look at it. And they've never said not to play them and, when I was younger, they encouraged me to play them.

Peter Kingston

My parents hated the game. They were certain that it was going to turn me into a raving maniac.

Shelley Solmes

Really? Was that for religious reasons or...?

Peter Kingston

They had seen the movie *Mazes and Monsters* and they heard all the reports in the media about people who axe-murdered their grandmothers and strangled their sisters and leaped off tall buildings, etc., etc.

Referee

You nimbly dodge underneath it and roll across the floor, come up standing in the other corner.

Player 2

Okay.

Referee

The thing is now fully inside the hut and sort of quivering by itself.

Player 2

(Incantation)

Referee

You say the magic word and your ring activates. And there's a blue, pulsing field around you.

Player 2

Can I do anything else in that turn?

~~Player 3~~

~~Like get out your axe?~~

Referee

~~You can get out your axe. That's your action.~~

Player 2

Good enough.

Referee

Okay? Next round. Roll for initiative. It only goes once. So, your armour class is now— (rolls dice) Natural one: Critical miss.

Player 2

Oh good.

Andrew Nellis

A good games master has the same skills that a good player does, only more so, which is good listening skills, good time-management skills, the ability to empathize with characters and people, the ability to see things from different points of view.

Shelley Solmes

The National Coalition on Television Violence and BADD say they have a hundred and twenty-five cases of D & D-linked deaths. Only forty of these cases have been published and half of those are anonymous.

The ones they do cite details for have no causal link with games. In every trial where Mrs. Pulling and Dr. Radecki have appeared, always as expert witnesses on the defence side, the defendants were convicted anyway

Fantasy Role-Playing for Mutual Aid in Children's Groups: A Case Illustration

Luis H. Zayas
Bradford H. Lewis

ABSTRACT. A fantasy role-playing game, *Dungeons and Dragons*, was used in a group of latency-age boys to foster adaptive social interaction. The game posed dilemmas and tasks that called for various aspects of mutual aid in the group. The authors provide theoretical background, a description of the game, and case material to support the usefulness of this program medium in group work with children. Opportunities in the game for worker interventions and group mutual aid are discussed. The game is evaluated according to the functions and dimensions of program activity as described in the social group work literature.

INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that group play serves the child's acquisition of skills for interacting with others outside the home (Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva, 1976; Erikson, 1950; Herron and Sutton-Smith, 1971). The group interaction enhances the ability to think about what others think and feel (Piaget, 1951; Piaget and Inhelder, 1969), appreciate differences among people, resolve conflicts cooperatively, and understand the complementarity of roles. The subjects, themes and plots in the play of latency-age children are often a combination of real life experience and fantasy. It is through the adoption of imaginary identities and role-playing with peers that much of

Luis H. Zayas, MSW, is Assistant Professor, Columbia University School of Social Work. Bradford H. Lewis, MSW, is educational coordinator/vocational counselor, Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association.

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this social development takes place. Frank and Zilbach (1979), noting that the latency child gauges his developing skills in his cooperation and competition with other children, write that through ritual and games "the necessary work on identity . . . associated with this phase of development can be supported by group life as peers respond to the individual's trying on different roles for size" (p. 254).

The social competence that accrues from completing tasks requiring collaboration among group members is similarly well-known to social workers. In group work practice with children the worker facilitates members' growth and group cohesion through mutually responsible interaction among members. By posing real or imaginary dilemmas that call for group problem-solving the worker naturally exposes the group to such aspects of mutual aid as the identification of common problems and tasks necessitated, division of labor with assigned roles and functions, and the formulation of a strategy for attaining the groups' goals.

In this paper we report on a fantasy role-playing game, *Dungeons and Dragons* (TSR, 1983) used with a group of latency-age boys in a neighborhood center to foster development of appropriate interactional skills via the kind of teamwork activity noted above. The game provided group members hypothetical situations of adventure, magic, and fantasy that required members to work together, each within a particular role and with specific qualities and skills, in accomplishing the group's tasks. The game offered opportunities for assuming imaginary identities and roles in an age-appropriate manner that would enhance group members social interaction. By its emphasis on group tasks necessitating joint endeavor, the game fit within our preference for viewing the group as "an enterprise in mutual aid, an alliance of individuals who need each other, in varying degrees, to work on certain common problems" (Schwartz, 1961, p. 18). The notion of the group as a reciprocal helping system is essential with children learning to participate in the broader social world of extrafamilial groups.

Since children require activity to work as a group, the selection of games and projects by the worker is an important consideration. These games and projects are, in fact, the "program," or medium of exchange (Shulman, 1971) by

which the group members can "give to and take from each other in a mixed transactional model" (p. 224). We were conscious that group program selection must be made with attention to the objectives of the group so that the specific activities achieve "the particular consequences pertinent to the treatment objectives" (Winter, 1967, p. 109). The choice of this fantasy role-playing game was made, then, with the forethought that social learning and benefits to ego functioning and self-esteem would be achieved by introducing experimentally to the group an activity calling for mutual aid.

We will provide a brief description of the game and how it is played. This will be followed by excerpts from the group process illustrating specific dimensions for group work. It is important to note that while we have experimented with this game there are other similar games available commercially which can be used. Of note is that the games allow for opportunities to engage in teamwork to solve problems facing particular individuals and the group itself.

THE FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME

In selecting a game that would allow for the development of mutual aid and cooperation among group members while engaging the group's attention and interest, the decision was made to use *Dungeons and Dragons* (D & D, TSR Inc., 1983). *Dungeons and Dragons* is a creative, imaginative and stimulating game that emphasizes adventure and fantasy reminiscent of heroic fiction, mythology and the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

One person, the Dungeon Master (in this case the leader), runs the game with 5-8 players for optimal play. Players create their own characters by rolling three dice six times to generate random scores representing their ability scores for strength, intelligence, wisdom, dexterity, constitution and charisma. Next, they choose a character class by their characteristics: either a fighter (for high strength), magic-user (intelligence), thief (dexterity), or cleric (wisdom). Each is needed on the adventure: fighters to combat the monsters, thieves to find and remove the traps in the dungeon, clerics to cast defensive spells and do healing, and the magic-users to cast

offensive and informational spells. The average group should contain at least two fighters, and one or more of the other classes for party balance. All classes are different and equally valuable, possessing traits that complement the others on the team. This is stressed within the group. Lastly, they must choose a race, chosen from elves, dwarves, gnomes, hobbits and humans. These things are all imaginary except for players' characters which are represented by miniature lead figurines. Using the figurines, the players move about on the board which is represented by a one-inch square grid, used because scenarios are most often designed on graph paper.

The board represents the imaginary environment described by the Dungeon Master. His job is to set the scene, to send the players on a quest or mission and adjudicate how their actions affect "the world" and the creatures in the encounters. Characters continue from adventure to adventure, gaining experience, treasures and new abilities as they attain higher levels through their experiences. Fantasy scenarios may be dungeon settings, the wilderness or anywhere else. There is a workable magic and combat system that is adjudicated by the Dungeon Master in the course of play.

Once the players have created their game personae, they are ready to begin. From the start, the players have control over how they may project themselves into the game. In this way they are allowed to try new and different behaviors safely. This encourages the process of risk-taking, while allowing players considerable input in shaping the course of the game.

The Dungeon Master sets the tone of the game and the players band together to use their various skills to achieve their common purpose, a key factor. All skills are necessary and so the group finds that it must learn interdependence, cooperation, and teamwork to attain group goals while fighting monsters, evading traps, and gaining treasure. The game is not "won" or "lost"; it is not competitive but instead emphasizes the mutuality inherent in the group. The group must also take time to scout an area and then plan how to effectively handle situational obstacles. These could be monsters to be overcome, traps set to slow them down and challenge their problem-solving skills, or natural barriers, such as caved in walls or open pits in the dungeon corridor. Often there

may be disagreement over an action plan and so the worker may engage them in learning interpersonal conflict resolution skills. This may be followed by work on how to plan ahead which helps to avoid conflict brought about by inflexibility or inability to compromise in the planning process. New behaviors can be role-played as well.

SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM THE BOY'S GROUP

The group in which the fantasy role-playing game was used took place in an after-school program of a neighborhood center in an economically and socially diverse area of New York City. As part of a graduate social work assignment for one of the authors (B.H.L.), the group was formed shortly after the beginning of the autumn school term and continued to the summer of the following year. There were 8 eight and nine year old boys in the group whose backgrounds reflected the diversity of the urban area. Staff had identified the boys as having problems in interpersonal relations, tendencies to act out, and mild to moderate hyperactivity. One boy, Steven, a shy and awkward Australian boy was included in the group at the request of other members who wanted generally to help and support him in this new culture. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the group members.

The group began in the context of socialization: to promote competency in social skills, relating to peers, teamwork, and ability to work within a group. Meetings were held once a week for two hours. As the autumn weather became colder, the group was forced to move indoors and away from such favorites as dodgeball and kickball. This challenged the group leader to find an activity that would lend itself to creatively insure verbal communication and cooperation among members while at the same time holding their attention. Recognizing that aspects of *Dungeons and Dragons* conformed to popular activities the group had tried, i.e., other board games, and its roleplaying nature would permit the boys to "act out" through their characters in more acceptable ways, the leader thought it practical for use in the group. This was an opportunity to introduce new program content to meet the group's specific needs at a particular time, helping avoid past

Table 1
Group Members

Player	Age	Descriptive information
George	8	White, lives with mother. Hyperactive and prone to acting-out.
Danny	8	George's best friend, lives with mother alone and some occasional violent acting-out. White.
Donald	9	From intact white Jewish family, several siblings. Poor frustration tolerance.
Carlos	8	Puerto Rican youth with history of acting-out and hyperactivity. Lives with mother and three siblings.
Malcolm	8	Lives with both parents and two siblings in intact black family. Some aggressive acting-out but not serious. Low frustration tolerance.
Adrian	9	Black youngster, only child in intact family. Seems to be follower rather than leader. Seldom willing to take independent action.
Allen	9	White British youth, lives with both parents. Only child. Bright but is unchallenged in school. Acts-out in reaction to resultant inactivity.
Steven	8	White youth. Allen's best friend. Lives with father and father's girlfriend. Withdrawn and seems to be experiencing some culture shock having just moved from Australia.

terms with particular issues together that could be generalized in terms of their social reality.

Work Group Formation (Session 8). When the game was first introduced, the boys "rolled up" their characters and then each wanted to strike off on his own. Upon talking to the "old man" (worker) who was "hiring" them to find and save his young grandchild, the worker disclosed that they would need magic users, clerics and thieves on the trip as well as the fighters. George and Danny (the fighters) then asked "Who's a cleric?" Carlos answered that he was, and asked "So what, what does that mean, what good is a cleric?" The worker asked what the group thought about this. Danny responded that they needed a cleric to heal them when they got hurt, and invited him to come along. Carlos asked what their jobs would be and Danny and George responded that they would do the fighting and protect their cleric. Carlos agreed. The worker used this opportunity to initiate a discussion about the different and necessary abilities, and that they were all needed for the group. This transaction demonstrates how the worker helped the boys form the group into a cohesive whole for their mutual benefit. All members identified their important roles and functions and their reason for coming along. It became an association of their own making which encouraged an appreciation of the individual abilities while fostering interdependence among the group members.

Group Goal Attainment (Session 9). At the end of the second session of play the group had successfully executed the first leg of their journey after a few minor skirmishes with bandits and monsters on the road. The worker congratulated them on their accomplishment and there was a general feeling of celebration. The worker asked them to explain how they had done it. Donald began the discussion which centered on their teamwork and pointed out what other members had contributed. Individual actions were also remembered by Steven with the worker's encouragement. The worker asked others how they had helped the group as a whole. The worker generalized the benefit of working together in group and outside of group, as well.

The session was also important as it allowed for a small success along the way, giving the group a sense of accomplishment. It reviewed the progress and consolidated the gains

content from feeling static to the group (Middleman, 1968). It was offered to the group and accepted experimentally.

Rather than describe the entire process of the group's development, we have instead chosen excerpts from specific group sessions that illustrate the kinds of situations the boys faced as they played. These fantasy play experiences were instrumental in compelling the group to grapple and come to

they had made as a group. The experience of success, not without difficulties and bolstered by review, paved the way for greater group unity. The success was gratifying to group members and reinforced the functional group cohesion that allowed them to attain their goal.

Planning ahead (Session 11). The group came to a long dark corridor in the dungeon. The worker asked, "What will you do now?" The two fighters, George and Danny, decided to charge ahead. Allen, the thief, asked if they wanted him to check for traps first. "No, we'll just go in and see what's up there," came the reply. Just inside the opening was a pit trap, and George's fighter fell in, taking some damage in the fall. He was helped out by Carlos and the others. The fighters were somber and thoughtful, and the worker asked, "What would you do differently next time?" They had learned their lesson, they said; next time they would get Allen to check for traps. They understood that one member's actions could threaten the entire group. If they lost one of the fighters, they would be less able to fight the monsters and be handicapped as a group. The consequences of not planning were serious, but only in the fantasy setting. Individual experience was useful to the rest of the group. They learned to coordinate their different skills in planning to reach their goals safely. In the ensuing discussion, the worker challenged the group to rely on each other more often and plan ahead rather than rush into situations.

Reinforcement of the group contract through induction of a new member (Session 12). In this meeting Malcolm joined the group, and the worker asked if they could tell Malcolm what they had been doing. After several group members described the game, the worker asked, "How about the group itself, and our agreements here?" The responses given included: "We don't curse . . . We all work together, it goes better like that . . . When we get into arguments, we talk about it rather than boff it out." The worker reinforced this and asked the group to explain why talking was used rather than arguing. Group members replied, "It's not good . . . We get slowed down . . . If we talk it out, we play better, together and it's more fun." Seeing some puzzlement on Malcolm's face, the worker asked him if there was anything he did not understand. Malcolm said no without conviction. To aid Malcolm,

the worker asked the group to point out any rules they had had difficulty understanding. Carlos said he had problems understanding the rule that you must stay with the group during the entire session but now he knew it. Here the worker had the opportunity not only to help the group induct a new member but to own the rules that they had created. This helped the members to internalize and integrate the rules as individuals and thereby reinforce the contract for the group as a whole.

Group problem solving and appreciation for individual uniqueness (Session 15). In this session, the group confronted five ogres. Adrian became more vocal and active than he had been previously. He began to help plan actions the group might undertake and spoke up on strategy, for example, sneaking up on the monsters from behind and surprising them. The worker supported Adrian's risk-taking and elicited ideas from other group members. A number of other ideas were discussed but the group responded enthusiastically to Adrian's solution. The plan worked and Adrian became the hero for the episode. While Adrian's plan worked, the unique contributions of others in executing the plan were similarly recognized by the group members.

The worker commended the group for their discussion of various proposals before acting impulsively and for respecting the individual action and skills of others, in this case Adrian. The member became an important person and was rewarded with the admiration of others for his creative idea in the situation. This point also demonstrated that the group had reached an appreciation of the value of all members to one another as well as the ability to recognize individual members' contributions. This facilitated positive interaction and helped draw out and give support to a less verbal member with encouragement from the worker.

DISCUSSION

We have described the use of a fantasy role-playing game in a group of latency-age boys. Its value lay not in that it was therapeutic per se but that the game, as a medium of exchange (Shulman, 1971), provided opportunities in the play

for mutual aid situations. In the hands of a skilled group leader who can appreciate the growth-inducing thrust that comes from mastering different situations through cooperative ventures, fantasy role-playing games can provide a continuous focus for the group. The worker can capitalize on the game's opportunities to aid children in conflicts in interpersonal relations and in the acquisition of adaptive social skills.

In the group it became readily evident that the boys enjoyed the fantasy role-playing. The game permitted them to assume roles and characters with specific skills necessary to resolve dilemmas facing the group, an important factor in group process. This then gave each player a sense of distinction that generally enhanced his self-confidence and helped earn the appreciation of other group members for assisting them at points where only that player's talents could help. Each member became clearer about the interdependence that exists among members of a group, family, and community. For example, during play and breaks in the "action" the boys gradually began to address issues that emerged from the play and dealt with real-life concerns and personal experiences. Sessions became fuller, with animated discussions of the boys' interaction with each other (in real and play action), of their relationships with peers and families, and of difficulties among them and their friends.

The authors gave recognition to the age-appropriateness of adopting imaginary identities in latency children's group play as noted in the literature (Bruner et al., 1976; Erikson, 1950; Frank and Zilbach, 1979; Herron and Sutton-Smith, 1971). However, in the case presented, the worker needed to do more than present the game as program. He needed to identify the chances for mutual aid consistently and intervene to help the group discuss the situation. The worker focused the players on the situation, generated group discussions, and encouraged the boys to generalize from the play situations to the real life experiences that the play resembled.

The areas in which the game offered the worker points for intervention were illustrated in the excerpts as: task-group information which included the delineation of roles and functions, group strategy planning, reinforcement of the contract by highlighting the interdependence among members, group problem-solving and the appreciation of individual unique-

ness. These excerpts describe some mutual aid aspects of fantasy role-playing in group adventures. The game required few other materials and where space limitations existed the game allowed for imaginary activities. The boys could "act out" through the game, using verbalization and fantasy rather than their previous inclination to physical acting out.

Most group work activities with children call for the leader to utilize every opportunity to promote group process. In this case the worker capitalized on situations of mutual aid, strengthening group cohesion and interdependence. Individual member's self-esteem was enhanced by the respect and attention they earned from fellow members as they exercised the talents that accompanied their game personae. Because the group members "rolled" into existence their character with 3 dice, each boy was able, at one time or another, to play each of the characters, so that no one was locked into a role permanently. This afforded the worker opportunities to deal with each member in a different fantasy role. The constellations of characters (member and fantasy role) to work with as a group were almost infinite: in each role each player brought aspects of himself that displayed his interactive style.

Finally, we evaluated the game using criteria found in the social group work literature. Shulman (1971) described some functions of shared activity as programs that are used by group members for their own purposes. Shulman lists the functions as: the opportunities for *human contact*, *data gathering* of information not immediately accessible to the group, *rehearsal* of specific skills needed in preparation for different life tasks, *deviations allowance* that first requires that the program enable the flow of positive feelings among members in order to allow for deviation, and *entry* into difficult areas of discussions that were hitherto unexpressed concerns of the group members (pp. 225-232). These functions were located in this game.

The shared activity function of providing people with opportunities for human contact was clearly evident in this game. The data gathering function of the program gave members chances to find missing data by asking the worker or seeking among themselves. In play situations that the group had to resolve, members discussed what they needed and how they could find the information that affected the scenario.

The boys were also able to rehearse group problem-solving skills that could be used as models for future life tasks. As the group's "reservoir of good feeling and mutual esteem" (p. 229) grew, room for deviation was allowed. This kind of cohesion permitted members to deviate from the group, raise sensitive issues, and "risk expressing ideas and feelings that might otherwise be taboo" (p. 229). Our group also experienced deviational allowance in combination with the function of entry. More subtle than other functions, entry takes specific situations as a way of discussing sensitive areas in the group and from the member's life experiences outside of the group. The situations group members confronted set the stage for entry into general discussions related to sex and racial biases and other sensitive subjects.

In a similar approach Vinter (1967) outlined six basic activity-setting dimensions of program. His formulation is useful in analyzing, choosing, and modifying program activities (p. 96). Vinter's activity-setting dimensions are: (1) prescriptiveness of the pattern of constituent performances (the extent and order of performances of participants), (2) institutionalized controls governing participant activity (this refers to the controls over the participants), (3) provision for physical movement (the requirements and allowances for group members to move about in the activity), (4) competence required for performance (the minimum level of ability necessary to perform the activity), (5) provision for participant interactiveness (the engagement of members in verbal and non-verbal interaction, and (6) reward structure (the type, abundance or paucity of rewards and the way they are distributed) (Vinter, 1967, pp. 98-101).

Accordingly, we analyzed the fantasy role-playing game with Vinter's (1967) criteria and found that the program prescribed certain rules and guides for conduct among group members. The activity called for the Dungeon Master to act as the agent for institutionalized control that governed members' participation. There were provisions for physical movement albeit limited and a minimum level of competence was required to participate so that no one member ever felt exceptionally behind others in his performance. Fantasy role-playing also provided for participant interactiveness that was intended to benefit their social functioning. Lastly, a reward structure

existed to gratify members. The rewards were generally more personal than material. The gratification for the boys came from secondary sources (p. 100) such as receiving praise for their accomplishments, improving problem-solving skills in the teamwork process, building a sense of camaraderie, and others.

CONCLUSION

There are many games available commercially, and our choice is but one. We experimented with *Dungeons and Dragons* for its excitement and the experiences it offered for mutuality among group members. In programming for children's groups our experience suggests that group workers must look around with a creative eye to locate games that pose tasks for individual members and group resolution while engaging the children's interest. Although our use of the game was with a socialization group of acting-out latency-age boys, the appropriateness of fantasy role-playing games in groups with other age groups (adolescents) and diagnostic categories (isolated, nonverbal) will be very much based on the worker's assessment of the group's needs and composition. Even after finding games that appear helpful, it is the social worker's ability to identify points of entry and choices of interventions that bring about the best results for the group members.

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Psychology in the Schools

Vol. 24

Volume 24, October 1987

EMOTIONAL STABILITY PERTAINING TO THE GAME OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS¹

ARMANDO SIMÓN

Edison Community College

The game of Dungeons & Dragons, which involves extensive fantasy role-playing by the participants, has been blamed by groups of lay people for having caused a number of suicides and homicides, as well as generally promoting such behavior. The 16 PF was administered to players of the game and a Pearson correlation was performed between years of playing the game and their emotional stability as measured by Factor C of the test. No significant correlation was found.

Traditional board games (such as chess, checkers, Scrabble, Parcheesi) have involved no role-playing on the part of the players, and some have involved a very minimum amount of role-playing within a-board setting (such as Monopoly, Clue, Starfleet Battles). There is a new generation of games, many of which principally, if not totally, involve role-playing. Foremost among the latter is Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). In this particular game, which incidentally has become exceedingly popular, players choose an *alter ego* within a Medieval setting. A profession is chosen as a fighter, thief, magician, priest, assassin, illusionist, or Druid. A particular ethical outlook called an Alignment also is chosen. The group of characters then go forth on "adventures" presented by a referee-player called Dungeon Master, thereby growing in experience, wealth, power, and status (Gygax, 1978; Johnston, 1980; Moramarco, 1980).

Some of the game's enthusiasts have claimed that the game attracts individuals of high intelligence and imagination, as well as improves the grades and social skills of players (Bonilla, 1978; Dear, 1984; Johnston, 1980). Detractors, on the other hand, have claimed malignant side effects of a psychological nature. A number of teenage suicides and runaways have been attributed to D&D under the rationale that players lose touch with reality because of the macabre aspects of the adventures themselves (Adler & Doherty, 1985; Brooke, 1985; Shuster, 1985). A national television program, 60 Minutes, raised the question at length of the game's potential harm. One psychiatrist has flatly stated that "the game causes young men to kill themselves and others" (Adler & Doherty, 1985).

The intent of this research was to investigate the validity of the detractors' claims. To this end, Cattell's 16 PF Test (Form C) was used, paying particular attention to Factor C, which measures emotional stability (Karson & O'Dell, 1976).

METHOD

Subjects

D&D players were mostly recruited through notices and word of mouth in science fiction and gaming conventions that offered as part of their program D&D tournaments. The subjects were informed of the aim of the research and were quite enthusiastic about

Reprint requests should be addressed to the author at Social Sciences Division, Edison Community College, 8099 College Parkway, SW, P.O. Box 06210, Fort Myers, FL 33906-6210.

¹The assistance of the staff of Jaxcon South and Dencon is gratefully acknowledged.

participating against what they perceived to be an irrational smearing campaign. Sixty-eight subjects volunteered; their average age was 21.5 years ($SD = 1.97$; range 15 to 35).

Procedure

Subjects were informed of the aim of the research. All were tested in small groups in varying isolation. All subjects' sten scores were ascertained from their respective age and sex tables, so that 26 subjects aged 15-19 years were scored using the High School Tables, whereas 42 older subjects were scored using the General Population Table. The Motivational Distortion Scale, which detects and corrects for attempts at "faking good," was used.

A Pearson correlation was computed between years spent gaming and Factor C scores. Low scores on Factor C have been present consistently in suicidal and antisocial profiles throughout various cultures (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Pearson correlation of .163 was found between Factor C and number of years of playing D&D; the correlation was not significant at the .05 level. The correlation of -.012 between Factor B (Intelligence) and number of years of playing D&D was also nonsignificant.

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation scores obtained on the 16PF for the whole group. Although there are individual differences, the group as a whole shows a mundane profile devoid of the emotional instability associated with suicides and homicides (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970). Almost all the scores are within the average

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation Scores Obtained on the 16PF

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
M.D.	5.85	2.32
A	5.20	1.98
B	6.63	1.75
C	5.20	1.92
E	6.22	1.84
F	6.01	2.08
G	4.33	1.59
H	5.22	1.92
I	6.47	1.92
L	5.94	1.82
M	5.95	1.61
N	4.77	1.86
O	5.20	1.75
Q ₁	6.88	1.87
Q ₂	6.54	1.77
Q ₃	4.89	1.90
Q ₄	5.32	1.97

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range. At the same time, the very high intelligence claimed by adherents of the game is likewise absent.

Figure 1 is a comparison of scores between the "old" and "young" subgroups. It can be seen that the scores are quite similar. Interestingly, the only score to be substantially out of the average range is Factor Q₁ (experimenting).

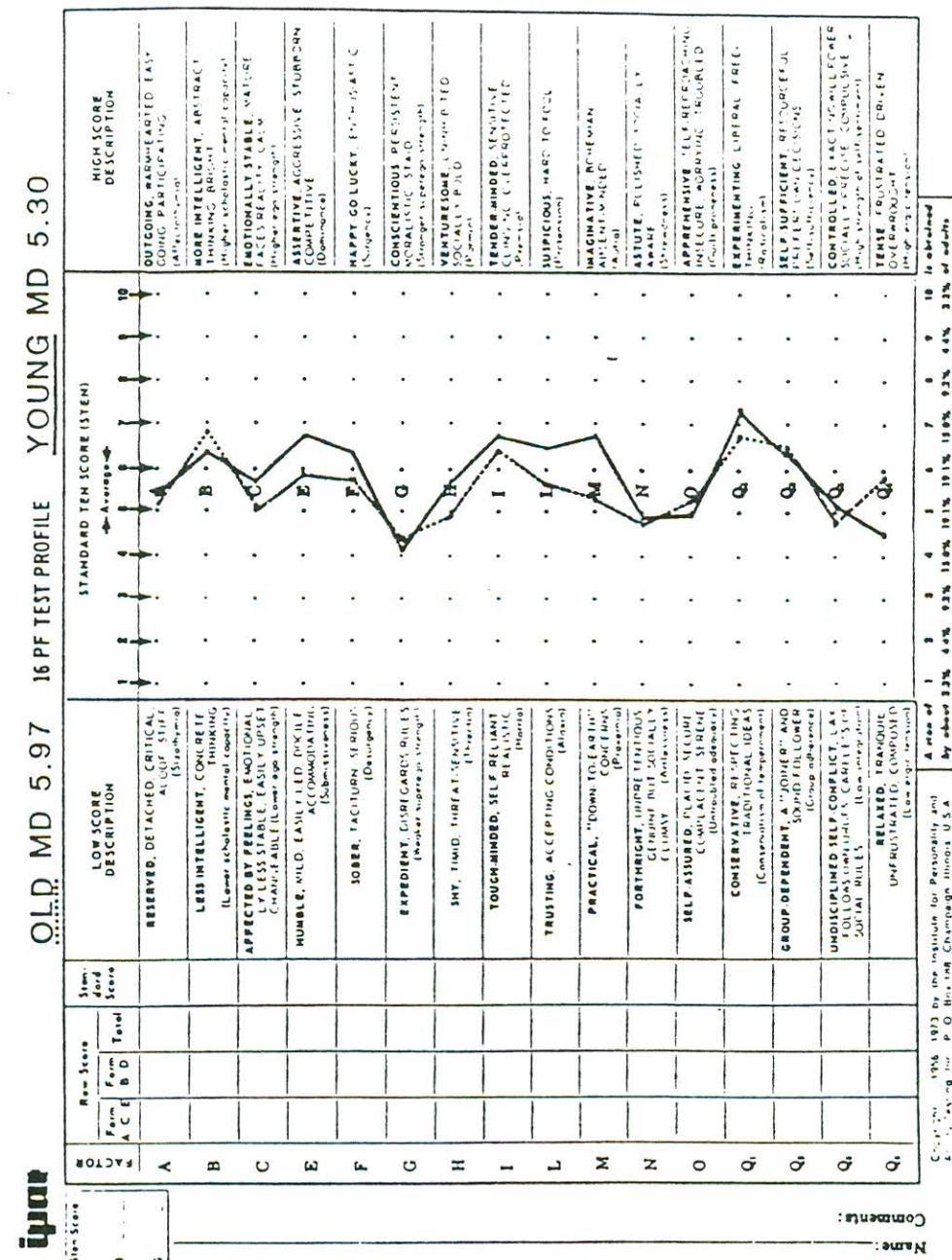


FIGURE 1. The average scores of 26 "young" (age 15-19) D&D players and 42 "old" (20-25 years) players are contrasted.

Notwithstanding newspaper reports of fundamental religious parents denouncing on the one hand that D&D is Satanic and on the other hand policemen and district attorneys blaming D&D for individual cases of runaways, suicides, and various crimes (Brooke, 1985; Dear, 1984; Shuster, 1985), our findings show a more mundane picture. Increased exposure to D&D is not positively correlated with emotional instability. Indeed, as a whole group, D&D players obtain a healthy psychological profile, as measured by the 16 PF. It appears, then, that in those cases wherein the individuals had previously played D&D, the game may have simply been an incidental, irrelevant aspect, rather than an etiological factor.

Obviously, this is one of those instances where a cause and effect study cannot be performed, so that we are forced to do a correlational study instead, a perfectly legitimate step, and one that occurs with much frequency in educational settings.

Furthermore, there is much evidence that overall playing of games is beneficial and therapeutic (Adler, 1979; Corbin, 1980; Elkins & Cochran, 1978; Hirshfeld & Hirshfeld, 1977; Lowenthal, 1977; Nickerson & O'Laughlin, 1980). For example, video games, another class of games that were initially condemned for alleged detrimental effects also of a psychological nature, were instead found to increase internal locus of control and spatial visualization (Blau, Schoppe, & Kerwin, & Spisak, 1986; Dorval & Pépin, 1986; Griffith, Voloschin, Gibb, & Bailey, 1983).

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Trial by media? Shoddy stories condemn Novak

JOURNALISTS PREFER to report facts when they can find them. But when facts are in short supply, rumor, innuendo and speculation often will do.

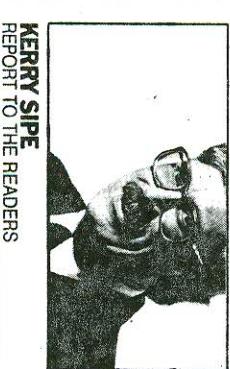
If that sounds cynical, it is because I have just reviewed all The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star have reported about a 16-year-old boy charged with slitting the throats of two children in Virginia Beach.

Frankly, some of it has been shallow and inflammatory. The readers with whom I have discussed this story are most concerned that the newspapers revealed the identity of the boy, Shawn Paul Novak, despite official efforts to keep it secret.

"I think it is despicable that you published that boy's name," one reader told me. Another said: "I was very disappointed in The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star. You have convicted this boy before he's ever been tried." A third said: "Shame on you for abusing this boy's rights under the guise of freedom of the press; in doing so you have abused all of us of our right to know the truth."

The newspaper does not routinely report the names of persons younger than 18 who have been charged with crimes. The policy is based on a belief that if a child has a better chance for rehabilitation if he is sheltered from the intense public scrutiny that surrounds a criminal investigation. Once a child is branded as a law-breaker, he may assume it is futile to try to go straight. He may conclude that no amount of exemplary behavior will overcome the fear and prejudice directed against him.

Despite the policy, the newspapers' edi-



KERRY SIPE

REPORT TO THE READERS

"If society has made a decision to treat juveniles differently from adults, and your own policy confirms the wisdom of that decision," he said, "how are you justified in naming juveniles when it's in your own self-interest?" What's your argument? Where's the philosophy there? It's an indefensible position."

Managing Editor James C. Raper made that decision in Mr. Novak's case "for the same reason we print the name of anyone charged with murder," he said. "This is a serious crime. The public has a right to know who has been charged."

Withholding the boy's name would not have accomplished anything. Mr. Raper said, "Everybody in that community knew he had been arrested. Thousands of people knew the kid's name. It's not like it was a big secret."

"If there were no news media, the boy's name would still be known," he said. "You are not going to stop people from talking about a case like this."

He said his policy has always been to

publish the names of people charged with violent crimes. "Once we were confident we knew the name, there was really no question that we would print it."

Commonwealth's Attorney Robert Hun-

phers, whose job it will be to prosecute Mr. Novak, said the editors are on shaky moral ground when they selectively enforce the policy against identifying juvenile defendants.

"If society has made a decision to treat juveniles differently from adults, and your own policy confirms the wisdom of that decision," he said, "how are you justified in naming juveniles when it's in your own self-interest?" What's your argument? Where's the philosophy there? It's an indefensible position."

Ironically, the decision by the media to interest in a crime is so intense that it surpasses the personal interests of an individual. The media have really taken the option away from the court," he said. "The best reason for trying him as a juvenile is that he probably thought the devil got hold of him."

■ Other unidentified sources observed

one untrained in psychiatry — was quoted as saying Mr. Novak is too religious and prefers friends who are younger than himself and wears belt packs. There was an implication that those activities are associated with sociopathic behavior.

■ In one story, Mr. Novak was described as having "an interest in the darker side of life," without any explanation as to what was meant by that remark.

■ Most disturbing, perhaps, is that the newspaper affords anonymity to a man who declared that if Mr. Novak came around, he would put a bullet through his head." The anonymous quote may have been intended to reflect the community's anger over the crime, but do not recall any other news story in which an anonymous source has been permitted to threaten to kill somebody.

If the words "rumor" and "innuendo" have any meaning at all, they apply to much of the information that was reported last week about this case.

The senseless murder of two little boys unquestionably has inflamed public passions. But the circumstances, as troubling as they are, simply do not justify the use of

knowing the facts of the case, it is poorly served by the quality of much of the information reported in these newspapers. If there is a legitimate public interest in that "he probably thought the devil got hold of him."

■ In one story, Mr. Novak was described as having "an interest in the darker side of life," without any explanation as to what was meant by that remark.

But if Mr. Novak is found to be guilty of these terrible crimes, it should not be because a schoolmate calls him names or because somebody is suspicious of his religious training. It should be because of hard evidence and the testimony of knowledgeable witnesses who are identified by name. Rumor, innuendo and speculation have no place in that defense.

That is why we try criminal defendants in the courts rather than in the newspapers.

■ A young girl was quoted as saying Mr. Novak is "weird." Readers were not told the girl's name or given any clue as to her definition of weirdness.

■ An anonymous woman — presumably

comments or criticism regarding the news content of The Virginian-Pilot or The Ledger-Star, call the public editor at 446-2475 or write him at 150 W. Brambleton Ave., Norfolk, Va. 23510.

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The Virginian-Pilot AND THE LEDGER-STAR

WEATHER

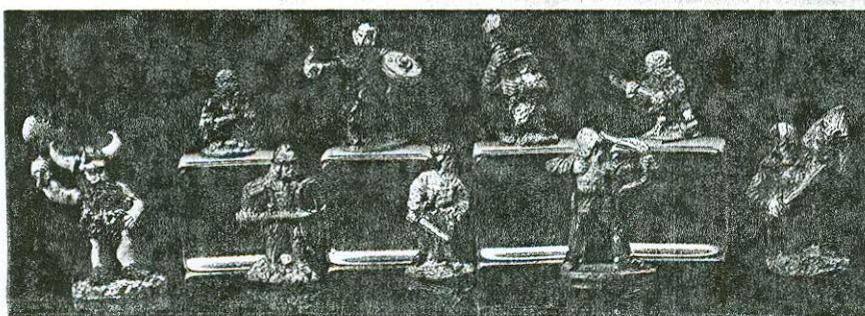
Mostly sunny but becoming cloudy by evening. Highs near 60. A 70 percent chance of rain tonight. Lows 40 to 45. Complete weather/A4

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Complete index/A2

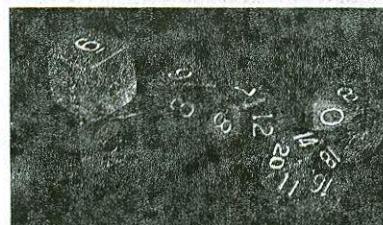
Fantasy turns to nightmare



Staff photos by MORT FRYMAN

Miniature figures and graph paper are sometimes used to track progress in a campaign.

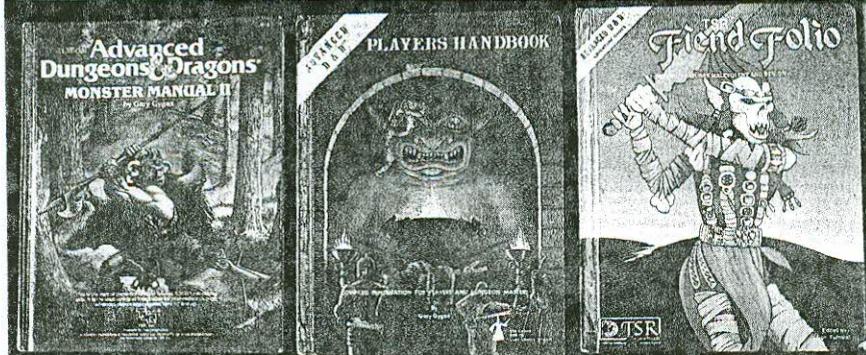
Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy role-playing game that is played in the imagination rather than on a traditional game board. **Equipment:** Players need only special odd-shaped dice, detailed game manuals and a creative mind. **Game goals:** There are no winners or losers. The object is for players to band together to navigate through caves, dungeons and castles to collect treasure. The settings are populated by demons, dragons and sorcerers who must be overcome in battle or by guile. **Characters:** Players create imaginary characters, some with mystical powers, such as fighters, clerics or magic-users. The characters adopt levels of strength, wisdom, dexterity, charisma and other traits based on a dice roll and get an assortment of weapons, equipment and armor. Weapons include axes, bows, daggers and swords. **The Dungeon Master:** He or she leads the game, inventing a mission for the players, such as rescuing a maiden from a dragon's lair or retrieving a treasure from a castle. The dungeon master describes the settings in detail, down to the sights, sounds and smells. **How to play:** Players announce their intentions to the dungeon master. Their success is determined by the dice. The characters' abilities, weapons, equipment and armor are factored in.



Rolling special dice equips characters with weapons, levels of strength.

If successful, the character moves on. If unsuccessful, the character could be wounded or killed. **How long it takes:** A game can last for hours or even years, depending on the intricacy of the mission. Experienced, skillful players can sometimes use the same character for years. **Manufacturer:** TSR Hobbies, Lake Geneva, Wis. **First Marketed:** 1973.

—Debbie Messina



Manuals such as these contain detailed descriptions of characters, weapons and spells.

Staff graphic by JOHN EARLE

For accused teen, life, games merged

By Lynn Waltz
Staff writer

VIRGINIA BEACH — In Shawn Novak's fantasy world, Daniel Geier was a Kender, a dwarflike green creature with pointy ears.

The world revolved around the playgrounds and woods of Wadsworth Homes, where Geier and other children would gather around Novak, whom they considered endlessly witty and creative, a boy who turned the mundane into the extraordinary.

Novak called them the Kenders and encouraged them to behave like the race of creatures in Dungeons & Dragons, a medieval fantasy game that Novak played with an obsession.

"Shawn had like his little group of Kenders, and the little kids would be in it," said 16-year-old John Cleapor. "They'd run around just goofing off. Daniel was in that group. ... It was pretty much normal everyday life, but he gave a name to it and made it more interesting."

In the literature of Dungeons & Dragons, the impish Kenders are playful, curious, fearless and independent. They wear their hair in braids and ponytails, often festooned with wildflowers and feathers.

The idyllic, happy-go-lucky world of the Kenders was shattered March 5 when Daniel's body, and that of a playmate, Scot Weaver, 7, were found in the woods beside a fallen tree.

They were stacked and meticulously covered beneath a blanket of branches and leaves. Fresh pine boughs obscured



Shawn Novak

Creativity fascinated friends

their faces. So natural was the shroud that the man who discovered the two small boys said he paused for a long time at the foot of their grave without noticing.

The following Saturday police arrested Novak. They declared in affidavits to the court that Novak overacted cutting the boys' throats with a knife.

Novak is now in the City Jail, awaiting a March 28 hearing before a juvenile court judge. The judge is expected to turn Novak over for trial as an adult in the Circuit Court, where the city's chief prosecutor has said he probably will seek the death penalty for the double homicide.

Early reports about Novak portray an odd youth who turned a dead bird into an ornament on a necklace and wore it to school,

Please see TEEN, Page A6

FANTASY AND FEAR

A death in Florida. Police say two teenage boys stalked and strangled a 14-year-old girl in what the chief investigator called the "culmination of the ultimate quest" in a Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game/A6

Growing up violent? A national expert says the popularity of Dungeons & Dragons is a sign of the way Americans have become jaded and desensitized to violence/A6

continued from Page A1

a loner who bragged to classmates, falsely, that he discovered the boys' bodies, an intense teenager who revelled at regular church attendance. But several dozen interviews with authorities, family members, teachers, friends and acquaintances paint a picture of a more normal 16-year-old who regularly babysat for his two younger brothers and expressed interest in girls, computer games and heavy-metal music.

He's a C-plus student who unwillingly attends church several times a week, has shoulder-length blond hair and wears T-shirts, jeans and a baseball cap. Almost all said he never had shown a violent side and are shocked that he is linked to such a grisly double murder.

At First Colonial High School, where he is a sophomore, Novak kept to himself, did not stand out and tended to sit in the back corner of the classroom. But at Wadsworth Homes, the Navy housing complex off Prosperity Road, he had several close friends.

They describe him as loyal buddy with an ingenious mind. He was fascinated by small animals, an interest that led to a bone collection and spawned a dream of a future as an archaeologist. "He was really good on his knowledge of collecting," a cousin said.

By most accounts, Novak is a typical teenager trying to find himself in a hop-scoching Navy family, a journey complicated by an off-the-boat, on-again marriage and a father who went to sea and seldom came home.

Those who know Novak best always talk about his love for the woods, a place to where he escaped from a troubled family and found solace in a rich and varied fantasy life. It transformed him from a slight-built, short teenager into characters with heroic stature and mesmerizing personality.

To his band of adoring Kenders, he was a big brother, a pied piper whose imagination could turn an ordinary walk in the woods into an action-packed, mountain-conquering adventure.

"Everybody loved Shawn," one

Relatives in Missouri, where Shawn Novak once lived, expressed shock about the charges he faces.
Pictured are Novak's uncle, Eugene Novak, front, and his wife, Jeanne; their son, Kim, and his wife, Dorian.



AP photo

always wore an Army fatigue jacket and carried a survival knife on his belt. He wore a necklace adorned with a cat's paw.

"He found it out in the woods and thought it would be cool to put it on a necklace and wear it everywhere," Kim said.

Kim described his cousin as "really smart, super smart" and said he loved to climb trees. "He was just an outdoor person."

Shawn collected bones and skulls of cats and dogs in Missouri and kept them in a shed near the trailer.

"He knew in all the different kinds of bones," Kim said. "He could tell you what animal every little bone went to."

It was in Buffalo that Shawn's mother joined the pentecostal Assembly of God Church.

Shawn was forced to attend and didn't like it, his friends said. That is not an abnormal adolescent reaction, said the Rev. Gary Wayne Neil, their pastor at the Buffalo Assembly of God Church.

"He was a very calm boy. Some young boys, they're trouble looking for a place to land. But that wasn't Shawn."

It was also in Buffalo — at the 300-student Buffalo Junior High — that Shawn was introduced to Dungeons & Dragons, his friends say.

"He was just getting into it whenever he left here," Kim said.

The hobby became such an obsession that he played it during free time at school.

"Some say Dungeons & Dragons is really evil. I don't see why people say that," said Shawn's friend Sims, who said that his mother has taken away his Dungeons & Dragons books and game materials. "But another point is that kids get too involved. Shawn was too involved."

Aside from Kenders and his funny songs, that was all he'd ever talk about," Sims said.

Shawn, Sims said, enjoyed writing songs and poetry and crafting exotic sketches.

"If he was going to draw a coffee mug, he wouldn't draw just a coffee mug with coffee," Sims said. "He'd draw a creature with the body of a mug with protrusions. And the liquid would be machinery or something."

"His stuff usually made sense and if it didn't, it was entertaining,"

"He could have been a great entertainer," he said.

Violence in pop culture is decried

By Debbie Messina
Staff writer

A national expert says that the popularity of Dungeons & Dragons is but one more sign of the way Americans have become jaded and desensitized to violence.

The acceptance of violence is especially evident in the commercial success of movies, television, books and games built around blood and gore, said Dr. Thomas Radecki, an Illinois psychiatrist and chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence.

"It has been documented that in many forms of entertainment there's an extreme fascination with violence and sexually degrading material," he said.

Before 1950, 15 percent of best-selling novels had violent themes, Radecki said. Now, it's 70 to 75 percent.

"Some people are no longer repelled by violence," Radecki said. "They learn to enjoy viewing violence. They enjoy being violent, as long as they don't get on the receiving end."

Quoting a study conducted by the University of Washington in Seattle, he said that the average American growing up on a diet of violent entertainment is 50 percent more prone to physical and verbal aggression than those who have not.

When Radecki was growing up, typical heroes were baseball's Babe Ruth and inventor Thomas Edison, he said.

Today's heroes, he said, are violent movie characters such as Sylvester Stallone's "Rambo" and Arnold Schwarzenegger's

"Terminator." Schwarzenegger's

"The evidence is really strong that the leading cause of the epidemic of violence in our society since the 1960s is the tremendous increase in violence in entertain-

ment," he said.

That is a side of Novak that his family in Missouri never saw. Because of his love for the woods, they hunted, the cousin said. Shawn never said he could never hurt an animal, much less a person.

Kim and Shawn spent endless hours roaming hundreds of acres of isolated woodlands and fishing in ponds, the cousin said. Shawn never hunted, he said. Seeing how close he could get to deer and wild turkeys without spooking them. He

"This is a total shock," said his

entertainer. "He could have been a great

DIALOGUE/Debbie Messina

Does Dungeons & Dragons contribute to violent acts?

Four months ago in Florida, police say that two teenaged boys lured a 14-year-old girl into the woods, stalked her, strangled her and set her on fire.

Last week, two 17-year-olds, avid players of Dungeons & Dragons, were indicted on first degree murder charges in the girl's death.

The crime was, in the words of the chief investigator, the "culmination of the ultimate quest" in the medieval role-playing game.

Port Orange Sheriff's Department Detective Robert Vail said the two boys became so immersed in their fantasy adventure that they camped out in the woods and acted out the hunting and killing of opponents.

"They went over the line with this thing," Vail said. "They were so deeply involved that when the opportunity presented itself, they planned this stalking-type thing, like they did in the game."

Virginia Beach authorities have not gone so far as to say that Dungeons & Dragons was an influence in the throat-slashing deaths of two boys in the woods near Wadsworth homes off Prosperity Road two weeks ago. But Shawn Novak, the 13-year-old accused in the murders, loved the game and had developed numerous characters.

But Novak's fascination with Dungeons & Dragons has been enough to touch off a flurry of debate among parents over whether it is safe for their children to play the game. The Florida case will only fuel their concern.

Do you think Dungeons & Dragons contributes to violence in society? Or is it just a game that is abused by people with a predisposition for violence? What, if anything,

YOUR TURN

Do you think there's a direct link between Dungeons & Dragons and violence?

Write us a letter and share your opinions. Address your letters to P.O. Box 62244, Virginia Beach, Va. 23462.

can be done?

"All I know is it's back and it's back strong," said Sharon Sipos, president of Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons (BADD), a national organization based in Richmond.

But to D&D enthusiasts, the game exercises the imagination. And they point out that in the game good prevails over evil.

Players say the game is not the problem. Instead, they say, the problem is participants who were already inclined to violently act out fantasies.

"The question people have to ask themselves is, 'Can they be swayed to kill somebody or themselves just because of a game?'" asked Kevin Boink, an avid player and owner of Mega City Comics in Virginia Beach, which sells the game. "If they can, that's not a person who is well adjusted anyway."

In 1988 BADD linked 125 deaths to D&D since 1979. Sipos said the number may be 300 now.

Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy role-playing game that is played in the imagination rather than on a traditional game board.

Players need only special odd-shaped dice, detailed game manuals and a creative mind.

There are no winners or losers.

The object is for players to band together to navigate through caves, dungeons and castles to collect treasures. The settings are populated by demons, dragons and sorcerers who must be overcome in battle or by guile.

The game starts with the players creating mythical characters, some with mystical powers, such as fighters, clerics, magic-users, elves and half-lings. The characters adopt varying abilities — strength, intelligence, wisdom, dexterity, constitution and charisma — based on a dice roll.

Also based on the roll of the dice, the players outfit their characters with an assortment of weapons, equipment and armor. Weapons include axes, bows, daggers and swords. The equipment includes iron spikes, lanterns, rope and torches.

The leader of the game, called the dungeon master, creates the intricate fantasy world for the players. He determines a mission for the players, whether it's rescuing a fair maiden from a dragon's lair or retrieving a treasure hoarded in castle tower.

The dungeon master then plunges the players into dangerous encounters with evil forces such as monsters, goblins, assassins and demons. The players must devise a plan to escape the dungeon master's traps by either fighting, talking or outwitting the opponent.

The players announce their intentions to the dungeon master. Their success or failure is gauged by rolls of the dice, factoring in the characters' abilities, weapons, equipment and armor.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

the Norwegian Lady

I'll always remember the first time I saw the Norwegian Lady. I was 7 years old and had just moved to Virginia Beach from Emporia. I am far too young to understand why this beautiful woman kept a silent vigil. I was old enough never to notice the sadness in her face and to feel safe and warm.

have never nor will I ever forget. I do remember that when I read it I cried for the lost souls both aboard the ship and of those who attempted to save them 100 years ago.

It is now nearly four years past my first reading of the Diktator tragedy, 16 years past the first time I saw her and 100 years past the tragedy itself. In the past four years

almost feel Captain Jorgenson himself gazing over my shoulder thanking her for not letting his family and crew go unremembered.

This year her post seems all that more important. She waits now for our young men of the sea to return from the Persian Gulf. I believe that her sad face will smile when they return.



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Shawn Novak faces trial as adult

Accused of killing boys

By Harry DeRochi
Staff writer

VIRGINIA BEACH — A judge

paved the way for prosecutors to seek the death penalty for Shawn Paul Novak on Thursday by ruling that the 16-year-old should be tried as an adult in the March killings of two neighborhood boys.

"The interest of the public demands this matter be transferred to the Circuit Court," said Juvenile Court Judge Frederick P. Aucamp at the close of the

three-hour hearing. "This is not the court to try this kind of case."

The ruling turned back arguments by Novak's attorneys that prosecutors were basing their capital murder case on a weak confession obtained with "lies and trickery."

Public Defender Peter Legler said police Detective Shawn Hoffman deceived Novak about evidence and coaxed his mother into leaving the interview room

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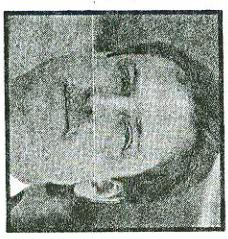


Illustration by BETTY WELLS

Shawn Novak and his parents, Leroy and Jenny, watch as a judge

determines that the 16-year-old should be tried as an adult.

STRESSFUL CASE



A look at Shawn Hoffman, the investigator who got Novak's confession/A2

NOVAK

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the Washington, D.C.-based National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Since 1973, 109 juveniles have been sentenced to death.

Questions over whether the death penalty can be applied legally to juvenile offenders — defined as those under 18 years of age — have been answered in recent years by a series of decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court.

There has been no definitive guideline set down by the court. But it has generally been accepted that a 15-year-old is too young to be executed, based on a 1988 Supreme Court decision.

That belief was bolstered in 1989 when the court upheld the death sentence handed a 16-year-old and his 17-year-old co-defendant in Kentucky.

The issue has never been decided in a Virginia case. In an interview Monday, Mahan argued that juveniles, who are unable to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of adults, should not be held to adult punishments.

In addition, he said, executing teenagers accomplishes none of the goals of the death penalty.

"As punishment, as an example to others, the execution of 16-year-olds is not going to serve as a deterrent to many adults," Mahan said.

The motion on the death penalty was one of four Mahan filed Monday morning.

The attorney asked that the Jan. 13 trial be delayed because of problems the defense has had in getting information from police and prosecutors.

Key evidence was not submitted to them until 10 days ago and included a videotape of Novak's interrogation by police "that was completely unintelligible," Mahan wrote.

He asked that prosecutors provide him with a copy of the report from a mental-health expert appointed by the court to determine Novak's mental state at the time of the murders.

"The defendant is not required, nor can he be expected to rely upon the opinions of the commonwealth's experts when his life is at stake," Mahan wrote in his motion.

Humphreys countered in an interview that it is the defense that has been dragging its feet by neglecting to forward psychiatric data provided them from a private physician in Harrisonburg.

Novak's lawyers move to block death penalty

By Kerry DeRochi
Staff writer



exercise.

"I don't think they've got a legal leg to stand on," said Commonwealth's Attorney Robert J. Humphreys, who added he has not yet decided whether to seek the death penalty.

"I think they're jumping through the hoops," he said.

A hearing on the motions was set for 2 p.m. today before Circuit Judge John K. Moore.

In a motion filed in Circuit Court, attorneys for Shawn Paul Novak argued it would be unconstitutional to send the 16-year-old to the electric chair.

If the death penalty was imposed, Novak would become the youngest member of Virginia's death row.

"I feel the imposition of the death penalty would violate our current standards of decency as it relates to 16-year-olds," said attorney Stephen C. Mahan.

"It amounts to nothing more than cruel and unusual punishment to a juvenile," he said.

But the motion, one in a flurry

filed by Mahan, was described by prosecutors as a meaningless legal

exercise.

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In a motion filed in Circuit Court, attorneys for Shawn Paul Novak argued it would be unconstitutional to send the 16-year-old to the electric chair.

If convicted and sentenced to death, Novak would become Virginia's second teenager in six months to be sentenced to the electric chair.

In August, a Middlesex County jury sentenced Douglas C. Thomas to death for killing his girlfriend's parents. He was 17 at the time of the murders.

Now 18, Thomas is the youngest inmate on death row. Prison officials say.

He is one of the 34 juveniles on death row nationwide, according to

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Fantasy May Have Gone Askew

Investigators Say Game Could Be Linked to Va. Woman's Killing

By Bill Miller
Washington Post Staff Writer

SPOTSYLVANIA, Va.—In the two weeks since Thelma Curtis Chewning was killed with an ax and a butcher knife at her home in the tiny hamlet of Paytes, her 15-year-old grandson has been charged and residents here have desperately searched for a reason behind such a senseless crime.

Now some think they have found one in the fantasy game of Dungeons & Dragons, the boy's favorite pastime. Investigators are saying the crime and the game may be linked, and the principal of the local high school has banned D&D.

In the weeks before the March 1 killing, the boy, whose name is not being published because he is a juvenile, played in a Dungeons & Dragons adventure in which he and his classmates were trying to dethrone a vicious queen who tortured and exploited peasants, his friends reported.

"He may have been fantasizing about killing someone as one of the characters in his game and acted the fantasy out," Commonwealth's Attorney William F. Neely said. "It's one motive that is being looked at."

"It's kind of a typical teenage obsession," Neely said of the suspect and the game. "But it was sort of his life, at least his recreational life."

Chewning, 62, whom friends described as gentle and compassionate, was a treasurer at her Baptist church, a woman who loved to play cards and bingo with her two sisters. She lived at her home near the Orange County line—about 70 miles southwest of Washington—with her son, grandson and mother. She had cared for the 15-year-old grandson since his parents separated more than a decade ago.

The attack took place early on March 1, shortly after Chewning told the grandson to go to bed, police said.

Chewning was stabbed repeatedly with a butcher knife and bludgeoned with an ax. She was hit so hard and viciously by her attacker that the ax handle broke, police said.

The youth allegedly fled in Chewning's Cadillac, taking with him his Dungeons & Dragons strategy books, police said. The grandmother collapsed in her front yard, where police believe she had gone trying to get help.

Citing the viciousness of the crime, prosecutors want to try the boy as an adult on a first-degree

murder charge. The knife and ax were found at Chewning's house, and the boy was arrested hours after the killing at a Fredericksburg, Va., motel. A hearing is set for April 9 in the county's Juvenile Court.

It was a grisly crime. A shocking crime. And reaction was swift.

Cary Atkins, the principal of Spotsylvania High School, where

"He read Stephen King and liked heavy metal too, but they're not saying everybody who reads Stephen King is going to kill somebody."

— Classmate of the accused youth

the boy and about 30 classmates played fantasy games as part of a Strategic Games Club, said he's concerned about his students' safety, and last week he told students they were not to play Dungeons & Dragons at school—ever, in any form.

In December, Atkins had forbidden the game after receiving complaints from some parents who were concerned about its occult references and the potential for violence.

"I didn't want to take any chances with the safety of our young people," Atkins said in an interview.

But several students, including the suspect, had continued to play a modified version of D&D, minus references to magic, hoping that would appease worried parents.

A local church now wants the school to ban all role-playing fantasy games and has asked the county's school superintendent to raise the issue with the School Board.

"We don't need the threat. Why fool with it?" said the Rev. Cliff Reynolds, pastor of Goshen Baptist Church. "Not everybody who plays this game is going to go bonkers. But there are young people who, because of their environment or emotional needs, are going to take it too seriously."

Since its creation 20 years ago, Dungeons & Dragons has been blamed for other violence, including

the March 1991 killing of two boys in Virginia Beach by Shawn P. Novak, a teenager obsessed by the medieval fantasy game.

The game's defenders say Dungeons & Dragons often is made a scapegoat for tragedy by those who don't understand it. A spokesman for manufacturer TSR Inc., of Lake Geneva, Wis., said more than 6 million Americans play D&D.

Games can last for long periods of time as players move about in fictional castles, dungeons and other places in a medieval struggle of good vs. evil governed by the roll of multi-faced dice.

Several of the boy's friends who played D&D with him said that his character in the game was a kind of good Samaritan and that players are penalized for violence. They said that nothing in the boy's recent behavior suggested a violent nature.

"I don't think there's any place to kill your grandmother in Dungeons & Dragons," said Mike Cagnina, 15, a sophomore and friend of the suspect's.

"The people in the community aren't really educated in the facts of the game," said Anthony Miles, 16, a junior. "There are penalties if you do anything unethical. I think it's sad the way people are treating the club and the way the school is taking care of this matter."

"He read Stephen King and liked heavy metal too, but they're not saying everybody who reads Stephen King is going to kill somebody, or that everybody who likes heavy metal is going to kill somebody," said another boy, 16, who did not want to be identified.

Lisa Gates, the Spotsylvania High School English teacher who supervised the boy and 30 or so classmates in the Strategic Games Club, said the group played games every other Wednesday in classrooms after school.

Gates, who said she believes the games have educational value, said the meetings were typical adolescent gatherings that tended to last about two hours or until the refreshments ran out. The students, she said, were nearly all boys and were polite and well behaved.

Gates said some club members were picked on by other youngsters after the slaying. "I know people are desperately searching for an answer," she said. "But at this point, nobody has given me or Dr. Atkins any clear connection. They're still searching."