

Introduction: Mr. Bromberg looks at D&D from an angle some of us sometimes forget: instructing newcomers to D&D roleplaying. When the newcomers number 55, one runs into certain mechanical problems. How does one instruct an entire class of new role-players? The following is Mr. Bromberg's account of just that experience:

A SHORT COURSE IN *D&D*®

Dan Bromberg

Dungeons and Dragons is very popular at Cranbrook Prep School. At the beginning of the school year, a lot of sophomores and juniors played *D&D*. And most all of the returning freshman had heard of *D&D*. However, none of the new freshmen knew how to play. Well, one day last fall a friend of mine, David Baxter, began to talk with Sean McCarthy, a new student and Tolkien fanatic, about *D&D*. David taught Sean and some other new students *D&D*. Slowly but surely, *D&D* spread until, incredibly, there were no more than four or five new freshmen who did not know how to play.

Obviously, there was much interest in *D&D* at Cranbrook. Interest not only in playing, but in learning it. So, a couple of experienced players began talking about having a *D&D* course in Interim. Interim at Cranbrook is a two week period where people either go on trips or take unusual courses at school. For example, there were trips to London, Mexican ruins, New York, etc. The courses ranged from Tutankhamen, computer programming, chamber music, to SAT preparation. Anyway, despite talking about having a course, none of the experienced players did anything about it. Well, one of the new Freshmen, Mark Middleton, did. He talked to the director of Interim, Carol Lebo. She told Mark that he needed a faculty member to sponsor and supervise the course, if it got off the ground. This is where I got involved. Since Mark hadn't played for very long, I decided to lend my knowledge to the course. Mark and I talked and we decided that we should have 15 beginners for the course. Then, through a friend of mine, we recruited Dr. Welch to supervise the course. After that we wrote up our course description and waited for the sign up.

We got an amazing turn-out. Over 60 people signed up for *D&D*. We had figured on getting many new freshmen students, but not the number of day students, juniors and seniors we did. At first (to keep the number of people down), the course required instructor approval. After a talk with Dr. Welch, it was decided that everyone would be let in. (Fortunately, our number was reduced to 55 by the time the course began). Then we went to the list and picked 10 Dungeonmasters. Originally we wanted DM's who were experienced players, but hadn't DM'ed before, but the number of people in the course forced us to use everyone we could. Each DM had a group of 5 players, except one, David Albrect. He took care of the people who "died" by putting them in his game. I was the "rover" who went around and helped solve any problems that arose.

The number of people in the course also allowed us to adjust the scheduling of the course. Since we had some players who had already played, we had to interest them without penalizing the beginner. So, we had a "random dungeon" in the first week and a "method-to-your-madness" dungeon the second week. In the first week, we used the first day to discuss the rules. I stumbled through the first 15 minutes doing an excellent job of confusing even the DMs until Mark stepped in and woke everybody up. Then, we divided up into the DMs' groups and let the DM's explain the rules. We broke up into groups because the players were getting restless and we thought that the players learn *D&D* best by playing it. Then, we began to play the "Random Dungeon."

Money. Well, we did need some money to run the class. We decided on \$1.50 from everybody except the DMs for the course and an optional \$1.50 for low impact dice. We wanted to let people have an opportunity to get dice because polyhedral dice are essential to *D&D*. We used the other \$1.50 per person to buy more dice and books. The DMs used the high impact dice during the two weeks, and then sets of high impact dice were given out for our tournament. The books we bought, a Basic *D&D* and a Player's Handbook, were to be donated to

the Cranbrook Library. However, Dr. Welch pointed out that books would not last a week in the library. So, we decided to give the books to the club we are forming.

The club, it was decided, will have a limited membership while it is being formed, to make it's set up easy. We are going to use the books for the club. We will also subscribe to *The Dragon* and other wargaming periodicals.

The dungeon we used the first week was, according to its designer, Paul Dworkin, "sickeningly normal." The dungeon was randomized except for a few things, like a treasure room that was guarded by ogres on the first level. The dungeon also had some interesting rooms: like one with bottle caps and another that had lead pieces! The dungeon introduced the characters to high level monsters with low hit points or other problems. There was a beholder with only two eyes and a baby white dragon with seven hit points. I'm not sure now if this was good, because it might have given some players the wrong idea about high level monsters. Also, fighters and thieves were started as 2nd level so they could have more hit points. M-U's and clerics were started as 3rd level so they could use 2nd level spells. Again we weren't sure that this was the best thing to do, but at least it kept the beginners alive.

To give the players a chance to develop, the characters they rolled in the first week were used during the second week. The tournament winner would be the person who was either 1) the most improved or 2) helped the others to learn how to play. We toyed with another interesting system, but rejected it. In it the winner was the one with the best experience over hit points lost ratio. This system equalized the classes, because although a fighter kills more monsters than an M-U, he also loses more hit points. We did not pick a winning group for a couple of reasons. First, the characteristics were random, so one group could have better characters. Secondly, the DM's all play differently. Finally, some groups had more experienced players than others.

In the second week we divided the nine DM's into three groups of three. You see, we wanted to try out a system whereby the three groups were in the same universe in the material plane. They could meet, join up, and/or kill each other. It was an interesting idea. It did not work, however. We wanted the groups to meet later in the week. For that reason each group was given a different objective. This was done for two other reasons: 1) to prevent "cheating" outside of class and 2) so no objective would already be taken. Despite this, two groups met on the first day. It was a disaster. Everyone was mad and felt cheated, mostly by me. As I sorted out this mess, I realized the main reason for the players' irritation: for some reason, it's all right to be killed by a monster, but not by a player character. As soon as we could, the DMs and I agreed it would not work and stopped it.

Letting groups meet was not the only problem we had. In fact, the biggest problems were death and paralyzation. When people died, we put them into the dungeon that David was running because, this being an "official" school course, the dead people wouldn't be allowed to leave the room 30 or 40 minutes early. The problem was, that as the week progressed, too many people died. Not all could be put into David's game. To compensate, we put some dead people into other groups if someone were absent there. Nobody liked that situation. The dead people were usually not accepted by the players in the group he or she was put into. However, dead people were better off than those paralyzed. The paralyzed people couldn't be put into David's game, because they could possibly be cured, either that day or the next. Unfortunately, they usually weren't cured quickly. Dr. Welch suggested that we do away with paralyzed players. From the view of running the course it was the right thing. However, from a *D&D* purist point of view I didn't like it. We had already departed from *D&D* guidelines in character levels and in monsters and I was afraid that we were giving a wrong idea of *D&D*. Finally, after talking with Dr. Welch and Mark, I was convinced that either giving people 2 characters or having servants, who could be taken over by the players after death or paralyzation, was the best idea.

Despite the problems of death and paralyzation, I feel the course was successful. The course taught over thirty people how to play and cleared up many misconceptions about *D&D*. The course was enjoyable to almost everyone and most of the complaints, I feel, were from the tensions created simply by playing *D&D*. With the success we had this year, I'm sure we will give an even more successful course next year.