MAKING THE GRADE

Role-playing and education
by Jeff Albanese

Role-playing games have become more than an entertaining way to fill a few hours or a weekend for Jeff Albanese, our RPGA™ Network regional director in Long Beach, Calif. Jeff has been teaching the AD&D® game to some of his special-education students during lunch, and has found the game to be an educational tool that has caused some of the children to become more interested in learning.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could turn our hobbies into a way to earn a living? Or, failing that, wouldn't it be nice to to mix our hobbies and work once in a while? As a high-school teacher currently working in special education, I have had the chance to introduce role-playing games to some of my students.

Now before all of you teachers and students try to jump into using role-playing games in school, there are some guidelines that you should follow. First, you must make sure the students involved have good attention spans, and the teacher must be patient with the students. These two elements are important in helping to keep everyone's interest in the game.

In my endeavors I also was helped by the fact one of my students has been playing the AD&D® game for about a year, which broke the ice in terms of getting the students into the role-playing aspect of the game. I made that student the party leader and managed to make sure everyone else got to lead at least once.

Combining role-playing games and education involves two stages. The first stage involves using skills that are taught in school:

Vocabulary. Let's face it: Looking at the various game manuals and learning all those words and terms improves a player's vocabulary and spelling.

Math. Division practices and calculating and percentages come to mind as skills that a player must learn in order to do well in role-playing games.

History. Since most role-playing games have some type of historical world to go along with them, a player's interest in history could be sparked.

The second stage of this learning process is what I refer to as the "non-school skills" — the ones we learn at home. The following would be listed in this group:

Leadership. Taking command and making decisions is something that we all do in both role-playing games and in real life.

Cooperation. In order to do well in gaming, all members of a party must get along, just as we must in everyday life.

Creativity and imagination. These are the heart and soul of any role-playing game. Without these, role-playing games could not

exist. Likewise, society would be still in the dark ages if creativity and imagination didn't exist or were controlled — something that has happened many times in the past, and sometimes even today.

Problem-solving. The last important skill that players learn in role-playing games is that of problem-solving. Most games present situations where the players attempt to solve a mystery, riddle, problem, etc. This is a skill that we can carry over into education and work.

Overall, the most important results I have noticed in combining gaming and education is the increase in learning the game spurs. Gaming has caused some of the special-education students I work with to come out of the shell that many of them

have constructed around themselves. A group of students, when given a common interest, tends to become more social and open. Given this, these students then tend to be more open in class, and ask more questions if they don't understand the material.

On the other hand, when these students do understand the material, they learn more material faster, which is one of the major goals of education. Even if the learning levels of these students do not improve by leaps and bounds, they eventually come to see learning as a fun process, and not as the hard work that many children and teachers characterize it as. Learning should be fun; otherwise it becomes boring. Role-playing games, and games in general, introduce some needed fun into education.

FASA's MECHWARRIOR™ Tournament, "The Glory Grab"; Robert Bell of I.C.E. for the CHAMPIONS™ Tournament, "On the Wings of Valkyries"; William Tracy for Chaosium's Stormbringer Event, "The Unicorn of Law"; and Chaosium for the Elfquest Tournament, "The Outcasts," the CALL OF CTHULHU Tournament, "The City In The Sea," the Pendragon Tournament, "The Adventure of the Dolorous Worm," and Avalon Hill's Runequest Tournament, "Times of Trouble."

There were several memorable happenings at HQ this GEN CON® Game Fair, such as DM extraordinaire Peter Hague teaching me how to make spitting sounds without actually spitting. Mudd, the NPC sea captain in the AD&D® game Grand Masters tournament, liked to spit over the side of his ship, so Peter took it upon himself to show me how to imitate Mudd. Marti Hayes, the GEN CON Game Fair manager, came upon the scene and ended the tutoring session with a long piece of masking tape.

Then there was an evening when Regional Director Keith Polster pretended to use Skip Williams' head as a football. At the time, Skip was doing an imitation of a pampered house cat. DM Darryl Behling kept us amused by studying a sandwich he left at HQ overnight. The lettuce had turned an interesting shade of brown. Darryl ultimately decided not to eat it. Harold Johnson, who was doing a ghastly impersonation of a zombie because he had gone without sleep the night before, ran a fantastic final round of the Grand Masters. Finally, all of the volunteers in HQ improved their fly-swatting techniques.

Most memorable, however, was the assistance the Network received from several of its loyal members. Without their help the Network would not have been able to shine at GEN CON Game Fair this year. Very

special thanks go to Chris Schon, who arrived in Lake Geneva about two weeks before the convention. Chris was responsible for organizing most of the RPGA tournaments into folders and boxes, and recruiting several game masters. John Vaccaro spent countless hours developing charts to keep track of tournaments, judges, and players. Dan Kramarsky wrote the final round of the AD&D Masters Tournament during the week before the convention. Skip Williams coordinated the Masters and Grand Masters tournaments, and helped HQ run smoothly. Rembert Parker and Michael Selinker expertly marshalled players and judges. Rembert also expertly immersed himself in mounds of paperwork at HQ. Sylvia Deering, Rick Wright, Peter Hague, Michael Selinker, Chris Schon, Dan Kramarsky, Lew Wright, Doug Wood, Steve Hardinger, Bob Etheridge, and others took turns at the table in front of HQ to answer gamers' questions. Gary Haynes, Richard Rydberg, Bruce Rabe, and Jim Wade also helped before the convention.

In addition, several RPGA members assisted Harold Johnson with the AD&D open. They are Jay Tummelson, Michael Selinker, Errol Farstad, Keith Polster, Andy Bethke and Michael Lach. Thanks are also extended to all the game masters who coordinated tournaments, volunteered a few hours at HQ, and generally helped the RPGA's events run smoothly. The evening before GEN CON Game Fair several RPGA Network members pitched in to help give out registration materials to people arriving early at the convention.

All of their efforts made GEN CON 20 Game Fair very enjoyable and a very important convention for the RPGA Network. With everyone's help again next year, GEN CON 21 Game Fair will be even better.

Take care,
Jean Rabe