

Dungeons and Dragons deserves deference



CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PAT PAYNE

Randor faces the orc, watching the fecund creature swing a heavy maul toward him. Mike rolls his twenty-sided die, and it comes up a 20! Randor's greatsword strikes the orc in the belly, slicing through the pitiful armor protecting it. It falls to the ground, a lifeless heap.

That was just a minuscule sampling of the action happening on campuses around the country as tabletop adventurers explore paper dungeons in search of fame, glory and, above all, loot. The game of choice for these adventurers is D&D.

What is D&D, you ask? Dungeons and Dragons is the progenitor of all modern role-playing games. Basically, the players assume the roles of characters that they have created, much like an actor assumes a role in a play or movie. The DM (for dungeon master) takes on the job of "director," if you will, controlling the world around the characters, including villains, villagers, the weather and even the fictional deities of the world.

Players can wield a sword as a mighty paladin, master stealth as a rogue or even command the primal forces of magic as a sorcerer. All this through the player's imagination and a handful of oddly-shaped dice.

The game came about as an extension of a more traditional war game put out by the Tactical Strategic Rules game club of Lake Geneva, Wisc., which would become the leading gaming company of the '80s and

'90s. After a while, the players found it more fun to play as individuals completing an epic quest. With that, Dungeons and Dragons was born.

Now in its third iteration (the first ran from 1974-1980, the second, "Advanced Dungeons & Dragons," from 1984-1999 and the third released three months ago), the game has proved immensely successful and laid the groundwork for a panoply of later games. D&D has also sparked novels, comic books, a 1982-83 Saturday morning cartoon and, coming later this year, a motion picture.

With such a runaway and sustained success, gaming should have been fully accepted (or at least tolerated) by the mainstream by now. That's what would happen in a world filled with normal people.

Yet groups like Patricia Pulling's B.A.D.D. ("Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons," a group she established after her son's suicide, which she blamed on the game) continually try to get the game banned or censored. Jack Chick, the religious right's grand poobah of foolishness, published one of his toilet-paper pamphlets excoriating D&D and calling it a direct entrance to Satanism and other really, really bad things. James Dobson of "Focus on the Family" took it one step further, making the outrageous claim that it is morally right for a person to steal and destroy gaming materials to "save" the players.

So what's the problem with D&D? The main complaint from the ruling cabal of the village idiots is twofold: First, the characters use magic, which in the Bible is seen as a tool of the devil; second, that the game uses its own, often polytheistic, theological system that has no mention of Jesus Christ.

First, yes, the *characters* do use magic, but characters are fictional constructs. To say that a player is actually casting magic when his character chants "magic missile" is the

equivalent of saying that Harrison Ford is a mass murderer because so many Nazis died in "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Just who has the fuzzy grasp of reality here?

Secondly, the religions in the game are also fictional, and so praying, in game terms, to Pelor



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(a good-aligned basic game deity) would have as much relevance as someone believing in The Force. However, no player I've ever met in a game has had even the slightest inclination toward the "dark side" (OK, one went into advertising, but that's a different story).

In fact, one of my old friends, the one who introduced me to the game, is a devout

church member, and, when last I heard, was running church-sanctioned D&D games. The guy with red underwear and horns was nowhere to be seen.

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The kids aren't all right when history repeats itself



DIARY OF A MALCONTENT

MICHAEL J. KLECKNER

It's National Character Counts! Week, and the Josephson Institute, a public-benefit, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, released the preliminary results Monday of its "2000 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth."

This is not a report card you want to show off proudly. This report card should greatly concern parents, educators and politicians. Take a listen to what the Josephson Institute found in its nationwide study of 8,600 high school students:

- 71 percent of high school students cheated on an exam in the past year and 45 percent said they cheated two or more times.

- 92 percent lied to their parents in the past year and 79 percent said they did so two or more times.

- 78 percent lied to a teacher and 27 percent said they would lie to get a job.

What's up, y'all? Dirty, lying cheaters. I know I'm a Gen X-er and my childhood started in a kinder, gentler era of American life, but is our culture so corrupt and perverse as to have raised teens this poorly? No wonder President Clinton lied about his sexual endeavors. All the kids are doing it.

But wait, there's more:

- 16 percent said they have been drunk in school in the past year.

- 40 percent of males and 30 percent of females say they stole something from a store in the past year.

So now they're stealing, lying, dirty, cheating drunks. Great. Whose fault is this? Are their parents so greedy and debased that they have demonstrated nothing in the way of personal ethics? Do they care so little about the quality of their souls that they'll sacrifice personal dignity for a false and superficial sense of success? Where have we gone wrong?

If you call now, you can get vio-

lence absolutely free:

- 68 percent of students say they hit someone because they were angry in the past year and 46 percent did so at least twice.

- 47 percent (and 60 percent of males) said they could get a gun if they wanted.

These statistics are pathetic and grotesque. Whose fault is it? Who cares. When I spoke to my parents about this study, they told me that lots of kids did the same stuff when they were in high school. Yeah, and then those teens grew up and became parents, and look where that got us. Apparently today's teens have been taught that material success is important enough to live in a world where no one respects themselves, each other or anything beyond physical gratification. That's not success. Success is living well, with an inner sense of character, so that we don't all have to walk around the world thinking everyone else is a stealing, lying, cheating drunk. No matter how many toys we have, an ethics-free world isn't successful.

But this vision of success is everywhere. While some people

want to post the Ten Commandments in schools, it isn't enough to say "be good." The adult world — media, business, social groups, peer groups, teachers, everyone — needs to be teaching by example. Teens don't care what their parents say when they see them doing whatever it takes to get ahead, have a better career and buy that second SUV. Apparently, not enough people in America care, because it isn't getting through to our kids.

So maybe I should just stop sounding like Bible Jim and join the party. Get myself a bottle of Jack Daniel's and head off to class with a baseball bat and a term paper I stole off the Internet. After all, the one thing I know is that 99 percent of all those kids surveyed will end up being successful in life. Wait, that's a lie. But I guess I don't care.

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Letters to the editor

Vote progressive

Many voters may be discouraged or confused by the large number of ballot measures in this election. Hopefully, the book-thick voter's pamphlet and so many measures will not discourage some voters from participating.

There IS a solution. If your general philosophy is pro-education and pro-environment, if you support working families and their interests, or if you are interested in background checks for gun sales at weapons fairs, please use the "Oregon United" progressive voters' guide online at www.oregonunited.org. Or, check the articles in the October issue of "The OTHER Paper" at various outlets around town or online at www.efn.org/~topaper.

And please, don't forget to vote and return your mail ballot by 8 p.m. on Nov. 7.

James Jacobson
 University classified staff member