
A MEDIA SPOTLIGHT SPECIAL REPORT

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

A LOOK AT FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

by Albert James Dager

Although fantasy wargames have been around for some time, it is only recently that they have become a fad, particularly among university and college students.

One such game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, is perhaps the most popular. It received considerable notoriety when the news media reported that it may have been a link in a series of mysterious circumstances surrounding the disappearance and subsequent suicide of University of Michigan student, James Dallas Egbert. It was suspected that 17-year-old Egbert had fallen victim to traps encountered during a real-life role-playing activity associated with that game in August of 1979. The bizarre circumstances surrounding his disappearance are shrouded in mystery as a result of his subsequent suicide a year later in August, 1980.

Equally bizarre are the circumstances related to *Dungeons & Dragons* and its part in formulating the idea for a series of mass murders in the "Freeway Killer" episodes in Southern California. According to the testimony of one of the suspects in those killings, the game was a motivating factor in prompting the actions of him and his accomplices.

There are several variations to *Dungeons & Dragons* as well as innumerable other games which center on fantasy and role-playing. Many electronic versions exist which, for a nominal price, allow participants to match their skills and wits against unforeseen circumstances in their quest for imaginary treasures secreted among imaginary labyrinthine obstacles.

It has come to my attention through inquiries from different locales, that this particular game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, has become, or is becoming, a fad on Christian college campuses. One dean of a prominent Christian university in the South called and, not being familiar with the game, asked our opinion since it was absorbing a good part of some students' time and was apparently gaining in popularity.

I must confess that, at the time, I knew little about the game beyond the fact that it involved a role-playing format centering on the imagined use of magic and blood-letting. Even with that limited information, however, it was easy to discern that such fantasy could harbor spiritual danger for the participant. The

dean with whom I spoke was astute enough to recognize such a possibility and he is to be commended for his concern in wanting to do what he could to protect those students under his authority and care. He was wise enough to seek as much information as possible, in order to be sure that he wasn't himself chasing phantoms, before confronting his student body with the issue. (This is a lesson we could all learn in our dealing with spiritual enemies.)

I have since, with prayer, done some research into *Dungeons & Dragons* and upon that research I have drawn some conclusions which, no doubt, will bring accusations that I'm just trying to find more areas in which to destroy people's fun. But I would like to reiterate, as I have before, that all things which come under scrutiny by Media Spotlight are examined in the light of God's Word and His truth. Only His light is pure enough and bright enough to expose the hidden flaws in seemingly innocent subjects. To do that it is necessary for us to put our own preferences aside and take on the mind of Christ, looking at everything as He would see it and not as we would like to see it.

As one who was at one time a "chessnut," my personal inclination would be to find a fascination with games that stimulate the imagination and offer challenges to logic and to problem-solving abilities. Yet, if one were to examine my heart and, indeed, every human heart, it would be found that the greatest satisfaction to be gained in winning out over great odds would be in the gratification of self: ego.

In fact, all competition has built into it the danger of falling into an ego trip (or trap). This is not to say that all competition as such is evil. In a free society, competition is necessary to ensure survival. Competition, though, should be engaged in with an attitude of humility, trusting God for the outcome, whatever it might be.

Some endeavors offer a greater temptation for ego to manifest itself in us, however. The next thing to actual defeat of others and self-exaltation as rulers over the vanquished is the voluntary, imaginary role-playing that is offered by such games as *Dungeons & Dragons*.

One might argue, and reasonably so, that *Dungeons & Dragons* offers no greater

an opportunity than sports such as football, basketball, or even golf to feed the ego. Yet there is a unique self-satisfaction that comes with superior mental achievement that does not come with physical achievement. This is because, above all, man is a spiritual being and, in everything, he seeks to satisfy his soul — even when engaged in what seem to be purely physical endeavors.

It is the opportunity for self-satisfaction that causes fantasy role-playing games to be so popular on campuses where it is meant for the intellect to be stimulated.

But why focus our examination on *Dungeons & Dragons*? Because, beyond the self-aggrandizement offered by other types of games (even chess), this game offers the player the added opportunity to cast himself in roles associated with demon powers. In his imagination he assumes the role of a sorcerer or some super-human person who possesses extraordinary abilities. It is through the casting of spells and enchantments that he breaks the powers of others seeking to destroy him on his quest for treasure.

The game offers an endless variety of situations as well as abilities to overcome, through magic, the adverse circumstances presented. The players create their own characters based upon guidelines that categorize them as "good" or "evil." There are six basic abilities for each character: strength, intelligence, wisdom, constitution, dexterity, and charisma. The game's creators suggest that characters be classified according to their strongest traits, determined by the rolling of dice.

Should a character have an exceptionally high rating in intelligence he would best be suited as a "Magic-user." He may also learn additional languages (some of them not human) which may enable him to overcome certain obstacles to his progress.

According to the instruction manual, "Wisdom is the prime requisite for clerics. Clerics can perform miraculous spells even though they do not have special intelligence, and second level (experienced) clerics can heal wounds."

It should be noted that, "Clerics are humans who have dedicated themselves to one or more of the gods. Depending on the god, the cleric may be good or evil, lawful or chaotic. Clerics have their own special spells. . . . Spells for evil clerics differ slightly from those of good clerics."

In addition to the above occultic roles available are those of "Fighting Men" including "Elves," "Dwarves," and "Half-lings" (half-human and half-something else). Then there are "Thieves" described as "humans with special abilities to strike a deadly blow from behind, climb sheer surfaces, hide in shadows, filch items and

