

New Updated Research!

Should a Christian Play Dungeons & Dragons?

by William Schnoebelen

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. 1 Cor. 15:33

Believe it or not, it has been nearly 12 years since I wrote the original Straight Talk on Dungeons and Dragons. In that time, I have received hundreds of letters and at least a thousand emails about it. This subject is surprisingly controversial, even among Christians. This astonishes me!

The posting of my article on the web and the arrival of email as a means of mass communication have facilitated the process wherein I can engage in dialog with those who defend D&D and Fantasy Role Playing Games (FRPG) in general. In this context, I am amazed at how many so-proclaimed Christians who defend the game, do so with foul and abusive language. This, I think, speaks volumes about the spiritual impact of the game.

Just a quick survey shows the cultural impact of D&D and its offspring. Just recently, a spectacular movie called Dungeons and Dragons was released. Additionally, the pop culture is virtually drowning in sorcery and occult related topics.

Today shelves in major bookstores literally groan under the weight of various of books on Wicca, for example. Some of these books, like TEEN WITCH, are written for young readers. There is even a DUMMIES GUIDE TO WICCA AND WITCHCRAFT!! When D&D started, you could perhaps find four or five books on Wicca in print.

Now, obviously not all of this can be laid at the door of D&D. But in the 1970's, it was one of the major cultural phenomena that planted the seeds that have sprouted into Harry Potter and all the occult books and movies.

What is Dungeons & Dragons?

For those unfamiliar, it is the grandmother of most (if not all) fantasy role-playing games (FRPG). Now many understand that role-playing originated formally as a psychological tool. Most counselors and psychologists (including this writer) have used role-playing as a powerful way to transform human behavior and thought. Please bear that in mind as we continue.

For example, someone might have a problem with an addiction (from a purely psychological perspective). The counselor might suggest that the addict role-play what might happen if a friend offers him a drug. This is done several times in several ways until the addict begins to develop refusal skills. The same could be done for people with anger problems or anxiety issues. The point to remember is that role-playing is a major and effective way to teach people new ways of thinking and acting.

The FANTASY component is the second part of the equation. In a way, this is the most problematic part. Obviously, changes in behavior can often be positive. However, the fantasy component in D&D and related games is mostly defined as inhabiting a quasi-medieval (or even Paleolithic) world full of magic and magical-related characters such as wizards, trolls, orcs, etc. It is a world very much like what is seen in the classic "sword and sorcery" genre of fantasy fiction. In this world, magic is seen as a part of every day life, and the ethos of the game usually involves the acquisition of magical power by most characters.

As in any role-playing, the players take on "characters" or roles. The broad categories of these would include:

Warrior or fighter

Wizard or Mage

Priest (or Cleric or Druid)

Rogue (or Thief or Bard).

In recent years, new permutations on these basic classes of characters have been added, including the Barbarian, the Sorcerer, the Paladin and the Monk (the last character does not appear to be any sort "Catholic monk," but rather a monk from more eastern religions, with high levels of martial arts and occult expertise).

The astute reader will have noted that already, some genuine magical terms from real witchcraft and occultism have been introduced. Druids and Bards are both part of the priesthood of ancient pre-Christian Britain. Wizards are of course the classic practitioners of magic, both in reality and in fantasy fiction. We will look at these roles more in depth in a moment.

Alignment - Introducing Morality (?)

Once the player has chosen their character, (Warrior, Rogue, etc.) they then need to choose their alignment. In D&D, this is a technical term meaning the crossing of two "scales." The first is the character's position on the continuum between good and evil, with the choices being available anywhere in between perfect good and appalling evil. The second is the character's place on the continuum between law and chaos. Here again, the character could range anywhere from being a perfect, "law-abiding citizen" to being in favor of absolute anarchy.

We are told in one of the game handbooks: "The character's alignment is a guide to his basic moral and ethical attitudes towards others, society, good and evil, and the forces of the universe in general." That sounds straightforward enough. However, you need to realize that quite often, players will pick an alignment that is more evil or chaotic because it is more "intriguing." This is much the same as why many talented actors would rather play villains.

There are actually nine possible combinations of alignment, ranging from Lawful Good (the Crusader) to Chaotic Evil (the Destroyer), with seven other combinations in between.

One other issue needs to be raised about alignment. The morality expressed in D&D is fuzzy at best, and is certainly NOT the morality of the Bible. The same handbook tells us "...that goodness has no absolute values. Although many things are commonly accepted as good (helping those in need, protecting the weak) different cultures impose their own interpretations on what is good and what is evil."

For example, you can have a "lawful evil" character. A handbook states that: "A lawful evil villain methodically takes what he wants within the limits of his code of conduct without regard to whom it hurts. He cares about tradition, loyalty and order, but not about freedom, dignity or life." Talk about a mish-mash of moral ambiguity. Our young people are having enough trouble getting their values straight without being immersed in this sort of material!

Tool Time!

Finally, to play the game, the person's character needs the tools of their trade. These include such mundane things as food, clothing and tack, with many dozens of items listed. Additionally, some 60 different kinds of weapons are listed, such as battleaxes, cross bows and swords. Additionally, however, characters may get to choose various magical tools: spells, charms, wands, talismans, potions - plus magical versions of most weapons.

It is important to understand that each of the above magical artifacts exists in "real world" sorcery and witchcraft. They are just as real as swords, saddles or cross bows. Thus, role-playing in this sort of game prepares the player for thinking like a magician. How seriously they take that preparation is something we need to consider.

How is this magic seen in the game? Well, in a guide written by the original author of the game, Gary Gygax, we read:

Magic users draw upon arcane powers in order to exercise their profession ... He or she must memorize and prepare for the use of each spell, and its casting makes it necessary to reabsorb the incantation by consulting the proper book of spells ... those of magic-users must be spoken or read aloud.

This is excellent advice for budding necromancers. When we were high priests and training witches, we would insist upon no less. This is obviously a game which requires real initiative and dedication. But look at what the gamers are filling their heads with!

Other than the magic issue, as we have seen, the overall morality of the D&D universe is pragmatism at best and amoral at worst. "Might makes right" seems to be the rule. You are to take treasure or magic away from other players using whatever means are available, including force, magic, intimidation, coercion or negotiation). An "advanced" D&D master's guide advises: "The best way to avoid taking damage is to beat the foe so badly he wants to crawl under a rock or, better yet, run away."

Now isn't that a wonderful "law of the jungle" kind of morality to instill in a young Christian? Whatever happened to the Beatitudes or gentleness or forgiveness or turning the other cheek? These things seem entirely absent from D&D. Of course they are, they are not very worldly or exciting.

Additionally, the games are very violent. John Eric Holmes, a doctor and editor of the "Dungeons and Dragons Basic Set" believes that the game can be a healthy outlet for anti-social behavior. However, he remarks that "The level of violence in this make believe world runs high. There is hardly a game in which the players do not indulge in murder, arson, torture, rape or highway robbery."

Now, supposedly, some of this violence has been toned down over the years, but the underlying ethos is still one of amorality and violence.

A Closer Look at the Characters:

The Warrior: Warriors, as the name implies, are fighters. They make their living as some sort of soldiers, knights or mercenaries. Some of the sub-types (Paladins and Rangers) can acquire the ability to cast spells. Keep that in mind.

The Wizard: Obviously, wizards do indeed cast spells. They are considered to be consummate "masters of magical energies, shaping them and casting them as spells." Additional, the handbook tells us that a wizard's "quest for knowledge and power often leads him into realms where mortals were never meant to go." That would have been an excellent description of this writer at the beginning of his magical quest over three decades ago. It is true of most people who become fascinated with the occult and the magical. It would go without saying that an impressionable young person who chooses this kind of character and really engages in it would probably develop an interest in such subjects.

The Cleric or Priest: This is the character that often gets mentioned in defense of D&D. This is because he (or she) is a "religious figure." Note what the handbook says: "The cleric in a generic priest (of any myth) who tends to the needs of a community. He is both protector and healer..."

When evil threatens, the cleric is well-suited to seek it out on its own ground and destroy it." Additionally, we are told the main tools of the cleric are spells. Finally, we also learn that various titles might be given to the cleric, including: abbess, Ayatollah, Imam, Metropolitan, Patriarch, Prelate, Rector, Vicar or Yogi. A couple of observations are in order. Anyone who would attempt to equate this character with a Christian clergyman is obviously woefully ignorant of both the Bible and Christianity. Yet, amazingly, Christian D&D players write me and claim that this makes the game alright. Obviously, no true Christian would use spells as their main tool. Also, the first sentence is very telling. The cleric is a generic religionist of "any myth." In other words, religions are myths. Christianity is a myth; Judaism is a myth, etc. This makes the D&D cleric align with the theology of Freemasonry, where the Great Architect is generic and any old god (or goddess if you please) would do. This generic quality of the cleric is further exemplified by the titles he or she could assume. A Christian would assume virtually NONE of them. They are all either related to monasticism, Islam, or Eastern religions. Any Christian who thinks that the cleric is an example of a Christian man of God is deluding themselves.

The Rogue (or Bard or Thief): This character, we are told, feels "that the world and everyone in it somehow owes them a living ... the less they have to toil and struggle ... the better off they are." Isn't that a wonderful character for your adolescent to emulate? What parent would not love to have their child come home from school and tell them that they are playing D&D and have taken on the character of a thief or rogue? If that is not bad enough, listen to this: "Successful, silent movement improves the thief's chance to surprise a victim, avoid discovery, or move into position to stab an enemy in the back." Then, there is the ever-present lure of magic: "A 10th level, a thief gains a limited ability to use magical and clerical scrolls (i.e. spells)." "A Bard also manages to learn a few magical spells." Now, admittedly, there is a long history in folk literature and legend for the "good thief." The best-known example would be, of course, Robin Hood. Many sword and sorcery novels have such characters. But does that mean this is a role a Christian should undertake? The values implicit in this character, whatever his or her alignment, are contrary to the Biblical commands against stealing. Additionally, even here we have magic as part of the possible repertoire.

Now, in review, and imagining you were a Christian parent or youth worker - which of these roles would you feel comfortable recommending to a young person? The two best choices would seem to be either warrior or thief, and even there magic and sorcery could figure in. Frankly, there is no good choice according to the Bible. You can choose between being an idolatrous religionist (cleric), a wizard who is condemned repeatedly in the Bible, a thief who violates the Eighth Commandment, or a warrior who may also develop the ability to cast spells.

Some people who contact us about this game query about what (if any) difference is there between a spell and a prayer. Thus, we are going to revisit that for a moment.

Spells vs. Prayers - a Clash of World Views.

The values of the game are not full of violence and death; they also engrain within the player an entirely different way of looking at life: what anthropologists call the "Magic World View." The concept of a spell is part of the magic worldview. Let me explain:

The Magic World View teaches that there exists in the universe a neutral force, like gravity, which is magic. In this world-view, there is no sovereign God; but rather the universe is run like a gigantic piece of machinery. Magic's application is the understanding of how to manipulate the universe to get what you want. The analogy would be of putting a right coin in the slot of a vending machine and pushing the button. You automatically get your candy -assuming you used the right coin and pushed the right button. The Magic World View is like that. If you know the right technology (spell, ritual, incantation, etc.) the universe must respond-just like the light must go on if you flip the switch. It is automatic, and almost scientifically repeatable. This view under-girds the spell, and is obviously different from...

The Judeo-Christian World View (i.e. the Bible) teaches, on the contrary, that the universe is in control of a sovereign Person, God. To get "results," He must be asked. This asking is what both Jews and Christians call "prayer." It implies beseeching from a position of inferiority. I am the creature, God is the Creator. Thus, it is more like a child going up to a parent and asking for candy, than getting it from a vending machine. The parent may say "yes," "no," or "Wait till later." Similarly, in the Bible, there is no way to automatically manipulate God to get what you want, because He is an omnipotent Person. Additionally, God says that magic is deep and abominable sin (see Exod. 22:18, Lev. 19:31, Lev. 20:6, Deut. 18:10, 1Sam. 15:23, 2Kgs. 21:6, Is. 8:19, Gal. 5:20, Rev. 21:8, Rev. 22:15).

Now obviously, these two worldviews cannot exist in the same moral universe. They cannot both be true. Thus, one cannot be a Christian and believe in the Magical World View without being some sort of hypocrite or deceived person. The reason is that in the "universe" of Dungeons and Dragons magic is neutral, and can be used by "good guys" or by "bad guys." It is like "The Force" in Star Wars. This magical morality pervades D&D, and it is utterly in opposition to the Word of God.

Here is how the concept of a spell is explained in D&D:

A spell is a one-time magical effect. Most spell-casting characters - wizards, clerics, druids, paladins and rangers - prepare their spells in advance and use them when the time is right. Preparing a spell requires careful reading from a spellbook (for wizards) or devout prayers or meditation (for divine spellcasters).

Note the blurring of distinctions here. So-called "divine spells" draw their power from a divine source (i.e., a god). On the other hand, wizards, sorcerers and bards cast "arcane spells" and this involves the direct manipulation of "mystical energies." This further confuses the issues raised above and makes prayer sound like magic; and makes magic sound like it can come from a "divine source." Obviously, the God of the Bible is not the source of magic, in any form.

Believe it or not, some spells can even revive the dead, mimicking the power of the Messiah Himself. Christians may take small comfort in the fact that divine spells are better than arcane spells for reviving the dead.

Now the question becomes, can a Christian play the game without subscribing to the world-view? It is possible, but considering the high level of emotional and intellectual commitment that the game requires, is that really realistic? D&D is not like chess or Monopoly. It is a game that engages the whole person at deep levels, and it can last months if well played. How can a person, Christian or not, immerse themselves in a reality view so deeply and not have it impact the rest of their lives? This is difficult to imagine, especially considering the highly demonic and magical content of much of the game. As the saying goes, if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas.

Defending the Game

The arguments I get from those defending D&D (Christians or otherwise) are similar to those from people defending their favorite cult (Mormons, Masons, etc.). That, in itself, is interesting. These would include:

The author (me) is an idiot who knows nothing about the occult or D&D. This is the most common defense and the laziest. It is the old ad hominem argument.

D&D materials do not really say the things which the older article says they say.

It is only a game. It is not real.

There is no danger in playing D&D because its rituals are NOT based on real magic.

The suicide/homicide/mental illness issues are grossly overplayed and part of a hysteria, which swept through evangelical Christianity in the 1980's. This last is based primarily on an article by a Jeff Freeman

The STRAIGHT TALK is old and out of date.

When we (the emailer and friends) play D&D, we do not do those nasty things.

The game offers positive skill development.

Examining the Issues

Two of these can be dismissed quickly. The first is obviously a personal attack, which is baseless. My occult credentials are well established and my IQ is comfortably above idiocy.

I have played D&D a few times and spent dozens of hours talking with players and Dungeon Masters (DMs). Admittedly, my first hand experienced with D&D is from the 1970's-80's, but I would think it still counts for something. Has the game changed that much?

As to the age of the article, yes - that is why this article now exists. But most of the spiritual material in the article is as valid and relevant today as it was in 1989. Some of the material in the article may need revisiting, and that is the purpose of this article.

Whether or not the D&D materials still say what they said in the mid eighties is a project beyond the scope of this Straight Talk. I covet your prayers that the Lord would give me the time and funds to thoroughly research the contemporary FRPG scene, which if anything appears to be more appalling than it was 20 years ago. A walk through any gaming store can prove that. For example, there is now a whole line of materials based on the hellish H.P. Lovecraft Cthulhu mythos, a form of magic that we practiced in the darkest days of our satanic career - a system of magic prominently featured in THE SATANIC RITUALS by Anton LaVey! Contrary to the ramblings of D&D defenders like Michael Stackpole, the Necronomicon and the Cthulhu mythos are quite real. We will talk more about Mr. Stackpole later.

Rearranging the Lawn Chairs in Hell?

However, let us look at the broader issue for a moment. Perhaps D&D has gotten more politically correct over the years. No more naked girls strapped to demonic altars, etc. Perhaps Hitler and rape are no longer praised. That is good. But it still does not address the fundamental problem of D&D and its ilk.

This problem is that the cosmology of D&D is fundamentally anti-Biblical. Many of the defenders of D&D make the common mistake of assuming that because there are roles in the game for "clerics," this makes the game alright. They make this mistake because they equate Roman Catholicism and its robed clerics for Christians. They do not understand that one can be a cleric (Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) and not be a Christian.

They even tell me that these clerics are supposed to have noble virtues and standards of conduct. I am also informed by irate DMs that in their games virtues such as self-sacrifice, heroism and persistence are rewarded and extolled. That is all well and good. But it will also take you to hell faster than a greased demon on roller skates.

How is D&D anti-Biblical? First, because it presents a universe without God in the Bible sense. To be sure, these clerics and other game roles serve gods, with a small "g." As mentioned above, these gods are mythic and generic, according to the manuals. Some DMs even create games, I

am irately informed (often with fluent cursing) that are monotheistic, where there is only one god. This would be very exceptional. The D&D handbook's section on religion begins with the statement: "the gods are many."

Also, a thorough reading of the entire section on classes of characters reveal that NONE of them are monotheistic in the Biblical sense of the word. Even the celebrated "cleric" character, so widely lauded in Christian gaming circles, are "of any religion. The most common deity worshipped by human clerics in civilized lands is Pelor, god of the sun. Among non-human races, clerics most commonly worship the chief god of their respective racial pantheon." This does not sound like a clergyman I would allow in any pulpit of any Christian church! To say that such a character is in anyway spiritually admirable or worthy of emulation is foolishness!

Of course, none of this matters from a Biblical perspective. Many religions extol nobility and self-sacrifice and are monotheistic. Islam comes to mind. But these religions will take you to hell just as fast as any polytheistic (many gods) religion. Unless the faith has Jesus Christ as Lord of the universe, it is damnable and deceptive. That is as true of D&D as anywhere else.

Another side of this which most gamers fail to see is the same issue raised in the original STRAIGHT TALK - that the world-view presented in D&D is not a Biblical world-view. It is - to the contrary - a view in which God and His providential power is eclipsed by the metaphysics of magic.

As has been thoroughly explained above, magic is different from prayer and from the way the Bible tells us things get done spiritually. In magic, there is really no power higher than the magician - or if there is a higher power, it can be completely manipulated by using the right magical technology (spells, incantations, etc.). This is contrary to the Bible, as has already been explained above.

The total absence of Jesus Christ the Lord as sovereign from D&D and almost all FRPGs is what makes them so spiritually dangerous - not talking about Hitler or having girl characters dressed provocatively. Cleaning up that part of the game and leaving Jesus, the true God, out of what is essentially a SPIRITUAL quest is like rearranging the lawn chairs in hell - especially when you consider there isn't very much grass in the inferno!

"But It's Only a Game!"

Defenders of D&D often complain that it is only a game. Playing chicken with cars is "only a game" until someone gets killed. So is Russian roulette! I am frequently told to "get a life" or write about something more important than D&D, like social justice or world hunger. The devil would sure like that.

It needs to be emphasized that a spiritual deception which draws people away from Jesus Christ is much more dangerous than automotive chicken or people dying of starvation. People who write such things are - in all Christian charity - deceived. Down through the ages, no institution has done more to help the poor, the orphans and the starving than has the church of Jesus Christ. I would just ask them where are the rescue missions and orphanages started by D&D gamers?

Concerning the metaphor about Russian roulette or "chicken," some D&D defenders have said that it is a ridiculous or extreme comparison. But remember what the Lord Jesus said:

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."-Matt. 10:28.

Yes, the life threatening consequences of chicken or Russian roulette are deadly serious and not to be minimized. But any game which draws people away from a true understanding of Jesus, God, salvation and the cosmos IS soul-destroying in the truest possible sense of the word. That is

incalculably worse. We only have our bodies a few scant years before they turn to dust. Our souls we will have forever, and what if they have been destroyed by playing D&D? They may well end up in the fiery blackness of hell.

Additionally, unlike Russian roulette or chicken, D&D is an extremely challenging game intellectually and emotionally. It truly involves its players in ways few games do, because it does demand a high level of imagination and creative engagement. Playing "chicken" demands neither. It is very like the devil to engineer a pastime which draws on the best of young people and then grind their minds and souls under the millstone of his hate.

Yes, D&D may be "fun," but it is fun with a spiritual hook in it. Sure it is stimulating and creative and there is nothing wrong with that part of it. What is wrong is that it is built on a superstructure of anti-Biblical cosmology.

"Real Magic?"

Another contention, often shared with me in email, is that there is nothing like real magic in the game. People who say that evidently have a very limited understanding of magic. Any serious sorcerer will tell you that magic can be as baroque or as simple as the magician him- or herself wishes.

Folk magic is usually pretty simple and rustic. Ceremonial magic can be very "high church" with robes, incense and elaborate rites that can take weeks to complete. Witchcraft is somewhere in the middle, depending on the tradition you are working in. Finally, true hermetic magic involves little more than the human mind.

One D&D defender wrote, "When I play the game, I might roll the dice and - depending on the result - state that 'I cast an invisibility spell.'" His point was, how is that like "real magic?" In mental or hermetic magic, it is EXACTLY like real magic (except of course for the dice)! It is all in the intent - in the mind. It is not in whether or not you are waving a sword around!

Now, admittedly, few people who play D&D actually intend to do magic when they play. But I knew some who did, and even today I have corresponded with people who were gamers and also active magicians on the "inner planes." If you are a gamer, you might be playing with such an individual.

But this goes even deeper than that. The mind is the primary battleground of your spiritual destiny. It is where the devil does his best work. Even if you have no intention to "do magic" when you play D&D, you are immersing yourself in an alien, magic worldview which can gradually change the way you think about life and spiritual matters.

Let me illustrate. I was raised in a devout Catholic home where I never, ever heard bad language. Neither did I hear it in Catholic school. I never really heard much of it until college. Even then, I had a strong value system against using such language and resisted it.

A few years after college, I ended up working in a foundry in Milwaukee. I was around some "rough" people for whom foul language was routine. I was so immersed in it, eight hours a day, that after awhile, despite my best efforts, I began to talk just like them. It took a couple years away from the place to get my vocabulary "rinsed out."

It is the same issue with D&D. When you spend the large amount of time required to play the game seriously, your mind begins to become "re-wired" by its immersion into a world where demons, magic and spells are almost real. This is all the more true because of the high level of intellectual and emotional engagement involved.

Unless the gamer is a person of strong moral fiber, it is likely they will eventually be drawn by the seductive power of magic into thinking thoughts that are entirely contrary to the thoughts of God. This is the devil's intention. And when you consider how hard it is these days to find people (of any age) who have moral fiber, the situation becomes quite frightening.

Remember, as a Christian, we are exhorted to bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5) How can this be done with so many hours being spent in a game which never mentions Christ and pushes the very sorcery He forbids? Please recall, our concern here is not what unsaved non-Christians do with D&D. Our concern is that supposedly Christian people are playing this Christless game and devoting dozens if not hundreds of hours to an activity which can do nothing but foster a fascination with the occult.

Now this is not to say that every serious D&D gamer is going to become a Satanist or demonized. But the odds are good that they might. Please realize that to be demonized does not mean you become a slaving maniac who vomits pea soup.

Most demonized people could not be identified as such by someone without Biblical discernment. But all one has to do is watch the news or walk through the halls of any high school to realize that there are a lot of demonized young people (and certainly older people too) in this country today.

Suicide and Madness?

The accusation has been made that much of the anti-D&D literature of the 1980's was based on hype and hysteria. The Freeman article mentioned earlier is a prime example of such accusations. Below, I quote salient parts with some commentary. He states:

"The American Association of Suicidology, the Center for Disease Control, Health & Welfare Canada, the California Creative and Gifted Children's Program, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and a handful of universities have studied the allegations that fantasy role-playing games cause suicide or murder. Not a single authoritative source has found any veracity to these claims at all."

No footnotes, no names of schools, no way to check out hardly any this information to see if it is accurate.

He subsequently dismisses the disappearance of Dallas Egbert (the first youngster to draw attention to D&D's possible psychological peril) into the steam tunnels of his university. He claims - again without footnotes or documentation - that a private eye named William Dear revealed five years later that the young man "hadn't played much D&D at all, let alone any sort of live-action D&D in the steam tunnels." How are we to know or trust this information?

Freeman continues:

"By then the attack on role-playing games was well under way. Convinced that fantasy RPGs had something to do with Dallas' death - essentially promoting the delusion that "some boy killed himself while playing D&D in the steam tunnels" - Fundamentalist Christians began a photocopied-flyer war on gaming. These tracts and flyers typically made their point by quoting rules out of context and blurring the distinction between player and character with half-truths and outright lies."

Again, no actual quotes are provided from these supposedly lying "Fundamentalist Christian" fliers, nor is any substantiation provided for any of these statements. It is hard to answer such vague and unspecified charges. In our original booklet, we provided footnotes for every documentable statement we made. Freeman does not. Then we proceed to...

"Irving 'Bink' Pulling was reportedly a disturbed young man who'd taken a fancy to Hitler and had displayed 'Lycanthropic tendencies' according to Pat Pulling, his mother. He became depressed at school when he couldn't find a campaign manager to run for student council and wrote 'Life is a Joke' on the blackboard at school. Two weeks later he shot himself with his mother's pistol. Instead of becoming a left-wing gun-control nut, Pat Pulling became a right-wing game-control nut. Refusing to shoulder any of the blame for not noticing Bink's problems, or for keeping a loaded pistol where the child could access it, she blamed D&D for the death of her son. Although none of the other kids involved in the creative & gifted program recalled such an event, Pat insisted that her son had been 'cursed' by his teacher in a game of D&D. She filed suit against the teacher, the principal and the school district only to have her suit tossed out."

Again, this may be true and may be untrue. We do not know. However, Mr. Freeman displays an astonishing lack of compassion. He dismisses a mother who had just lost her son offhandedly as a "game-control nut" and then proceeds to attack her for several paragraphs with ad hominem arguments that are not well substantiated. The fact is, it does not matter very much whether or not Ms. Pulling only had a two-week course as a private investigator under her belt. It does not change the truth of the dangers of D&D. By the way, what are Mr. Freeman's credentials to write on this subject? It is a poor and futile argument to attack the character or personality of your opponent, especially when that opponent is a grieving mother.

Additionally, I would want to know: where young Mr. Pulling acquired his concept of "lycanthropic tendencies?" Where did he get his ideas about Hitler? Both are discussed in the D&D material. Lycanthropy is the clinical term for being (or believing yourself to be) a werewolf. It is not a word commonly used in high school badinage, at least not back then. Probably few secondary school teachers would even know the meaning of the word. However, the occult milieu of D&D is rife with such concepts. This is an excellent example, provided by Freeman himself, of the kind of occult defilement that can occur from being exposed to the D&D material.

Finally, the fact that the suit was tossed out is not surprising. US courts (in my experience) are increasingly reluctant to get involved on the side of people fighting the occult influences in our culture, in any way, shape or form. Freeman then writes:

"So much hysteria was generated over the D&D-suicide delusion that serious investigators finally began doing their own studies. Also, the game manufacturer's association assigned Mike Stackpole to investigate the claims that role-playing games caused suicide."

We will get into the Stackpole report shortly. However, note that these "serious investigators" are not identified - other than Stackpole. Of course, one might be forgiven for suspecting an investigation paid for by the FRPG industry itself. That would be like asking the fox to guard the henhouse.

"Quickly enough, it was discovered that only a quarter of Pat Pulling's "Trophy List" was sufficiently documented to even verify that a death had occurred. Half of those suicides were refuted by the parents of the victims. All of the suicides had significant other factors that one had to ignore in order to blame D&D. One suicide was a fictional death that had occurred in a novel. More importantly, the "Trophy List", even counting every single death as a bona-fide D&D-suicide, revealed that gamers had a suicide rate some ten times below the national average."

Again, notice the cavalier attitude with which Mr. Freeman treats this subject. He refers to the tragic list of alleged D&D fatalities as a "trophy list." I doubt that Ms. Pulling thought of her son's death as a "trophy," nor of any other young person's death. It is certainly how the devil feels about the deaths of young people killed before their promise could be fulfilled. Again, no documentation for any of these assertions is provided.

Finally, the comment about the D&D suicide rate being ten times below the national average is insulting. I would like to see how Mr. Freeman arrived at that figure. As has been observed, statistics can be manipulated to prove just about anything. But in addition, even ONE death or suicide attributable to D&D is one death too many. These young people are real, not just statistics!

He then proceeds to attack Dr. Thomas Radecki, who is a psychiatrist that joined Ms. Pulling's crusade. Freeman claims he got his license suspended. As far as I can tell, this is true. However, that does not make Dr. Radecki's assertions on D&D and its psychological dangers false. Freeman makes the same assertions about D&D related murders as he does about the suicides, and claims that they are below the national average. No documentation is provided. Then of course, one would like to know the statistical samples, the norming group, etc.

When statistical statements like this are made, many complex issues need to be examined. Just as an example, when the national murder rate is cited, a vast number of variables come into play. While I am not a statistician, I have a masters' in counseling and was required to take a course in the graduate level in statistics and measurements.

In this case, you have two groups - one rather small and selective - the gaming population, alleged to be around 9 million. By and large, this group appears to be somewhat homogenous: mostly male, in their teens and twenties, mostly white and well educated and creative and sensitive. This is not to say that there are not female gamers or gamers among people of color, but they do not figure very large in the statistics as I can best understand them.

Demographically, 46% of the game's sales are to ages 10-14 and 26% are to people 15-17. This means that almost three-fourths of the games sold are sold to people under 18! The typical D&D player is described as follows:

Between 13-20 years of age

A large majority are male

They tend to be sensitive and shy individuals

Often they have below average social skills

They are often people who "march to the beat of a different drummer."

On the other hand, murders are committed by a much broader segment of the population. Most murders originate in domestic disputes or domestic violence OR are crime or gang-related. The large majority of murders are committed either by older people (20's to 30's) with limited income and education OR by gang members and other criminals such as drug dealers. Without wishing to appear racist, it is also true that people who are non-white commit a significant majority of these murders. That these killings are related to socio-economic inequality and poverty is certainly true in frequent cases, though that does not and should not excuse the killing.

My point is, you have two almost entirely different groups of people here you are measuring statistically - the gaming population and the population of people who commit murders in this country. What would be better (and we have no way of knowing from Mr. Freeman's article if this was done) would be to measure the number of murders (or suicides) among gamers and compare it with the national sample of murders committed by well-educated, creative, sensitive and imaginative young males of a mostly white population. The statistics might show an entirely different result than that alleged by Mr. Freeman.

Then Freeman reveals his true colors. He is against Biblical Christianity:

"Ultimately Pat Pulling had only one allegation remaining that anyone would listen to - and even then only fundamentalist Christian groups were willing to believe it. Fantasy role playing games, they asserted, were occult indoctrination tools that lured white suburban teens into horrific satanic cults. Furthermore, these cults were everywhere. The popular "fortress mentality" of certain religious groups - the belief that the world is a wholly corrupt, evil place that only their faith protects them from - latched onto this "evidence" of Satan's power. Proof that the world was in Satan's grasp could be found by demonizing every aspect of pop-culture."

Like many (almost all?) media mavens, Mr. Freeman desperately defends his precious popular culture against the onslaught of "fundamentalist Christians" who have a "fortress mentality." Well, excuse us, sir, for believing in the Bible. He quite obviously fails to grasp the discussion concerning the magic worldview and the ethical underpinnings of various genres of literature and films:

"Any movie, book or game containing spell-casting characters, wizards, witches, demons and the like, was an "occult" indoctrination tool that 'glorified evil' and lured kids to devil worship. Ultimately, exceptions were made. For example, the movie The Ten Commandments contains spell-casting Pharaoh's magicians but is not satanic. J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, featuring Gandalf the Wizard fighting a demonesque "Balrog", is not satanic. C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, although fantasy, is not satanic. This Present Darkness, although populated with an entire cast of demons, is not satanic."

Freeman misses the point entirely about the difference between "fantasy" and fiction such as Peretti's novels or films like THE TEN COMMANDMENTS that glorify God vs. fantasy such as D&D games that promote an un-Biblical worldview. It is not necessarily that the subject matter (sorcery) is bad, but rather, how does the medium treat sorcery? Is it shown as a viable tool or as something ineffective or evil? Obviously, in D&D it is presented as an important tool. In the movies and novels cited, sorcery is shown in its true colors, as something evil and ultimately useless against the power of the true and living God.

"Clearly, role-playing games are huge. If they were luring kids into cults, one would expect a mighty lot of cults. A large number of cults, meanwhile, would leave a lot of evidence of cult-activity. What evidence is there?"

One is more tempted to ask, what evidence ISN'T there? As one who has been regarded for about 15 years as a "cult expert," I can say that the evidence mentioned at the beginning of this article: the vast proliferation of books, movies, video games and TV shows about the occult, witchcraft and sorcery is compelling. Additionally, the numbers of people involved in various occult practices are rising higher and higher each year, if book sales and the spread of related magazines and websites is any indication. There are witch covens in every major city and in many minor ones! This was not the case 30 years ago.

Mr. Freeman then continues to not only bash Christians, but also police!!

"The evidence suggests that most cults in North America are bible- believing fundamentalist sects that carry their members off into physical and psychological isolation. There is a sad irony in all this delusion. Pat Pulling warned police officers that gamers might commit suicide: Gamers have a below-average suicide rate while police officers have the highest of any profession."

He then goes off on a tirade against fundamentalists and tries to characterize Christian churches as being potential Jonestowns or Wacos.

"Some Christian groups seize on the "games lure kids into cults" (among other things) as proof of the world's corruption: The fortress mentality is the first step in psychological alienation that cults must use in order to control their members."

In other words, any church that advocates holiness and separation from the world is an incipient mind-control cult whose peril dwarfs D&D. This is just using ad hominem arguments to attack because you have no other spiritual or logical leg on which to stand.

"Any claim that role-playing games are physically or psychologically dangerous is just flat wrong. It is a misconception or worse, a lie."

Again, he has offered no substantial proof for this rather broad statement. This kind of nonsensical reasoning continues as he claims that those Christians, such as this writer, who speak out against D&D are ignorant and dangerous!

"The claim that role-playing games are occultic (among other such claims) is founded in ignorance and perpetuated either to validate the fortress mentality or to take advantage of it (e.g. to solicit donations). Real danger of cult involvement springs from world-views that encourage psychological isolation. Religious leaders that blur the distinction between mythology and occultism are being disingenuous. Theologians that further claim no distinction between occult involvement and fantasy entertainment often present a clear danger to those who believe them."

As a former witch high priest, and one who worked with game writers for D&D back in the 1970's, I could hardly be called ignorant. And I am only "dangerous" to the wallets of the moguls of the FRPG industry and to the devil. Freeman makes unsubstantiated claims about the lack of relation between D&D and suicide. Even if it were true that the writers of the eighties were overstating the case, (and I have NOT seen this satisfactorily demonstrated), that still does nothing to alleviate the SPIRITUAL peril of D&D which is far greater than its psychological peril. Many of the D&D gamers I have corresponded with seem to have already committed spiritual suicide. To kill the body may or may not follow as a tragic consequence.

Mr. Freeman obviously writes as a bigot who dislikes those who take the Bible seriously. If he has proof that the late Pat Pulling had overstated the level of suicides, I would like to see it. But just to write something is not to prove it. Nor is citing a study paid for by the gaming industry. If his points are genuine, I will be happy to remove any of the statistics from the STRAIGHT TALK that are wrong. However, neither Freeman nor William Stackpole has offered any proof that this is the case.

Therefore, here are just a handful of the tragic deaths reported (as of this writing) to be related to D&D:

The "Freeway Killer," Vernon Butts, who committed suicide in his cell in 1987 while being held as a suspect in a string of murders, was an avid D&D player.

D&D player (14 years old) commits suicide by hanging, 1979, name withheld by parents' request.

D&D player (17 years old) Michael Dempsey, Lynnwood, WA. suicide by gunshot wound to the head, 5/19/81. Witnesses saw him trying to summon up D&D demons just minutes before his death.

D&D player (age not mentioned) Steve Loyacano, Castle Rock, CO., suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning, 10/14/82. Police report satanic writings and a suicide note linked the death to D&D.

D&D player (21 years old) Timothy Grice, Lafayette, CO., suicide by shotgun blast, 1/17/83. Detective reports noted, "D&D became a reality. He thought he was not constrained to this life, but could leave [it] and return because of the game."

D&D player (18 years old) Harold T. Collins, Marion, OH., suicide by hanging, 4/29/83. Collins was noted to be "possessed" by D&D as if he were living the game.

D&D player (16 years old) Daniel Erwin, Lafayette, CO., murder by brother's shotgun blast to head, 11/2/84 (right after Halloween). Death was apparently the result of a death pact as part of the game.

D&D player (12 years old) Steve Erwin (see above) suicide by gunshot, 11/2/84. Detective report: "No doubt D&D cost them their lives."

D&D player (no age given) Joseph Malin, Salt Lake City, UT., pled guilty to first degree murder 3/2/88 and was sentenced to life in prison. He killed a 13-year-old girl while acting out the fantasy-role game. The girl had been raped, her throat cut, and she had been stabbed twice in the chest. Police said his "violent urges were fed by 'extreme involvement in the fantasy role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons.'"

D&D player (14 years old) Tom Sullivan, Jr. got into Satanism and ended up stabbing his mother to death, arranging a ritual circle (from D&D) in the middle of the living room floor and lit a fire in its midst. Fortunately, his dad and little brother were awakened by a smoke detector; but by then, Tom, Jr. had slashed his wrists and throat with his Boy Scout knife and died in the snow in a neighbor's yard. (1/19/88, Amarillo, TX).

D&D player Danny Remeta went on an eight-state crime spree, including murder. In an interview in the DETROIT FREE PRESS, he asked, "Have you ever heard of Dungeons and Dragons? That had a lot to do with it ... It is not just a board game. It's a lot deeper than a board game. I've got five friends that are locked up for the same thing [murder] right now because of the game."

D&D player (14 years old) Sean Sellers was convicted of killing his parents and a convenience store clerk in Greeley, Oklahoma (1/11/87). He was the youngest inmate of death row in the country before being executed for his crimes. His involvement in hard-core Satanism began with D&D, according to his own testimony. Praise the Lord; he became a Born Again Christian some time before his execution!

Stackpole and "The Pulling Report"

We put Sean Sellers' case last because we need to comment on that. Before we can, we need to look briefly at the work of Michael Stackpole. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Stackpole is the author of a fairly extensive response to the Christian anti-D&D material, most specifically the work of Patricia Pulling.

According to his own report, Stackpole is a science fiction novelist, an FRPG game designer and a computer game designer. It is evident from his writing and his background that he is obviously biased in favor of the gaming industry. However, he may have some valid points.

He spends much of his paper going after Pat Pulling, ridiculing her expertise and her worldview. He also goes after Lt. Larry Jones of the Boise police and several other prominent writers in the field of occult apologetics. Many of his points only make sense if you look at the issues through the eyes of a humanist or atheist. In short, he does not get the underlying spiritual concerns.

For example, after mocking some of the materials and resources that Ms. Pulling has provided for police and educators, he seems to editorially scratch his head about the criteria for young people at risk. He writes: "Obviously, in Mrs. Pulling's view, no child is safe at any time." This was true in 1990, and if anything it is even more true today - IF you understand and believe in the Bible.

I would agree, understanding the power and malevolence of the devil, that no child - not even those raised in God-fearing Christian homes - are ever completely safe. This is because we are "behind enemy lines" down here on earth and the devil's primary battleground for our children is their minds. Even children home schooled and going to good, solid churches are not completely

safe from the assaults the devil has in store for them. As the motto of the Strategic Air Command has it: "Eternal vigilance [on the part of parents] is the price of liberty [in Christ.]"

Stackpole does not get this, because he is a Biblical ignoramus. That is too bad, for him and for his readers. He is also pretty ignorant about hard-core occultism, as mentioned earlier, when he mocks the Necronomicon and claims it is entirely fictional. It is not, and its use (even in part) has led to the destruction of many young minds and souls. I have personally watched it happen.

He spends some time going over the same ground as Mr. Freeman in discussing statistics, material which has already been dealt with. Really, there is not much very new in the Stackpole report. He does succeed in making Ms. Pulling appear to be confused about some of her issues and her own story, and that may be true. However, as has already been mentioned, ad hominem arguments do nothing to disarm the central spiritual evil that is D&D.

However, Stackpole does produce an interesting letter from the late Sean Sellers, mentioned above. Sellers was executed for his crimes, but his letter is an important testament to the dangers of D&D, even though Stackpole tries to make it sound as though the condemned young man almost sided with him. To be sure, Sellers does downplay the role D&D played in the crimes he committed somewhat. Still, his testimony is telling.

Read the letter from Sean Sellers as Stackpole reproduces it:

With the controversy over role-playing games so prevalent today many well meaning people have sought to use my past as a reference for rebuking role-playing. While it is true that D&D contributed to my interest and knowledge of occultism I must be fair and explain to what extent D&D contributed.

When I was playing D&D I was not a Satanist, and in fact would probably have punched any Satanist I met right in the mouth. I was interested in witchcraft and Zen however. In doing some research at the library for a D&D adventure, I was leading, I happened upon other books that led to my study of occultism.

After I became a Satanist, I used D&D manuals for their magical symbols and character references for my initial studies. I also used my experience as a Dungeonmaster to introduce people to satanic behavior concepts and recruit them into the occult.

I do have objections to some of the material TSR released for their role playing games. I think their excessive use of paganism and occultism is unnecessary and can lead to idealistic problems among some players; however, to be fair to TSR and in the spirit of honesty, I must concede that D&D contributed to my involvement in Satanism like an interest in electronics can contribute [sic] to building a bomb. Like the decision to build the bomb, I had already made decisions of a destructive nature before I incorporated D&D material into my coven projects, and it was Satanism not D&D that had a decisive role in my crimes.

Personally, for reasons I publish myself, I don't think kids need to be playing D&D, but using my past as a common example of the effects of the game is either irrational or fanatical.

February 5th 1990

Sean Sellers

[Emphasis added by this writer for editorial purposes]

Now, let us back up and take a look at this. First of all, I think it speaks volumes about how clueless Mr. Stackpole is about the real issues that he thinks publishing this letter will help his case. However, as the Word says, spiritual things can only really be discerned by spiritual people.

Initially, in the first paragraph, Sellers acknowledges that D&D contributed to his interest and knowledge of occultism. That is one of the major points we assert, and he agrees.

Now, let me break down a kind of time-line for the next couple of paragraphs:

Sean got into D&D.

At some unclear point, he got into witchcraft. Which came first is not clear from the letter.

Sean - because of his involvement in D&D - began researching occultism at the library.

Sean becomes a Satanist, whereas at the start of this continuum he is most vehemently NOT a Satanist. The equation is rather clear: Sean + witchcraft + D&D = Sean as Satanist.

Sean acknowledged the usefulness of D&D materials in studying magic.

Sean says he used his position as DM to introduce people to "satanic behavior concepts" and then recruit them into the occult.

This is precisely the scenario that concerns Christians who are upset about D&D. Involvement with D&D clearly led Sean from a mild interest in witchcraft and Zen into Satanism and even recruiting others through the game into Satanism.

Now, note that he objects to the use of excessive paganism and occultism - so do we. Also he does seem to deny any immediate causality between his D&D involvement and getting into Satanism. He compares it to gaining a knowledge of electronics and then ending up building a bomb. Fair enough.

It has never been our contention that D&D alone turns people into drooling demoniacs. However, it is evident that without knowing something of electronics (to use his example) the bomb could never have been built. The difference is (to differ with Sean somewhat) is that electronics is morally neutral. Occult or magical knowledge, according to the Bible, is emphatically not.

He ends up by voicing his disapproval of young people playing D&D, which we totally agree with. He does state that "... using my past as a common example of the effects of the game is either irrational or fanatical." We agree, and do not mean to imply that every D&D gamer is going to end up on death row before they are 18. Sean Sellers is probably close to the "worst case scenario." Most of the D&D problems we have encountered are a bit more mild - things like demonic obsession, suicide attempts, involvement in witchcraft or Satanism. However, they are all pretty serious and indeed can be life-threatening.

What About the Positive Elements of D&D?

Another thing which D&D defenders claim is that the game has definite positive benefits. Some things which have been suggested to me are that the game builds teamwork and listening skills. It certainly gets people reading (we have heard THAT chestnut about the Harry Potter books as well!) Finally, it helps young people develop good memories.

As anyone who has looked at the D&D manuals will confess, this stuff IS complex. It is certainly acknowledged that reading and memory skills would be needed to successfully play the game and interact well with peers in the game. That is all well and good.

However, we really need to look at the content of what is being read, memorized, etc.

Teamwork - the gamers are working together to kill, destroy, steal or take whatever they want;

Reading - they are reading about immensely complicated worlds of magic, spells and violence;

Listening - listening to magic and violence being repeatedly acted out in the game;

Memory - what on earth are they putting into their minds?

Here is the point. For a Christian youth (or adult) to fill their minds with all this occult (and pseudo-occult) gibberish is an insult to the God Who made that mind. How can they take every thought captive in obedience to Christ (see above) when they have to memorize "Phezult's Sleep of Ages" spell? Most peoples' minds can only hold so much detail. Sooner or later, all of this complicated eldritch verbiage is going to crowd out the scripture verses and Sunday school lessons these young people may have absorbed.

Yes, they are building skills. But the skills they are building are not morally neutral. This makes the game more problematic than ever.

D&D As Template

Finally, a rationale that a few Christian defenders of the game have come up with is the concept of using D&D to create Christian world-views. These individuals - claiming to be Christian Dungeonmasters (now there is an oxymoron for you) - say that they create games where the spiritual environment is monotheistic and almost Judeo-Christian in nature.

It is true that the DM is allowed a wide variety of latitude in creating the "world" in which the game takes place, etc. However, when asked if they talk about Jesus or the Bible in these "monotheistic" games, they acknowledge they do not. These people view D&D as a template, into which they can pour whatever ideas or theologies they would like.

Perhaps monotheism is an improvement over polytheism, but as was mentioned above, there are many good monotheistic religions that will lead a good-hearted person to hell. A spiritual world created without Jesus and His gospel is still a spiritual danger because it leads people away from the truth.

Make no mistake about it, magic and sorcery ARE spiritual. It does not matter if they are "make believe" magic or not. It is the mind that is the battleground. I just recently had a D&D player who professed Christ tell me that everything he did had Christ in it, because Christ lived in him, even as he was playing D&D. While that may be true of a Christian, the question needs to be asked: is Christ pleased with what His servant is doing?

I used the metaphor of a porn role-playing game, where the participants play acted in various forms of sexual sin such as fornication, adultery or homosexuality. There was no actual sexual touching involved among the players, nor any nudity required. It was all in the mind. Would Jesus be pleased with that?

See, most of us can understand that concept better because most of us are more familiar with the power human sexuality can have over our minds. It is one of the most powerful forces God created within us. Yet, what most Christian gamers do not understand that magic is a kind of spiritual lust. Allowing the concepts of magic and sorcery into our minds awakens within us a kind of sexual itch that has no definable source or cause. It is, however subtle, an itch for power. Magic, at its root, is about power and about rebellion. It is about not liking how God runs the universe and thinking you can do a better job yourself.

Now of course, we are not saying that everyone who plays D&D is going to end up a sorcerer or a Satanist. But we are saying that being exposed to all these ideas of magic to the degree that the game requires cannot but help have a significant impact on the minds of the players, no matter if they are Christian or unbeliever, and no matter what the "template."

This is not just chess, football or bridge. This is a game that envelops the player in an entirely different fantasy world in which the power of magic and violence is pervasive. It is a game with a distinct and seductive spiritual worldview that is diametrically opposed to the Bible. Yes, sorcery appears in the Bible. But it is NEVER in the context of a good thing to do. It is always presented as something dangerous and utterly contrary to the will of God.

The question still stands. Why would a Christian wish to involve themselves in such a game?

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."
—1 Samuel 15:23.

A special note of thanks to Wendell Amstutz, Steve Lansing, Ph.D., and Richard Noe for their excellent work on D&D in their masterful book, EXPOSING AND CONFRONTING SATAN AND ASSOCIATES. Some of their research has been incorporated into this article and their book is most highly recommended, not just for D&D but for an incredibly wide range of topics.