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The Truth: On sale now!

By Jeff Freeman

Stories of *Dungeons & Dragons* satanic-suicides have died off in recent years as we discovered other things to worry about. While the topic was still hot (between 1979 and 1992), the AP and UPI circulated 111 articles mentioning fantasy role-playing games. According to an article by Paul Cardwell Jr., published in *The Skeptical Inquirer* (Winter, 1994), eighty of those reports were largely anti-game.

Little wonder that many people still have this idea that "D&D" (misused as a generic term for "fantasy role-playing game" even though it is a trademark of TSR Hobbies, Inc.) is an occultist lure. The charges are still that FRPG causes suicide, promotes violence, is Satanic/Occult and causes participants to murder their parents. This isn't the media-hype of the mid-1980s, either. *Recent* articles, though far less common than in the mid-80s, have alluded to one or more of the above charges. Recently D&D-occultism has been brandished in otherwise sound articles about *Magic: The Gathering* (a "spell-card" game), such as the July 27, 1994, article in the *Washington Post* which referred to D&D as "an infamous tool for occultists."

February 16, 1995, the U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals must have confused talk-show sensationalism with scientific inquiry when it upheld the lower court decision that an Oklahoma state prison warden was justified in banning role-playing games on the basis that they "encourage aggressive behavior through role-playing and the game characters may be used as tattoo [sic] patterns." I'm not sure what the tattoo-pattern thing is all about, but James L. Carroll and Paul M. Carolin's study published in *Psychological Reports* (June, 1989) as well as Armando Simón's published in *Psychology in the School* (October, 1987) well established that gamers are not "more violent" than non-gamers. On the contrary, the findings of Suzanne Abyeta and James Forest as reported in *Psychological Reports* (Number 69, 1991) indicate that gamers as a group have *fewer* criminal tendencies.

In the *Vancouver Sun*, June 10, 1994 Phil Davidson blames the murder of a street-sweeper in Spain on a "fantasy adventure board game." Possibly he relied on an article by Harold Glasgow (which popped up in a NEXIS search the day prior) in lieu of actual research. According to these reports, the perpetrators were playing a game in which the object was to kill a certain number of a certain type of people. An LTE running a week later (and read by far fewer people than the original article) casts doubt on that exposition by pointing out a number of inconsistencies. The perpetrators aren't accused of killing anyone else; they weren't members of the university game club; there's no evidence

they ever even played any FRPGs ; and there's no such "fantasy adventure board game" anyway. This is just the sort of "D&D murder" that would have made *Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons'* Trophy List back when Pat Pulling was actively slamming D&D.

Pat Robertson runs an anti-game commercial during *The 700 Club's* broadcast nearly every day. Respondents are offered a misinformative flyer that quotes Pat Pulling of BADD as a bona fide "expert." It references a hoax that occurred when *The 700 Club* invited Paul Sanchez on their show under the pretense that he was a former employee of TSR Hobbies, Inc. The pamphlet suggests the game ditch the references to real-world mythology (which Pat Robertson finds "occultic") and use instead a fictitious "game mythology" (not mentioned is that this was done in 1989). The flyer outlines a couple cases of "D&D suicide" and "D&D murder." An accompanying tract addressing "The New Age," claims that playing D&D leads to demonic possession and "is a sin against God." Not only is it full of falsehoods, the text is nearly ten years old. When I wrote CBN and documented each untruth line by line, I received a thank you, the suggestion to pray for them and three months of junk-mail for other *700 Club* projects.

FRPG and suicide

First the good news: If fantasy role playing games are in any way related to suicide, it's a positive connection. The American Association of Suicidology; Centers for Disease Control and Health & Welfare (Canada) have conducted extensive investigations into teen suicide in general and found no link to D&D. Furthermore, Dr. S. Kenneth Schonbert of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York found not a single case (in a meticulous study of over seven hundred adolescent suicides) in which FRPG was a factor. A survey of psychological autopsies of adolescent suicides in all major American cities (conducted by The Associated Gifted and Creative Children of California) did not locate a single case in which D&D or any other FRPG was a determinant.

Though all of the above studies were conducted nearly ten years ago, just last week I received a letter from U.S. Representative Dick Armey stating that "studies" had shown D&D was harmful and that parents shouldn't let their kids play. No reply yet to the question, "What studies?"

The suicides listed among BADD's "Trophy List" are most often referred to when anti-game groups are challenged for evidence of D&D-suicide. What we find from that list is that sometimes teens commit suicide, whether they play D&D or not. Overall, however, we find a suicide *rate* for gamers some ten-times below the national average.

Part of that is due to "teen suicide statistic" abuse. Most of the "teen suicide" is committed by "teens" in the 20 to 24 year age range. Indeed, much of the suicide among that group is in the military. Yet in the mid-80s when BADD compiled its list of anecdotal evidence, FRPG was almost exclusively the domain of white suburban teens and college students. Moreover, the oft-repeated claim that "teen suicide has increased 300% since 1955" is in itself misleading. In 1955 when a teen committed suicide the parents were blamed by family, friends and all of society. Sympathetic family doctors might record a suicide as "accidental death." Relatively few groups were actively compiling statistics on teen suicide. As the blame for teen suicide shifted from Freudian "bad-parenting." to chemical imbalances or even society in general and greater effort was made to collect accurate suicide statistics, the teen suicide *rate* increased. That this was an increase in the *actual* frequency of teen suicide by 300% seems unlikely. Consider that D&D was released in 1972, but did not gain really wide popularity until Random House began distributing it in 1979. According to a report released by the CDC in 1986, the teen suicide rate peaked in the late-1970s and then declined for nearly 10 years. If there is a link, it's a rigorously positive one.

Part of it may well be that. Role-playing games mandate social interaction. Unlike reading, watching TV, playing video-games, etc., RPG demands that a group of three or more people sit around a table and actually talk to one another. Social interaction, however, is not the hallmark of potential suicide.

FRPG and murder

The evidence that FRPG is in some way related to murder is every bit as substantial as the evidence D&D causes suicide. That is, no more tangible than the evidence of UFO abductions, Elvis-sightings and homeopathic medical successes. While studies as extensive as were done for the suicide allegations haven't been conducted, we must remember that these charges come from the very same people who claimed D&D caused suicide. Also we must recall that this charge did not even emerge until the previous "suicide" claim had been utterly refuted. Furthermore, The

Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games has investigated every single case that *Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons* ever advanced and debunked them one by one. Details on the vast majority of any documented case (and many of BADD's cases are not sufficiently documented to even verify that a death occurred) have been there for any half-serious investigator to discover all along, which might explain why most of BADD's press-clippings come from small-town papers and Christian newsletters. BADD's work in documenting D&D-murder was no more fit than their D&D-suicide evidence. In over 20 years of searching, there has never been found a single documented case of either suicide or murder in which D&D was a significant element.

The most famous case of "D&D Murder" aired in the made-for-TV movie *Cruel Doubt*. Two teens supposedly juiced-up on LSD allegedly killed their purportedly abusive parents for a \$2-million inheritance. A nonexistent "game scenario" was blamed. Though this game scenario was never introduced in court, the jury didn't buy the "D&D defense" and no such game-scenario has ever been published anyway (according to TSR Hobbies, Inc. and scores of gaming enthusiasts on the internet). The "true-crime" novel concluded that this was a D&D-murder. This leap is almost as grand as Mr. Davidson's aforementioned *Washington Post* article, but at least the novelist can retreat behind the shield of entertainment.

The made-for-TV movie based on that "true crime" novel likewise blamed the game. In the movie, "quotes" were read from the rule book that the book doesn't contain, the scenario *really did exist* and "satanic pictures" that aren't actually in the rule book were shown as though the book *actually* contained those illustrations. It's the sort of pick-up truck tampering and wrong-size gas-spewing-cap trickery we expect from reputable TV news-magazines, not from "based on a true story" TV-movie producers.

Other reports of "D&D Murder" are every bit as dubious. Many are based on no more than an over-zealous cult-cop concluding that "D&D did it," quoted by a home-grown reporter and thus entered into the journalists' scriptural NEXIS archives. Most don't even have that. A LEXIS search reveals that no jury at the appellate level has *ever* found any validity in the "D&D-defense."

D&D occultism

Of course the real beef that fundamentalists have with D&D is that it contains the word "magic" throughout the rule book. Characters in the game cast spells and are not, according to the game world's imaginary gods, fictitiously "sinning." We can pretend that wizards cast spells such as the pharaoh's magicians in *The Ten Commandments* but we must never pretend that it isn't a sin.

Then there is the fact that the game-world has different "gods" than the real world to begin with. Perchance these are folks who want to evangelize every corner of the real world and every corner of every fantasy world as well. They want to convince all the imaginary characters worshipping imaginary gods that Christ is the one true way to salvation, oblivious of the fact that imaginary characters aren't going to gain any immortality (or even mortality) by such devotion anyway. Then they toss out the accusation that *gamers* might confuse fantasy with reality.

The D&D defamation emerges from the same grim camp of extremists who denounce *Care Bears* and *Smurfs* for their "magic powers" and who postulate, perhaps, that Papa Smurf is a Satanic cult leader.

Of course the mainstream doesn't and will not ever buy such a delightful load of gibberish. For the mainstream, the charge is secularized to "D&D causes suicide and murder," backed up with anecdotal accounts that delude journalists and cops into creating still more "evidence" of FRPG's evil. *Why does it cause suicide and murder?* Because it is a Satanic lure! *Why is it a Satanic lure?* Because it causes suicide and murder!

Get the picture?

The opprobrious anti-game tracts that a number of fundamentalist Christian organizations produced in the late 1980s are basically the same sort of "Satan's Coming!" hate-trash that attacks Mormons, Masons, Jews, Catholics and every other Not-A-Real-True-Christian group there ever was. Quotes are pulled from the rule books and misrepresented so that the substantially ignorant will think the *players* are trying to cast spells, the players themselves are worshipping pagan gods, swearing oaths to Beelzebub, under some sort of mind-control by a David Koresh-like figure known as the "Dungeon Master," etc. The accusation is rather like maintaining that watching *Forest Gump* not only teaches one how to be a

shrimp-boat captain, but also that it will *compel* one to shrimp. Movie actors playing the role of bad guys are *actually* sinning. Authors of novels with bad-guys (let alone the demons that show up in pop-Christian novels like *This Present Darkness*) are in danger of demonic possession themselves. Such authors are, after all, describing the actions and reactions of evil characters doing evil things . . . *just like D&D!*

Most fundamentalist Christians wouldn't even agree with such extremism. Certainly not if they knew that the game rule books don't contain recipes for poisons, directions for casting spells, demon-summoning mumbo-jumbo, etc. as the anti-game tracts are so fond of claiming. Casting a spell in D&D often amounts to saying, "Bob, my character casts a *light*-spell now." Just as piloting a starship in the *Traveller* role-playing game doesn't require substantive knowledge of hyperspace (or for that matter, that *hyperspace* even exist), the player says that his character is trying it and the game referee tells him what happens. Bob might say "The room is filled with a glow," or perhaps, "The starship leaps into hyperspace and in two weeks you'll arrive at Sol."

One-man bands

I've nearly completed a survey of twenty-three organizations promoting various causes. Actually most of them are one-Ph.D. "organizations" publishing The Truth in pamphlets at 20 for \$5. (One cannot fault the formula. The one-man organization is the very foundation of such mega-corporations as CBN/*The 700 Club*, et al.) Many also offer a newsletter and "maybe I'd be interested in a reference book for just \$29.95?" The cause they are promoting is uniformly Christian Fundamentalism cloaked in the mantle of, say, family-advocacy or crime-fighter or suicide prevention. Write them with almost any question and you'll receive an offer for an "informative" handbook, flyers, posters and for \$1,000 they might conduct a seminar at your local church. The bottom line is that if you want to save your teen from suicide, yourself from being murdered, your marriage from falling apart, your soul from eternal hellfire, etc. then you *must* become a Real True (fundamentalist) Christian. Voting a straight Republican ticket is just an added bonus.

I wrote them all and asked for information on "a role-playing fantasy game called *Dungeons & Dragons*."

Eleven have responded so far. Only one simply replied with "Sorry, no info." and suggested I try the local Christian bookstore. All of the other respondents have either replied with anti-game flyers or referred me to one of the other anti-game groups. I have material, therefore, from thirteen of the original twenty-three groups. One is neutral, twelve of them are anti-game. If they didn't tell me it was dangerous and sinful, they referred me to someone who would. They all seem to know one another, yet not a single one of them seems even vaguely aware of any legitimate product-safety or mental health organizations.

Not one righteous Christian referred me to the Consumer Product Safety Commission or Centers for Disease Control, Intentional Injuries Section. None referred me to the American Association of Suicidology. I didn't even receive a referral to the local *library* (though there were several suggestions to visit the local Christian bookstore). The Truth About D&D ("and other fantasy games," they say) is that it causes suicide. It causes Murder. It is Satanic and leads to horrific occult crimes.

This is a *truth* that suicide professionals don't know. Numerous studies have failed to reveal it. Criminologists and law enforcement officers, though they deal with crime *day in and day out* have no idea that FRPG is related. Coroners in every major city in the U.S., reviewing case after case of suicide, somehow failed to notice FRPG was a factor. The entire Psychiatric industry is without a clue.

But these fundamentalist organizations not only *know* The Truth, they have it on video for just \$19.95!

Jeff Freeman is the Texas state coordinator for CAR-PGa (a role-playing game research and information network), and a confessed news junkie. He lives in Carrollton with his wife and two young boys.

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Healthy skepticism

By Tim Gorski, M.D.

Heimlich: A victim of quackery

Henry Heimlich, the originator of the "Heimlich Maneuver," appears to be yet another victim of medical quackery. In an article that appeared in last October 30th's Los Angeles *Times*, staff writer Pamela Warrick reported that Heimlich, now 74 years old, has been raising money from Hollywood celebrities including Amy Irving, Estelle Getty, and Paul Winchell, for the ostensible purpose of combating the HIV epidemic. In the spring of 1993 he was promising to "end the scourge of AIDS by 1994."

Heimlich's "cure" is to infect HIV victims with malarial parasites in order to stimulate their immune systems. Moreover, Heimlich has apparently been doing exactly that, it seems, on patients in China and Mexico, though no reports of cures have been made as yet. In response, a group of 20 researchers and scientists from the U.S. and Mexico have petitioned government authorities to investigate Heimlich's activities.

"This exploits the AIDS crisis, exploits the generous and caring entertainment community, and it exploits the good that Heimlich himself has done in the past," Warrick quotes Dr. Paul Bronstein, national ethics chair of the American College of Medical Quality as saying. But Heimlich, as is so typical of true-believing quacks, doesn't seem to understand the nature of the objections being made to his claims. He responded to the petition by saying that "some people think if they attack a famous person, they can become as famous as the assassin."

Heimlich has previously touted malaria as a cure for Lyme disease. But patients known to be so treated for the disorder have not recovered. One of these is cited in the *Times* article as saying that "if anybody ever asked me about Dr. Heimlich and his supposed cure, I wouldn't hesitate to tell them to run away fast. . . . When I called [Heimlich] again and again and told him to stop using me as an example of how malaria therapy was the cure for Lyme disease, he never called me back and kept telling people I was fine, when I am definitely not fine." Because he is "philosophically opposed" to the use of animals in medical research, the article also states, "Heimlich's guinea pigs are usually humans."

The name Heimlich has heretofore been synonymous with the life-saving anti-choking maneuver that he devised and promoted. But given the doctor's current projects, the possibility exists that he will be remembered instead as a bizarre and eccentric crank.

This information is provided by the Dallas/Fort Worth Council Against Health Fraud. For further information, or to report instances of suspected quackery and health fraud, please contact the Council's President, Tim Gorski, M.D., at (817) 792-2000 or write P.O.B. 202577, Arlington, TX 76006.

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The third eye

By Pat Reeder

Sorry this column has been so sporadic, but I'm under a tight book deadline. As soon as the book is published, I'll be back in these pages regularly, so I can plug it shamelessly. In the meantime, here are a few news items you might have missed over the past two months . . .

It was revealed that members of the Aum Shinri Kyo cult suspected in the Tokyo subway gas bombing were looked upon as real cash cows by their leaders. The cult offered followers a whole catalog of bizarre religious items for steep prices. For \$10,000 they could either drink a sample of their leader's blood ("tastes great, less filling!") or put on a headset that would synchronize their brain waves with the leader's (an idea they stole from talk radio). Those on a

budget could purchase a small bottle of the leader's miraculously curative bath water for just \$2,000, or for a low, low \$500, you could touch the forehead of another member on a higher spiritual level (but you had to provide your own stepladder). I'll bet Robert Tilton would just like to buy their mailing list!

A United Nations global warming summit in Berlin in early April yielded nothing of value. In fact, it barely got off the ground due to bickering by the participants. Environmentalists demanded strict new laws to stop global warming, while scientists from Britain declared the "crisis" to be nonexistent. The U.S. and Europe disagreed on a timetable for reducing greenhouse emissions. Underdeveloped nations wanted rich nations to reduce emissions, but wanted to be exempted themselves. And OPEC nations opposed any proposals to reduce fossil fuel use. One German delegate griped that the summit was nothing but "negotiations about negotiations" (maybe everyone was grumpy because the weather was so darn cold). If the Earth's temperature is increasing, I suspect it's because of hot air generated by global warming summits.

Warren E. Smith of Roanoke, Virginia, is suing palm reader Lola Rose Miller (a.k.a. "Miss Stella") for over \$3 million for selling him losing lottery numbers. Smith claims he gave her \$75,724 last year, including \$29,000 from his retirement account, to use her psychic powers to give him winning lottery numbers, but he never hit the jackpot (it never occurred to him that if she knew lottery numbers worth \$3 million, she wouldn't sell them to him for \$75,724). So he's suing her for the money he would have won if the numbers had been good. He finally figured out the only sure way to hit the jackpot in America: sue somebody!

There are so many voodoo followers in the Miami area that Dade County Courthouse officials were forced to create a "Voodoo Squad." No, that's not a new cop show on the Warner Brothers network, it's just a bunch of guys whose job is to clean up all the sorcery paraphernalia left behind by defendants and their families trying to get an extra edge in the courtroom. Early each morning, the Voodoo Squad polices the courthouse grounds, picking up dead chickens, goats, charms, beer bottles, and other stuff sacrificed to the gods. I can't believe the O.J. Simpson defense team hasn't tried this yet!

As if Satan doesn't have enough minions in politics, former self-proclaimed witch Penny Hoeflinger has announced her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for governor of West Virginia. Hoeflinger spent much of her life following such occult practices as spell casting, witnessing animal sacrifices, and engaging in naked midnight dance rituals. However, she has since converted to Christianity and is running on a platform of education and recycling (maybe she can recycle those animal sacrifices into school lunches). I don't know why she's wasting her time with the governor's race. With her experience at drinking brew and dancing naked at midnight, she should be in the Senate with Ted Kennedy!

The New Life Center Church in Springfield, Oregon, came up with a novel way to celebrate Easter. They presented a drive-through Passion Play, in which you could view the entire story of Jesus' death and resurrection without ever leaving your car. You could drive past the Last Supper ("You want fries with that?"), cruise by the Crucifixion, then park for awhile to ponder the empty tomb. I hear that their Jesus even performed a miracle of resurrection by getting a Yugo to start again without jumper cables. For an extra \$15, He'd anoineth your engine with oil and check your radiator fluid!

Still, nobody can throw an Easter soiree like the Filipinos! Thousands of people jammed the town of San Fernando in the Philippines for the holiday festivities. It all started with dozens of penitents volunteering to be publicly whipped for their sins. Afterward, they walked off, beating themselves on the back with switches. Street vendors then sold burgers, beer and ice cream as the blood-soaked crowd cheered the annual crucifixion tableau. Twelve volunteers were crucified, with nails driven through their wrists and into wooden crosses, although they did have small platforms to stand on to keep them from actually dying. One man's wrists were permanently pierced, due to the fact that it was his ninth straight year to be crucified. To me, this is really overdoing it. Even Jesus was only crucified once. This guy must've felt like Susan Lucci at the Emmy Awards!

Finally, some sad news: fire swept through the Houdini Magical Hall of Fame in Niagara Falls, Ontario, recently, destroying many of Houdini's priceless props, including his famous Chinese Water Torture Cell. The weird part is that Houdini requested that all his memorabilia be burned after his death, but his brother sold it instead. Fire officials suspect

arson, but they haven't ruled out other causes. Houdini's ghost, perhaps? Remember, with Houdini, no conclusion is inescapable! Personally, I say that if it turns out someone torched it, he should be tied up, locked in a truck, and dropped over Niagara Falls! Let's see him get out of THAT!

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