

DAGON

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THE ASSAULT ON ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Putting the Accusations into Perspective

There are two reasons people usually give for finding role-playing games objectionable: Some are opposed to the games for religious reasons, and some are concerned about their content, finding them excessively violent.

Religious objections to the games are three: 1) They can be very time-consuming, and detract a from young person's attention to other, more important, things in life; 2) they act as doorways into the occult and satanism; 3) they promote vicarious participation in murder, theft, rape, and other violent and sinful acts (this gets a little complex—many believe, on the basis of scripture, that pretending to sin is as bad as actually sinning, in much the same way that lusting after a woman in one's mind is the same as raping her—from a sin standpoint). *Playing With Fire*, published by the Moody Bible Institute, summarizes the religious position against RPGs, and discusses the three points mentioned above.

The antiviolence objections refer to the vicarious "pretend" fights, duels, and combats that occur as a part of all role-playing games. This vicarious violence is supposed to be psychologically damaging to players.

RELIGIOUS OBJECTIONS

The religious objections are hardest to answer, since they are grounded in strongly held matters of faith. The accusation of time wasting is partially true—adolescents (and adults, for that matter) can become fixated on playing RPGs to the exclusion of all else. This is no reason to ban them, however. The teenage years are a period of fixations and strong emotions, sometimes directed towards sports, the opposite sex, cars, clothes, and so on. Teens (and adults, for that matter) should partake of a wide variety of life experiences, including sports, social activities, and diverting entertainments such as RPGs.

The accusations regarding satanism are groundless. Role-playing games no more make their players satan worshipers than Monopoly makes its players slum landlords. The game may be a person's first exposure to the occult but cannot be considered any more a "doorway into satanism" than the average Steven King novel or H. P. Lovecraft story. Some encyclopedias contain information on satan worship, witchcraft, spells, and magic. Books on these subjects can be found in many bookstores and libraries. Attackers may claim that the games contain spells,

incantations, and other descriptions of how to work magic. Many games deal with magic, demons, and various supernatural forces (some based on what their designers feel to be genuine magical principles, others fabricated out of the designer's imagination). These "magical" activities are presented as things to be done by a player's character as part of the game. In a similar fashion, a game may allow a character to climb a tree, drive a car, shoot a bow and arrow, or plant an explosive charge. It may describe these events in considerable detail. No game assumes a player will actually try to drive a car based on the game rules, or cast a spell, or call up a demon.

As for "vicarious sin equals actual sin," carrying this argument to its obvious conclusion results in movie actors becoming the roles they play—Clint Eastwood is a murderous gunfighter; Charles Bronson is an urban vigilante; and any actor who ever portrayed a philanderer or a rapist actually is one. That anyone would actually use this argument may seem farfetched, but one of the books attacking RPGs (*Playing With Fire*) actually goes so far as to suggest that actors and actresses may be placing their souls in jeopardy by playing sinful roles.

VIOLENCE

The primary sources of this sort of antirole-playing propaganda are the organizations called NCTV (the National Coalition on Television Violence) and BADD (Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons). Addresses for these organizations are provided on the last page of this handout. Pat Pulling, who is the founder of BADD, is also a director of NCTV. NCTV/BADD maintain a list of deaths and crimes which they claim are related to RPGs. NCTV has been unable to interest any federal agency in investigating these deaths, or in funding a study to determine the impact of RPGs on players of such games. On an examination of their "evidence" it is easy to see why.

The factual basis of the data NCTV has gathered is of questionable accuracy. In an information package dated January 17, 1985, NCTV and BADD identified a novel as a work of investigative journalism and a fictional death as a real one (among other things). In this information package, one the deaths on their list is one that they link to a game called Mazes and Monsters. The list quotes as proof "the investigative book, 'Mazes and Monsters by Rona Jaffe.' *Mazes and Monsters is*

a novel, a work of fiction. Since an extensive quote from the book is included in the NCTV/BADD information package (un-attributed, giving the impression that the statement is NCTV's), it is obvious that the book itself was consulted by their investigator, who either did not notice or chose to ignore that it was fictional. NCTV should have checked this report before publishing it. That they did not calls into question the reliability of their other evidence.

Not that their other evidence is strong. Of the cases mentioned in their 1987 information package, reasonable doubt about three is established by the very newspaper articles NCTV provides as proof. In three more, the association with D&D is disputed by statements of the victim's parents. Two more dissolve under a small amount of further investigation. There are many cases in which the information package says "the information is confidential" or withheld for some reason. This is not in keeping with a statement of Thomas Radecki (the NCTV director) that all NCTV's D&D data "is available and has been available upon request" (*NCTV News*, vol. 8, no. 7-8).

Thomas Radecki considers D&D and AD&D to have harmful psychological effects (the January 1985 information package quotes him as saying, "There is no doubt in my mind that the game Dungeons & Dragons is causing young men to kill themselves and others."), and the NCTV has asked the government to require warning labels on any toy or game linked to multiple deaths from murder or suicide (*NCTV News*, vol. 8, no. 5). It is useful to look at what else Thomas Radecki and the NCTV consider harmful.

Radecki and NCTV consider films to be damaging if they are excessively violent. See if you can guess the name of one particular film from what NCTV says about it in a review (*NCTV News*, vol. 6, no. 6-7): "Intimidating Queen terrorizes all. Drug use includes hallucinogenic mushrooms...Walrus openly smokes opium." and "Violence is graphic, unneeded and senseless." Got it yet? The film contains 32 violent acts per hour and thus is rated RV (R for violence) which, NCTV says, is given when "the film is *definitely* likely to cause viewers to become more violent," (italics theirs) and NCTV goes on to say that: "Any person concerned with his own thinking would probably want to avoid RV movies..." What is this film? Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*. That's right, Disney's *Alice In Wonderland*! How many of you out there have seen *Alice in Wonderland*? Have any of you become more violent because of it? Before you answer, consider that Radecki says that *tickling* can be a violent act (*NCTV News*, vol. 6, no. 1-2). Have you ever tickled someone, and persisted after they asked you to stop? That may have been a violent act.

How about Saturday morning cartoons? Anybody watch them? NCTV's monitors report that *Bullwinkle*, *Kissyfur*, *Wildfire*, *The Flintstones*, *Muppet Babies*, and *Smurfs* contain eight or more violent acts per hour, and NCTV suggests that viewing of these shows be restricted to those age 13 and over. *Bugs Bunny*, according to NCTV contains 56 acts of violence per hour, more than the movies *Platoon* (with 54) and *Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 3* (with 53). According to NCTV, *Smurfs* contains almost as many acts of violence per hour as the movie *Angel Heart* (14 for the former versus 17 for the latter). All of these violence counts are as of first quarter 1987, and are quoted in *NCTV News*, vol. 8, no. 5-6.

Do you read? Murder mysteries (like those of Agatha Christie) desensitize their readers to violence, stimulate fantasies of committing violence, and "teach people to use violence as a means

to excitement" (*NCTV News*, vol. 6, no. 1-2).

A few other notes: Professional wrestling (*NCTV News*, vol. 6, no. 3-4), boxing (*NCTV News*, vol. 8, no. 5-6 states NCTV's support for a ban of boxing), childhood snowball fights, detective magazines, and military history magazines (*NCTV News*, vol. 7, no. 1-2) are all bad for our mental health, according to Radecki. Ever lose your temper? Radecki says that anger of any sort is bad for you and that "Christ clearly taught that only God, Himself, has the right to get angry" (*NCTV News*, vol. 6, no. 3-4). Ever been guilty of a selfish act? You should read Radecki's essay, "Selfishness Similar to Violence & Destroys Democracy" (*ibid*).

It should be obvious by now that something is seriously wrong here. NCTV's violence criteria are too sensitive—like a smoke alarm that goes off whenever someone takes a shower. The *Smurfs* are almost as violent as *Angel Heart*? Hallucinogenic mushrooms, opium smoking, and "graphic, unneeded and senseless" violence in *Alice in Wonderland*? What planet are NCTV's monitors living on? It can't be the Earth.

RESPONSES

This section was prepared using material obtained from NCTV as of October 1, 1987, but it primarily draws on the NCTV anti-D&D information package dated January 17, 1985. In this section are discussions of several of the more commonly quoted cases in particular and for the listing in general. This section also contains mention of several other cases which may be brought up in a debate, but for which no other information is available. This is done in order to allow the reader to be informed about the most commonly mentioned cases (we cannot mention every name on the NCTV/BADD list—there are over 100). Local groups may have names or cases not mentioned here. One or more of the general points can probably be used against these.

General Point 1: A number of accused murderers have claimed that D&D caused them to commit their alleged crimes. An accused murderer can be expected to say almost anything in an attempt to get off, and such statements should be taken with a grain of salt. Even a murderer in prison after conviction has almost constant appeals in process and will wish to maintain his innocence in all statements. Such statements may also be an attempt to persuade a parole board to allow an early release.

General Point 2: A speculation in a newspaper article, or a remark in a police report to the effect that a particular game led to a death cannot be considered authoritative. Reporters and police are trained in their professions, but they are not often trained psychologists or behavioral scientists. Speculations by laymen (especially those who are under pressure to come up with *some* explanation that will close the case quickly) are not proof that a particular RPG caused a particular crime.

General Point 3: Likewise, a mention in a report or newspaper article that a person played a game is not proof that the game caused that person to turn violent or suicidal. If this were so, football would be the cause of many more deaths than RPGs.

General Point 4: There is no point in discussing a particular case with a relative or someone else emotionally involved. There is no hope of an unbiased discussion in this case; you should express sympathy at their loss and move on. The subject of teen suicide is loaded with emotion, and it is difficult to discuss it rationally with the parents of a victim. Suicide, especially of teenagers, is a complex phenomenon and can seldom be traced to a single cause. The Centers for Disease Control investigated teen suicide last year, and we can be sure they found no link

between RPGs and suicide (or BADD and NCTV would be screaming the fact to all who would listen).

General Point 5: The D&D game does not suggest that real weapons be used or that players actually act out fights in any way other than through the use of paper, pencil, and dice, or the use of miniature figures and dice. Descriptions of torture, poisoning, assassination and so on are given only in terms that indicate that such an act took place. Descriptions are not vivid and do not encourage such acts in real life. RPGs are usually set against backgrounds involving violence, just as crime novels and movie thrillers are. The games are no more harmful than these things (which NCTV also believes people should avoid—more on this elsewhere).

General Point 6: People commit suicide for many reasons, and it is absurd to try to isolate any one cause. However, there are some characteristics of teen suicide victims that bear remembering. They are generally loners, with poor personal skills and few friends, and often are heavily involved in some form of substance abuse (alcohol or drugs). Since RPGs are necessarily group activities, they tend to develop social skills and provide gamers with a strong framework of friends. As a result, we would expect less alcohol and drug abuse and fewer suicides among gamers than in the general teen population. To the extent that we have information on gamers as a group, the data bear this conclusion out. Despite isolated instances of gamers who have committed suicide, gamers are on the whole *more* stable and well-adjusted than their age group as a whole.

SPECIFIC NAMES

This list is keyed to the names of the victims or alleged perpetrators and deals only with deaths. It does not include the other crimes which NCTV and BADD attribute to role-playing games.

Adcox, Ronald Gerald: See Towey, Mary.

Brown, Bonnie: Neighbor of Paul Sargent, Kansas City MO, Sargent murdered Brown on January 18, 1985, according to NCTV. Sargent is said to have testified that D&D teaches its players to kill. See general point 1.

Collins, Harold T, Marion, OH: NCTV labels Collins' death as a suicide, but the fact that Collins practiced autoerotic hanging indicates otherwise (the newspaper article NCTV quotes as "proof" calls the death accidental and mentions D&D casually along with Collins' pornography collection).

By way of explanation, practitioners of autoerotic hanging do not intend to kill themselves. The partial asphyxiation is reputed to be a means of heightening sexual pleasure during masturbation and is sometimes practiced with other fetishes such as self-bondage. Deaths sometimes result when an individual loses consciousness during the process and is unable to loosen the self-imposed ligature in time. (NCTV's quoted source: Lake County (Ohio) *News*, April 30, 1983 headline reads "Sister Unaware Her Brother Engaged In Bizarre Fetish." The fetish mentioned is not the game, although many will think so at first glance).

Cartier, Roland, Putnam, CT: The only evidence NCTV gives in this case is to state that Roland "played D&D with a fervor." The organization does admit that less information is available in this case than in the others they mention. In a letter quoted in the Norwich, Connecticut *Bulletin*, Martha Cartier, Roland's mother, denies D&D caused her son's death, saying "My son also played Uno, Yahtzee, Monopoly and other games...it was not from any game that my son committed suicide. Not even D&D."

Dempsey, Michael, Lynwood, WA: NCTV says Dempsey killed himself after an argument with his father. His father says the game caused behavioral changes in his son and that the argument was over his son's obsession with the game. NCTV says his parents "witnessed him summoning D&D demons only moments before killing himself."

Egbert, James Dallas III: This is the primary case of the anti-D&D movement. It was with the Egbert disappearance that D&D achieved national publicity and tremendously increased sales. There are several sources of information, including articles in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and a book (*The Dungeonmaster*, by William Dear, the detective hired by Egbert's parents after he vanished). The full story is too complex to sum up simply, but basically Egbert was a highly intelligent youth with poor social skills, few friends, and homosexual tendencies. His inability to live up to his parents' expectations, his repressed homosexuality, and a general depression led him to drugs, suicide attempts, and finally caused him to run away in order to escape what he believed to be an unbearable life. After he surfaced, he underwent therapy but killed himself over a year later. The association with D&D is partially a case of media hype, and partly due to Dear and the East Lansing, Michigan, police, who seized upon a possible D&D connection to the disappearance (in the absence of other leads). Dear's account of the affair shows that the game had nothing to do with Egbert's death (despite what Dear now seems to believe). In the two chapters where Dear recounts his talks with Egbert, D&D is mentioned briefly as one of Egbert's few joys in life (computers are also mentioned in this context). Egbert only discusses the game after Dear brings up the subject. Egbert discusses his drug use, pressure to excel scholastically, anxiety over his parents' inability to accept his homosexuality, and depression over his inability to fit into society as the reasons he attempted suicide. As a side note, Dear now believes RPGs to be dangerous, despite the evidence in his book, and is a contributor to the NCTV/BADD list of alleged deaths.

Erwin, Steven and Daniel, Lafayette, CO: These deaths were part of the investigation undertaken by *60 Minutes* a few years ago. Basically, the older boy feared going to prison as a result of a car theft conviction and had his brother kill him. His brother then turned the gun on himself. The "evidence" that D&D was involved is a speculation in the investigating detective's report. Their mother denied that D&D was a factor in their deaths in an interview after the *60 Minutes* segment aired (per an AP wire story, printed in the *Janesville Gazette*, September 18, 1985).

Grice, Timothy: NCTV quotes a police report to the effect that D&D became reality for Grice. Royce Grice (Timothy's mother), in a letter to TSR, Inc.'s *Dragon* magazine, denies D&D had anything to do with her son's suicide and states that the game was one of his few pleasures. TSR, Inc. included a copy of this letter in their pro-D&D public relations package.

Jacklovich, Jeffrey, Topeka KS: NCTV says he left a suicide note saying, "I want to go to the world of elves and fantasy and leave the world of conflict." The original source seems to be a newspaper article in the *Capitol Journal*.

Kimbrough, Juan DeCarlow (or DeCarlos), Oakland, CA: (The name is given several ways in various NCTV publications). Kimbrough was shot by his brother "as part of a D&D game" according to the investigating detective. NCTV quotes Detective J. Harris as saying that Kimbrough was running the game and that the gun was "used as a kind of prop." See general point 5.

Loyacano, Stephen, Castle Rock, CO: Stephen's mother is now western director of BADD. Loyacano seems to have become interested in the occult through D&D, but the reasons for his suicide are far from clear.

Macon, Missy, Ragland, AL: A convenience store clerk killed during a holdup. The perpetrators "lived Dungeons and Dragons" or played Top Secret, depending on which report you read.

McFall, Kurt, Concord, CA: NCTV says McFall was an "apparent suicide," "heavily into D&D, satanism and war games (Bill Deer [sic] investigator)." NCTV gives an article in the *Chicago Tribune* of January 27 1985 as their source. The *Tribune* article was partially from an interview with William Dear. This case was covered in a recent, NBC television, "Unsolved Mysteries" program, during which D&D and the Society for Creative Anachronism were both mentioned. According to this program, McFall's father believes his son was murdered, possibly by a satanist cabal, to silence him. The program states that local police could not find sufficient evidence for an arrest, and the case is still unsolved. The NBC program made no mention of McFall being beaten or having a carving in his back as the NCTV information package states.

Molitor, Darren Lee: See Towey, Mary.

Moore, Glenn O.; Schroeder, John R.; McFarland, Larry: NCTV says these three were killed during a 14-state crime spree by Danny Remata and Mark Walter. Remata claimed two other murders and says he has five friends who play D&D and are "locked up at the present time for murders." See general point 1.

Pulling, Irving Lee, Montpelier, VA: One of the seminal anti-D&D cases. Irving's mother, Pat Pulling, is founder of BADD (Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons and an active anti-D&D campaigner). The newspaper article which NCTV refers to (*Washington Post*, August 13, 1983) quotes Victoria Rockecharlie, a classmate, as saying: "[H]e had a lot of problems anyway, that weren't connected with the game." This article further states Pulling shot himself shortly before final exams, after a period of depression. Among other things, he was unable to find a campaign manager in a bid for school office. NCTV includes this clipping with its anti-D&D information package of 1985 but omits the portion quoting Ms. Rockecharlie. The claim that D&D caused his death is based on his mother's assertions that he was normal and happy before he played the game, something the newspaper article cast doubt upon.

Stailey, James A., Arlington, TX: On January 20, 1985, (or Jan 18, depending which NCTV report you read), Stailey shot himself. He was "Heavily into D&D and martial arts." NCTV gives a UPI article in the *Houston Chronicle* as its source.

Swartz, Robert and Kathryn, Cape St. Claire, MD: Their son, Larry, was charged with their murder. The source of this is an article in the *Maryland Gazette*, March 10, 1984 ("Teen D&D Player Charged in Parents Murder"). This article states that Larry Swartz played D&D and mentions the game in reference to his recollection of more pleasant times past. Swartz is also identified in the article as a high school student, science fiction reader, and a soccer player. The headline could just as easily have read "Teen Soccer Player...."

Towey, Mary, St. Louis MO: Darren Lee Molitor and Ronald Gerald Adcox were charged with her murder. Molitor has been the author of a number of anti-RPG statements and letters from prison. Special Prosecutor John Chancellor stated that "Molitor had given police several differing versions of how Miss Towey was strangled, and that none of the versions included the game of 'Dungeons and Dragons'." Molitor stated (in one version) that he and Adcox tied an elastic bandage around Towey's throat as a Friday the 13th joke (*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, March 10, 1985). Molitor's anti-D&D statements appear to be an afterthought, possibly in an attempt to get leniency or to lay the basis for an appeal.

CONCLUSION

It is important to remember that we, as members of the game industry, hold the moral high ground on this issue. We have nothing to defend, cover up or apologize for.

ADDRESSES

National Coalition on Television Violence, 144 East End Ave, New York, NY 10128.

Bothered about Dungeons and Dragons, PO Box 5513, Richmond, VA 23220.

Moody Bible Institute, 820 North LaSalle St., Chicago, IL 60610.

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GETTING CAUGHT UP

This issue of DAGON will be both short and late, since final examinations have just taken place, and I have had little time to do much else other than grade a few hundred elementary laboratory reports. Furthermore, for various reasons my publishing load for my two war-gaming fanzines, GRAUSTARK and EMPIRE, just became temporarily heavier. And I wasn't even able to get into Manhattan to replenish my ink supplies, which is why much of this issue of DAGON will get printed a few days later than it ought to, and this present 281st Distribution of APA-Q will probably get into the mail on the 31st, and to the people who pick it up in person on the 4th.

DAGON is published every third Saturday by John Boardman, 234 East 19th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11226-5302. It circulates through APA-Q, an amateur press association which is collated here at this same address and frequency. DAGON also goes to subscribers (12 issues for \$10) and to people whom I think might be interested in it.

The complications of the past month have also caused the last few issues of DAGON to be mis-numbered. The issues of 16 April and of 7 May were respectively numbered "370" and "371"; each of these numbers was one too small. This issue is #373.

APA-Q goes by mail to anyone who sends in a few dollars for postage and the envelope. Periodically, APA-Q members are apprised of the state of their postage-and-printing account. Including mailing costs for this present Distribution, the state of your account is given in the space to the right. Accounts which fall into arrears will be suspended. Presently suspended accounts are:

Vinnie Bartilucci	-76¢	John Hartzell	-79¢
Andre Bridget	-72¢	Mark Keller	-86¢
Shelby Bush	-\$5.98	Ted Pauls	-39¢
John Colton	-88¢	Joyce Scrivner	-75¢
Liz Ensley	-37¢	Peter G. Trei	-73¢

If you do not have your own printing facilities, send me a few dollars and I can print for you any stencils that can fit on a Gestetner mimeograph. Printing costs are 2¢ per sheet per copy. If you want extra copies beyond the APA-Q copy count of 35, let me know and I'll send them to you.

Apparently this issue of APA-Q will have a "generic cover", since no one has yet sent in a cover, and I used up my last collage cover on the 280th Distribution and haven't had a chance to print another.

The deadline for the next Distribution is Saturday 18 June 1988. As nearly as I can now tell, I expect to put it together that afternoon beginning at about 2 PM.

The first four pages of this issue of DAGON consist of a counter-attack, by a war-game designer who used to work for Simulations Publications Inc. (SPI) here in New York, against the notion that Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) and other Fantasy Role-Playing (FRP) games are harmful. This campaign originated among Christian religious fanatics, who have somehow got it locked into their miniscule brains that the spells invoked in D&D are real spells that call on real demons. Unfortunately, Christians have been yammering about this for so long that they have got people actually to ban the play of FRP games in some schools. If you doubt me, drop around to that Christian bookshop on West 43rd Street just off 8th Avenue in Manhattan, or a comparable shop in your town. You will find numerous books and tracts claiming that FRP gaming (and, sometimes, many other toys and games including Cabbage Patch Kids) are works of the devil. Notice that Barasch does not waste time trying to talk Christians out of their delusions. Instead, he addresses those to whom the complaints and accusations are being made, and quite reasonably points out the logical and factual errors in this campaign.

This is
O At
P Great
E Intervals
R This
A Appears
T To
I Inflame
O Optic
N Nerves

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And now to get to Distribution Comments on the 279th and 280th Distributions, which were cut short in the last DAGON owing to lack of space.

Quant Suff! #162 (Malay): "Wist" and "wilst" are two different verbs, both expressed in the old 2nd-person singular which is now obsolete in English. "Thou wist" and "thou wilt" are in modern usage respectively "you know" and "you will" or "you want". Y'don't suppose there were mediaeval Dalesmaids ("Valley Girls") who were continually saying, "Thou wist?"

Our elementary laboratory manual has to be rather extensively re-written this summer, which means that I am going to have to learn word-processing and get the job done. Our department computers are IBMs with more bytes than I've yet seen on a micro. I will be working off the manual that came with them. Wish me luck.

Vaudeville Lines #195 (Lipton): Is Ernest Heramia still active in fandom in Rhode Island? This is the guy who, some years back, founded a "Christian fandom" with an irregularly published fanzine called Radio Free Thulcandra. To the best of my knowledge, RFT bogged down in bickerings between Protestants and Catholics, as might have been expected.

One notion that was floating around after the publication of Bimbos of the Death Sun was that "Brenda Lindenfeld" was supposed to be you, with the sex changed to avoid lawsuits.

Blancmange #199 (Blackman): I have read all the Dragaera novels thus far published but have not read Brokedown Palace.

The burglarly at Phil Dick's place, some 15 years ago, has begun to achieve legendary proportions. From the beginning Dick discarded the notion that it was some low-IQ skell trying to raise a little drug money; instead, he put forward hypothesis after hypothesis about various conspiracies that were out to get him. From time to time, Dick would announce that all his previous hypotheses were wrong, but that this time he had really found out who was Behind It All. A few weeks later, this would be succeeded by yet another Reason Behind It All.

Far into the 1950s I met, in the Midwest and South, people who were still fighting against Franklin Roosevelt's reforms. I have the feeling that Sacks will still be promoting the Bork nomination, years from now.

Anthony seems to be adjusting very well to the simultaneous new sibling and new home. I have never seen or heard him being the least bit resentful about Michael.

"Beauty and Bestiality" (Blackman): This would be the right way to end the series, but I fear we won't see it. More likely, she'll be drafted for the Judge Advocate General's office when the war with Iran starts, and he'll be caught by the dogcatcher and "put to sleep".

DAGON #371 (me): Rambo III finally has been released, six months after the originally announced date. I hear that it is getting hoots and catcalls from the audience whenever it appears among the "Coming Attractions". It is already a critical failure; if it also a financial failure, it will mean that the country is finally over its binge of vengeful violence.

On the Air in La-La Land (a pseudonymous coward): And why is he pseudonymous? "About three years ago," he tells us, "I aired a piece about Accuracy in Media based on an interview with Reed Irvine. It was fair and balanced, but my boss gave me a severe dressing down for having done that piece..." And how do we know that "it was fair and balanced"? Why, because its author himself said so!

Reprint from Acrata (franked by Hauser): How clever the "International Proletarian Hammer Throwing and Rhetoric Flinging Competition" flier is! From it, we know that anybody who publicly objects to anything at all is a semi-illiterate fanatic. If this realization had been around 30 years ago, Those People would still be riding in the backs of the buses. If it had been around 130 years ago, that gross violation of property rights promulgated by a tyrannical President on 1 January 1863 would never have been issued, and Anarchists would still be in possession of their precious property rights.

New York Area Skeptics announcement: I was at that meeting where James Randi spoke, and found that his built-in bullshit detector is still functioning perfectly. He even showed some tapes of his exposure, on the David Letterman show, of a faith healer who was really working off information provided through his hearing aid by a

backstage helper. Another tape exposed the "psychic surgery" hoax as an application of ordinary stage magic, a field at which Randi is a leading expert. Local groups such as New York Area Skeptics have been helpful in exposing such frauds, and this newly founded group looks very promising.

One person at the meeting claimed to have a tape that provided allegedly damaging information about Randi, but he refused to allow anybody to take it to check his statements. I gathered from comments of others that this tape is a concoction of Christians who object to the way in which Randi is exposing their scams, and that furthermore it has been through several re-editings. Considering what Jim Freund once told me about how easy it is to edit a tape to produce allegedly damaging statements on it, I am not surprised.

Vaudeville Lines #196 (Lipton): Considering your experiences with investment counselors and that "science-fiction" course, I am not surprised that, according to the New York Times Magazine of a few weeks ago, New Age idiocies are beginning to show up in Colorado schools. That'll be another good state to stay away from.

Since the cycle of U. S. politics is 4 years, it does not fit neatly into the alleged "Thirty Year Rule", but must be trimmed to 28 years, or expanded to 32 or in extreme cases to 36. And that's where the trouble lies for politicians who want to catch the gold ring the next time it comes around. In the present polls, Dukakis is leading Bush by something like 10%. If this holds up in November, Cuomo, Bradley, and Nunn are going to be left looking foolish. I am convinced that these three are staying out of the 1988 campaign because they think the cycle isn't complete yet, and that Bush will win in '88 like Hoover did in '28, and then fall in '92 as Hoover did in '32. By 1992 they could be dismayed to find a tremendously popular President Dukakis parlaying his successful economic policies into a landslide re-election, with them all locked out.

However, I am not yet counting out Vice President Bush. If U. S. troops are fighting in Central America or the Middle East by October, there may be a general reluctance to rally behind the President and his Chosen Heir. It would be the easiest thing in the world to arrange.

Quant Suff! #163 (Malay): "Life" has apparently come a long way since Conway had that article in Scientific American in the 1960s.

When Harrison wrote Bill, the Galactic Hero I was of the opinion that it was a parody of Heinlein's Starship Trooper.

Anent that New York Times Magazine article of 1 May, it is a relief that the same regions that support New Age airheads also seem to have lots and lots of Fundamentalists. We can sit back and watch them argue with each other. Christians have a positively poisonous hatred towards anything to which the label of "New Age" can be attached, as a glimpse at the books in a Christian bookshop can inform you.

DAGON #372 (me): I have just finished Friesner's Mustapha and His Wise Dog. It is good, but not up to Elf Defense.

Fremont's Intelligence Newsletter #5 (Hauser): During the Reformation there were people who felt about the mass as you feel about draft registration. They felt that the mass was a complete nullity and meaningless. Since it is meaningless, why should anyone make a big deal about refusing to attend? I suspect that these "Adiaphorists", as they were called, lived in parts of Germany where the Catholics were strong, and hoked up this argument to salve their consciences about attending mass under compulsion. So, as you say, "I registered for the draft because I figure that registration protests, like registration itself, are merely symbolic, and therefore meaningless."

For further information on how various methods of draft resistance work, I refer you to Chance and Circumstance (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1978). The book's authors, Lawrence N. Baskir and William A. Strauss, were senior officials with the Presidential Clemency Board established by President Ford to deal with draft cases. The authors make no secret of their belief that war and the draft are wrong. They give general statistics and specific case histories - and you suddenly realize that they are advising their readers on how to get out of being drafted! If you want to know how to find and take advantage of irregularities in draft board procedure, this book tells you.

If you want to fake a gastrointestinal ulcer, or Meniere's syndrome, this book tells you how. If you want to make an army examiner believe that you are suicidal, or homosexual, this book tells you how.

As a general rule, the principled draft resister who tried to make a case against American military policy, or for his individual rights, fared less well than the man who sought nothing but his own selfish interests. Quietly ignoring the whole registration business and keeping a low profile will do a man better than will striking a political posture before a press conference. Not registering, but telling everyone that you have, could also be effective in avoiding trouble.

In all, about 500,000 men avoided the Vietnam era draft by simply not registering in the first place. Another 50,000 fled the country, with some 30,000 going to Canada. (Next time around, the West Indies might be a good idea, especially for non-whites.)

Baskir and Strauss conclude with these words:

"The effective functioning of a post-Vietnam draft hinges on a number of other optimistic assumptions: the overnight mobilization of a draft structure that is presently non-existent, the fair application of laws and regulations by draft boards whose Vietnam-era performance did not withstand judicial scrutiny, swift and certain criminal enforcement by a judicial system that dismissed more than 90 percent of all Vietnam-related cases, and the absence of a concerted resistance effort by pacifist groups who oppose conscription as a matter of principle...Millions of draft-age youth will know that their fathers were avoiders, war resisters, or disillusioned veterans. This is not the stuff upon which to build an ethic of unquestioned patriotism."

More subtle and effective attacks on conscription exist than the outright defiance. Some men may register several times, using the names of different non-existent or ineligible persons each time. Suppose that someone registers in my name, with all the pertinent vital statistics, except that the year of birth is given as "1972" instead of "1932". When the federal marshal comes, he finds a grandfather in his fifties. Or a man could register using the vital statistics of a woman with a plausibly masculine name such as "Lee", "Leslie", "Marion", "Tracy", or "Carroll". In due course of time an induction notice is delivered to, or an indictment is made out against, a woman. Or a man may register in the name of a fifth-grade classmate who was killed grabbing a ride on the back of a bus in 1982. Or, come 1990, forms will be available in every post office and bank so that people missed by the census can mail in their vital statistics. Large numbers of highly eligible but non-existent people can thus be created, and the Selective Service System can waste its resources finding out where they are and why they haven't registered.

The victory of the right-wing ARENA party in El Salvador certainly does open up some sanguine prospects - using "sanguine" in its original sense of "bloody". "The conservatives are even talking about sending U. S. military advisors packing," you say, "so they can win the war with the rebels." Fine - 10 years from now ARENA and "socialist" exiles will be sitting in Miami, back-biting about who lost El Salvador, and the present "rebels" will be running the country - and I won't care a hoot.

Blancmange #200 (Blackman): Congratulations on the milestone!

I recall one comic book version of Flash Gordon in which Dale Arden, far from being the usual decorative heroine of pulp s-f, had a doctorate in chemistry. But I also recall a comic book, sometime in the 1950s, which had Flash and Dale and the villain in a crippled airship flying low over a Mongolian swamp. First Dale falls out. Then Flash and the villain, locked in combat, fall out. Since the plot line requires them to reach the water before Dale does, it is explained to us that they fall faster because they weigh more!

I like your reference to "Cold War in Space" science-fiction as "sdi-fi". However, as the "SDI" hoax fades into the past, the reference will become increasingly obscure.

The Buttoneer's Den #4 (Holzman): The last time I wrote to Nancy Lebovitz I suggested some buttons for her stock that could take advantage of the astrological follies currently emerging from the White House. They will be inset into this page.

Regrettably, there are also AIDS jokes. The best one I've heard is "Can AIDS be transmitted by mosquitoes?" "Only if they've been exchanging needles."

That alcohol-related version of "I Never" reminds me of this Chess set consisting of bottles shaped like the various pieces. At the beginning of the game, each bottle is filled with brandy. A player who captures a piece must drain it. A player who checks the King must drain it; it is then refilled. Play can get rather odd during the mid-game.

New York has a State Fossil; however, it is neither the Senate Majority Leader (as I had suspected) or a dinosaur (which are not found in New York). It is a Paleozoic sea scorpion some 2½ meters long, the Eurypterid.

I have heard exactly nothing about the film version of Hadashi no Gen since it had its American premiere in Dallas in March.

You realize how lucky Robert Sacks was, when you realize that the man he insulted is a southwestern WASP. That cultural pattern reacts strongly and violently to insults.

Mystics make excellent butts for humor, and we have all too little of that in our lives these days. I particularly like the reaction you get when someone tells you that she or he "meditates". You profess ignorance, and ask this person to explain "meditation". As soon as the explanation starts, you interrupt and say: "Oh - relaxing! Yes, I've always been fond of relaxing."

Roger Elwood was an enthusiast who started publishing novels and anthologies in the early 1980s. It developed that he was a "born-again Christian", and was trying to wrench s-f into a "Christian" direction. But the books were generally not very good, and Elwood tended to make an ass of himself at conventions, so the whole effort sank without a trace. I haven't the remotest notion what he's doing now.

When Lincoln was President, there was an organization that wanted to send free Blacks back to Africa, so we could have a nice profitable colony all our own. I have never seen anything to indicate that Lincoln supported this idea.

I have the impression that judges only rarely discipline lawyers "for filing frivolous briefs". In recent years, a Connecticut attorney tried to get his client off a murder rap by claiming that he'd been possessed by demons, while in Texas an attorney presented a case against the Air Force by two women who claimed that they hadn't been protected from being molested by a flying saucer. So I fear that the attorneys for the train engineers who are suing the man whose legs they ran over will be treated as if they were responsible "officers of the court".

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

For reasons explained on p. 5, I have had very little time lately to put original material into DAGON, or even to keep up on ordinary correspondence. This is why a lot of people who should be getting letters from me are going to be getting this until I can get those letters written.

This means that things I've been planning to put into DAGON have been piling up, waiting for time and space. I still intend to review Hal Morgan's and Kerry Tucker's two books Rumor! and More Rumor!. about those ridiculous stories you keep hearing on

"It's better to have Uranus in Cancer than to have Cancer in Uranus."

"Bush will line up all the states, and Nancy will line up the planets."

"I was born on a cusp between Aries and Cancer - the doctor said it was the longest delivery in medical history."

"I'm an Aries - can I Ram you?"

"You look like the latter half of Sagittarius"

"I was born when Jupiter entered the Virgin."

"I don't feel so good - I think Mercury is in the Fish."

Paul McCartney's death or the spider eggs in Bubble Yum. I also plan to review those two novels with settings involving the Society for Creative Anachronism. And print much of a very interesting letter from Robert H. Knox about the later career of Wally Wood, whose King of the World I reviewed in a recent installment of my comic art column "I'll See You in the Funny Papers". Knox, it seems, has information about revisions and sequels to King of the World of which I was unaware.

There will also be comment on some of the many great science-fiction writers who have recently passed from among us. First among them in eminence was Robert A. Heinlein, though I feel that in the long run his admirers will draw a curtain of merciful silence over the works of the last 30 years of his life. Clifford Simak, Randall Garrett, Lin Carter, and C. L. Moore are also among the recent deaths in our field.

*

On Sunday the 29th we drove down to Monmouth County, New Jersey, along with Deirdre and her kids, to attend the christening of Dean Earl Wright IV. (As H. G. Wells once remarked, it is a ceremony "which advertises the church, gratifies the faithful, and does no perceptible harm to the object blessed.") Once we were finished with the ceremony, which the parents put up with mainly to gratify the Wright side of the family, we all went off to a buffet lunch at the Officers' Club at Ft. Monmouth, since Dean Earl Wright II is a retired Army colonel.

The Officers' Club was a palatial setting, surrounded by a golf course, a large swimming pool, and tennis courts, all of them in heavy use. The luncheon itself was held in a huge room, somewhat mitigated in its effect by a non-functioning air conditioning system. There can be little doubt as to who is the true aristocracy of the America of 1988.

*

Randy Newman of "Mr. Mimeo", the source of printing equipment for many New York City area fans, has announced his summer vacation schedule. Wednesday 29 June will be his last day for over two weeks in his office on the 3rd floor of 1140 Broadway, between 25th and 26th Streets. He returns on Monday 18 July, and will be taking Wednesdays and Fridays off for the rest of the summer, through and including 2 September. For further information phone him at 212-889-7781.

DAGON #373

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FIRST CLASS MAIL

Are there Christians in
your Dungeon? (See p. 1)