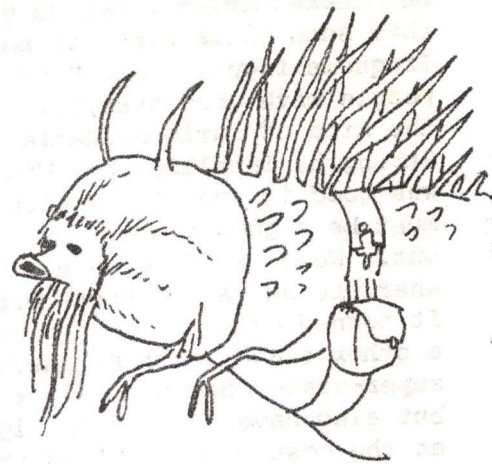


Will I get CONFERENCE CALL 46 into APA-L just one week after the preceding number? Good lord, that means I may be breaking out of my Fafia! At all events, this is Operation Crifanac 626 and

It's Eney's Fault

ROUND AND ROUND FAR UNDERGROUND: Judy Tockman uttered a challenge that no green-blooded fan could ignore when she asked for a short explanation of Dungeons and Dragons. As far as I know, there is no such thing as a one-sheet explanation of the game, and I would say it's as valid an intellectual test to devise one as Jack Speer found it to develop an explanation of fandom that would fit on a 3x5 card.



Carrion Crawler

The game, then, involves sending parties of Characters -- who may be Fighters, Magic-users, or Clerics, and sometimes Thieves, Rangers, Courtesans, Druids, or Monks -- into a...well, colloquially a Dungeon; it may be anything from a literal prison-under-a-castle through the Pits beneath a deserted Martian city to open terrain (wilderness terrain, naturally). There they seek treasure and have to fight or avoid fights with Monsters who may, in fact, be Dragons. They may also be: Brigands, Gargoyles, Vampires, Ogres, Carrion Crawlers, Balrogs, Sphinxes...

If you've ever played the game of Battleship, it's like that, only a couple of orders of magnitude more so. If you haven't, that involves two players taking graph paper and sketching in a small fleet and then "firing" -- by stating the coordinates where their shells land -- at the opponent's flotilla. Since you are told when a hit is scored, you can try to deduce your opponent's formation and plant your shells accordingly: the winner is the first to hit all the enemy's occupied squares.

In Dungeons and Dragons the situation is similar in that the Expedition knows nothing of the territory they're entering (or even may remember it from earlier trips, which as like as not will lead to some awkward surprises when changes have taken place). It is much more flexible in that all the Characters and all the Dungeon Monsters have nearly as wide a variety of possible actions as real-world beings would, and (what some people like most of all) it is not zero-sum in that there are lots of possible wins other than exterminating the opposition.

The object is to gain wealth and experience points: wealth because it increases your ability to equip yourself, and experience because this increases your strength, skill, and other powers. (Fighters gain strength more rapidly than others and pick up increased resistance to magic faster, too; Magic-users and Clerics gain less strength but become able to use more spells and more potent spells; and so on. Thieves, for instance, learn to pick locks and climb sheer walls; Courtesans gain the power to Fascinate their marks...) The overall result is an individual-combat wargame with a bit of Monopoly and a strong flavoring of a potent mythic theme: the Harrowing of Hell.

D&D involves plotting and scheming, vastly attractive to all of us, and also -- not of necessity, but, given fans' interests, almost inevitably -- the development of suitable personalities for our Characters. Some of these are figured out on the basis of Characteristics: the values we roll to determine our Characters' abilities, using three 6-sided dice. (The game also uses 4, 8, 12, and 20-sided dice for checking various types of chances or determining the effect of various weapons.) The dice rolls have to be taken in sequence, so there's no dictating in advance what type of Character you're going to get; and they are erratic enough that an excellent score in

one Characteristic may be gained at the cost of a poor one in another. Need I add that such situations are naturals for Rationalization? Why, for instance, does my Iroquois fighter, Red Hawk, have only a 6 dexterity? Well, because I keep rolling people with good everything else and lousy Dexterity, for one thing, but that isn't the kind of rationalization I mean. Characters do these rolls to determine their Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Constitution, Dexterity, and Charisma, and Red Hawk was good in everything else and excellent -- 17 points -- in Charisma. So there must be a good reason why he has only 6 Dexterity and it remained but to figure it out. Well, we'd found him (as occasionally happens) as a prisoner in the Dungeon, where he and some others were being used as porters by the Black Druid's men, and it turned out that he'd tried to -- or rather, succeeded in an effort to -- protect another slave, Ruth Balinsdottir, from one of the Uruk-hai. Lawful Fighters with super-grade Charisma (17 or 18) can play as Paladins, who have some special abilities but also have to take on highly Lawful responsibilities like that. He'd saved Ruth at the cost of attracting the Orcs' attention to himself and they broke his thumbs and fingers for his pains. (Pack animals don't need dexterity...)

Then, too, thinking up these background stories is fun in itself (remind me to tell you some time about Brilliant Jade, my Taoist fox-sprite). And sometimes the situation makes a fairly well realized Character take off on his/her own. I'd thought Kuei Yang would turn out to be a Greedy Banker type, a very appropriate thing for a Dwarf or an industrious Chinese, and in his first couple of adventures he was trending that way. But then I played him alone a couple of times and what did he do but fight single-handed against an Orc-chieftain three game levels above himself (and win a +3 sword for doing so: that is, a sword which automatically adds 3 points to the die roll when its chances for hitting are determined) and then go galloping off to Hawkmoor, a blatantly murderous Dungeon, in an effort to rescue a party which had gotten trapped in a magical mirror. Right now he's trying to get his young friend Garin out of a tricky situation involving Garin's power of Unicorn Friendship...

But that's about all the explanation I can give without either quoting the rule books *in extenso* or telling you a couple of stories to give you an idea what a particular Expedition is like. (Hilda has been doing that, but her narratives are so condensed that you have to read several before picking up enough knowledge of her Characters to really enjoy them.) If Bruce complains loudly enough, maybe I'll do that. After all, as a LASFS member I am entitled to drive others to madness.

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SURE AS GRUNION ARE ALIVE, HERE'S APA-L 585:

Rothstein: My own favorite Gnomon thingy is the mission orders to the *Enterprise*...

Bucklin: The R and H stand for "red" and "hair", unless somebody has already answered. If somebody has, they still stand for "red" and "hair", but you may have gotten a reply much more interesting than the truth could be.

Digby: Actually, the problem isn't just that dealing with racism according to your model requires knowing how to detect and monitor/avoid the supersaturated state. It requires a government able to decide how the population ought to react, and then make them react that way. Well, maybe not the government to start out with, but they'd be there in a few years...

Rose: What's so impossible about Teddy Kennedy being the New Prophet? The story was set up in such a way that the voters couldn't prevent it. I shudder to think that you may have meant that the man's innate decency, or the scruples of his intimates and advisors, would have prevented such a thing from happening.

Andruschak: The gods take care of these things, as they do with Lee Gold's dice. The delay from the planned 4 July landing brought the landing to 20 July; but if you'd aimed for 20 July and had the same delay that would have brought the landing to 5 August, and that's a LASFS meeting night. The notion of Heaven employing backup redundancy is mildly ookable...

WIDOW BROWN'S
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Tepper: 'Raus mit der "Areological".'

We can afford to use a unique word for the geology of each planet only if we plan to be limited to the Solar System permanently, and we can't start too early quashing such a notion as that.

Judy: The difficulty in avoiding the mutual narration gimmick was that everybody had forgotten most of the details of the Round Robin in the 4-5 months since the last chapter ap-

peared, so if I hadn't done it that way I'd have had to do it some other way. And this way I could react to a comment somebody made before you joined -- that we were all egotripping by having our RR-alter-egos acting super-competent -- by having me do something klutzy. Getting two members of different Underground movements to accidentally and simultaneously dope each other with truth drug struck me as a nice antidote to that charge...

Locke: The proposition that free speech covers the display of swastikas comes awfully close to buying the idiot's-delight notion of "symbolic free speech", i.e., any conduct reflecting opinion is Constitutionally protected. The Nazi atrocities after all: the opinion that Jews were *Untermenschen*. The act of displaying a swastika (or waving a Viet Cong flag, or burning a cross on a black activist's lawn,) isn't the same thing as, say, wearing long hair and smoking pot. In the latter case the bigoted may read peripheral evidence as a declaration that you adhere to degenerate values; in the former, you are openly communicating that adherence by an act which is meant as a declaration in favor of those values. People don't display swastikas as aesthetic objects, y'know. ** Haven't seen any male belly dancers yet, but at last Twelfth Night the SCA had a company perform the Knights' Bransle (pronounced, and sometimes executed, like "brawl"). Sherna formally (and with a straight face, at least for the first five seconds) thanked the organizer for entertaining the ladies with a troop of Dancing Guys...

Chalfin: You know, that's an oookably sinister comment. "There were several hundred unruly kids there, but...the museum authorities have ways of controlling that." Say no more...

NOW WE GET SADISTIC KICKS FROM APA-L 586:

Glyer: As a Desperate Wrong-Doer, I admit it would be but just for me to contribute a fee for my APA-L, should this be the judgement of the group. ** Sure there isn't any unbiased way of measuring intelligence, but nobody thought there was. You don't give your target population an IQ test; you give them several whose biases compensate for each other. The more things you find out that intelligence can help you do, the closer you come to a core measurement. ** You are overreacting a little to Harrison Rose when you say that fans don't get jobs, or at least don't excel at jobs, that require full-time pursuit. Assuming you mean full working time and are not working a quibble on us -- X can't be a full-time pursuit because you, Y, have spare time for fandom -- the sample is inadequate for a statistical decision, but there are certainly instances of fans working at jobs that require close application for many years. I won't go into the question whether pro-crashers should count, but some of the jobs you cited as impossibles have been held or approached. Plumber? Would you accept a heating engineer like Dean Grennell? Airline pilot like Art Hayes? I pass on railroad engineers, but if you want a fireman try John Conlon. I would be surprised if we didn't have some union officials though I don't know of any. How high a public office do you want fans to be elected to -- will Speer of Crane or Hensley do? I disremember any Admirals or Generals but there are three or four field-grade officers of whom you must know, at least, George Scithers. Why

not mention bureaucrats of comparable rank and longevity of service? Bill Evans is high enough on both counts to please the most finicky and Bob Pavlat and I aren't that far behind him. Why not ask about physicists or lawyers or physicians or criminologists or astronomers or...shiffuh, dammit, now I'm overreacting.

Bev Kanter: With all the errors and blunders your trick-cyclist seems to have made, do you keep him on just for comic relief? The supply can't be that short...er...can it? ** No, "Russian" means the opposite of "French Kissing": where both parties carefully keep their mouths shut.

June: Sherna and I both chortled over the minutes. For those who didn't see it, a group, including me, was proposed and it was moved that all except Dick Eney should be accepted. The motion passed unanimously. Then, just before I went into shock, it was moved that Dick Eney be accepted. That also passed unanimously. Good grief, timed gags in a set of written minutes! ** Yes, Elliot Shorter is married to Sandy last-name-I-forget, who is Caucasian.

Digby: The term "the aggressor" doesn't imply that all the blame, 100%, is on one side. It implies that somebody did something quite unmistakable that was the start of the war, and this often enough is the case. Germany invaded Poland, not the other way around; Japan invaded China, not the other way around; Russian and puppet troops marched into Prague, not Czech and East European troops into Moscow; and so it goes. It's fun to dig into the fine details of history, but an error to assume that because some issues have wide ramifications they are not essentially simple in other respects.

Kara Dalkey: Quick, before he finishes, ask your father: once he's finished that Klein bottle, what is he going to put in it?

Hertz: The heck I was in the D&D room. I made a point of circulating whenever I was awake during the convention. I played D&D, alright, but only in the evenings, although some of the latter stretched on into the mornings...

Tannenbaum: The battle of Bunker Hill was fought in the red light district of Oahu. Bunker Hill was the local fuel storage area and the joy-girls had appropriated some of the work shacks and resisted being thrown out. The Monitor really never fought the Merrimac -- the New Englanders only made noises about secession, so the contingency plan to send an expedition up river never materialized. The first man to fly nonstop across the Atlantic was Louis Bleriot, but lots of people won't give him credit because he logically chose the narrowest part he could find. The President whose real middle name is "Lynch" is the one who was christened that; the others are impostors and bandwagon-jumpers. There are no illegitimate children, only illegitimate Presidents. One month no Presidents have been born in is October 1976. Aren't you going to ask some really tough questions? ** Duck eggs are richer and, depending on your palate, either gamier or more flavorful than chicken eggs. They also make better hundred-year-old eggs, if you care.

Deckert: You are kicking Rothstein a little too hard, methinks. If mentioning a silent treatment as something we could do to Korbas is censorship, what is deleting his zine from the Disty? What is pressuring, rather than suggesting to, others a silent treatment? What is working on Korbas' boss to get him fired? I am aware of the delight of using the most emotionally loaded words possible to bludgeon people with, but after all, in addition to the semantic lead shot most words also contain at least a debased meaning. Censorship is something we do to Korbas' zine or to Korbas to abort the zine. Our comment or lack of comment after it's published is no more censorship than it is embezzlement or pickpocketry.