

DIFFERENT WORLDS Special Feature

My Life and Role-Playing

**LEONARD H.
KANTERMAN, M.D.**

One of the purposes of this project is to find out what kind of person some of these people are. I never met Leonard. Read on if you wish to know more about the designer of Starships & Spacemen.

“Where No Man Has Gone Before”

Author's Preface: At Origins IV in Detroit, I was fortunate enough to take part in a seminar on Fantasy Role-playing games with some of the more notable designers in the field. I would like to take this opportunity, the premier issue of a new magazine on the subject, to convey some of the thoughts I expressed on that panel.

* * *

I was something of a latecomer to the field of fantasy/role-playing games, having cut my teeth on conventional board war-gaming. Indeed, I was already a published game designer before I'd even heard of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Like many other wargamers, I reacted with a healthy blend of interest and skepticism at the idea of a game that could be played without a board, units, or combat tables. (The association of *D&D* with medieval

miniatures in fact dampened my enthusiasm, as I could not spare the expense that would be required.) However, my curiosity was piqued.

My first exposure to *D&D* was at a meeting of a New York wargame club I used to belong to that met in a dank, rat-infested cubbyhole on the Lower East Side. (What better atmosphere for *D&D*?) It was a disaster. The DM ran a group of 6 novices through a wilderness encounter, taking each of us separately in turn rather than as a group, thus incurring a wait of up to 2 hours before our characters were in play. To compound this error, he put our weak, vulnerable first-level characters up against such formidable foes as were-bears, manticores, and cockatrices. I was almost put off of role-playing completely, but I had learned from this brief, initial encounter, two of what I consider to be the four cardinal rules of role-playing. Firstly, an enjoyable game requires an experienced and imaginative gamemaster; and secondly, the key to interesting and challenging encounters is to fit the degree of hazard to the ability of the characters to deal with it.

The third cardinal rule I learned during my next brush with role-play, at Origins II in Baltimore. I took part in the *D&D* tournament. Again, a disaster; thrown into a group with fourteen players I'd never seen before, my attempts at participation were squelched by the one or two vehemently vocal members of the group. The third rule: role-playing is best

among friends, with the corollary to this rule being that, among friends, all should be allowed their chance to participate.

After two such experiences, I almost didn't come back to *D&D*; fortunately, one of my New York gang, Tim Slack, had obtained a copy of the rules and our group began to explore his dungeon. Being a former U.S. Army Engineer, his place was a marvel of architecture, and it was liberally sprinkled with elements from the New York scene (a subway, a massage parlor) to keep things refreshingly light.

It was but a small step from being a player of *D&D* to designing my own worlds of adventure. I designed my first two dungeons, The Enchanted Castle (complete with a black cauldron guarded by three cats who metamorphosed into witches when attacked) and The Haunted House (with Harold, the ghostly butler; a "living room" with living furniture; and The Library, with a talking portrait). I'm still using these two, with refinements, with new players.

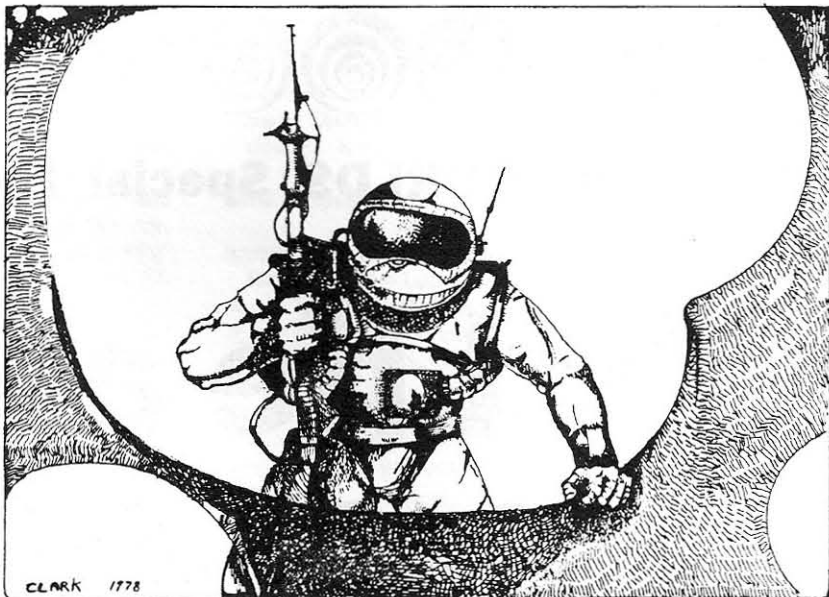
Shortly thereafter, our group became involved in an extended campaign that lasted months, traversing miles of countryside and several castles, including a picturesque detour to The Island of Lost Souls. I ran several characters in this world, my favorite being a Rabbi whose constant companion was Chazzar, the magic pig, as the Rabbi was the only one in the party who didn't want to turn him into pork chops! Although our progress

was dogged by a vengeful vampire (woe to those who heard "the flapping of leathery wings" while on midnight guard duty), we eventually triumphed in a climactic battle against The Acid Queen and her champion, Apollo Creed.

Through these adventures, I learned a lot about the nature of role-play, and many of these observations saw print in an article I did for *Campaign* magazine with Charlie Elsdon, called "Introduction to Yourself: D&D for Beginners". The most important lesson I learned was what I see as the fourth cardinal rule: when playing a character, one should *play his role*. That is, the best play results when a player fully understands his character, and tries to act as he thinks his character might in a given situation. While this is sometimes not the best course of action, it makes for a much better game overall. In addition to reconfirming the first three cardinal rules, I also discovered the importance of a sense of humor in role-play.

If *D&D* was so fulfilling, one may ask, what possessed me to design *Starships & Spacemen*. Well, first off, I was very dissatisfied with the rambling, disorganized nature of *D&D*'s rules, which do not leave one with any idea of how to play the game after one has read them. There were other points in the *D&D* system that annoyed me; for example, the fact that a player's abilities did not get better with experience but, strangely enough, the amount of damage he could sustain did! I also had my "consciousness raised" by a woman in our group, Lee Buckley, who pointed out the limitations of the game vis-a-vis female characters. Lastly, and most importantly, by the end of our campaign the possibilities of play were severely hampered by what I term "fantasy inflation." Our DM, Scott McPartland, was an avid practitioner of the second rule of role-play, namely, that the challenge should fit the character's capabilities. By the end of the campaign, our characters were sufficiently advanced in power that the boundaries of fantasy had to be stretched to find a suitable challenge. ("Fantasy inflation" was probably the chief factor responsible for the failure of the last of the original booklets, "Gods, Demi-gods, and Heroes"). In short, I was looking for new worlds to conquer.

As I stated in *S&S*, the idea for a *Star Trek* role-play game was first suggested to me by Anita Cohen, another in our group, after an adventure in our fantasy campaign. I applied design techniques I had employed designing more conventional games, including *Cromwell*, to the role-play genre. The game was a big hit in my group, successfully capturing the flavor of *Star Trek* while incorporating other elements of science fiction and correcting many of the deficiencies of the



original *D&D* that had bothered me. For example, in *S&S* characters have inborn abilities, like physical strength, which cannot be improved upon, while acquired abilities, like intelligence and technical skill, improve with experience. In addition, physical attributes are much less important in *S&S* than in *D&D*; one value, strength, encompasses the considerations of physical power, constitution, and the amount of damage a player can sustain. Since damage is limited, the

I thought S&S would be the first Sci-Fi RPG on the market.

weaponry in *S&S* remains lethal, whether a character is a 1st level ensign or an 8th level admiral. In addition, since physical strength is downplayed, women characters more than hold their own in *S&S*. Using Mr. Spock's "infinite diversity in infinite combinations" as my guideline, *S&S* explores the interrelationships between various races and sexes as one of its fundamental themes. Each race and sex in *S&S* is different and unique, with its own particular advantages and disadvantages. While the sexes are *not* the same in *S&S*, they are at least equal (although, in my opinion, female characters are probably superior, gaining more in charisma and psionics than they lose in strength, a fact which my current group has failed to realize). The races of *S&S* have different biologies, something which an astute gamesmaster (and astute players) can use in employing novel solutions in a variety of situations.

Once *S&S* was designed, I began looking for a publisher. Since this was before either *Traveller* or *Metamorphosis Alpha* was published, I thought *S&S* would be the first science-fiction role play game on the market. I finally found Scott

Bizar, of Fantasy Games, and, while Scott was a never-failing source of encouragement and inspiration, the vagaries of the publishing business dictated that *S&S* did not see print until after these other games were on the market. *S&S* was designed independently of these, and concentrates on different aspects of role play. (*Traveller*, to the best of my understanding, confines characters to humans only and is intimately concerned with the conomics of space, while *S&S* is probably one of the least competitive role-play games around, being completely lacking in money with the only rewards being the advancement of one's character and self-satisfaction in a job well done).

Since *S&S* was published, I keep running across elements I would have liked to have included in the game. It seems that every heroic fantasy or sci-fi book I read has something to offer, and I keep mentally translating the action in the books into gaming terms. Hopefully, some of these elements will see the light of day in this or other publications in the field, as I see the designer as having a responsibility to keep his game fresh after publication. Fear not, however, there are no plans for dollar-consuming "supplements" to *S&S*, and the game, with the exception of the inescapable typos, is complete as it stands.

I would like to close this article with a few thoughts on what I see as the future of role-play. First, and most importantly, I see role-play games as a tremendous opportunity to get new people from all spectrums involved in gaming, especially more women (since wargaming is a 99% male endeavor). It seems easier for women to identify with an elf-princess than with Rommel. From a personal viewpoint, I was able to get my wife, who cannot understand my fascination with games, to try role-play and, to both of our surprise, to enjoy it.

Secondly, I see role-play as an opportunity for people to learn more about themselves and the people they live with. By exploring the possibilities of different courses of actions, even to the point of different morality systems, through the "safe" medium of fantasy, people can learn who they are and why they think and act the way they do. The original *D&D* brings one amazingly close to the archetypes of Jungian psychology (the wise old man, the young hero), and may help us peer into our "collective unconscious." Although role-play can deteriorate into a childish enterprise, there is more to be gained in role-play than an afternoon of vicarious thrills offing monsters and scooping up the loot. At its best, role-play offers a challenge to our wits and our wiles, while extending the potential for insight into ourselves. With a good gamesmaster, in the company of good friends, an adventure in role-playing can be a stimulating and satisfying experience for those willing to extend themselves.

NIALL SHAPERO

Niall's publication, The Lords of Chaos, is probably the most carefully edited APA of them all. Which probably explains its irregular publication. Well maybe not irregular, but regularly a bit late. But I'll let Niall explain. . .

Memories

One fine Saturday morning in October, 1974, I drove to the home of a fellow wargamer in Redwood City, California. Fully prepared for an afternoon (and evening) of miniatures battles, I was more than slightly surprised to find the sandtable totally unprepared and all figures still stacked on the shelves. I was not amused.

The regular Saturday crowd was all playing this strange and incomprehensible pen and paper game called *Dungeons and Dragons*, and would not deign to involve themselves in anything quite so mundane as a miniature's battle. Not being a sword and sorcery nut at the time, I decided to head for saner (?) regions, and returned to Berkeley.

It took, I think, all of three weeks before I overcame my rather prejudiced opinion of the game to sit down and read the rules. As no one in Berkeley had a copy of the rules, this meant a "short" trip to acquire same. Six of U.C. Berkeley's finest cramed into my BMW, and we proceeded to cover most, if not all, of the gameshops in the San Francisco Bay Area in search of the rules. Some six hours, eighty miles, and several frayed tempers later, we discovered 1 (one) rule set in some out-of-the-way game shop.

Within a week, we had xeroxed relevant portions of the three original books

and were straining mightily to create our first dungeons. In those dark days, this was no easy task. The original rules were a mass of contradictions, vague in the extreme regarding many points key to (our) play, and, in general, somewhat less than useful. I think that the first three weeks saw each of us produce at least two small dungeon complexes each, no two of them run under the same set of "rules."

Chaos reigned for the better part of the next year. Arguments over rule interpretations took up almost as much time as dungeoning, and it was not unusual for stands to change regarding said interpretations on an almost daily basis. The arguments went on for hours and hours, stretching through several days. And at least one of our number flunked out of Berkeley at least in part due to the amount of time spent arguing and playing *D&D* as opposed to studying.

It was the year of the gilded hole, and our dungeons were just that, and nothing more. No societies were built around those gold-lined holes-in-the-ground, and adventures existed in a strange limbo between expeditions into the netherworld.

Our days of isolation were, of course, numbered. For most of that first year, our contact with other *D&D*ers was distinctly limited (we had far better things to do with our time on weekends, after all, than drive across the bay to the only other group we knew that played the game). But at that same time, in Los Angeles, a

It was the year of the gilded hole. . .

bright-eyed pixie named Lee Gold was laying the groundwork for a, dare I say it, international forum for *D&D* players.

It was at the 1975 *WesterCon* that I first met Lee. It was my first science fiction convention, and though the rest of the Fourth of July weekend passed in something of a blur, I still remember that encounter quite clearly. I was talking with some random LA fan about *D&D* (said fan being one Jack Harness) when a short, stout, brunette bundle of energy came bouncing by.

"You like *D&D*? Well then, you'll just love this!" she said, thrusting a copy of *Alarums and Excursions* under my nose. The price was reasonable and, what the devil, I was at a convention anyway. . . That evening, as I sat reading that first fanzine/APA of many yet to come, a new urge began to build within me. Here, at last, was a place that my humble scribbings might actually be printed and, perhaps, even be COMMENTED UPON! EGO-BOO. I had finally gone round the bend.

My first contribution to *A&E* did not see print until *A&E* #6 or thereabouts (though I do remember with a certain fondness a review of my dungeon that ap-

peared in, I think, issue four or five). And during the Golden Age of *A&E*, I was one of the regular contributors. For nearly two years, in fact, I found myself thoroughly entangled with the contributor side of that fan publishing project.

A number of fan feuds developed in *A&E* as the readership and distribution increased and divergent gaming philosophies came into contact with each other. It was, of course, inevitable that eventually people would start screaming at each other over the game; the rules were so incoherent as to virtually guarantee divergent interpretations. And, of course, as *A&E* was the only real forum that most of us had, *A&E* was also something of a battle ground for a good many months.

During this same period, my own dungeon/campaign was undergoing something on the order of a major reconstruction. Where once there had been only gilded holes in the ground, a world was growing. Cities rose, trade routes grew, and empires sprang into being, literally overnight. No longer did the adventurer live in limbo between expeditions; now he was a part of a living world where dungeon crawls made up only a small portion of his activities. Needless to say, as the complications grew, expeditions began to take longer and longer to run until towards the end of this period, expeditions were taking in the close neighborhood of thirty hours to run.

In the end, what with the seemingly endless arguments in *A&E*, and the seemingly endless expeditions on the home front, something had to give. But before I threw up my hands in complete disgust, and abandoned fanish circles completely, I decided to give the world of *D&D* fandom one more try.

On the home front, I restricted the gaming hours to weekends, and tried to keep even those weekend hours reasonably limited. As a result, surprisingly enough, the games actually improved in quality (something about the DM and players not being completely exhausted half way through the expedition might have had something to do with it).

And on the fanpubbing front, well . . . For many months I had been toying with the idea of a DM oriented quasi-APA patterned after *A&E* but under stricter editorial control (my own, naturally). Other fan editors had tried to produce something of the sort but I found nothing that matched quite what I wanted in a DM oriented zine. And so, after a little scratching around for articles and a LOT of scratching around for a second-hand mimeo machine, *The Lords of Chaos* was born.

Issue number one of *TLOC* had a copy count of fifty-five, and was twenty-three pages long. It started as a quarterly publication, and that first issue appeared on May 25, 1977. With issue number six,