GARY ALAN FINE

SHARED FANTASY

Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds

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To

Dalor, Talinor, Vandor, Rhoop, Lord Ahanbasrim hiTokalmy, Sayvon, Alain, Max Burrows, Salmesh, Sir Alexei Androvich, Findal, Zollo, Naile Fangtooth, Anborn, Hrolf Haakenson, Ralph the Rash, and all the other characters I've known

We
Are living in a fantasy world
Together in a make-believe campaign
With mystic wizards, desperate heros, mightly warriors
A time apart, a place apart
In future and in past

We
Are living a fabulous life
Together in a make-believe time
With cruising starships, deadly planets, interstellar war
In search of gold in empires lost
The universe is ours

We
Are living the fantasy
Of life
Illusion surrounds us
Confusion and suffering
Are figments of our own imagination
Beyond this shadow world
Lies peace
And glory
And life

Deron Johnson
and Eric Johnson, 1978

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Preface

Sociologists who study leisure typically find themselves attacked on two fronts. First, they are accused of not being sufficiently serious about their scholarly pursuits. Second, they are accused of alchemically transforming that which is inherently fascinating into something as dull as survey research computer tapes. While both charges are answerable, the responses do not meet the real legitimacy of these critiques.

In regard to the first charge, the researcher may claim (as I do) that the theoretical integrity of the work will stand and fall on its own merit; that topic does not necessarily prejudge quality.[1] While I believe this deeply, as my self-image requires, I also recognize that there is some merit in the charge of playfulness. I speak only for myself in admitting that my research includes some self-indulgence. Studying fantasy gaming groups is fun—I cannot deny that. It is not that the research is always enjoyable, or that typing, indexing, and compiling field notes are inherently fascinating. But the field observations are inherently interesting, playing the gaming is entertaining and exhilarating, and writing this book was for this reason a labor of love. Anyone who enjoys work and admits it should rightly be viewed with suspicion. This suspicion is shared by my wife, who found it difficult to understand that my work should continue into the hours I normally reserved for "leisure time" and family pursuits. That I enjoyed this research, and that it was leisure to a point, made her critiques dramatically effective. Her tolerance, and that of some of my colleagues, who perhaps felt similarly but were more jocular in their comments, was important in that it allowed this work to take

the form it does. We who study leisure sociology sometimes feel that the sniping from others may represent jealousy of the enjoyment we gain from our "work"; if so, it is probably well placed. It perhaps represents an attempt to equalize research rewards; since we have intrinsic rewards, perhaps, it is said, the external rewards (grants, publications, status in the profession) are less important. But we want to have our cake and eat it too, and ask, despite our denial of that children's truism "If it tastes good, it can't be good for you," that our work stand on its own merits.

Having held the serious scientists at bay (for the moment), our other flank is attacked by the hedonists who argue that we are stealing their fun. As Halliday notes of folklore scholarship: "It will perhaps appear but as an ill-starred attempt to break butterflies of fragile irridescent beauty upon the cumbrous wheel of pedantry." (Halliday 1933:1). In other words, analysis is incompatible with experience. Again, there is some merit in this charge. One does lose something by a detached stance. In describing these fantasy role-play games it may appear to the reader that they reveal things of sociological note, but not that they are *fun*. Fun is the central reason— sociological, psychological, and otherwise—why they have become so popular. In this monograph I shall have scholarly cause to describe some of the humor that occurs spontaneously in these gaming groups. Social psychologists who study humor have been attacked for their decimation of the content of humor, and the question has been asked again and again by the lay public: Why are humor researchers (and others in leisure studies) so serious? One must not confuse the order of analysis and experience. One should be open to experience, particularly in the early stages of research, and once one has had some personal understanding of the phenomenon, proceed to analysis. Although the distinction is never absolute, this is the proper order. One first laughs at a good joke and *then* asks why it was funny.

Perhaps the partial legitimacy of this second criticism is a reaction to the first criticism. To avoid being labeled frivolous, some retreat to ponderous prose which does not allow the inherently interesting phenomena to emerge. To some extent this criticism will be with us as long as we intend to go beyond description to analysis, but good analysis is based on good

description, and so the texture of the experience should not be lost.

I wish to emphasize, if it does not come across in the text, that these fantasy role-playing games are enjoyable and stimulating. I do not mean to be a huckster for the gaming industry in suggesting they are worth whatever personal investment the reader wishes to make in them. Particularly for those oriented toward fantasy—a transformation of the mundane, workaday world into a land of imaginative delight—these games are worth knowing about. I learned about the great works of fantasy through this research. J. R. R. Tolkien is first among equals, but the works of H. Beam Piper (*Space Viking*), Robert E. Howard (*Conan: The Hour of the Dragon*), and Jack Vance (*The Last Castle*) were also inspiring.

In this research I have been assisted by several individuals who benignly tolerated my many weaknesses as a fantasy role-play gamer. Even after a year of research my technique, though improved, still made my skilled gaming contacts wince, as I found it hard to distance myself from the role of pedant to that of swashbuckling dwarven prince. I am grateful to those who aided this research, although because of promises of confidentiality these individuals cannot be named directly. I have acknowledged some by *nom de guerre* in the dedication. In the course of playing with some one hundred persons and interviewing two dozen, I made the acquaintance of some very fine persons. Some individuals who provided help can be named because their positions permit identification. My colleague at the University of Minnesota, Professor M. A. R. Barker, created the fantasy game *Empire of the Petal Throne*, the most sophisticated and subtle fantasy role-play game published to date. Phil Barker, being a game designer himself, provided me with much insight into the nature of fantasy gaming and the origins of his mythos and commented on the manuscript. Dave Arneson, a co-author of the first published fantasy role-play game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, willingly gave of his time to explain the historical development of fantasy gaming. E. Gary Gugax and Tim Kask of TSR Inc., allowed me to observe at GenCon XI, a major national gaming convention, and spent an afternoon with me answering many critical questions for this study. Chuck Anshell, the editor of the *Judges Guild Journal*; Tim Kask, editor of *The Dragon*; and

Howard Thompson, publisher of *The Space Gamer*, were generous in making available readership surveys from their journals; some of the results are cited in this book. The observations and interviews described in this book reflect the state of the hobby in 1977–79; I have made no attempt to revise the manuscript in light of the changes in the games or players since that time.

Many colleagues in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota, and elsewhere, allowed me to bounce ideas off them, although they may not have been certain what fantasy role-play gaming was all about. I would like to acknowledge David Axler, Howard Becker, Judith Bennett, David Emigh, Linda Hughes, Sherryl Kleinman, John O'Brien, John Roberts, Gregory P. Stone, Cees Straver, Brian Sutton-Smith, and Russell Thornton. Jo Dossey served admirably as a research assistant in transcribing several game interviews. I would also like to thank Gloria DeWolfe, Pearl Isaacson, and Lisa Thornquist for a variety of secretarial services, all expertly done, not the least of which was translating my first draft from Elven script to a typescript readable by humankind.

Finally, I would like to mention the tolerance of my wife, who found herself alone for a year's worth of Friday evenings, only to find me staggering home at 4:00 A.M. on Saturday morning. She never questioned my claims of engaging in research, but then my spending all day Saturday typing field notes probably served to indicate the lack of any untoward assignation.

Introduction

By any standards the fantasy gaming world is a rather small, perhaps trivial, social world. It doesn't have a massive economic impact, it isn't a representative sample of American life and culture, and it does not exemplify any particular social problem. It certainly is not the most important subsegment of American society on which one might choose to do research. Yet the world of fantasy gaming poses interesting sociological questions—questions that have not been widely addressed elsewhere, and for which this particular social world can provide some answers.

In this research monograph I have three basic goals: First, to analyze and describe a contemporary urban leisure subculture. Second, to understand the development and components of microcultural systems and explore their relationships to the structure of the groups in which they are embedded. Third, to understand the processes by which people generate meanings and identities in social worlds. I use the interactionist perspective to achieve these goals, for only by focusing on the behavior of individuals and their relations to each other can we understand the dynamics of collective action. I have no illusions about the magnitude of the task, or the inevitability of falling short, but I hope that my discussion will stimulate others to continue this research with a better understanding of the problems involved.

Urban Leisure Subculture

John Irwin argues that urban life comprises a large number of settings in which people can "do their own thing":

> Swirling in and around every large city are hundred or thousands of leisure, expressive scenes which I will label "activity systems." What each possesses is some central leisure activity or set of activities. . . . [Irwin 1977:27]

Qualitative urban sociologists wish to document such subcultures or activity systems, and to analyze how they came to be, why individuals participate in them, and what satisfactions these members claim they derive from their participation.

I use articles written by members of this subsociety, interviews, and participant observation to draw a fairly complete portrait of this gaming world, at least as it exists in one Midwestern American city. This descriptive-analytic approach to the gaming subsociety not only provides information about this one leisure subsociety, but provides a means for understanding the way in which other leisure subsocieties are organized and recruit members.

Cultural Systems

Fantasy gamers create cultural systems as their avocation—worlds of imagination formed by the participants, given the constraints of their own knowledge and the structure provided by the rules. Analyzing these fantasy games provides insight into the creation of group cultures, and the way in which these group cultures transform more extensive cultural systems. Each gaming group interprets, defines, and transforms cultural elements in its sphere of knowledge into the cultural framework of an imagined society.

Fantasy games consist of players and referees collectively constructing history and biography for their society and characters. These "experiences" can then be meaningfully referred to by members of the group. Such references reveal important features of the fantasy world created, the characters who inhabit this fantasy world, and the style of interaction of players and referees. When a gaming group exists over several weeks or months, this shared culture can become quite extensive and meaningful for group members.

I shall examine how players and referees jointly construct this culture, and the forms of constraint and social control that each has over the other while playing. This social order has

implications for the content of the cultural system under construction. Structural positions, the personal statuses of participants and the positions of characters in the gaming party, together produce the content of the gaming world.

Since these games involve fantasy—content divorced from everyday experience—it might be assumed that *anything* is possible within a cultural system. Since fantasy is the free play of a creative imagination, the limits of fantasy should be as broad as the limits of one's mind. This is not the case, as each fantasy world is a fairly tight transformation by the players of their mundane, shared realities. While players can, in theory, create anything, they in fact create only those things that are engrossing and emotionally satisfying. Fantasy is constrained by the social expectations of players and of their world. The game fantasy, then, is an integration of twentieth-century American reality and the players' understanding of the medieval or futuristic setting in which their characters are placed. Collective fantasy lacks the seemingly random, illogical feature of dreaming; it does not have the egocentric or autistic qualities that Freud and Piaget discuss as characteristic of fantasy (or psychotic) states. Because gaming fantasy is based in shared experiences, it must be constructed through communication. This communication is possible only when a shared set of references exist for the key images and a clear set of expectations exist for which actions are legitimate.

Gaming fantasy combines the expressive freedom of fantasy with the structure characteristic of games. It is neither as rule-governed as games, because of its fantasy components, nor as free-floating as fantasy, because of its organization, which derives from the gaming model.

Engrossment and Identification

The third main focus of this study is how the fantasy role-playing game induces engrossment and promotes identification with the figures in the game. Central to understanding this process is being aware of the players' definition of the situation and how they orient themselves to the game. Fantasy gaming comprises three interrelated systems of meaning: commonsense reality, the gaming rules, and the content of the gaming fantasy itself. Participants enact different persona on each of these three levels. My goal is to explore the relationships among these forms

of "reality," how individuals can become engrossed in the gaming world, and how they identify with their characters.

A key concept is the *engrossment* of players in the game. For the game to work as an aesthetic experience players must be willing to "bracket" their "natural" selves and enact a fantasy self. They must lose themselves to the game. This engrossment is not total or continuous, but it is what provides for the "fun" within the game. The acceptance of the fantasy world as a (temporarily) real world gives meaning to the game, and the creation of a fantasy scenario and culture must take into account those things that players find engrossing.

Each of the several selves that a person enacts during the game has knowledge associated with it. By this I mean that the "character" will know different things from what the "player" does. Different types and amounts of knowledge are available to individuals in each of their positions in the game. The awareness context of each framed self, the ease of moving to other frames of meaning, and the ambiguities inherent in situations with several levels of meaning permit an examination of relationships among experiences on each level in the game.

Related to this are questions of identity and identification. On the level of mundane reality, players identify with themselves. However, when animating a character a player must choose between playing his own self in the guise of that character or playing the self of that character. For example, I must choose whether to play myself in the role of a magician or play the character as a medieval magician might. In each case the player closely identifies with the character he portrays. Identification with one's character influences the game structure. For instance, players are reluctant to have their characters killed.

I have included a methodological appendix describing the techniques I used in collecting the information presented in this monograph, their strengths and weaknesses. One fundamental difference between this work and other studies that are categorized under the heading of participant observation is that I was in fact a full participant in these games and I used the reflexivity that is available with full participation. Issues concerning the implicit bias of this method are contrasted to the advantages of this research technique.

One

FRP

Tolstoy once wrote: "If we were always to judge from reality, games would be nonsense. But if games were nonsense what else would there be left to do?" (cited in Opie and Opie 1969:338). Tolstoy, in justifying play, suggests several dimensions that are central to the understanding of shared fantasy: reality/fantasy, work/games (play), and sense/nonsense. Often fantasy, play, and nonsense have been depicted as opposed to the important doings of human life—working and knowing the real world. These dichotomies have influenced even those who profess not to accept their implications. Philosophy (Huizinga 1955; Callois 1961; Sleet 1974; Riezler 1941) and research (Sutton-Smith and Roberts 1971; Roberts, Sutton-Smith, and Kozelka 1967) have described specific acculturation functions that play and games possess. Other research and theory points to functions of games which are intrinsic to the activities themselves—the autotelic characteristics of playing (Piaget 1962; Anderson and Moore 1960). Whether the focus is on intrinsic or extrinsic justifications, the issue is why people play as opposed to doing something serious. A similar research focus directs the understanding of fantasy, which is closely related to play in content and structure (Klinger 1969).

Although I shall address these functional issues in chapter 2, this is not my central concern. Following Tolstoy, I shall assume that play (and fantasy) are taken for granted by their participants, whatever their raison d'être. My question is not only *why*, but *how* people game, jointly play, and construct a shared fantasy. My goal is not just to present a description of one type of gaming,

although ethnographic detail is essential for the analysis, but to focus on the *process* of social gaming—gaming is a collective achievement, only possible through ordered interaction. How do players enact an orderly gaming world?

Fantasy Role-Play Gaming

I shall examine one particular form of gaming: fantasy role-play gaming (FRP as it is known to its participants). A "[fantasy] role-playing game" has been defined as "any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment"[1] (Lortz 1979:36). Most of these games are based on science fiction settings (*Metamorphosis Alpha*; *Traveller*; *Gamma World*) or scenarios that derive from medieval European fantasy (*Dungeons & Dragons*; *Chivalry & Sorcery*; *Runequest*). However, some games are set in other periods and places, including the American West (*Boot Hill*), *Watership Down* (*Bunnies and Burrows*), or fantasy worlds unique to the game (*Empire of the Petal Throne*).

Because of their complexity, these games are difficult to describe succinctly. They are a hybrid of war games, educational simulation games, and *folie à deux*. TSR Hobbies, the leading fantasy game producer, describes the structure of their best-selling game *Dungeons & Dragons* in a brochure writtten for hobby store owners:

> While one of the participants creates the whole world in which the adventures are to take place, the balance of the players—as few as two or as many as a dozen or more—create "characters" who will travel about in this make-believe world, interact with its peoples, and seek the fabulous treasures of magic and precious items guarded by dragons, giants, werewolves, and hundreds of other fearsome things. The game organizer, the participant who creates the whole and moderates these adventures, is known as the *Dungeon Master*, or simply the *DM*. [In other games this person is called the Game Master, or simply the referee.] The other players have game *personae*—fighters, magic users, thieves, clerics, elves, dwarves, or what have you—who are known as *player characters*. Player characters have known attributes which are initially determined by rolling the dice. . . . These attributes [e.g., strength, charisma, in-

> telligence] help to define the role and limits of each character. . . . [T]here is neither an end to the game nor any winner. Each session of play is merely an episode in an ongoing "world.". . . Each Dungeon Master runs a "campaign," the series of connected adventures, for his or her participants. Some have been running more or less continually since 1973 or 1974. Players pit their wit and imagination against the creations of their DM, so *D & D* is basically a cooperative game where the group teams to defeat the hostile environment developed by the Dungeon Master. . . . [A] typical expedition to explore a dungeon labyrinth has a Dungeon Master narrating to players what they see. . . . The entire game board is seen only by the moderator, players having to create their own as they go along and "see" and "experience" the dungeon and what lurks therein! [TSR Hobbies, 1979:1]

This role-playing is oral, and does not involve physical acting. In this way this game fits the shifts in children's games over the past decades from physical to verbal games or board games. Often the players or the referee must roll dice to determine the outcome of battles or other encounters among players, or between players and hostile creatures. These dice rolls, which determine (through the rules) who is killed or the extent of injury, provide some formal structure for an otherwise *very* flexible game. Obviously the social world of fantasy gaming is not directly generalizable to other social contexts. However, the *processes* by which these games are organized are relevant to gaming occasions and social settings generally. Coleman has argued that games provide a caricature of social life (Coleman 1968:7), and it is the processes of constructing these caricatures that are of interest. By simplifying and exaggerating, games tell us about what is "real." Although fantasy role-playing games differ from most games in that they lack a competitive structure, they are included in the standard definition of games as "an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrial outcome" (Avedon and Sutton-Smith 1971:7). The elements of voluntary involvement (Huizinga 1955:7), rule-governed structure, and outcome unpredictability (Goffman 1961:67) are the essential features of gaming. However, although these three components apply to fantasy role-play games, the latter two

apply in special forms. In FRP gaming rules and outcomes do not have the inevitability that they possess in most formal games; rather, both features are negotiated, and rules are adjusted by the referee[2] and his group. As a result fantasy role-playing games are in some ways more like life, and less like games.

I suggest that FRP games have parallels with war games, educational simulations, and *folie à deux*. A brief discussion of each of these activities exemplifies the central features of these games.

War Games

War gaming has had a direct influence upon fantasy role-play gaming. War games attempt to preserve the strategy and competitive excitement of battle without the personal hazards by *simulating* the strategy of battle more or less explicitly.[3] These games have been traced to the lower valley of the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates valley in the third millennium B.C. (Murray 1952:229), and include such well-known games as chess and wei-ch'i (or go).[4] Chess represents a battle between two opposing armies, and is said to have originated in northwestern India in approximately A.D. 570 (Murray 1952:83). Wei-ch'i is even older, dating from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 8), when it was a favorite strategic game of Chinese generals and statesmen. Boorman notes: "historically, there has probably been considerable interaction between the strategy of wei-ch'i and the strategy used in Chinese warfare" (1969:5).

Although the original form of these war games is not known, their current form is a pale simulation of battle strategy. Their relation to war is so abstract that few modern participants recognize any relevance to military strategy.

The development of contemporary war games can be traced to the 1780s in the German duchy of Brunswick, where the master of pages developed a game that he named War Chess. This game was revised in 1811 as *Kriegspiel* (the War Game) by Herr von Reiswitz and his son, a Prussian artillery officer (Young and Lawton 1967:4; Hausrath 1971:5). Their game, played on a sand table that simulated a hypothetical, though feasible, terrain, helped to train Prussian officers. The game required an umpire who, after secretly receiving the decisions of the opposing military commanders, would determine the outcome of that encounter. Dice were introduced later to simulate chance factors

associated with military encounters. The game proved popular among Prussian officers, and the British military attributed the Prussian tactical skill to the game. After the Franco-Prussian War, the British developed their own version of *Kriegspiel*, and today war simulations are widely used to train officers in tactics and to predict military outcomes (Paxson 1971).[5]

The first set of rules for the amateur war gamer was written by H. G. Wells (1915) in *Little Wars*. Wells borrowed the idea of the sand table to simulate a landscape from military war games, but suggested miniature figures, rather than counters or markers, to represent troops, in order to provide the amateur gamer with a feeling of historical realism. In 1953 Charles Roberts designed the first commercial board game, *Tactics*, based on a simulated conflict. Five years later the game had only sold 2,000 copies and was only then breaking even; however, Roberts decided to form the Avalon-Hill Game Company, and published *Gettysburg*—the first commercial simulation based on an actual event. *Gettysburg* was a huge success, and by 1962 Avalon-Hill was the fourth largest producer of adult board games (Reed 1978).[6] Today a wide variety of battles and situations are simulated through war games; some more political or economic (*Rail Baron*, *Canadian Civil War*) than military.

Two groups of war gamers exist: some simulate history through miniature battles, while others simulate history through board games. Although many similarities exists between the two approaches, the primary differences are the exactitude of the topographical representation of the battle environment (greater in miniatures in which players are not constrained by the structure of a two-dimensional board), the options for battle moves (highly structured in board games; relatively open in miniature combat), the technique for determining outcomes (the dice and rules in board games; the decision of a referee in miniatures), and the cost (miniatures can be very expensive). While miniature gaming has higher status because of its historicity and flexibility of decision-making, both contrast with fantasy role-play games.

Features of both types of war games limit their appeal, and led to the development of fantasy role-play games. First, most war games placed great emphasis on *historicity*—on replaying battles. One expert war gamer commented that historical knowledge "really helps you enjoy the game." The concern with historical accuracy is limiting to some players who wish to

discover what might have happened if they controlled the entire situation, not only the tactics and strategy of historical armies.

A second limitation of war games is the constraints imposed by *structured rules*. Games magnify certain aspects of interaction while ignoring others (Coleman 1968:7–8). Thus, in chess, players cannot move their pieces off the board, mutiny, or commit suicide. The options open to players in the context of the game are deliberately limited. Further, decisions are strictly rule-governed, and any deviation undermines play, and is considered dishonest.

A third feature of war games is a relative lack of *involvement* of players. While war games may provide much more engrossment in the game and identification with one's side than other leisure-time activities, players identify with a side, an army, or a nation. One does not act as *oneself* in the game. Even in *Diplomacy*,[7] the structured semi-role-playing game, individuals identify with nations. Full engrossment is unlikely because of the structured positions in the games.

Since FRP games are fantasy rather than historical simulation, they allow more flexibility than is possible in a game with a single scenario, which requires the same structural constraints each time it is played. The referee constructs a "world" (in medieval fantasy games) or a "universe" (in science fiction fantasy games), and these terms indicate that players can do whatever they wish within the confines of their character. A referee must be capable of incorporating the actions of the players into the structure of the "world" (see Simbalist 1979:4). One referee commented:

> *D & D* is a successful game because the referee and his players get together and they create a game that they all enjoy playing. The group and the referee really make up a game for themselves, because they tailor-make it to suit themselves. And the referee gets feedback from his players, and he knows that if he's had a good adventure. He wants to keep games like that. [Personal interview]

While game rules provide some structure, flexibility is considerable, and referees pride themselves on being able to react to any decision by their players.

Finally, because players *create* individual characters or personae, they develop a strong identification with these game

figures. Players sometimes become so engrossed in the game that they may shelve their natural identity and temporarily adopt the one of their character.[8] Indeed, the level of engrossment that is possible in fantasy gaming is one of the hobby's most distinctive features.

Simulation Games

By definition, war games are a type of simulation. However, although they borrow some of the structure of war games, simulation games have transcended their limitations, adapting principles of psychodrama for educational ends (Boocock 1968:58; Taylor and Walford 1978). Simulation games are designed to teach participants to deal more effectively with life situations, such as those involving business (Hausrath 1971), natural hazards (Inbar 1968), or conservation (Taylor and Walford 1978). Many simulation games are targeted at students, and attempt to facilitate education by establishing more pleasurable conditions for learning (Coleman 1961:323). Because these games, like fantasy role-play games, are not competitive contests, the participants can acquire cooperative social skills, in addition to decision-making and topical learning. Educational simulations constitute a minor growth industry, and these researchers publish a journal, *Simulations & Games*, to report findings, descriptions of new games, and theoretical analyses.

Although similar to FRP games, because of individual role-playing and referee decision-making, educational simulations differ from fantasy games in three ways. First, educational simulations are explicitly didactic, and as such typically attempt to simulate situations that participants might encounter. The pure flights of fantasy, central to the leisure games, are not relevant in educational simulations. Second, the roles that individuals play in educational simulations often are *positions* in a social structure rather than *persons* (with personal attributes) in an imaginary world. While FRP gamers take great pleasure in determining their physique, hair color, and physical attractiveness, these personal characteristics are ignored in educational games. The lack of attributes, coupled with their irrelevance to the game action, leads to a minimalization of identification with the *person*, and a focus on the *role*. The third feature that distinguishes these two activities is that decisions in educational games are more structured than in FRP games. Players can not do *anything* within the

game; their choices are limited to judgments on a decision at hand—although more options may be available than in conventional board games. Although designers sometimes move from fantasy games to educational games, or vice versa, the two approaches are distinct.

Folie à Deux

In fantasy role-playing games participants collectively construct a fantasy world. This world may be quite robust, even having a unique language. Game players often joke that they are "crazy" or "insane." While players do not intend this literally, its frequent repetition suggests a relation between psychosis and immersion in a fantasy world. Sharing a fantasy with others is not in itself an absolute disconfirmation of psychosis, since *folie à deux*, or "shared madness" is a recognized psychiatric disorder (Lasegue and Falret 1964; Gralnick 1942; Dewhirst and Todd 1956; Sims, Salmons, and Humphreys 1977; Soni and Rockley 1974). In *folie à deux* individuals share a delusional system—often a set of paranoid beliefs, which are not accepted by their physician and other legitimators of their social world.[9] A complex and "well-thought-out" delusion system may be quite tempting to enter, and has almost trapped at least one psychiatrist (Lindner 1955:280–93).

Fantasy gamers share a "fantasy," which they collectively construct and modify. Most writers on adolescent or adult fantasy employ daydreaming as a prototype, and emphasize the mentalistic, private and covert components of fantasy (e.g., Klinger 1969).[10] Like a shared delusion, shared fantasy is considered rare, and typically is not examined. Fantasy gamers are not psychotic—their fantasies are systematic, logical, and realistic to the assumptions they make. Further, unlike participants in delusional systems, gamers have little difficulty switching from fantasy to reality. Gamers have a repetoire of humorous anecdotes in which a gaming colleague took a role too seriously—firing "magic spells" in science class, or running and hiding in the (real) basement to avoid a fantasy encounter. These anecdotes are repeated in jest (as was the original behavior), and are portrayed as symptomatic of the dangers of total immersion (a real source of anxiety). The collective nature of the fantasy provides the similarity between *folie à deux*, and not a functional relation between the two sets of belief systems.

The Historical Development of Fantasy Role-Play Gaming

Thomas Kuhn (1970), in discussing scientific discoveries, claims that the point at which a new substance or phenomenon can be said to have been discovered is often ambiguous. Does the discovery coincide with the recognition of the new substance or with the realization of its significance? Kuhn's discussion of the problematic components of discovery can be generalized beyond the natural sciences. Putting other differences aside, the creation of FRP gaming is comparable to how oxygen was discovered, in that in both cases pinpointing the moment of creation rests on assumptions about the nature of discovery. Kuntz (1977:51) suggests the creation of *D & D* was a multistage process.[11] If we exclude the discovery of role-playing, characteristic of children's games (playing sheriff or photographer or soldier), then fantasy role-playing gaming was created recently. Dave Arneson, one of the *D & D* co-authors, credits his original insight to a war gamer in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area in 1968:

> I would have to give a lot of the credit to another local gamer, Dave Wesley. He was the first one to input role-playing . . . the first game that stands out in my mind is little medieval games, a very dull period of war games. He had a dull set of rules and after our second game, we were bored. To spice it up, Dave, who had been doing the set-ups and refereeing [for miniature battles], gave each of us a little personal goal in the battle. [Personal interview]

Players were motivated to change as a result of frustration with the inadequacy of a well-established system of play ("normal gaming"). Arneson continues:

> Well, that kind of got us all thinking about "wasn't that neat," and we did a couple of other games with various people. "Let's have a big medieval campaign with half a dozen different people playing with little powers with fifty or sixty men, and then you're king or the knight or whatever." And it developed from there. That got us into role-playing. As far as the fantasy part, I was the first one to come up with a violation of the basic concept of warfare of the period. We were fighting an ancient game. Very dull again. And I'd given the defending brigands a Druid high priest, and in the middle of the battle, the *dull* battle, the

> Roman war elephant charged the Britains and looked like he was going to trample half their army flat, the Druidic high priest waved his hands and pointed this funny little box out of one hand and turned the elephant into so much barbeque meat. This upset all of the participants in the game a great deal and the fellow playing the Druidic high priest was, well, he was laughing his head off in a corner. That was absolutely the only thing in the game that was out of the ordinary, but they weren't expecting it and it was of course, Star Trek was then playing, firing a phaser was adding science fiction to an Ancient game. [Personal interview]

Arneson was bored with the game, and although he had thought of the *possibility* before the game began, his decision was not premeditated. He continued with minor variations, but the first game in which fantasy was dominant occurred in 1970 or 1971 when Arneson organized the Blackmoor dungeon campaign, which he claims was a fantasy role-playing game as we know it today:

> All the fellows had come over for a traditional Napoleonic battle, and saw the table with this huge keep or castle on it. [They] wondered where this had come from in the plains of Poland or wherever we were playing at the time, and they shortly found out that they were going to go down in the deep, dank, dark dungeon. [Personal interview; for more details see Arneson 1979]

Arneson and E. Gary Gygax at that time were members of the Castles and Crusades Society, an informal organization whose members shared an interest in medieval warfare. During the early 1970s Gygax and Arneson corresponded and both play-tested what was to become the rules for *Dungeons & Dragons*, which included innovations from both men. *D & D* appeared commercially in 1974, published by Gygax's gaming company, TSR Hobbies, Inc.

Following Kuhn, the question is, When was the first fantasy role play game played? Clearly, Dave Wesley's war game with individual battle goals is not an FRP game; equally clearly by the time of the publication of *D & D*, fantasy role-play games were being played. All of the crucial ingredients for an FRP were present when Arneson's Druid barbequed a war elephant, and yet it seemed there was no realization at the time that a new game

format had been created; that realization apparently came with the first Blackmoor dungeon campaign. However, even then no rules existed, and the set of rules that became *D & D* developed over time. While it is stretching a point to suggest that Arneson was dealing with an anomaly and in the process produced a gaming paradigm shift, Kuhn's insight that difficulty exists in determining a date for a discovery is supported by the creation of fantasy role-playing. FRP gaming did involve the acceptance of a new method of playing games, a substantial break from traditional methods of war gaming, and, as such, while other players may have felt the desire to stretch or break the confines of war games, it was only over several years that one individual was able to do this. This discovery emphasizes that innovation is a *process*—few innovations emerge like Athena, full-grown from the brow of Zeus.

As with many innovations, *D & D* originally did not have much of a following. Major gaming companies rejected the game (Arneson 1979). When it was privately published, it took eleven months for the first 1000 copies to sell out. It was not a "hot" reception (Gygax 1977d:5). The second 1000 copies did somewhat better and were sold out in under six months, and the sales curve continues to increase geometrically. By March 1979, the *Dungeons & Dragons* set was selling at the rate of 7,000 copies each month and E. Gary Gygax, the president of TSR Hobbies, estimated the number of players at 300,000 (personal interview, May 1979; Schlesinger 1979). These figures are out of date now as the number of players probably tops several million. *Fortune* magazine, calling *D & D* the hottest game in the nation, estimated that TSR Hobbies would gross $7 million in 1980 (Smith 1980).

Whatever the sales potential of *Dungeons & Dragons*, it is apparent that it has had a dramatic impact on the gaming "industry." One writer even suggests that "the recent growth of interest in role-play is not just a passing fad, it's the birth of a *major popular art form*" (Lortz 1979a:27; emphasis added). In addition to the informal groups that meet to play these games, play-by-mail campaigns have been organized. Some have even discussed computerizing these games (Gygax 1979:29) and research is now being conducted in that area.

The aesthetic and financial success of *Dungeons & Dragons* sent other game designers to their typewriters in desperate pursuit, and today dozens of role-playing games are sold. Some of

these games were inspired by *D & D*, others developed out of frustration with the game, but all have been influenced by it. While I was conducting research, at least two role-playing games were being play-tested in Minneapolis-Saint Paul: a science fiction game and a simulation of naval adventures at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Games and Settings

I had the opportunity to play and observe four of the FRP games. Since not all readers will have played these games, I shall present a brief synopsis of each game, then describe the settings in which they are played, and finally describe my methods of data collection.

Games

The games examined were *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Chivalry & Sorcery*, *Traveller*, and *Empire of the Petal Throne*.

1. *Dungeons & Dragons* was the first fantasy role-play game, and being the innovator it is the narrowest in its construction. *D & D* is based loosely on medieval fantasy; it was a convenient period on which to base a game, and was sufficiently flexible that mythologies and legendary creatures from other periods could be (and have been) added.

D & D does not present a specific social system, although the setting is supposed to be reminiscent of medieval society. There is no attempt to maintain the fiction of an explicit social structure—flexibility that Gygax finds essential to the game's success. Most of the action in *Dungeons & Dragons* involves players organizing themselves into a party, and under the guidance of the referee, exploring a dungeon, which the referee has composed (on graph paper). In this dungeon players try to collect gold coins, jewels, and magical items, and gain experience points by killing monsters and demons.

To create their characters, players roll for six personal characteristics (or prime requisites): strength, wisdom, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, and charisma. Players then choose an occupation on the basis of these prime requisites. The four major character classes are fighter (high strength is necessary), magic user (high intelligence), cleric (high wisdom), and thief (high

dexterity). These attributes are determined by rolling three six-sided dice and using the combined number of pips.[12] Participants then roll to determine the number of hit points (damage points) they can take; at the beginning of the game this is determined by dice, and increases with the character's increasing ability. Each player must decide to which of the game races his character belongs. One may be a dwarf, elf, gnome, halfling (like a hobbit), half-orc, half-elf, or human. The designers of *D & D* strove to achieve balance in their racial and character class, so that no single type could dominate all others; thus each race has advantages and limitations. Finally, a player must decide on his character's alignment. Alignments vary on two dimensions: orientation to legitimate authority (one can be lawful, neutral, or chaotic) and morality (good, neutral, evil). Thus one can be lawful evil—obedient to the forces of darkness—or, alternatively, chaotic good—doing what one sees as morally right regardless of the law or the opinions of others. One's alignment, in conjunction with one's prime requisites, determine one's motivations and abilities.

Some criticize the lack of social structure in the game. Competing game designers, even those impressed with the innovations of *D & D*, cite this omission as a rationale for the creation of new games. M. A. R. Barker, author of *Empire of the Petal Throne*, noted:

> I very quickly saw the problem with this [*D & D*], that it didn't have much of a world to it. It was fun and you could go up great levels [in experience and power] and you go back to your barracks or tavern or whatever it was and you went to sleep and stayed there until next adventure. You and your friends simply got together and went off and entered the labyrinth and went down and proceeded to kill more stuff. [Personal interview]

In a similar vein, Ed Simbalist, a designer of *Chivalry & Sorcery*, commented:

> The rules [of *Chivalry & Sorcery*] began as a variant on *D & D*, then we threw out the baby with the bathwater because we despaired of ever whipping *D & D* into shape for the type of world-scope (or at least national-scope) campaign we desired. [Simbalist 1978:66]

D & D was designed as an adventure game, pitting good against evil, and was not designed as a sociological simulation. As such, it has the largest and the youngest audience.

2. *Chivalry & Sorcery* (*C & S*) in some sense is *D & D*'s major competition, in that it also is based loosely on the medieval period. However, while *D & D* deemphasizes social structure, *C & S* revels in it:

> The Feudal Age was chosen as the setting of the action. There is a powerful and most appealing tradition of glorious deed and stirring events surrounding the whole period of Chivalry. Furthermore, most fantasy occurs in societies that are generally feudal in nature, and the richest traditions of "Magick" belong to that period as well. To make the life of the Feudal Ages live again and to provide an authentic setting in which to play out the campaign, *Chivalry & Sorcery* is filled with aides [*sic*] and guidelines which make the creation of an entire world possible. Our group has chosen France, 1170, as the center of our world, although it is a France drawn with a liberal brush indeed. [Simbalist and Backhaus 1977:1]

In supplementary material to the 128-page game book, Fantasy Games Unlimited provides players with information on how to incorporate weather, plagues and disease, trade and commerce, and even agriculture into the game framework (Simbalist and Backhaus 1978). Another supplement explains how the game can be adapted to Vikings, Steppes Nomads, Gaels, and Picts (Simbalist and Ives 1978). This detailed information would be counterproductive in *D & D*, which is focused on the adventure rather than the society. *Chivalry & Sorcery* scenarios typically do not involve dungeons, but overland quests.

This orientation has both advantages and disadvantages. *Chivalry & Sorcery* is a far more complex game than is *Dungeons & Dragons*. One player (age sixteen) comments:

> *Chivalry & Sorcery* is one of my most favorite games 'cause it allows you to be realistic in a way that no game has ever done before. It is probably one of the most internally consistent games that I've ever seen. . . . The one thing that gets across is that you may play five hours of the game, five hours real time, and you may have only gotten

through five hours of game time. And that's a really fun feeling. [Personal interview]

However, others complain about the strictness of the social structure and about the complexity of the rules:

GAF: How do you think *C & S* could be improved?
Ted [age fifteen]: Make the rules a little bit easier to understand. . . . 'Cause the book is . . . super small print and it's pretty long. . . . Like, I can play the game pretty well, I don't even know the rules that well. . . . I was looking at the magic, and I couldn't really understand it, you know. It's kind of complicated. [Personal interview]

Another gamer commented: "You almost have to take a Ph.D. in *C & S*" (personal interview). In addition to the complicated structure of the game, rolling up characters is tedious for the beginner. Some *C & S* games require two hours to roll up characters. In *D & D* only six prime requisites are rolled up. In *Chivalry & Sorcery* one rolls[13] for race (human, elf, hobbit, dwarf, lycanthrope, or a variety of monsters), age, sex, height, frame, dexterity, strength (disabled to superhuman), constitution (scrawny to weatherproof), personal appearance, bardic voice (inarticulate to orphic), intelligence, wisdom, alignment (a single dimension from saintly to diabolic), horoscope, mental health (thirty-four phobias and five mental ailments are possible, ranging from fear of crossing a road to megalomania), birth order, status in the family ("good", "credit to the family," or "black sheep"), father's social class (from serf to royalty), and father's occupation (over 100 occupations are listed). In addition, there are attributes that a player constructs through combining previously rolled up attributes. These include charisma, body points (a measure of a character's physical prowess), fatigue level, carrying capacity, military ability factor, command level, personal combat factor, and weapons skill. These traits provide guidelines for players to use in acting out characters, although they do remove flexibility from players in sculpting their own personae. As one gamer commented: "If I really want to feel what my character is, then I'll play *C & S*" (personal interview).

3. *Traveller*. When I began to study the gaming world in December 1977, *Traveller*, a science-fiction-based role-playing

game, had just been published. Although other science fiction games have been published, none has matched its popularity. *Traveller* scenarios focus on interplanetary exploration. In *Dungeons & Dragons* the referee designs a dungeon; in *C & S* he designs a world; in *Traveller*, a *universe* is created. Some of these universes are extensive, containing hundreds of star systems: some known by characters, others located in unexplored space. Unlike other games, players in *Traveller* often control planets or starships, and so they have more authority than in other games.

The level of complexity in *Traveller* falls somewhere between that of *D & D* and *C & S*. Since many worlds may be visited, the game creators are not able to provide for a detailed social structure of each—this is left to the imagination of the referee and players. Planets vary according to starport type, planetary size, atmosphere, hydrographic percentage, population, governmental type (anarchy, representative democracy, feudal technocracy, balkanization, charismatic oligarchy, etc.), law level (the type of weapons allowed), and technology (levels range from 0 to 18—1977 United States is at approximately level 7). More complicated than the design of worlds is the design of starships, which players design and characters pay for themselves. Twelve pages of rules provide enough basic engineering information for players to determine technical aspects of the starships, including hull size, jump drive, power plant, computer, fuel, weaponry (missiles and lasers), cargo capacity, and even number of staterooms.

Character development in *Traveller* is modest, consisting of six prime requisites determined by players rolling two six-sided dice. Players determine their strength, dexterity, endurance (comparable to constitution in other games), intelligence, education, and social status. Following this, players choose in which government service to enlist (navy, marines, army, scouts, or merchants); the player then determines (through dice rolls) how many terms of service he amassed, skills acquired, and how much cash or material benefits he received on mustering out of the service. Unlike *C & S*, the personality and alignment of one's character is determined by the player. Also, unlike other games, there is no provision for advancing in levels—the adventure is an end in itself, unless one sets a personal goal such as the accumulation of wealth or power.

4. *Empire of the Petal Throne*, created by Professor M. A. R. Barker of the University of Minnesota, is called by some the "Cadillac of the role-playing world" (personal interview). Since the creation of this game and the mythos behind it will be discussed in Chapter 4, I will not detail its structure here. *Empire of the Petal Throne* (*EPT*) was published in 1975 by TSR Hobbies, the second fantasy role-playing game on the market. Many of the game systems were borrowed from *D & D*, but the mythos is unique. From his childhood Barker had fantasized about a planet he named Tekumel. The world is unlike the planet Earth, although according to the mythos it had once been colonized by earthlings. The structure of the game society bears some resemblance to Pakistani and Indian society (Barker teaches in the Department of South Asian Studies), and the religions, governments, and language it depicts are alien to American society.

This alien setting poses a central difficulty for playing the game. Many claim that it can only be properly refereed by Professor Barker himself. While Barker denies this, and others do run successful *EPT* scenarios, it is truly Barker's world.

EPT allows for a wide range of adventures—in dungeons, exploring unmapped territories, or within cities. The social structure of Tekumel is potentially extremely complex, although some of this complexity can be ignored if one treats it as a dungeon adventure game. There are twenty religions that one can belong to (each with its own rituals), some 500 clans to be born into, demons, magic devices, new languages, and a complicated political system (the Empire of the Petal Throne). Since these cultural elements have little relationship to players' personal experience, the game requires considerable time and energy. These features (plus the $30 cost of the game) have prevented *EPT* from attaining the popularity of other games with less psychic and material investment.

As in *D & D*, one rolls for six character traits: strength, intelligence, constitution, psychic ability, dexterity, and comeliness. These traits are determined by rolling two percentile dice, and range from one to 100. Players also choose a number of abilities, depending on character class, which, as in *D & D*, can be either fighter, magic user, or priest. One also computes the number of body hit points one's character has, which is necessary to determine how many damage points the character can take in

battle. *EPT*, like *C & S* and *D & D*, has a system by which characters can advance in level based upon the experience points one accumulates through killing monsters and collecting wealth.

Settings

Three distinct types of gaming environments were examined during the research: (1) games in a public community room at a neighborhood police station, (2) games in private homes, and (3) gaming conventions. Over fifty gaming sessions were examined in a year of intensive participant observation. These sessions totaled over 300 hours of field observations.

1. Many Twin Cities gamers enter the hobby by playing at the Golden Brigade clubhouse.[14] This loosely structured organization had permission to use the community room of a Minneapolis neighborhood police station on Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons. Friday evenings were reserved for FRP games, while Sunday afternoons were devoted to miniature war games.

On a typical Friday evening fifteen to forty gamers participated in one to five games. At approximately 7:00 P.M. players begin to arrive, and shortly after several individuals announce (or are pressured into announcing) that they will referee that evening. Typically these referees are the older, more experienced players, since it takes considerable skill to referee. Once an individual announces that he will referee a particular game, a group of players joins him at one of the tables set up in the community room. Depending on the referee's wishes, the attendance that evening, and the game to be played, from four to twelve players will participate in the game. Players then roll up their characters (or use ones created in previous weeks), the referee explains the scenario he has constructed for the evening, and the players organize their characters into a party and begin adventuring. The game is played until it reaches a conclusion or a breaking point, or until the players are no longer interested in continuing. Frequently these games last until 2:00 A.M. Saturday morning. On occasion games last until dawn and are ended by breakfast.

The regular members of the Golden Brigade know each other, and before and during games they converse about topics of personal interest. If a game is dull, or if other characters are the central focus of the adventure, players may temporarily abandon their group and wander around to see how other games are progressing. If a game becomes unbearable, or other games seem

particularly attractive, a player may leave his group to join another group, although this is considered "bad manners." The presence of other groups provides a Comparison Level for Alternatives (Thibault and Kelley 1959) for players. Games refereed by different individuals[15] permit players to experience various styles of organizing fantasies, and this produces gaming sophistication. Playing with numerous referees also provides a variety of feedback, which also contributes to the sophistication of play.

The Golden Brigade is not unique. Similar groups have been organized on many university campuses and in most large cities, and they provide a base of support for the gaming subculture.

2. Most players at some point participate in a private group that meets at someone's home. The formation of such groups may be a result of ignorance of the existence of clubs such as the Golden Brigade, or a result of inconvenient meeting times or locations. However, the reasons for forming such a group may be other than ignorance or inconvenience. Playing in a private home has several advantages. Such games are not disrupted by background noise. One major difficulty of playing in a public setting is that others are also present, and at times the decibel level can best be described as a dull roar, making it difficult to hear the referee or other players.[16] Playing at a residence avoids this, and also allows the group to be loud and boisterous without the rebuke of other gamers seated a few feet away. A second advantage is control over the game. In a public setting it is considered poor form to refuse to admit a player who wishes to play, unless the game is obviously too large or the players are in the middle of an adventure. This openness has the effect of allowing players with markedly different styles of play or abilities to participate together, which sometimes leads to friction. A game operated by "invitation only" permits selection of participants. I was invited to participate in two private gaming groups, one specializing in *C & S*, the other in *EPT*.

3. The third setting in which gaming occurs is at conventions. These conventions occur throughout the year in all regions of the United States. For example, in the period from February through May 1979, *The Dragon*, TSR Hobbies' professional gaming magazine, listed fifteen conventions in ten states and one Canadian province. In this study I attended two—a national convention and a regional one.

These conventions give gamers from all over the United States the opportunity to meet each other, play in informal games, and compete in tournament games for money or prizes. These tournaments are sometimes run for teams of players in which a team competes against other teams being run in the identical scenario, thus "sport"-like. In the team tournament, cooperation and coordination are essential, and the loose structure of informal games in which players drift in and out of the game is counterproductive. In a tournament in which individuals compete, each player strives to make the proper decision as quickly as possible, regardless of the others in the party, and sometimes directly contrary to the best interest of the party as a whole.

Even in informal games, convention play is distinctive from gaming on one's home turf. First, players often are unacquainted, and as a result they sometimes ignore normative restrictions—their partial annonymity leads to wilder play. In part, this daring is attributable to a second feature of convention play—that the game will not be continued. A player will therefore "go for broke," and play without considering the long-term development of his character. If the character gets killed, no matter—the character will not be used again. A third feature of convention play is the varied background of players. Attenders start games with players from other parts of the country. Despite the rulebooks, all groups modify these rules or interpret them differently. At conventions one must negotiate differences quickly, and create a lingua franca. Players do this by sticking to the rules closely and by allowing the referee to have full authority to interpret rules according to *his own* style of play.

Conventions broaden the experience of players by introducing them to other styles of play and variations on rules. These styles and variations may then be introduced into local groups. Conventions also introduce players to new games, and game manufacturers schedule new releases to coincide with the major national conventions.

Interviews and Documents

In addition to participant observation, I conducted lengthy interviews (one to three hours) with two dozen gamers. Although the interview subjects are neither a random nor systematic sampling of gamers, an attempt was made to interview gamers of

different ages and levels of commitment and skill. Three of the interviews were with professional game designers. Of the rest about half were with sophisticated players, many of whom refereed frequently; the others were with younger and less knowledgeable players. Needless to say, the relationship between age and gaming sophistication is by no means precise.

In addition to the interviews, I examined the contents of seventeen magazines—at least two issues of fifteen of them. These ranged from professional, glossy magazines, such as those published by gaming manufacturers (*The Dragon*, *Wargaming*, *The Space Gamer*, *Different Worlds*) to amateur fan magazines, published by individuals, some of which were composed primarily of their own writing (*Quick Quincy Gazette*, *The Apprentice*) or a collection of mimeographed material (mini-fan magazines) written by other players (*Alarums & Excursions*, *The Wild Hunt*, *APA-DuD*). These magazines were valuable in showing how committed gamers viewed their hobby and how they shared their interests.

Fantasy Role-Play Gaming as a Subculture

One goal of this study is to provide a description of this urban leisure subsociety. This requires that I not merely *assume* that this activity constitutes a subculture, but that I show that it meets the criteria for being subculture. In determining whether fantasy game players constitute a subsociety, the characteristics that constitute a subsociety and its attendant subculture must be described. One difficulty is that sociologists have discussed subcultures as if the term referred not only to the culture of the group but to members who share this culture. Because of this linguistic confusion some treat subculture and subsociety as synonyms (Fine and Kleinman 1979).

A subsociety is a collection of individuals who have importance as a distinctive segment of society (Gordon 1964).[17] Further, common activity patterns must be present. In the case of fantasy gaming this is evident by definition, since the criterion for belonging is engaging in these fantasy games. One must also indicate that common cultural elements characterize the population segment.

However, as Kleinman and I have pointed out (1979) merely indicating common activities, culture, and segmental importance

is not sufficient to show the existence of a subculture. Three additional features need to be considered. For a subculture to exist one must be able to cite networks of communication through which common information is transmitted. Second, one needs to show that gamers identify themselves as a group and as sharing a subculture. Finally, the subsociety must be identified as such by those outside of the group, which increases the perception of common interests of the group members and increases solidarity.

Size of the Gaming Society

The number of fantasy role-playing gamers in the United States is not easy to determine, since there is no extensive marketing research. As mentioned, 7,000 copies of *D & D* were sold in March 1979 and at that time approximately 300,000 individuals played *D & D*. Considering the number of games on the market, the duplication of friends' rulebooks (despite legal restrictions), and the continuing growth of the hobby (Weathers with Foote 1979; Schlesinger 1981; Winsor 1981), it is probably realistic to suggest that at least a million Americans play these games today, at least occasionally.

Obviously these individuals have different levels of commitment to the game, and both the hard-core gamers and the less involved general public are required for a game to be a success. Game companies are particularly interested in the latter group. Gygax notes:

> I talked to [an officer] at Avalon Hill [the largest war game company] a few years back about gamers. He said, "Look, we've got a hard core of about 5,000 people here and while we don't want to lose them, they're not the audience that we really care about, because they don't make or break a game. We couldn't live with them, you know, and it's nice that they like it, but we've got to sell the games to everybody." [Personal interview]

However, these core gamers have a crucial subsocietal role, since they are the opinion leaders, and if they accept a game or a gaming innovation, their contacts who are less intensive gamers may follow. The two-step model of communication flow (opinion leader to follower) applies to the gaming world (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955).[18] Although occasional gamers provide an economic grounding for the gaming subsociety, it is the core gamers

or "insiders" (Unruh 1978) who provide for the continued existence of the subsociety's cultural traditions.

One indication of core interest comes from sales of TSR's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook* (1978). During its first three months of sales approximately 10,000 copies were sold. These were purchased by experienced players who wished to learn the nuances of playing. Another indicator is magazine sales. *The Dragon* is the hobby magazine with the largest sales. Approximately 10,000 individuals purchased *The Dragon* each month,[19] with 3.5 other individuals reading the same issue (according to a 1979 readership survey). A total of about 40,000 people read *The Dragon* each month, presumably the most involved gamers.

I tentatively estimate the 1979 base of FRP gamers as about 500,000. Of these perhaps a tenth are serious, involved gamers who play regularly and see the hobby as a central part of their leisure-time activities. A handful of these—perhaps several thousand—are intensely devoted to the hobby: they write for the amateur magazines, create their own games or modify previously established ones, play several times a week, are the subject of industry gossip (e.g., D'Arn 1979), and have a considerable input in the direction of the subcultural traditions.

Economic Significance of Gaming Society

Compared to other American recreational activities, fantasy role-playing gaming is not big business, but there *is* money to be made. The game *Empire of the Petal Throne* costs $30. The basic set of *D & D* is only $5, but by the time that one has purchased the advanced manuals one will have spent well over $50. A subscription to *The Dragon* currently (1979) costs $24 for twelve issues, and TSR Hobbies regularly publishes play aids for their games: new fantasy maps, or dungeon modules. "Service industries" have evolved to meet the needs of FRP gamers by supplying fantasy maps, graph paper for designing dungeons, information sheets about legendary creatures, dice of various number of sides (four-, six-, eight-, twelve-, and twenty-sided dice are used in the games), t-shirts, and even a novel based on a *D & D* scenario (Norton 1978). The *Judges Guild Journal*, a magazine that supplies playing aids for *D & D*, asked their readers to return a questionnaire about their gaming habits. One question concerned the amount spent on games each month. Of the 162 persons who

responded (8% of the subscribers) the mean amount spent was $18.50 (median $15.00), with a maximum figure given of $122 per month! Obviously, these figures do not represent the hobby in general (and perhaps not even the magazine's readership), but they do suggest a potential market.

By August 1978, only four years after the publication of *Dungeons and Dragons*, TSR Hobbies had a full-time staff of eighteen employees, and by September 1979 was grossing over two million dollars annually (Weathers with Foote 1979). One writer predicted in 1978 that by 1983 a gaming company would have sales of over $10 million—although he included traditional war gaming products in this analysis (Thompson 1978:3). As a result the major family game companies such as Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers are now exploring possibilities of becoming involved in fantasy role-play gaming.

Although fantasy role-play games do not have a major share of the gaming market, they are growing in their economic importance and are a sufficiently large and targetable market that game companies and stores specializing in gaming products are springing up and many general bookstores now carry *D & D* products. Most large cities have at least one store that specializes in selling products to this market and that serves as a central meeting place for war gamers and fantasy role-playing gamers.[20]

Shared Culture

The term subculture implies that a number of individuals share a set of cultural elements. Obviously gamers have a knowledge of the rules of play. However, these rules are imposed on the players by the game manufacturers. More significant are those cultural elements that are not necessary components of the games played, but are constructed by the members of this subsociety. Similar to the science fiction subsociety (Bainbridge 1976), which is recognizable by its cant, in-jokes, and common expressions, there exists a fantasy gaming subsociety. This subsociety overlaps with those of war gamers, science fiction enthusiasts and medieval history buffs,[21] but in the past decade a distinct new set of cultural traditions has developed. For example, gamers give each other salutations such as "May you never be caught in a dead end by an iron golem!" or "May you always make your saving throw."[22] Similarly, jokes have been created which relate to the hobby. For example:

> *Q*: How many NY *D & D* players does it take to screw in a light bulb?
> *A*: Ten. One high leveler to screw in the bulb and nine first levelers to share the experience points. (Lidofsky, May 1979:1)[23]

Easy referees are called "Monty Haul" referees; sadistic refs who create difficult dungeons are said to manage "Dungeons of Death," and particularly gruesome and unusual monsters are termed "Saturday Night Specials." A short, but representative list of subcultural terms is presented in Table 1.1, although not all of these terms are known to all members of the hobby.

Table 1.1 Selected Terms Used by Fantasy Gamers

apa* Amateur press association. APAs are gaming magazines written and published by amateurs as nonprofit ventures. Often these magazines are mimeographed and sold through personal contacts.
buying the farm*** Committing a foolish act that gets one's character killed.
caller Person in a gaming party who announces to the referee the collective action of the party (also, the leader).
con* convention
DM Dungeon Master; the referee, particularly in *Dungeons & Dragons*.
Dungeon of Death Dungeon that is considered extremely difficult, in which few characters survive.
ego-boo* Ego boost; a compliment.
FRP Fantasy role-playing.
GM Game Master; the referee, particularly in *Chivalry & Sorcery*.
Gilded Hole Dungeon loaded with treasures.
grognard War gamer; particularly one concerned with extreme realism.
hex** Hexagon, the basic unit of maps in fantasy role-play games and war games.
hit points Number of points of damage that a character can take before he is considered dead.
hose** kill
kinigit Humorous term for a knight in *D & D* and *C & S*.
leech** kill

Table 1.1 Continued

Monty Haul Generous referee, who lets game characters survive and prosper; from TV personality Monty Hall, in that this referee gives "gifts" to players.
NPC Non-player character; a character played by the referee.
percentile dice Two twenty-sided dice, which when rolled together can give a dice score of 1–100.
S & S* Swords and sorcery. A type of adventure-oriented science fiction, such as that written by Jack Vance, Robert Howard, or Michael Moorcock. Sometimes known as "Space Opera."
Saturday Night Special Particularly difficult monster; frequently one created by the referee, rather than taken from a book. Refers to the fact that frequently games are played on Saturday nights, and to a type of cheap but deadly pistol.
saving throw Dice roll that a player-character makes to see if his character has escaped being hurt or killed by an opponent.
'zine* Magazine that deals with the hobby: 'zines are typically classified as either prozines (professional magazines) or fanzines (amateur or apa magazines).

* Words borrowed from the science fiction subculture. All but S & S are cited by Bainbridge (1976:213).
** Words borrowed from wargaming.
*** Borrowed from military slang (Thorpe, 1967)

Hobbyists frequently discuss the game in a highly technical fashion, attempting to resolve seemingly minor issues in the game structure. The extensive use of technical talk, much of which seemes incomprehensible to an outsider, suggests that gaming has a subculture. Players discuss the best techniques of rolling dice: whether it is better to roll against a wall of some kind or straight out on the table. Other topics are the weight of medieval armor and the economic feasibility of orbiting star bases. These technical discussions are bolstered by the contents of gaming magazines, which feature discussions of the proper use of vampires in a dungeon (Miner 1978), the effects of weather (Tillery 1978), the powers of Zoroastrian gods (Arkenberg 1978), and the progression of the disease of lycanthropy (Rihn 1978).

Although determining the core values of a subsociety is difficult, the values of masculine aggressiveness, adventure, and

escape are central to these individuals. These themes will be detailed in the discussion of why players participate in these games, and in the examination of the role of women in the games (see chapter 2).

Communications Network

In order for a population with a shared culture to be considered a subsociety, it is necessary for channels of cultural dissemination to operate. A subsociety is not merely a population segment in which members share culture, but is an interlocking network of groups. Through group linkages a subculture is developed and changed. Four types of communication linkages operate by means of which information can be disseminated between groups: (1) multiple group memberships, (2) weak ties, (3) structural roles, and (4) mass media conduits.

Multiple group membership. Individuals may belong to several groups simultaneously or sequentially. For example, some players played at the Golden Brigade and at the University of Minnesota; others played in private homes and in one of the public gaming groups. Gaming by mail also permits players to participate in several scenarios simultaneously. Most players belong to more than one group, although these groups typically differ in importance to the player. This structure permits cultural diffusion between groups.

Many of these FRP gamers are young adult middle-class males, a group that is notably mobile. During the year of research players migrated to Minnesota and emigrated elsewhere, spreading the local traditions of the game throughout the nation. Even in the Twin Cities area players left one group and joined another with a different structure, style of play, or set of participants.

Weak Ties. Acquaintanceships or "weak ties" have an especially powerful effect on the rapid diffusion of information (Granovetter 1973, 1974). For a subculture to exist a network of these weak ties is necessary, and such a network is found among fantasy gamers.

This national network of gamers took time to develop. During the early years of fantasy gaming, players created local variants (particularly of *D & D*), and some local differences are still recognized by gamers. The San Francisco Bay area is known

by gamers from other areas for their "Dungeons of Death" and "sadistic" referees; Boston referees, many of whom play at MIT, have created interlocking universes called a Multiverse and arranged them so that players can play in these compatible dungeons with no break in the logical structure of the game.

The original diversity of gaming techniques proved nettlesome to players who moved from group to group. Lee Gold, the editor of the amateur magazine *Alarums & Excursions*, commented on the problems that gave rise to the creation of her "national" magazine:

> In 1974, we started a weekly *D & D* game in Los Angeles among the local science fiction fans. We knew there were people at Cal Tech playing the game (or rather what they considered their own improved version of it), but we didn't interact with them much, nor with the wargamers who frequented games at the local hobby shop, nor with the UCLA students who played under Computer Club auspices. We had a small but friendly circle of play. Besides, we got nervous when mixing with people who played radically different rule variations than we did. . . . As the months passed, our group became more concerned about the different varieties of *D & D* play we had encountered: Cal Tech, San Francisco, Boston, LA . . . surely with the Rules' vagueness and fans' inventiveness, if this went on we would soon be unable to play in a non-local friend's game without succumbing to culture shock. [Gold 1979:21]

This sense that the hobby needed a central culture and a common set of rules promoted the formation of magazines called amateur press association (apa) magazines, which permit communication among active gamers.[24] These 'zines are published (mimeographed or duplicated) each month, and consist of contributions from gamers around the nation within the editor's social network. These contributions are essentially long open letters which comment on topics raised in previous issues and suggest gaming innovations (Holmes 1981:194–202). *Alarums & Excursions*, the oldest, largest, most widely read, and most prestigious of these, had contributors in the April 1979 issue from Los Angeles, CA; Albany, NY; Scarsdale, NY; Fort Lauderdale, FL; Fort Gordon, GA; Detroit, MI; Lancaster, PA; Brooklyn, NY; Berkeley, CA; Columbia, MD; Mishawaka, IN; Edmonton, Alberta; Washington, D.C.; Leander, TX; Australia, England, and Norway—and

has been called a "quasi-official postal system between universes" (Johnston 1980:37). Whatever the literary quality of these magazines and the adequacy of their advice,[25] they allow committed gamers to maintain long-distance relationships with each other and to exchange information that they, as referees, find useful in designing their campaigns. These apa 'zines provide a vast amount of information about playing FRP games (especially *D & D*), and because contributors comment on the contributions from the previous issue, one receives feedback on the variations one has suggested. Through these 'zines there is at least the possibility for knowledge to be disseminated, despite the absence of intimate relations.

Conventions also play an important role in the dissemination of subcultural information. Approximately 3000 attended Origins '77 held at Wagner College on Staten Island (Reed 1978) and attendance at Origins '78 at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor was estimated from 3500 to 4200 (Kask 1978:2), although these figures include miniatures war gamers, board gamers, and fantasy role-play gamers. GENCON XIV (1981), sponsored by TSR Hobbies at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, had an attendance of about 5000. These national gatherings permit the sharing of information among newly acquired acquaintances. Regional conventions, though smaller, serve the same purpose within a more limited geographical area. They provide channels through which subcultural information is diffused and players learn game variants.

Information about the major dungeons is now sufficiently diffused that players in one dungeon campaign may adventure in another. For example, gamers in San Francisco whose characters belong to an evil society planned to attack and take control of a dungeon in Los Angeles. These plans were thwarted by Bay Area gamers who had played in the LA dungeon at a convention (Johnston 1980).

Structural roles. Diffusion of cultural knowledge may occur through individuals who occupy structural positions in social organizations that permit contact with a number of separate groups. In the gaming world the major structural position is the game creator (or publisher), who answers players' requests for detailed information on how to play the game or on some other aspect of the fantasy world. Gygax claims that he once received a

letter asking how many eggs a hippogriff lays.[26] The creator is taken as *the* expert on all questions relating to his game, even though the facts requested may have no meaningful bearing on the game.

The role of author as expert is particularly evident in the case of M. A. R. Barker, the architect of Tekumel (*Empire of the Petal Throne*). He comments:

> I get letters, hundreds of them, from people who play Tekumel. People have called me up . . . from Tennessee and New Jersey, Florida and so on, and talked to me sometimes an hour at a time at their expense. . . . People write to me from England and Germany, Saudi Arabia. . . . One guy has just sent me a six-page letter of inquiry asking for the exact architectural and geographic, geological details of Bey Sy [the capital of Tsolyanu, the major nation on Tekumel], because he and a friend want to draw up a detailed city map. They're both students of architecture at the University of Texas. . . . I'm sort of the center of the network and everybody comes to me . . . I get lengthy reports from players in other campaigns who will say "I did this and I did that and I have now become Lord Such and Such, is this OK?" And then I will have to pass on it. . . . Usually if it's possible, I'll say "OK, that's fine with me . . . I'll work you into my campaign in that capacity.". . . Somebody says "OK, I have become high priest of Thumis [the Lord of Wisdom] in Paya Gupa [a border city in western Tsolyanu]" or something, and I say "all right." And when my players go to Paya Gupa they meet him. [Personal interview]

The versions of the game in which people participate are conceived by Barker as alternative universes, meaning that the basic structure of the worlds are identical but action can proceed in different, and contradictory, directions. However, in practice events that occur in one group may affect other groups by altering the structure of Tekumel through Barker's decisions. In one instance Barker decided to allow the High Priest of Thumis to defeat four Mu'ugalavyani legions (in one group), much to the annoyance of his regular players in Minneapolis, who have little respect for Thumis troops. Similarly, characters played by gamers in Schenectady, New York found a cure for a disease that had been deadly in Minnesota. Barker's structural position as the

game arbitrator allows this cultural diffusion, and allows us to speak of an *EPT* network.

Mass media. The media also have some effects on the dissemination of information within the subsociety. Although these sources may be publicly available, only persons who identify themselves as members of a relevant subsociety will experience these specialized media productions, such as science fiction or fantasy novels, books about medieval weaponry or armor, or professional gaming magazines.

Certain books and films provide the basis for the shared culture of the group. Virtually every fantasy gamer has seen *Star Trek* and read Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1966) and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1965) and many references are made to these programs and books. In *Traveller* players may be requested to have read a certain science fiction novel in order to comprehend a referee's universe. In one game players were instructed to have read H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking* (1963), since the referee had planned a universe based upon Piper's Sword Worlds. Some referees read arcane sources on magic in order to make their magic systems "realistic." They share their information with the groups in which they participate, building a subculture. In turn some authors may base *their* writing on the fantasy games they have played (e.g., Walker 1978).

Professional gaming magazines serve this function for those who purchase them. Tim Kask, the editor of *The Dragon*, recognized the role of gaming magazines as a source for subcultural information:

> Magazines exist to disseminate information. The future of magazine publishing . . . seems to be in specialization. Magazines dealing with camping, quilting, motorcycles, cars, dollhouse miniatures, music, teen interests, modeling, model building, horses, dogs, fishing, hunting, guns, hair-styling and beauty hints already exist; why not wargaming? [Kask 1979:4]

The effect of a new issue may be immediate:

> One of the major topics of conversation for the evening was the new issue of *The Space Gamer*, which had rules for robots in *Traveller*. Mark, Don, and others commented on it, saying that they thought it was an important addition

> to the game, and that they would incorporate it into their gaming worlds. [Field notes]

These magazines, as a consequence of their relatively large circulation, are able to disseminate information rapidly. *The Dragon*, with a readership of some 40,000 (1979), can reach a much wider audience than would be possible through informal channels of communication.

The existence of these four channels of communication suggests that in terms of my criterion that there exist an interlocking group network, fantasy gaming should be considered a subsociety with its own social network.

Identification with the Hobby

In order for a collection of individuals to be a subsociety they need to perceive themselves as such—they must recognize that they have a subculture, and act in accordance with the expectations of their group.

Evidence detailing this identification is found in articles that speak to shared problems faced by gamers (for example, "What to do when the dog eats your dice, or some other calamity befalls you twenty minutes before the game club gets to your place" [Kwalish 1977]). Similarly, direct statements by writers and gamers indicate the perception of identification with the hobby:

> As diverse as this melange of enthusiasts is, they all seem to share one commonality: a real love for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and a devotion that few other games can claim. This remarkable loyalty is a great factor in the game's explosion of popularity, and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS has become a gaming cult, as avid D & Der's have ceaselessly "spread the gospel," enrolling new players in expanding groups which just seem to grow and grow. [Carr 1978:2]

This shared orientation produces a sense of community:

> I found that gaming develops a camaraderie between gamers that a lot of people I notice outside of gaming don't necessarily have. . . . Gaming brings people together. [Personal interview]

One player even gave copies of the latest *Chivalry & Sorcery* rulebook as Christmas presents to his gaming friends.

Response from Others

A final feature which suggests the existence of a subculture is that outsiders recognize that fantasy gamers have similar characteristics. This existence of an external response in turn influences the members of the subsociety.

Since FRP gaming is not an overtly deviant activity it is not perceived as a social problem, and thus the attention focused on nettlesome groups is not given to these gamers. However, there is some conflict between fantasy role-play gamers and traditional war gamers, particularly those who attempt to simulate historical situations through miniatures.

This hostility can be traced to the very beginnings of fantasy gaming. Gygax notes:

> I mentioned *D & D* to Avalon Hill, but the reception was a trifle chilly. The reaction to fantasy battle in such magazines as WARGAMER'S NEWSLETTER and PANZERFAUST had stirred up a good deal of controversy, and one fellow had gone so far as to say that not only was fantasy gaming "up a creek," but, if I had any intelligence whatsoever, I would direct my interest to something fascinating and unique; the Balkan Wars, for example. Nonetheless, I persisted, but the "establishment" was not about to jump into something as different and controversial as fantasy. . . . [Gygax 1977d:5]

Mark, a fifteen-year-old who has played both types of games, but who eventually became more interested in fantasy games, commented:

> I found out that role-playing games were not in exactly as much high stature as the others. A lot of the people that had originally played the board and campaign games almost ridiculed role-playing type games. [Personal interview]

Another fantasy gamer, Brian (age eighteen) commented:

> A lot of board gamers and miniatures players think that role-play games are just, you know, kind of crap and really shouldn't be called true war gaming. [Personal interview]

War gamers criticize FRP games because they are "unrealistic" and because they aren't structured enough. More particularly, they ridicule the participants, who tend to be younger and less knowledgeable about history; from the beginning a sharp status

distinction existed between war gamers and fantasy gamers.

The growth of fantasy games brought the two groups into conflict, particularly over scarce resources, such as space:

Mark: *D & D* began to take over the Golden Brigade a while back. When it first came out people started playing it so much that it was outlawed . . . totally. Except on Fridays. And then it was limited.
GAF: Why was that?
Mark: Well, it started interfering with those people who wanted to play board games and some of the other things. [Personal interview]

A similar situation occurred at the University of Minnesota gaming club, where FRP games were also prohibited for a time. Within a few years after the games were marketed people recognized that the group playing them was significantly different from war gamers.

As often happens when stereotyping is present, members of the subsociety respond to the views of others. In this case the response is partly defensive: distinguishing serious fantasy gamers from children who have only a temporary interest. This response had implications for the Golden Brigade club, which at one point established a curfew to limit the attendance of younger players (see chapter 5). A second means of dealing with external criticism is to attack war gamers for their militarism, their misguided belief that they are engaging in "realistic" battles, and to suggest that their personal peculiarities label them as "misfits." The hard-core miniature players are termed *grognards* by fantasy gamers, a French term meaning the conservative old guard, or literally "old sweats." However, since FRP gaming is the most rapidly expanding segment of the adult gaming market, an attitude of studied nonchalance is also possible.

These features of fantasy gaming (size, economic significance, shared culture, social network, identification, and external response) taken together indicates that fantasy role-playing is an urban leisure subsociety with its own distinctive subculture. How this subculture is used and manipulated by players in collectively creating fantasy worlds is the topic of the rest of the book.

Two

Players

The portrait of the subculture I have sketched in the previous chapter lacks important features. The connections among players have been depicted, but the characteristics of these players have not been described. Who are they? What do they say are their motivations for playing? How do they become involved in the gaming subsociety? The characteristics of players and their motivations structure the fantasy that they create, and this is the focus of the present chapter.

Characteristics of Gamers

Age. Like the participants in many leisure "scenes," most fantasy gamers are young. From observation it appears that the typical gamer is in his late teens or early twenties, although many players are still in high school, and apparently the median age of new gamers is decreasing (Smith 1980). A gamer over thirty-five years of age is rare, but it was not uncommon to meet a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old at a convention or at the Golden Brigade.[1]

Readership surveys of gaming magazines support these observations. A survey conducted by the *Judges Guild Journal*, a magazine that specializes in playing aids for *Dungeons & Dragons*, received 178 responses (out of a circulation of 2,000) to a request for readership information. The mean age of their respondents was 21.8 years, with a median age of 20.4 years. The age range of readers was from twelve to forty-seven, with only seven respondents over thirty-five. Another readership survey conducted by *The Dragon*, published by TSR Publications, received

approximately 2,000 responses (from a circulation of approximately 10,000, using prepaid envelopes). A third, conducted by *The Space Gamer*, a magazine published by Metagaming, received 528 responses (from a circulation of approximately 5,700, without prepaid envelopes). These readership surveys also indicate that adolescents and young adults are the most frequent gamers (see Table 2.1). While these figures may be biased in that a random sample of hobbyists does not read these journals or participate in surveys, the data are consistent with my observations. Adolescents and young adults have free time, few social responsibilities, and are relatively open to fantasy. Players cite marriages, full-time jobs, and graduate school as reasons for disengaging from the hobby, indicating that social responsibilities affect the free time necessary for participating in these games.

Occupation. Most gamers are students,[2] in part because students have considerable discretionary leisure. The occupations of nonstudents vary widely (Hargrave 1979:28) with many in art, science, the professions (Kern 1977:5F), or technical fields

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Gamers

The Dragon (Feb. 1979)		*The Space Gamer* (Nov.–Dec. 1978)	
Age category	*% of sample*	*Age category*	*% of sample*
Under 13	1.8	Under 13	0.2
13–16	28.6	13–16	22.8
17–21	28.8	17–20	23.5
22–30	30.6	21–25	20.7
Over 30	10.3	26–30	18.6
		31–39	11.2
		Over 39	2.8

The Judges Guild Journal (June 1978)	
Age category	*% of sample*
Under 13	0.6
13–16	26.7
17–20	23.3
21–25	23.9
26–30	14.2
31–39	10.2
Over 39	1.1

(Brotman 1981). This occupational range is represented by the leadership of the Golden Brigade, which during the winter of 1977 consisted of a musician, an artist, a chemical engineer, and a high school student. Because of the diversity of occupational backgrounds within groups of gamers, a variety of outside interests or latent cultures exists (Becker and Geer 1960), which can be incorporated into the game world, imparting a richness to the fantasy.

Sex. Later in the chapter I will discuss the position of women in the gaming world, and how female characters within the game scenario are treated. Here it should be noted that the participants are almost entirely male. In the *Judges Guild Journal* survey only 2.3% of the respondents were female (four respondents) and in *The Space Gamer* survey the figure was even lower—0.4% (two females). These figures are probably not gross underestimations. At Origins '78, the major national convention, approximately 95% of those in attendance were male (Freeman 1978:16). This figure also applies to GENCON XI (1979), another major national convention, and the 1979 Minnesota regional convention. In *The Dragon*'s 1979 referee list (excluding referees with non-sex-typed first names) only 3.8% (nineteen) were female. Gary Gygax estimates that approximately 10% to 15% of all *D & D* players are female (personal interview), a figure probably higher than for the hobby as a whole (Carr 1978:2).[3]

Intelligence. Players flatter themselves by claiming that they are more intelligent than the general population (Schulzinger 1979:5).[4] By intelligence they refer to education, particularly the knowledge of literature and history, and claim that they apply what they learn to other areas.[5] Most young adult gamers who are not in school have a college degree, and many have received graduate training. In the *Judges Guild Journal* survey, 23.2% of the respondents had more than sixteen years of education, an impressive figure in that the median age for the sample was 20.4 years. When one considers only those gamers over twenty-one years of age, 51% had more than a college education. These figures are duplicated in *The Space Gamer* sample, in which 26.0% of the total sample, and 49.6% of those over twenty years of age had more than a college education.

What most distinguishes gamers from others is their specialized knowledge of topics relevant to the game, and this is both a cause of their involvement and a result of their participation. Beyond this, estimates of relative intelligence (particularly when controlling for social class and occupation) are difficult. Although there is evidence that children with high IQs are more likely to engage in imaginative play (Parker 1973), this research is not directly relevant to these groups. While game players have a wealth of specialized knowledge, their global intelligence, probably no lower than their peers, may not be higher.

Imagination. Although a meaningful empirical test is difficult, gamers are probably somewhat more imaginative than their nongaming peers (Holmes 1981). Players share a belief that imagination is one of their collective attributes, although they recognize that players are imaginative to different degrees. Some suggest that imagination is necessary for game participation:

GAF: Do you think game players are more imaginative than average?

Andy: Some of them, yes; a fairly good chunk of them are more imaginative than other people. . . . Especially with *D & D* and *Traveller*, because they have to use their imagination, you know, to develop a world and to be able to accept this stuff as real. So they do to a certain extent have . . . a little more imagination. [Personal interview]

A connection between fantasy and imagination has also been found in research on daydreams. Daydream frequency is correlated with originality of thought and with the tendency to seek out novel experiences (Singer 1975:67). Those successful at producing literary and artistic works are more likely to engage in daydreaming. Schafer (1969) found that creative adolescents are more likely to have had imaginary companions as children. These studies lend credence to the belief of gamers that their fantasy reveals their imaginative and creative powers.

Militarism. A common stereotype among those outside the war gaming and fantasy gaming subsocieties is that all players are interested in war and killing. While this stereotype is particularly prevalent for war gamers,[6] it also is applied to those interested in FRP games.

Gamers respond that they no more can be considered warmongers than the medical researcher who studies cancer can be called a cancermonger (Greene 1979:33). Two relatively distinct arguments are raised against the claim of militarism: the educational function of the games for preventing warfare and their value as a release of pent-up energies.

Gary Gygax expressed the educational view:

> I don't think they're militaristic at all, because they [gamers] probably know better than the nongamer what war is all about, because of having read it. Read a lot about it and begin to understand just what a really unacceptable solution it is. [Personal interview]

Another regular gamer claimed that his friends play FRP games to control personal aggression:

> I think a lot of people through playing war games begin to get a much better sense of sadism, militarism, and thereby can limit it in themselves. [Personal interview]

Other gamers explain their pacificism by saying that through gaming they release their hostilities:

> Unfortunately you get a lot of people that think we are warmongers, and are the type, you know, "give us a weapon and we will kill, pillage and everything," and in actuality, myself, I don't want to enter the military. As far as I'm concerned we should ban all weapons. You know, I'd rather not have them. I'll play my games. You can simulate; try and get your hostilities out that way. [Personal interview]

Players use both cognitive and emotional explanations to avoid the stigma of being seen as bloodthirsty. Yet, despite these claims, it is difficult to accept these denials fully. After all, these games are centered on killing and death—the struggle between "good" and "evil," in which evil must be wiped out without mercy or pity. I have participated in scenarios in which player-characters decide to kill all nonplayer characters that they meet, in order to ensure that these characters do not secretly attack and to gain experience points for killing these characters. Within the context of the game, players are oriented toward murder and death without consideration of any moral niceties (Holmes 1980; Johnston 1980).

This aggressive orientation may become irrational. In one *C & S* game that I was refereeing, I attempted an experiment. I told the players that they had come across a group of twenty preadolescent children in the wilderness. I decided that these children would give no information to the party, nor would they harm the players' characters in any way. Despite this lack of harm, there was serious talk of killing the entire party of children for fear of what they might do. Eventually the consensus was that the children should be forced to leave immediately with the warning that if they were spotted by the party they would be summarily executed. Unfortunately because of the structure of the game I could not bring the party of children in contact with the players again, but that outcome would likely have been the children's death. Frequently male nonplayer characters who have not hurt the party are executed and female nonplayer characters raped for sport.

Does this indicate militarism and aggressiveness? In other words, how permeable is the membrane between reality and fantasy? Is the individual who gives aggressive fantasy as a response to a Rorschach ink blot or a TAT card an aggressive person?

In large measure I think the barrier is impermeable. Although individuals engage in "atrocities" in the game, generally they are not bloodthirsty people. The stereotype of interpersonal violence ("How do I know that one of these people isn't going to stab me in a dark alley?") is not credible. Outside the game they are not overtly aggressive. Yet it probably is true that these individuals have a relatively high level of aggression that they need to express. Players deal with the stigma attached to aggressive orientations by denying they exist, and then act out their aggressive impulses within the framework of "fantasy play."

This explanation, though helpful in understanding why so many pacifists should take delight in "killing," does not recognize the diversity of the subculture. This diversity is shown dramatically in one of the questions in *The Space Gamer* survey, which asked respondents to describe themselves according to a number of political labels, some legitimate, others ("monarchist," "bureaucratist") facetious. Five labels were particularly relevant to this analysis: very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, and very liberal. I combined the categories "very conservative" and "conservative," and "very liberal" and "lib-

eral." The results indicate a remarkably balanced political distribution in the sample: 35% liberal; 33% moderate; and 31% conservative. One referee commented on the range of political orientations within his group:

> We've got within my own group . . . one guy who's a super-pacifist. He likes playing in the games, he's very much a role-player, yet he has a control over the kind of social programs they instituted in the country: "I want agrarian land reform." We've got another guy, you know, in no matter what situation we play, what kind of social development you want for your country . . . military schools starting in kindergarten and everybody runs fifty miles when they're twelve years old. [Personal interview]

The talk of one young man at the Golden Brigade, a former marine, was sprinkled with references to "gooks," "jar heads," and "nukes." Yet he no more represents the hobby than do the long-haired "freaks." I was struck by the political diversity of the hobby on one occasion by a friendly political conversation among an ex-navy man who had spent four years in Vietnam, a young man who had flunked out of boot camp, and a pacifist proud of having avoided the draft and having protested against the war.

Social nonconformism. According to one science fiction fan: "Most fans *prefer* to be as strange as possible" (Bainbridge 1976:211; italics in original). The extent to which this debatable description is applicable to fantasy gaming seems related to one's commitment to the hobby. Hard-core gamers may be eccentric or deviant but, as the hobby expands, a larger number of people participate, making the typical hobbyist more like the "average" person. Those most involved people in any group may be deviant because of their intense commitment and full acceptance of subcultural prescriptions. Intense commitment is a symbol of their deviance in that it precludes participation in other activities that are considered "normal" ("social life," stylish clothing, or knowledge of television shows) because of the time and cost of gaming. Gary Gygax notes in this regard:

> Anytime you get into a hobby you're gonna get people who are really hard-core hobbyists. [They] usually are pretty strange. . . . You've got to be kind of off-the-wall to be golfing in . . . thirty-five degrees freezing, and it's just hor-

> rible, but you'll see golfers out there. I mean go fishing out in the rain, cold, and I mean it's nuts! How can they be having fun, but they are. [Personal interview]

One regular gamer dramatically describes the hard-core gamers he has known:

> Some people would be committed. . . . A lot of these guys are really warped. Almost certifiable psychos. [Personal interview]

But we must go beyond the suggestion that hard-core gamers are "eccentrically fanatical," as one gamer phrased it, and ask in what ways. Hard-core fishermen are likely different in important respects from hard-core fantasy gamers. Gamers often reject American mass culture. According to one regular gamer:

> They're not your average car salesman. They're not your average Joe Blow off the street out there, obviously. These people are usually students or imaginative characters who have been somewhat misfits in this society. . . . They're not the mainstream who gets their interest out of football and television and Ann Margaret. [Personal interview]

A similar view was expressed by a peripheral gamer:

> You see, the people down at the Precinct [where the Golden Brigade meets] are a little off-beat. They're different types of people than the average Joe on the street. . . . Like I was surprised, why were they meeting in a police station. I should think that they'd want to stay away from this place. You know, that kind of stuff, but a little disreputable, deviant. [Personal interview]

Both gamers use the image of "the average Joe on the street"[7] as a counterpoint to the peculiarities of the gamers. "Joe" is the middle-class man with conventional habits and the responsibilities of having a family to support and a workaday job; often there is the implication of a phony pretense to respectability. "Joe" is a man with so many normative commitments that he has no time, energy, or inclination for active fantasy. His fantasy life is passive, deriving from television violence, sports, and the undulations of the sex goddesses of prime-time entertainment. Rarely do gamers discuss television shows or sports, and when they discuss sex it is in the context of the game, not in the context of the real world. Gamers use their fantasy to supplant accepted

pastimes, and their denial of the workaday world and mass entertainment leads others to perceive them as "misfits." Support for the relationship between fantasy and normative behavior is found in research on daydreaming, which indicates that those with routine lives have routine and minimal fantasies (Sutton-Smith 1976:2). Thus the offbeat interests of gamers may contribute to their success in the game world and their heightened imaginations, which in turn lead them to this subsociety.

The typical gamer. Describing the "typical" gamer by a single example is impossible, probably more misleading than instructive. However, we may reach certain tentative conclusions about this subsociety by focusing on the hard-core gamer. This person is male, unmarried, and in his early to mid-twenties; he has read deeply in science fiction, fantasy, and history; he has completed college and may have attended graduate school for some time; he believes that he has a lively imagination; he either has a job commensurate with his skills or has decided to live as best he can with a low-paying job for the present, planning to look for a more appropriate job later; he often has strong feelings about war, either as a former member of the armed services or as a confirmed pacifist; finally, he disregards many of the normative requirements of conventional society, feeling a need to concentrate on his own interests without regard to the expectations of others. Having drawn this picture we must not forget that a population's variance is as important as its central tendency.

Recruitment

Voluntary leisure subsocieties fluctuate in membership—they grow rapidly and then fade when they are no longer a fad or no longer meet the needs of their members. Since the pastime of fantasy role-play gaming is still expanding, it provides a means by which we may examine subcultural recruitment.

Three methods of recruitment will be described which enhance the likelihood that an individual will join a voluntary subsociety and will accept its subculture. At the beginning of a new subsociety, recruitment occurs through the *change of culture* of a previously existing group. Individuals accept the new culture, while maintaining their network of social relations. By accepting a publicized cultural innovation, an established group

may change its orientation from a previously existent subculture to adopt new traditions. The other two processes refer to recruitment after the subsociety has achieved some stability. Recruitment operates through the recognition by a nonmember that he has *common interests* with members of the subsociety; he then participates because of the perception of personal satisfaction. If the activities are satisfying, the recruit remains in the group; if not, he disengages from it. The perception of shared interests does not in itself recruit a member into a subsociety; the individual must also have the opportunity to participate in the group's activities. *Interactional opportunities* are necessary for the potential recruit to judge the activities. When a subsociety is small and unformed, recruitment is primarily personal and informal; as the subsociety grows in size and economic importance, informal techniques of recruitment may be supplemented by media announcements—either advertising and publicity or journalistic reportage.

Change in Culture

As discussed in chapter 1, fantasy gaming developed out of war gaming. Arneson's original Blackmoor dungeon expedition was conducted only with the forebearance of players who expected to participate in a Napoleonic miniatures campaign. The original fantasy role-playing gamers were all war gamers. This sudden introduction is apparently fairly common:

> 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 miniatures battle. [Shapero 1979:11]

Collective reorientation occurred as the hobby developed. In many groups one member "discovered" the game and decided that it was worth exploring. If the group accepted this decision, which was likely to occur if the innovator had high status, and if the first exposure was considered enjoyable, group members

might choose to continue playing. The literature on the diffusion of innovation indicates that innovators, often persons with wide networks of contacts, tend to have high status (Rogers and Shoemaker 1971). While this appears to be the case, my assertion is based on impressionistic evidence.

Once a "critical number" of groups have adopted the innovation, recruitment to a subsociety operates primarily through individuals' perception of common interests and interaction opportunities. Of course, the *original* decision by the innovator to "experiment" is also based on contacts and perception of interest. In the early stage of a subsociety, recruitment is predominantly collective, in that participation requires the presence of others. As participation increases, these others are more readily available (e.g., through public gaming clubs) and individuals are recruited.

Common Interests

Most gamers report that prior to becoming involved in fantasy role-playing gaming, they had interests in the *components* of fantasy gaming. One gamer lists seven background areas that are relevant to gaming: (1) military history/war gaming; (2) knowledge of fantasy literature; (3) knowledge of real-world mythology; (4) knowledge of general history/social sciences; (5) knowledge of real world physical science; (6) knowledge of real world mysticism; and (7) Society for Creative Anachronism experience (Huber 1979:2). The interests of most gamers focus on military history, medieval history, and fantasy and science fiction literature, although some gamers incorporate each of these seven elements into their gaming. These interests increase the likelihood that individuals will have the opportunity to learn about FRP games, and increase the likelihood that they will enjoy participating. They serve as filtering elements for recruitment.

The magazine *Different Worlds* published a collection of thirteen essays collectively entitled "My Life and Role-Playing," written by leading figures in FRP gaming. Ten of these essays mention a prior interest in fantasy and science fiction:

> Since the 7th grade, I have been a reader and collector of fantasy and science fiction, starting with Edgar Rice Burroughs and moving in steady quest of the bizarre to ever more obscure authors and mythologies. [St. Andre 1979:12]

Eight essayists reported an interest in military history and war games. These interests are also reflected by many recent recruits. One young gamer, Mark, comments:

> I think anybody that has a real interest in history will gradually get involved in [FRP] games. I think anybody that is interested in science fiction will gradually get involved in those games. I think anybody who's real interested in fantasy will gradually get involved in [FRP] games. Or else he's totally isolated and cut off. [Personal interview]

Although these interests seem to be necessary (though not absolutely required), they are not sufficient for involvement. One must learn of the game and become involved with those who play it.

Interaction Opportunities

It was not inevitable that Mark would become a member of the gaming world, despite his being ready for involvement:

GAF: How did you hear about the [FRP] games?
Mark: About [two and a half years ago] I had found out that there were other people in Minneapolis who did read science fiction and fantasy like I did, and I was not alone in the world, and I was not isolated. . . . I think it was just the association with these people that liked science fiction and fantasy that got me to be interested in fantasy war gaming and other types of war gaming as well. [Personal interview]

Mark's involvement is similar to the recruitment pattern of many gamers. The interests are long-standing, but often a chance friendship is necessary for subsocietal involvement:

> Stew told me that he began playing *C & S* because of a friend's interest. This friend bought a copy of *C & S*, and Stew and his friend got interested in the game. Stew commented that after a while "My friend turned pacifist on me," and so Stew kept the game rulebook. [Field notes]

GAF: How did you first get interested in gaming?
Barry: I remember what it was. A friend of my brother at church went to a war gaming club, and he told my brother about it [FRP gaming], and my brother told me. [Personal interview]

GAF: How did you first get interested in gaming?
Chuck: Well, let's see, last year I [went] to South [High School], and I was on the wrestling team and I met Greg and he introduced it to me, and I just enjoyed it, and I brought it home. [Personal interview]

These accounts suggest the importance of social networks in recruitment (see Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980). Significantly, the recruiters were not themselves hard-core gamers at the time; they were peripheral gamers searching for others to share their pastime. These players gain status by having recruited a new member and also gain status with the new recruit by being perceived as knowledgeable and innovative. Interactional opportunities often are connected with identification with the recruiter (see Gerlach and Hine 1970:79; Stark and Bainbridge 1980).

Noninteractional circumstances may also produce involvement opportunities. Some individuals purchase games without personal contact with other gamers. After purchasing the game the buyer may then search for a community in which to acquire playing skills. The purchase of the game occurs through a recognition of common interest (e.g., war gaming, fantasy literature, history), but the involvement in the gaming subsociety and its subculture is still dependent on interaction:

GAF: How did you first get interested in gaming?
Tim: Just went to a hobby shop one day and saw all these games, and said that looks pretty neat, and I bought one and started playing one all by myself.
GAF: Well, what made you go out and buy it?
Tim: I don't know. I just thought it would be a little more interesting than the common games, you know. Then I met a friend who I worked with about four years, and he said "Do you want to play this game," and I came on over there, and we played *Dungeons & Dragons*, and I wound up playing it almost every week. [Personal interview]

Mass media reports supplement personal contacts. In December 1977 the *Minneapolis Tribune* printed a feature story on fantasy role-playing games, which described the Little Tin Soldier Shoppe and the Golden Brigade club. The Friday after the article the Golden Brigade had the largest attendence in its history; many of these new members had never before participated in fantasy games. Yet they shared interests and were potential recruits:

George: When I was here in the city, I read the newspaper about the game *Traveller* and started playing the game *Traveller*, and then went and bought the game. . . .
GAF: So you found out about the Golden Brigade through the newspaper?
George: Right.
GAF: Did you know anyone before you came [to the Golden Brigade]?
George: No. [Personal interview]

For some a combination of events is necessary for recruitment, such as a friend's report coupled with the newspaper article:

Ted: I had a friend at church who played at the Brigade and then he told me about it, and then I got interested that way, and the article in the paper.
GAF: Did you go down to the Brigade before the article?
Ted: No. I was thinking of it, but then I wasn't sure. But then I read that it sounded good. [Personal interview]

Obviously the perception of a common interest and the opportunity to interact does not ensure that members will enter the subsociety, nor does it predict the depth of involvement. Rewards must result from the gaming experience for continuing involvement, as is true in interpersonal relations generally (see Hartup, Glaser, and Charlesworth 1967).

The decision to enter the gaming world can operate either collectively or through individual recruitment; the former seems particularly common when the social world takes form, the latter while the subsociety expands. Both require a previous orientation to the components of the social world. Continued involvement occurs if the social world satisfies members' needs.

Justifications for Gaming

If one asks participants why they game, they answer quickly and emphasize the entertainment ("fun") component of the hobby. Social scientists are prone to dismiss such reasoning as tautologous and as indicating that people do not understand the "real" reasons for their commitments (a view shared by psychological determinism and structural-functionalism), or that "enjoyment" is a gloss for a more complex explanation. The former

approach presumes a person lacking free will, the latter an overly cognitive individual. While such approaches expand our insight of gaming, we should not ignore the players' rationale—that they play because they like playing. Goffman in his aptly titled essay "Fun in Games" notes:

> Games can be fun to play, and fun alone is the approved reason for playing them. The individual, in contrast to his treatment of "serious" activity, claims a right to complain about a game that does not pay its way in immediate pleasure and whether the game is pleasurable or not, to plead a slight excuse, such as an indisposition of mood, for not participating. [1961:17]

The possibility of "engrossment"—distancing oneself from the "serious" world—produces the "fun." Games are "fun" because we think they are worthwhile *in themselves*. The engrossment is in itself the indicator of success, and the game is structured to maximize this engrossment. However, recognizing the enjoyment inherent in playing the game does not mean that gaming is unrelated to the "serious world." However, "serious" aspects are "side benefits," and do not affect recruitment or continuing involvement of players in the gaming world.

Recruits do offer "serious" explanations for why they play. Whether the effects are real, the rhetoric of gamers in claiming serious effects for their leisure activities is real. Such claims are treated as rhetoric in that they convince others (and oneself) that games have a useful purpose and a beneficial effect. They provide an account for why individuals spend time in an activity that non-gamers consider frivolous; gamers use these explanations to justify activities others think are peripheral to the business of living (Scott and Lyman 1968). Although play itself needs no justification, the time commitment, financial outlay, and unusual content call for some explanation. My interest is not whether such statements can be verified, but that they can be credibly expressed. I treat these explanations as *explanations*, rather than as matters to be empirically tested. The four themes that emerge regularly as justifications are: the educational components of gaming; gaming as an escape from social pressure; games as aids in increasing one's sense of personal control or efficacy; and games as aids in dealing with people.

Games as Educational Tools

A successful gamer must learn about the situation being simulated. This not only implies awareness of the rules or the probability of actions, but involves extensive knowledge of the game setting. Although some knowledge is necessary for gaming involvement, players claim that they learn about the history and structure of the Middle Ages or the technology and economics of space travel through gaming. While these games do not provide realistic depictions of either medieval Europe or (of course) futuristic space travel, serious discussions of these topics do occur, and players discuss such things as the weight of plate armor, the social structure of the Catholic Church in twelfth-century France, or the effects of atmospheric pressure on rocket design.

Gaming is also claimed to facilitate such behavioral skills as acting ability (Gygax 1978:7), synthesizing information (Johnston 1980), decision-making,[8] leadership, and role-playing. Role-playing skills are particularly important in that they are the focal point of these games. Consistent with the belief that games perform an enculturative function, one gamer writes:

> What do people do in life, other than play roles? We are the people we are, because we selected roles when we were children. We know how to behave in most situations because we practiced playing our roles in childhood games. . . . What more appropriate form of entertainment is there, than a role-playing game? . . . Apart from the fact that RPGs [role-playing games] can be just plain fun, they can help us survive in our shifting cultural environment by restoring our childish ability to vary the number of roles we can play in "real" life, and by allowing us to explore the nature of that "reality" through engaging in fantasy. RPGs can perform an invaluable service by preparing us to face the unexpected with equanimity and to search for truth in spite of manifest meaninglessness. [Lortz, 1979a:27]

Escape

Leisure permits a sanctioned disengagement from the constraints of the "serious world." Many gamers mention that an important component of gaming is the escape from the constraints of the players' mundane reality, a component of interest

in science fiction and space travel as well (Plank 1968:31; Dubois 1961:132). Gaming magazines use this rhetoric of escape:

> The dreamer's art, the ability to cut loose from the restraints of reality and touch new shores and lives, is the essense and lure of *D & D*. [Filmore, 1977:10]

> Our modern world has few, if any, frontiers. We can no longer escape to the frontier of the West, explore Darkest Africa, sail to the South Seas. Even Alaska and the Amazon Jungles will soon be lost as wild frontier areas. Furthermore, adventures are not generally possible anymore. . . . It is therefore scarcely surprising that a game which directly involves participants in a make-believe world of just such nature should prove popular. [Gygax, 1979:29]

Players distinguish the passive envelopment characteristic of the mass media from the active, dynamic gaming escape:

GAF: Why do you think most people play fantasy role-playing games? What's the motivation?
Tim: I think it's like an escape. It's fantasy, yet it's real.
GAF: An escape from what?
Tim: Reality. Day-to-day life.
GAF: On the same order as television or something deeper?
Tim: No, no. Much deeper! For me anyways. I can't get into television at all. I don't like it. [Personal interview]

The gaming escape involves two related components: release from the constraints of self and release from restrictions on behavior.

Escape from self. As a new gamer I was struck by how little I learned about the private lives of others—even others to whom I felt close. One didn't talk about occupations, marital status, residence, or ethnic heritage. In some cases it was months before I learned a player's surname. Others confirmed this observation, and suggested that it represented a need to establish a distance from one's real self.

> Well, face it, the games are, after all, escapism, really. So, you know, to get away from your private lives, your real life, and get into war gaming. [Personal interview]

> I think the fantasy . . . you're trying maybe to be things that you're not. So if you just lived your same character [real self] over in the game, it wouldn't be as enjoyable. [Personal interview]

Within the game, one does not portray one's "real self." However, as we shall discuss in Chapter 7, people play personae by transforming their "real self." Yet the fact that one acts the part of a drawf or gnome provides sufficient self-distance that players believe that they have transcended the constraining features of their selves.

This escape does not imply that the games lack intensity and tension. Some gamers recognize that they are tense while playing:

> I remember reading a letter to the editor of *White Dwarf* magazine by Gary Gygax . . . and he said that these games are designed to relax people and get them out of what one would say is the hum-drum, the strain, the tension of normal, everyday lives. This may be so, but I've seen a lot of people that have really gone into it and gotten more strained and more tension-filled when they're playing these games. . . . I can say that I myself get more strained and more tension-filled. [Personal interview]

While this is an extreme view, escape is not synonymous with passivity and lack of involvement. Players care about their characters almost as much as their "real" selves—perhaps more so because these characters are continually in danger.

Escape from conventional behavior. Although fantasy gamers are not warmongers, aggression has an important role in gaming scenarios, and gamers permit fantasies about normally inappropriate behaviors:

> Relief for your frustrations is a big [value of gaming], 'cause when you've gone all day and you've put up with about just as much crap as you have, and you walk into a fantasy game and go beat somebody up. It makes me feel good, it really does. It's a great way for me to release my tensions from everyday life, because as a bookkeeper and a clerk for [a chain of drugstores] I have to put up with a lot of crap from a lot of customers and sometimes I feel like reaching over the counter and hitting them. However, I'm

> not allowed to do that, so I usually take out these frustrations . . . on the battlefield [in a war game] or in a role-playing game. And I've noticed a lot of people do that. And I mean, you know, it's nice to do that every now and then, just get to the point where you actually hit someone, you hit a figment of your imagination. It's a lot less painful for both parties. [Personal interview]

> Let's say I come home from a hard day at the office having suffered the slings and arrows of bureaucracy down at the goddamn university all day long, and I feel I'm just fed to the teeth with this reality. Now that's [FRP gaming] just a straight, old psychological blow valve. [Personal interview]

Whether gamers are more aggressive than others or whether gaming helps to control frustrations is not the issue. Gamers use catharsis to explain and justify the aggressive parts of their gaming [Holmes 1980]. As discussed above, much "killing" occurs and players make explicitly violent statements within the game: "I like to kill wastepaper heads"; "You see that girl whose back is to me? I'm gonna bite her ear off"; or "I want to taste blood and sinews." Mass murder and wanton destruction are not uncommon, as when a player character fires a machine gun into a crowded room of strangers or another lights a fire that destroys a town "just to cause havoc." While such activities are a legitimate part of the game, they also require legitimation, since they provide *prima facie* evidence of players' immorality. The rhetoric of escape with its justification that such behavior prevents aggression preserves the moral integrity of players.

Sense of Control/Efficacy

Implicit in the arguments that gaming is a means of escape is the image that a gamer, today's Everyman, is battered by forces outside his control; he is at the mercy of restrictions, superiors, and bureaucrats. Gaming is said to provide not only an escape from wordly pressures, but a feeling of control or efficacy over an environment—even if it is a fantastic environment. Engrossment in a fantasy world gives the participant the opportunity "to know, to do, and to be all the wonderful things denied . . . all men by temporal limitations" (Lindner 1955:281). This engrossment expands the opportunities of the self. As one gamer noted:

> [Gamers] get, judging from my own group, to put themselves into a role where they can get their goals, get their kicks, get their goodies, in a sublimated way, they can get their aggressions off. That's their kick; they can get tremendous amounts of money, wealth, power, without actually having to put up with the inequities of this world, where it's much harder to do. Most fantasy gamers are not really winners in our societal sense. Most of them are fairly small potatoes people. . . . They're losers only in terms of our society's judgment of them, not necessarily in their own judgment. But yet I think they're affected by our society. They see that other people are running General Motors. Somebody has a yacht. Somebody marries Princess Grace and takes her off to Monaco or something. And . . . they see these desirable things, and they're totally unobtainable. [Personal interview]

Gaming gives participants confidence in their personal powers by testing these powers in "dangerous," "adventurous" situations:

> You get the satisfaction sometimes of knowing you've done something right, and knowing you can do something. There is something inside of your head besides mush. You do have some intelligence. [Personal interview]

> Role-playing games in general are like being able to see what I can do in a certain role. I like being able to see how I can get out of this situation, how can I get myself into a situation, how can I work it out. How can I, myself, on my own, do things. How successful can I be. [Personal interview]

This belief is consistent with research on simulation gaming, which indicates that performance of surrogate roles facilitates ego mastery, producing psychological growth and insight (Cassel 1973:19). One gamer suggested that role-playing provides testing of boundaries, enabling players to learn about themselves in situations of controlled danger:

> It's a scary idea to think about—that it might be possible to learn something of yourself and your reactions to various situations from such a "game." [Cooper 1978:3]

Another writer sees the value of the game in putting players in touch with their human instincts:

> 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. [Kanterman 1979:11]

The sense of control and personal insight is equally important for referees, who create the world and have the responsibility for structuring the encounters of the players. As one said: "As a referee . . . I am setting up the situation, I am in control, I'm writing the book" (personal interview).

Game Sociability

Being young adults, gamers sometimes feel unsure of their social skills; being urban Americans they sometimes feel alienated from their primary groups and sense a need for a community. Gaming, according to their rhetoric, provides a structure for making friends and finding a sense of community. The importance of friendship formation in the playing of these games is widely recognized—through bringing together individuals who have personalities or interests in common, and through teaching players to accommodate each other.

Similarity and friendship. Through recruitment, individuals whose interests are similar (in warfare, fantasy, science fiction, and history) can share them in the gaming world. Not surprisingly, players see each other as fundamentally alike:

> It may not be that FRP gaming promotes harmony and brotherly love (there have been many times when we were at each other's throats), but it is more likely that kindred (if not crazy) spirits were unavoidably brought together. [Jacquays 1979:26]

Another gamer notes that their cliquishness is based upon the intensity of their subcultural interests:[9]

> They'll socialize with each other. I know very few of them have social lives outside of gaming, 'cause gaming is their hobby, their spare time is spent gaming. And that's it. You

> know, a fishing nut or hunting nut or whatever, it's the game nuts or role-playing game nut. That's what they do, that's their fun in spare time; otherwise they're working or going to school. So that's their social interaction; they interact with the same sort of people, and they stick together, very clannish. [Personal interview]

Common interests are not sufficient to explain the interaction of members; the regularity and intensity of interaction combines with the shared background cultures to generate friendships.

Gaming and sociability. Bainbridge (1976) notes that 73% of his sample of science fiction fans believed that science fiction fans generally are shy and introverted. This finding corresponds to the way in which many gamers see themselves and others. Yet role-playing is significantly different from science fiction fandom in that gaming requires *active* participation. Gaming therefore is a means by which former (and current) science fiction fans feel that they can overcome their shyness—by adopting alternate persona. These persona have attributes that many players believe they lack: strength, social poise, rugged good looks, wisdom, and chivalric skills (see Holmes 1980).

As described above, players see themselves as a little "odd" or "deviant," and say they have difficulty interacting with others, particularly women (Holmes 1981). One writer comments sarcastically: "Frankly, I think the only reason most people play *D & D* is that they can't find anything to do on Saturday night" (Seligman 1979:2). A seventeen-year-old gamer notes more seriously:

> We are fairly isolated because we have a tendency to meet like every Friday night, you know, which is your social night normally. [Personal interview]

Whatever the direction of cause and effect, gamers recognize that many of them do not have active social lives, even with other males:[10]

> I know some people that are totally socially out of it. . . . they don't have any real social life. They go to school, they do their work, they come home, you know. Me, I used to be like that . . . and this is the reason I've gotten out of war-gaming and role-playing gaming a lot. . . . My social life comes before my gaming life. [Personal interview]

> A lot of people I've noticed who are there [at the Golden Brigade] are the type of people who are, you can't say rejects, but kinda like that. They're not the type of person who are jocks; they're the type of person who just has a hard time getting along with other people . . . they're the type of person that tries to get other people to like them so much, you know, a lot of times. Or they just have a hard time in life, period. [Personal interview]

Speakers are careful to distinguish themselves and their friends from this accusation, often by claiming a partial, rather than total, interest. The belief in social skill deficiencies is congruent with the rhetoric of the gaming subsociety as a community that permits the acquisition of these traits. Whether a gamer believes that gamers are marginal or socially disorganized persons, most agree that gaming provides a supportive atmosphere for the development of interpersonal skills:[11]

> The impact of role-playing games on my life is more than the kilos of correspondence and reference works on my shelves, more than the pages of rules and the money spent on APAs (Amateur Press Association) and magazines; the impact has been in the relationships I've made, the people I've met, the ideas shared and many ways my mind has been opened. [Marsh 1979:14]

Brian: I tend to be a very shy person in real life; I tend to kind of keep my distance and try and look as inconspicuous as I can.
GAF: Do you think [gaming] helps you overcome your shyness?
Brian: Yeah, it does . . . it's just a complete reversal. [Personal interview]

This is similar to people who stutter unless they are acting or singing. Taking on a role helps one overcome deficiencies of one's "real self." The gaming community is described by participants as being protective for its members, and through the development of gaming competence coupled with the ability to enact idealized roles—a collectively shared Walter Mitty fantasy—individuals claim to gain confidence.

These four benefits (education, escape, efficacy, and increased sociability) are the justifications given by gamers for their unusual and time-consuming hobby, and each suggests a compo-

nent of the construction of fantasy scenarios. The educational value of the game is reflected in the historical components of the construction of a game scenario. The escape value of the game is reflected in the fantasy and fantastic components of the scenario structure, both in the incorporation of fantasy and mythological themes and the use of contemporary cultural elements to structure game events. The striving for social efficacy is expressed in the way in which the referee uses his power to constrain the players and construct a scenario, and how the players adapt to their roles and manipulate their characters within the game context. Finally, the sociability aspect of the game is reflected in the social structure of the gaming party, particularly in collective decision-making. While each of these justifications for playing is reflected in the fantasy constructions of the game, none of them is unproblematic, and the negotiation of each raises important issues for analyzing fantasy as a social production.

Before turning to the social construction of fantasy, I will examine one important topic that relates to the nature of the players, their recruitment into the gaming subsociety, and the effects of playing. This is the absence of women as fantasy game players, and the role of women in the fantasies of male players.

Women and Fantasy Gaming

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, few women participate in fantasy role playing games. Somewhere between 5% and 10% of all players are women, and the percentage of female hard-core gamers seems to be considerably lower. This lack of female involvement is striking, particularly in light of the benefits claimed for gaming by its proponents, the increasing equality of women, and the decline of sex-typed behaviors. Virtually all gamers believe that women, if they became involved in gaming, would enjoy it as much as men, and comments from female gamers seem to support this. Why then do women not participate in this social world? I offer three explanations for women's lack of involvement: characteristics of women; the process of recruitment into the gaming world; and reactions of men to the presence of women and female characters in the gaming scenario.

Characteristics of Women

Whether because of biology or social learning, women and men have different orientations to leisure activities in American society, and although patterns are changing, there are still considerable differences between the sexes. Fantasy gaming, as its name implies, represents a blend of fantasy elements and play elements. Research in both areas indicates sex differences, although the nature of the sex differences is not entirely clear.

In fantasy, we find that boys tend to write longer and richer stories than girls do, and their fantasies are more likely to include aggression, self-assertion and material objects—important content for fantasy gaming (Sanford, 1943, cited in Kureshi 1975:15). Further, the difference in fantasy patterns between boys and girls develops after they enter school (Cramer and Bryson 1973; Cramer and Hogan 1975).

Studying play and games we find a similar phenomenon. While both boys and girls engage in informal role-playing games, boys emphasize war and adventurous aggression (Opie and Opie 1969). A study of the development of play interests among children aged twelve and younger found that boys throughout childhood have less interest in imaginative play than do girls, and a correspondingly greater interest in physical play (Child and Child 1973). While this research implies that females should be interested in fantasy role-playing, the fact that FRP games sublimate physical play is important. It is, one might say, the physical role-playing of childhood tamed into a verbal activity. Lever's research on play differences between boys and girls has focused on the structure of their games (Lever 1976, 1978). She found that fifth-grade boys are more likely to play in large, age-heterogeneous groups (see Tiger 1969) and to play longer games than do girls. Since fantasy role-playing games can have as many as ten players, and players may range in age from twelve to forty, and games may continue over years with game sessions lasting eight hours or more, fantasy role-playing reflects a "male-type" activity. The issue of the length of games was commented upon by one regular gamer:

> I don't know whether it's instinctually, culturally, constitutionally or whatever, [women are] just not able or willing to maintain that kind of interest for hours and hours and hours the way these guys maintain it. [Personal interview]

By adolescence children have acquired stable sex-role attributes, and thus these games do not promote sex-role socialization, but reflect sex roles. A further difference is based on the sex-role labels given to games; girls may be reluctant to play games that are considered male games. Montemayor (1974) suggests that children tend to be more successful at games that are described as sex-appropriate than those that are described as sex-inappropriate—even though a single game is used in the experimental research.

The different styles of play and fantasy of men and women help to explain women's absence in fantasy gaming. Some, however, suggest that the lack of interest by women may be traced to the nature of men and women. This was stated explicitly by the fiancée of the vice president of a college gaming club. She said that she hated her fiancé's games, and claimed on behalf of womanhood that "girls just don't have enough imagination" and that the games were "too complicated for girls" (field notes). Such a view, while not the opinion of the majority, was also expressed by some males:

> As George says, [his wife] doesn't like to have all these decisions. . . . Like you play *Monopoly*, there's only one decision: to get all the money you can. And he says that that kind of game she likes. [Personal interview]

Male players explain this in terms of females' greater commitment to social reality. These young men are sophisticated enough, whatever their private beliefs, to frame their speculation in language complimentary to women, and to apologize or make disclaimers when they make a statement that others might consider sexist:

> I'll probably be accused of being a male chauvinist pig at any point I say anything, but it seems to me that women don't enjoy playing this kind of a role simulation. They may be too realistic; they may be too tied to this reality to get off on a role simulation of this nature. [Personal interview]

This rhetoric may not be grounded in fact, but it indicates that gamers think that the lack of women is due partially to intrinsic differences between the sexes.

Recruitment of Women

In discussing the recruitment of gamers I described three components of recruitment: the change of culture in a preexisting group, common interests, and interactional opportunities. Each of these has implications for the lack of women in fantasy gaming.

1. Change in culture. FRP games were developed from war games, particularly those based on military miniatures. In the early years of the hobby, miniature players were introduced to FRP gaming by a member of their war gaming group. Since war gaming is a virtually all-male activity, women were unlikely to be recruited in this way in the early stages of gaming. The only exceptions were a few science fiction groups that became involved in fantasy gaming not through an interest in war games, but as a means of making their science fiction and fantasy musings more intense. Lee Gold, one of the prominent females in the hobby (the editor of *Alarums & Excursions*, the leading apa magazine), was recruited to fantasy gaming in this way.

2. Common interests. The topics that contribute to the interest of players in this gaming subculture are, in our society, generally relevant only to males, such as war gaming and military history. Most science fiction fans are men, and space travel is a popular male fantasy theme (Pitcher and Prelinger 1963; Plank 1968), which is consistent with both sex-role modeling and Freudian symbolism. Women are typically unfamiliar with the central gaming themes. As one male player comments:

> We're a little weird, you know, it's almost all men, and you know, you talk about war and things like that, you know, we're discussing things . . . why are longbows able to penetrate armor or something like this . . . there's not a lot of women interested in that. [Personal interview]

Medieval games are structured particularly for male characters, reflecting the contemporary view of the Middle Ages. As a result, women as female characters have little importance. Male players comment that female characters should be treated as property and not as human beings. Particularly in *C & S* the role of women is limited by the restrictions imposed by the code of courtly love. While there are a few female fantasy and science fiction characters with whom a woman can identify, the vast majority of characters are male. *C & S* rules give human characters a 75% chance of being male, and elves, dwarves, and

hobbits an 85% chance of being male. The presumption that a dwarven warrior, elven mage, or hobbit adventurer is more likely to be male is obviously not based upon a reflection of historical circumstance, although it does reflect the content of fantasy literature.

This means that women who wish to participate must portray male characters:

> It's hard for men to play women unless they're used to it, or, you know, they've had experience in it before, and I think it's probably correspondingly difficult for women to play men. I don't think it's impossible with a little practice, at least I've seen them do it . . . the games are set up so [it's a] man's world, where the man is dominant and the woman is kind of just there . . . it's not that she has any importance, and it's hard for a woman to get into that. [Personal interview]

Moreover, there are few female fantasy or science fiction characters with whom a woman can identify while playing:

GAF: Why do you think so few women play these games?
Greg: I think a lot of them maybe have trouble identifying with a female who's a warrior or wizard or that sort of thing. There isn't a whole lot of literature about female warriors. You know, Red Sonja[12] maybe, but that's just a comic book, I've never seen any books on that. Most of them are like Conan[13] or Gandalf[14] or something along those lines. I think maybe it's just a matter of them needing something to identify with. [Personal interview]

Women are not encouraged to become knowledgeable in background areas that facilitate involvement in fantasy gaming, and if they do have these interests the structure of most of the games themselves poses obstacles for females wishing to become involved in playing a character.

3. Interactional opportunities. In addition to having different interests from men, women often are not integrated into male leisure networks. As a result, females with the potential to be interested in these games never learn of them:

GAF: Why do you think that females don't play these games?
Paul: They probably don't know about it . . . 'cause like me, I didn't even know about it until I got to Barry and Jerry [friends].

GAF: Why wouldn't an equal number of women know about it as men?

Paul: Well, probably, you know, some guy started the game and they'll pass it on to their friends and like it will go from there . . . the guys they'll just keep passing it on. [Personal interview]

Women's involvement often comes from dating or marrying a fantasy gamer, rather than through friendship:

> We had one guy's wife [who for] many years didn't play, started to play within the last couple years, really got involved. Maybe it's just they don't get involved. . . . They're not invited to get involved, so they don't get involved. [Personal interview]

Of the eight female players whom I have talked with only two were not the girlfriend or spouse of a male gamer, and all of these women had become interested through their relationship. The team that won the *D & D* tournament at Origins (the large national convention of gamers) was comprised of seven males and two females: the females were each married to a male player. Some females who do play comment that they are given the choice to play or stay home alone. Occasionally women who don't play force their husbands or boyfriends to quit. Thus, gamers assume that when a male gets married he will no longer be active:

> Jack, a married man, mentions to me that being married usually prevents one from being very involved in these games. He mentions one player who was heavily involved in gaming, but he recently married and now doesn't game much. . . . The next week one of the regular gamers attends a few days before his wedding. Jack comments to him jokingly: "You *were* a good guy." [Field notes]

After discussing one woman who played these games without a boyfriend or husband, a male regular comments:

> The other ones that I've noticed have always been either part of the group in general [a preexisting group of friends] or somebody's specific girlfriend. One girl in the Sunday group comes over and she started off as the girlfriend of one fellow. She started coming with him and then somewhere in the middle she switched over to another person in the group, and they are now happily married and have children. [Personal interview]

Thus recruitment of women is different from that of men. Women do not learn of these games from female friends or from male platonic friends, and perhaps, given the greater intensity and exclusiveness of female friendships (Waldrop and Halverson 1975), women may be more likely to leave the gaming group for a love relationship. Recruitment of women is complicated by the fact that female adolescents are less likely to go out in the evenings than are males (Parker 1973:55), thus curtailing opportunities to play.

Attitudes of Males

So far I have focused on the attributes or structural positions of women. An additional possibility is that females are not welcomed, and when allowed to play are treated inequitably. Although males deny this, females recognize their low status, at least when they first join a group:

> JoEllen's tactful explanation is that "too many men feel uncomfortable unless women are very good at it [war gaming]. The group I'm in at home has been very patient with me." [Russell 1978:8]

Gary Gygax noted that a designer recently hired by TSR Hobbies had difficulties adjusting to her gaming group:

> She said, "at first they didn't want me to play" and then they would let her play, they made her play a male character first. Then, after she played a while, she could play whoever she wanted. [Personal interview]

Even when the treatment isn't overtly hostile, comments may lead the female to question whether she is welcome:

GAF: Are [women] accepted by the male players?
Jack: Yeah, they're accepted. They're accepted and they're sort of treated special. I mean people make a little joke about them, or talk to them in kind of a kidding way, and it's quite obviously a reflection of our own societal values. You know, they're making sexual remarks to the girl and teasing her about sex and so on: it's considered standard, no big deal. [Personal interview]

Although some women may find this camaraderie enjoyable and respond in kind, others feel uncomfortable or recognize social or political implications, particularly since the game simulates an oppressive male society. Women are not expected to play, and even regular female players can be made to feel out of place:

> Ken and Nancy walk into the Golden Brigade clubroom. George says to Nancy (whom he doesn't know) with curiosity: "Are you playing?" She responds sarcastically: "Is that funny?" George, perhaps taken aback by her reply to what he doesn't consider an insulting comment, adds: "No, it's just that not many girls play." [Field notes]

In addition, female players, especially those without established relationships in the group, may be treated as sex objects:

> Andy says to Mark: "Denise turns Bruce on. She walked by and the table moved up three inches." [Field notes]

Although those behaviors are not unfriendly, many women might feel uncomfortable in these settings. A "locker room" atmosphere sometimes prevails, and some male players feel that female players might inhibit them:

GAF: Do you have any groups in which females regularly play?
Brian: For a while there we had a couple play. The only problem is I find that I get more slowed or inhibited with them playing. I don't get as carried away as I do. . . . You know, when I'm with friends I tend to get carried away; however, when I'm with new people I don't get carried away too badly. And the same thing with females. There's a lot of things that you do in *C & S*, or *D & D* or even *Traveller* that would embarrass you, if you went out and did it now.
GAF: You mean the way you treat women in the games?
Brian: Well, the way you act in there. Because a lot of people I know go in and pick up a woman and just walk off. . . . Some people get a little carried away and rape other people [in the game]. . . . Well, I've seen a lot of players just kind of calm down because of [females]. [Personal interview]

It is striking that players consider inhibitions that prevent characters from engaging in fantasy rape to be a problem, but such is male informal interaction (see also Fine 1981). Groups vary in the actions permissible within the fantasy context; fantasy rape is not legitimate in every male group.

In theory, female characters can be as powerful as males; in practice they are often treated as chattels. Many games reflect fantasies that assert male sexual potency and fear of impotence. For example, players take their physical constitution score (ranging from 1 to 20 in *C & S*) as being the number of times their characters can have sexual intercourse during a night. The

techniques of meeting women are similar to the most offensive images of the macho spirit: "Brian (the referee) rolls the dice and says to me (my character is in a tavern): 'You grab a barmaid and pull her toward you like any red-blooded American male' " (field notes). This theme of male sexual aggressiveness also appears in discussion of sexual activity:

> Dan and Alvin are talking about having their characters find a barmaid for the night. Alvin comments about his character's sexual prowess: "I'll drown her in my squirt." [Field notes]

And it appears in the mix of sexuality and aggression:

> In a game of *EPT* our party comes across six Avanthe worshipers [female warrior-priestesses, enemies of our party] in their refractory. Their leader (a nonplayer character, played by the referee) places a spell on us, but I remove the spell before it can work. Tom says, laughing loudly: "I will dive over and grab their turdy necks." (He really looks as if he is eager to kill). Tom yells: "I'm screaming at them, 'Stop and be raped, you goddamn women!' " After all six are killed, Tom, still excited, suggests: "Let's get gems and jewels and panties." Later in the game when we meet another group of Avanthe priestess-warriors, Tom comments: "No fucking women in a blue dress [*sic*] are going to scare me. . . I'll fight. They'll all be dead men."
> *Jack*: Men?
> *Roger*: Is that your definition of a woman, a dead man?
> *Tom*: A *dead* man. [Field notes]

While Tom's reactions are extreme, he is never sanctioned by others. Given these examples, it is perhaps not surprising that few females participate in these games. While it is not inevitable that the games will express male sexual fears and fantasies, they are structured so that these expressions are legitimate. Although females were not present when these comments were made, it is not surprising that male players do not invite their female friends to play. Since these sexual remarks are typically accompanied by laughter and joking and generally increase interest in the game, it is expected that if female players were present, men would consider the game less "fun," and possibly make negative attributions to the female player.

The absence of females is not an accident of fate, nor is it something that will likely change rapidly. Because of attributes of females, the structural characteristics of the game, the nature of recruitment into this subsociety, and the needs that the game serves for men, females will not constitute a large percentage of the gaming world in the near future, although as with so much about sex roles in our society, this is not an immutable situation.

Three

Collective Fantasy

Fantasy gaming is a social world, luxurious in imagination and filled with mysterious delights. This is a world of distant keeps, regal castles, glistening starships, fierce hippogriffs, rainbow dragons, and fiery jewels. It is also a world of dank dungeons, villainous necromancers, green slime, and omnipresent death. It is a world of dreams and nightmares; yet unlike these constructions of our sleeping mind, these worlds are not experienced in a state of reverie or unconsciousness. These worlds are experienced collectively—they are shared fantasies. This shared component raises issues not present in private fantasies, and it is this social element I will analyze in this chapter.

The structure of the game focuses on one individual—the referee—whom players expect to create a scenario for their characters to react to and to build upon. The construction of a game fantasy is grounded in decisions made by the referee, and it is his role I shall examine first.

The Referee and the Game World

The referee is in theory omnipotent. The "world" is, after all, his creation—he is "God" in that he creates the world in which his players must survive (Johnston 1980); he maintains ultimate interpretive authority. For this reason players refer to the referee as God:[1]

> If the players give you [the referee] any flack, just say, "Lookit here, buddy (or buddess), I play the gods in this

> game. You gonna argue with the gods? We'll strike you down! We don't have to take none of this." [Thompson 1978:13]

> Ralph comments seriously to George, who is refereeing: "You're the god in this game." [Field notes]

Others describe the referee as a storyteller or playwright. Each of these metaphors recognizes the position of the referee in structuring the action of the game. He chooses how the game will be constructed, both in terms of the setting and the scenario. In theory he is the dreamer; he is in control.

Settings

As a first step to creating fantasy the referee must choose a *setting* for his world and the history that produced the setting; this is particularly necessary for *Dungeons & Dragons*, which is adaptable to any period, and for *Traveller*, which is congruent with many science fiction environments. Even in *Chivalry & Sorcery* and *Empire of the Petal Throne*, in which the general setting is described in the rules, the referee has considerable discretion in the creation of the specific environment. For example, although *Chivalry & Sorcery* is supposedly set in the France of 1170, few referees use the geography and politics of France of the period as the basis of their world; rather, they spend considerable time mapping their own world and designing its politics. Maps and societal plans are often complex. Many gamers keep large loose-leaf notebooks filled with information about their worlds and dungeons; one Boston-area referee reportedly created a dungeon with 110 levels.

On a less complex level the structure of a world may be borrowed directly from fantasy literature (*The Lord of the Rings*, *Conan*, *Space Viking*) or from actual history and geography, but some world settings are more imaginative:

> Using the *Chivalry & Sorcery* rules, I created a world that included as wide a variety of peoples that I could. So I basically designed myself a map of a continent, a hypothetical continent . . . I put in the mountains, the woods, and I designated places where the "evil" creatures are, and [where] the "good" creatures are. . . . And then I dispersed the various types of human cultures or subcultures that they use in the rules, including Vikings, Mongols, and Celtics or

> Celts. And there are places where you could find Welsh and Irishmen. Viking raiders come out. And I included, basically because I like their society, the Spanish, as, you know, a big power, because they got a nice society. . . .

GAF: A church system?

> Yeah, the church system mostly, and they're easier to do than Italy, because Italy was so fragmented at the time. And I included, you know, your military-type power like Prussia . . . that is, a place like that, and a couple of smaller nations that have their own importance or relative importance, and I included your nomad types and Mongols, trying to push everybody off into the seas. . . . I had the biggest seaport there was under Spanish control, because Spain was a big maritime country. I put in a little Germanic type, and I put in a couple little elven areas. I also included a couple of different types of Mongolians, a Khitan Lao, which I like basically because they're troops. They've got fairly interesting troops, but they were, you know, a very small population. So I stuck them off in their own little corner, they took over, or they have control of a larger valley and . . . that's the entire extent to their country. And then the various other little satellite countries that you put in just to make things interesting for people to wander through. . . . It took me about a week to draw up the map and that was just, you know, one map. I had spent, you know, a couple of months deciding various maps that I just scrapped and I didn't really like. They just didn't quite fit. And so after that and after reading through the rules carefully, which took me about . . . three weeks, a month to do all this. [Personal interview]

While this is a complicated world, it is not unusually complicated. Another referee designed his game setting for *D & D* to represent Canada in the year A.D. 5550, complete with its own history:

> Toward the beginning of the twenty-first century population pressure starts to build up, and food supply is very weak. So there are several riots, rebellions. The end result is the chancellors of West Germany and Italy are killed and the pope is so afraid of what's going on that he has the throne moved to Montreal, because the western hemisphere is one of the few safe places left. Well, anyway, natural resources start to be depleted, and there are all

> types of problems going on with keeping up the countries. So nuclear energy is very heavily relied on. But in the race to get nuclear energy, the United States has not built very safe reactors. So there are a few explosions, and it effectively cuts Minnesota and Canada off from the rest of the country. Canada is then faced with a food shortage, increasing fallout mutations and so on and basically what happens is just that the people revolt. The government is thrown down, and the people go back to savagery. [Personal interview]

A third example is from the science fiction game *Traveller*. Here there are three intergalactic empires: the lawful Corvus empire, the warlike Reyech empire, and the largely unknown Muscuv empire. The Corvus empire and the Reyech empire are in the center of this system, and the two empires have been bitter enemies for some time. Players recognize that this setting parallels European history. Reyech (R-eye-ch) was a futuristic transformation of Nazi Germany; while Corvus represented the British empire, and Muscuv, of course, the Soviets. The details in the game supported this interpretation, later confirmed by the referee.

In each of these settings the same process operates. Referees systematically transform historical or current events to produce the fantastic world, extrapolating from contemporary social problems, politics, and human nature. These fantasies do not emerge spontaneously, but are culturally conditioned, although sophistication in setting construction produces a world unrecognizable to an outsider. As Hebb (1974) has suggested, creativity does not emerge *ex nihilo*, but is the novel combination of previous familiar elements. One game designer has stated this interrelationship explicitly:

> As Tolkien and many other commentators . . . have noted, *all fantasy is founded upon our perception of reality*. The trick is not to let the fantasy be entirely bounded and controlled by hard reality, merely informed and guided by it. [Simbalist 1979b:23; italics in original]

This is what these three creative young men have achieved in the construction of their imaginative worlds. While each component is recognizable, the whole is unique. These fantasy worlds are socially determined, but they are also aesthetic innovations.[2]

Yet if the setting was all that was being created, our interest in the social components of fantasy would be misplaced. These are not only fantasy settings, but are *worlds* in which the game action takes place. The creation of the broad outlines of a fantastic setting is not sufficient to set the stage for a game.

In addition to creating the setting, the referee must establish a world view that directs the game action and represents the implicit philosophy or ideals by which the world operates. The referee in the construction of his social structure must incorporate a set of "folk ideas" (Dundes 1971), which are the integral components of the referee's world view (and of the "world view" that the players must adopt if they are to survive). These folk ideas have been defined by Dundes (1971:95) as "traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world." "Folk ideas" and "world views" (Jones 1972) (and various terminological alternatives—"ethos" [Geertz 1957]; "themes" [Opler 1945]) capture the "essence" of a society—its core beliefs or central values.

Unlike the setting, these "folk ideas" are typically not consciously created by the referee. Rather, the American folk ideas to which these individuals have been socialized are expressed in these fantasy worlds. As Burns (1978) has recognized, commercial games express the themes of a culture, and this argument can, in the case of fantasy role-play games, be extended not only to the formal game itself, but to the way in which the referee constructs his world. To indicate how these themes influence the construction of the game world, I will consider four folk ideas. Since these ideas typically are implicit in the game design and are common to many referees, I shall not discuss them in terms of the specific forms they take in each scenario, but as collective "folk ideas" held by game participants. These are: (1) the image of unlimited good, (2) the sharply defined oppositional nature of the world, (3) the distinguishing of sexuality and evil, and (4) the Puritan Ethic and the nonrandom nature of luck.

1. The principle of unlimited good in American culture (Dundes 1971:96–97) has been contrasted to the prevalent attitude in other societies, such as Mexico's, where one person's success implies someone else's failure (Foster 1965). The structure of dungeons and fantasy worlds reflects the American image of a potentially unlimited supply of treasure. Some referees even "restock" their dungeons when players have found a particular

treasure so that the next time someone enters that room (and kills the dragon or other beasties guarding it)[3] they, too, will be rewarded. Other referees, while not replenishing their dungeons, create additional dungeon levels so that new rewards are possible. I never discovered a dungeon so thoroughly looted that players could not be successful if their mettle held. Further, finding these rewards did not mean that others would suffer misfortune or would have fewer advantages as a result. Because the rationale for the existence of the treasure is frequently left undefined, an unlimited supply of "good" is possible, and this maintains players' interest in the game.

2. Most worlds are conceptualized as battlegrounds between good and evil with no middle ground. Although neutral characters and settings exist, these are to be *used* by the forces of good or evil to achieve their ends. This oppositional aspect of the world is endemic to the game structure. For example, TSR Hobbies claims:

> *D & D* . . . furnishes a world in which everything is categoriezed and labeled; there is no mistaking good and evil. . . . [TSR Hobbies 1979:1–2]

This view, however, is not a necessary part of the game since ambiguity is structurally *possible* within a referee's world, but this ambiguity rarely occurs. Since players can select (or roll up) evil characters, "good" does not always emerge victorious, but the oppositional structure always exists. Contributing to this dichotomy in the game between alignment types is the fact that characters typically know each other's alignments, and referees often express the alignment of nonplayer characters through stereotyped facial features or symbolic colors.

3. Evil can be described as any action outside of the moral boundaries of a society. Since moral action tends to be rather tightly constrained, this, in theory, leaves a wide latitude for evil. Yet, in these games, as is true generally of Western literary tradition, evil is reflected in greed and hunger for power, and not in other forms of degradation. Barker, the creator of a non-Western fantasy world, comments about the nature of evil in Tolkien (and by implication in fantasy gaming):

> Tolkien had a world which is particularly English. When you open those pages and the cute little hobbits and their little houses and the creatures and so forth, the evil in

> Tolkien is particularly English . . . it's not really sort of depraved kind of evil that . . . one senses in other cultures that are non-Western cultures, where things really seem pretty "icky" to a person with European values. It's sort of English-style medieval evil. You have white knights and black knights. And then you have knights who run off with princesses and knights who rescue princesses . . . and they don't do anything particularly hideous to the princesses apparently; they lock them up in a tower. And the white knight comes along and rescues them. [Personal interview]

A gentlemanly evil is reflected in these games—a wholesome evil, in which murder, rather than debasement or mutilation, is the primary weapon of evil.[4] The fantasy worlds reflect this attitude toward evil, in that monsters unintentionally behave evilly because it is in their "genetic" makeup, and in that worldly forces compete for control, power, and wealth.

4. Although the events in role-playing games are based on chance (the roll of the dice), this structure masks the thematic importance of courage as a folk idea. The notion is that success comes to him who is prepared for it, is willing to work for it, and that "no guts, no glory." Referees construct their world in line with this theme, and there is a positive correlation between the danger in a setting and its payoff in treasure. In most dungeons each level downward increases in danger and in treasure, although why this is the case in terms of the legendary rationale of the game is usually not explicit. This is an attempt to put potential rewards and costs in balance, to provide a situation of equity—part of our belief in a just world (see Lerner and Simmons 1966; Rubin and Peplau 1973). Thus in one game a holy sword was found embedded in rock guarded by an evil necromancer, a wyvern,[5] and a balrog.[6] Although chance is not entirely eliminated from the game structure, the decisions of the player-characters are more important. Thus luck is deemphasized; effort and courage are seen as more important criteria for success.

Scenarios

Up to this point I have focused on the setting or world in which the characters must perform. However, the referee must also propose motivations for the characters. He must create a scenario—that is, a set of forces in the setting that provides motivation for the characters (Lortz 1979b). These scenarios can

range from very simple ones, such as the existence of a dungeon filled with monsters and treasures, to more complex issues, such as mysterious blight that has affected local vineyards. These scenarios may be directly borrowed from works of fantasy and science fiction or they may be products of the referee's imagination, influenced by fantasy and science fiction traditions.

Fantasy scenarios, like the worlds in which they occur, are grounded in shared "folk ideas" about the nature of the universe and of motivation. For example, the world is seen as a hostile plane on which good and evil compete; scenarios typically use this feature to direct the actions that players should take. In one scenario our party learns that the beautiful princess of a large kingdom has been kidnapped by an evil duke. Our party, because of our reputation as superior fighting elves, was asked to rescue her from the evil duke and the even more evil and more dangerous necromancer who manipulated the duke. Another scenario was based upon the struggle of a party to stay alive while being hunted by their captors for sport:

> [The referee] took a Marion Zimmer Bradley novel or something, and made that into a ground encounter, and that was probably the most enjoyable *Traveller* that I ever played, although everyone was killed in the end. . . . It was where we were on an island. We were captured, and sold into slavery, and these people would hunt their slaves. They were called hunters. We would be on an island, and if we survived twenty-one days, they would give us a ship and all the gold that we wanted. [Personal interview]

Some scenarios provide the players with a motivation but while they have leeway in their reactions to the situation, the basic structure is set by the referee.

Referees differ in the importance they give to scenarios. Some referees merely create the setting—the "world" or "universe"—and then sit back and wait for the players in the game to decide what they wish to achieve. While not having a scenario supposedly gives the players more freedom, it also makes the game less organized and often causes disagreements among players about lines of action. Players distinguish between "scenarios" and "worlds" (which do not have a goal). Since players can ignore or alter the scenario set for them (through the actions of their characters) they can shape the referee's decision of

whether to provide a scenario or just a world. Most successful are mixtures between worlds and scenarios. A referee should not construct too complete a scenario—one that gives the players their total motivation and eliminates individual action:

> The question is how much of a good scenario can you plan in advance, and how much has to happen along the way. And it seems to me that it would be very difficult to plan. . . . A game is made out of a long-term theme or quest, and it's possible to plan that in advance, but the real nitty gritty of the game, the building blocks of the game are the adventures along the way, and it seems to me it would be impossible to plan real adventures and then make them seem to the group that they really were interesting and alive. I think the secret is just for a referee, is make the game have as many possibilities as possible and be as free as possible, and just move it along, and fill it with what the player wants and what comes naturally. [Personal interview]

This comment reveals an important aspect of refereeing—the joint construction of a game by the players and the referee. Both develop lines of action within the game framework. Although the referee is supposed to be in charge of the game, in fact he can only create a meaningful fantasy world with the support of the players. They make decisions within the context of the game, and thus the fantasy is a dynamic social system. While the referee may suggest a scenario for players' characters, the players give this scenario meaning through their actions. The unsatisfactory game is one in which either the referee has too tightly constrained the actions of the players, so that they are forced to play out his own personal fantasy, or one in which the scenario "gets out of control" and players go in directions that the referee is unprepared for and unable to deal with.

Realism and Logic

In order to understand the process by which players and the referee jointly construct game events, one must examine two critical dimensions of the referee's fantasy world: realism and logic. Both are somewhat paradoxical for the social construction of fantasy, since fantasy is said to be neither realistic nor logical. However, because a referee's fantasy is shared by others and manipulated by them, a common frame of reference is necessary.

Realism. A frequent debate among gamers is the proper amount of realism desirable within a fantasy role-playing game—an issue particularly in medieval games.[7] Every game has a setting, and this setting can be relatively accurate historically or true to a particular mythos or, alternatively, it can be as eclectic as a referee and his players desire. Gary Gygax, one of the creators of *Dungeons & Dragons*, criticizes referees who attempt to make the game too "realistic":

> Realism in a fantasy game is, in my way of thinking, ludicrous. Here are people who are doing things in a typical dungeon . . . that a marathon runner wouldn't be able to do. Run up five hundred steps carrying eighty pounds of armor after fighting for three hours . . . just the physical strain on the body, even for a really superior individual who was familiar with hard conditions and early training . . . there's no magic; one of these spells or any of this magic is all garbage and baloney. [Personal interview]

Other referees revel in what they perceive as "realism":

GAF: The question is to what extent should *Chivalry & Sorcery* be based on 1170 France?

Jack: The answer to that would be that for me the more realistic the better. I would like it to be based on medieval France; I'd even like the names of the people . . . the time we played ancient Egyptians against the Syrians [in ancients miniatures] and I wrote out the battle orders for my Egyptian army in hieroglyphics, and handed them to the referee, who was not amused. I think it's fun; it's part of the gig. [Personal interview]

In a sense the difference is only in degree. "Actual" realism is an impossible goal; as with nostalgia (Davis 1979), what is involved is a specially constructed history—a history designed to capture the adventure and romance of the period,not its blistering poverty, intolerance, and plagues (e.g., Tuchman 1979; McCall 1979; Ladurie 1979). The realism is an *illusion of realism*. Ed Simbalist one of the designers of *Chivalry & Sorcery*, argues that the realism of the game is in the minds of the participants (Simbalist, 1979:23). The crucial issue is to create a world that players can accept *as a world*, and which they can become engrossed in. One gamer remarks:

> Well, the way I see it, what's important isn't actually that the details are realistic, but rather that like the emotions and feelings and the things that you run across are realistic. . . . It's possible to have a novel that takes place with [a] different universe, but it feels like you can sympathize with it. [Personal interview]

This recognition of the validity of fictional reality allows the referee to disengage himself from history books. While there are referees who are concerned with insuring that the amount of gold in circulation is not excessive and that the plate armor weighs as much as it did in the Middle Ages, this historicity is not essential. Further, referees do not simulate (except as a joke) food preferences, language, or church services, although each of these can be built into a game. Referees use an illusion of the essence of medieval realism, perhaps based on Tolkien or on the Knights of the Round Table or on the *C & S* rulebook, and then add those elements they feel are appropriate.

Despite the flexibility of depictions of realism, the referee must be sensitive to his players' images of the Middle Ages, and the extent to which they wish their historical beliefs to be simulated. For example, one referee who introduced flintlocks into his medieval world was criticized for destroying the "realism" of the game. One player who is more oriented to "realism" than many, expressed his distaste for such historical flexibility:

> I came down [to the Golden Brigade] tonight expecting, you know, maybe there's something reasonable going on. And I saw a travesty, some of the things that went on. I was shocked! I take a look and I see that Brian is reffing *C & S*, and he's added pistols. . . . For about half an hour after I got there, I simply felt like I wanted to leave. I was . . . oosh. This isn't the game. That sort of thing disgusts me! You can't have pistols in a *C & S* campaign. [Field notes]

According to this view, Brian's game was outside of the limits of historical realism, although strictly speaking the games run by this critic were not "historically realistic" either. The "realism" of a fantasy game is determined by the referee and can be negotiated by the players. Within a game setting, some aspects are effective simulations of medieval Europe, and other aspects are a blend of traditional fantasy and contemporary humor. If

properly integrated in a world, both can coexist in the context of a well-run scenario.

Logic. Related to the issue of realism is game logic. How logical or consistent should a fantasy game be? Private fantasy is instructive, for in its most private form, the dream, conventional logic is not expected (although psychic logic—dream work—may be present). However, fantasy gaming assumes a shared universe of discourse, which presumes that the referee and his players can communicate about their expectations of the game action.

As with realism, absolute logic is not necessary; what is required is consistency and the belief that the game is logical:

> The way I see it, the game has to feel as though it's easy and natural to the players. . . . For example there have been . . . several cases where a person is killed with seemingly no reason; something is blown up all of a sudden. A person feels very, very frustrated like he's floating along—all of a sudden he just disappears. . . . I think the game should feel natural, but whether it should be logical, if you mean following some preconceived rules, I'm not so sure about that. But the characters have to feel that they're being dealt with fairly. [Personal interview]

This is reflected in another player's concept of "true falsehood":

> I feel you have to follow the laws of true falsehood. While the logic of the world may not be the same as the one we live in, where, yes, magic may work, but you cannot be illogical . . . if you're not going to keep the same laws as this universe, then what set of laws are going to be used? . . . You have to have a consistency. [Personal interview]

Central is the belief in logic by players and referees. The referee needs a logic to feel that he has indeed created a world (with its own form of natural law), and players require this logic, both to incorporate their game selves into the fantasy world—that is, "feel" what the world is like—and also to construct lines of action for their characters with a reasonable presumption of what will happen as a result. Game logic primarily involves a sense of causal consistency—a perceived connection between cause and effect—coupled with the "folk ideas" of the world.

Logic can be understood as realism that ignores historic validity. The logic of a society is built into the meanings that

events and objects have. Consider a fantasy role-play game based on contemporary American society. Realism in such a game implies a game logic. The existence of "automobiles" in the game, and players' (and characters') knowledge of how to use these large metallic objects, means that the game permits the operation of these machines. If players were unfamiliar with these objects, they would have to acquire knowledge of automobiles in the course of the game—the *logic* of this piece of machinery. Similarly, if players believe they are familiar with an object, but it worked in a consistent, yet unexpected fashion, the game would lack realism but would be logical. An automobile that operated differently each time would be a frustrating challenge for players and an indication of an illogical game.

Neither realism nor logic is an absolute that characterizes *games*; rather both are subjective feelings that characterize gamers' perspectives on particular fantasy worlds. They are connected to the referee's depiction of his world, but they are not the same thing as those depictions.

The Social Construction of Fantasy

Although the referee creates a world and at the beginning of the game describes the basic scenario that motivates characters, the direction of the game results from players acting through their characters. In theory a referee is supposed to be "disinterested" concerning what happens to the groups he is running (Gygax 1977:5); he creates his world, and then he waits for players to be trapped or find treasures; kill monsters or be killed by them—all of which are located by mapping prior to the game or by dice rolls during the game. Formally, the referee is present to administer the incompletely understood "world" to the party (Game Designers Workshop 1977b:4), provide a description of the world, and then decide fairly and impartially what happens when game rules do not cover a particular situation. Indeed, in reading game rulebooks, one presumes that the referee has a small role after the game begins—primarily to settle rule disputes. This, however, does not reflect the game reality, as the referee is continually involved in shaping the game action.

Both players and the referee attempt to shape the scenario to their ends (here I shall treat the players as a unit—assuming they have identical goals—a point to be considered in greater detail in

chapter 5). Each wishes to shape the fantasy, but in doing this each needs the cooperation of the other, so negotiation occurs throughout the game. The players wish to have an imaginative fantasy experience, survive in the game, collect material rewards, have fun in killing monsters, and gain experience points so that their characters can advance to a higher level (and be more powerful).[8] Referees also wish to create an imaginative fantasy experience, but they have other goals that players don't share, some of which conflict with the desires of players. Referees do not want to give out too many treasures, powerful weapons, or allow players to have overly powerful characters, because all of these influence the relative balance in the game between the nonplayer characters that the referee has created and the player characters. Because of these different goals, players and referees see themselves in conflict and, although this opposition is frequently stated jocularly, it stems from different perspectives:

Jerry: In one of the games I was reffing against Paul. Not against, I'm sorry, you don't ref against people. I'm sorry. I meant with.
GAF: It's an interesting statement.
Jerry: Yeah. It is. Maybe it's a Freudian slip. [Personal interview]

Our party enters a dungeon room, in which we find a large amount of dust in the four corners of the room.
Ralph: Is it radioactive?
Maury: [the referee] Would I do something like that?
Roger: I expect anything from a ref.
Ralph: Especially Maury. [Field notes]

> [Advice to referees on when to grant wishes:] For the most sadistic of our fold [referees] don't worry! This doesn't mean you can't kill them [player-characters] any more, just that you'll have to have a logical reason for doing it. [Thompson 1978:12]

These examples are consistent with the ritualized behavior of the referee in smiling, grinning, or expressing delight upon learning the players will meet a powerful monster. However, despite this

rhetoric, referees do alter the action in the game in ways that support the players.

This perspective, sometimes expressed in mock rivalry between the referee and his players, does not imply that there is continuing hostility; rather, players and referees deal with each other to produce a satisfactory experience. Given the structural preeminence of the referee and the perceived conflict between players and referee, how do players exert power over the referee and shape the fantasy world in which their characters must act? Similarly, how do referees control the desires of their players in light of the intense engrossment players have in the game? In the rest of this chapter I shall focus on three techniques by which players and referees try to affect the game structure and influence the content of fantasy in the game: (1) decision-making, (2) controlling chance, and (3) interpersonal social control.

Decision-making

Game content is generated from a series of decisions by players about how their characters will respond to the fantasy environment. Referees also must make decisions in structuring game events to insure that action progresses with appropriate speed, dramatic balance, and tension so that all participants enjoy themselves.

Players

Game content is generated from a series of decisions by players about how their characters will respond to the fantasy environment. Although the referee proposes a scenario, the way the scenario evolves results from players' actions. These decisions may be a result of lengthy debate and considerable thought, or may be immediate, a consequence of the need for quick action:

> Maury (the referee) has told us only that we are to explore uncharted land, and that there are rumors of treasure-laden dungeons. But he does not indicate where these might be. Don, the most experienced player in the party, suggests that we should explore off the King's Road. He sticks his pencil on a distant area of the map (seemingly without a specific rationale), and says, "Let's head here," and the rest of us agree. [Field notes]

Gaming groups have different orientations to fantasy—some players seek mayhem and violence, while others enjoy puzzle-solving or a quasi-sociological investigation of an alien society. However, often the actions of players simply involve the need for *some* action in a game that has become stagnant:

> Doug's character in his home city accompanies a seriously ill nonplayer character to the palace to be examined by a physician. As they are walking through the town, they meet two members of a female military legion which is hostile to them. Doug says spontaneously to Jack, the referee, "I without warning give her [the legion leader] a blow." Jack responds, "You kill her dead." and says that the other one runs away. [Field notes]

In terms of the game structure Doug's character had no reason for acting so dramatically since the legion members had not attacked or threatened him. However, this action was consistent with the logical structure of the game, since ill-will existed between Doug's character's group and these female warriors. When this occurred we had been playing for over three hours. This was the first violent action in the game and appeared to be as much a consequence of Doug's personal frustration as the logical unfolding of a story.

Similarly, in a *C & S* adventure:

> Ken, playing a female character, decides he (she) will start a fight in the local tavern to add excitement to the game. The rest of us support Ken's idea since the game had become rather boring. As we plan to instigate the fight (actually out of character for our group), Ken comments, "This is really gonna get fun." Ken, as his female character, comments that she will be acting coquettish. Don, the referee, rolls to determine what the reactions of the others in the bar is to this behavior. Finally he says that one of the king's guards attempts to make a pass at Ken's character, asking her to sit down with him and five other guards. She says, "You'll have to ask him," referring to Brian's character, the leader of our party. Brian says that his character looks at the guard, who has an average personal appearance, and begins to laugh (laughing as his character might). The guard, according to Don, "seeing" this, takes off his chain glove and hits Brian's character in the face with it,

> challenging him to a duel the following morning. [Field notes]

Players, by consciously manipulating their actions, can significantly affect the structure of the game. The scenario in this game had been focused on a quest by another character in the party, but this was not generating sufficient interest and players wished to change the scenario to one that involved action more directly. In this short period (no more than fifteen minutes), the referee and the players negotiated the direction of the game. The referee, through his control of nonplayer characters, accepts the decisions of the party, but shapes them in directions that he believes are profitable, and constructs a good "story" which he can control.

Referee

Although the referee is not omnipotent, he does exert considerable influence over the development of the fantasy. Often this shaping is a consequence of his desire to create an aesthetically pleasing and enjoyable scenario for the players. One referee commented to me that he "sculpts" the scenario to the interests of his players. He notes that some players like intrigues (puzzle-solving), while others prefer fighting, and he attempts to oblige both types. As Gygax comments:

> Not to be pretentious, but the rules for *D & D* are like Aristotle's *Poetics*, if you will. They tell me how to put together a good play. And a [referee] is the playwright who reads these things and puts his play together. [Personal interview]

While creating this fantasy, the referee influences the scenario by emphasizing those aspects of the game that he finds personally appealing—military tactics, political considerations, intergroup relations, or interpersonal behavior. Thus, when Don refereed, occupation was important, and there were encounters in which one's occupational expertise was central to game action; in one game the phobias of each character frequently affected game events, because this interested the referee. The best referees attempt to maintain dramatic balance in the game, incorporating humorous, trivial episodes (such as an encounter with a practical joker demon,[9] or with a gigantic chocolate pudding[10] "with whipped cream and a cherry") with others that are

more serious. Ed Simbalist, a designer of *C & S*, recognizes the importance of an involving plot:

> A story has to be going some place. There is a structure known as the plot. Characters have a role to play in the unfolding of that plot. As a [referee] I have certain goals in mind for some characters and others (for the moment) may appear to me to be less necessary for the continuing story I and my players evolve from moment to moment and week to week. But sooner or later even their roles will become clear to me. . . . [Simbalist 1979c:4]

In discussing the player's position, I noted that they have the power to direct the scenario. While the referee has some discretion to prevent this (for example, if players are spoiling for a fight, he can ensure that they do not find anyone to battle), often he will accede to their requests, letting the adventures stray from his plans. Referees are supposed to use their discretion in such situations, deviating from the formal rules:

> If you can't find the certain person you need from the pool you've rolled up, Fake it! Just supply the needed attributes you want for those particular non-players. You certainly have license as [referee] to literally create the right man for the job. [Watson 1977:7]

In addition to influencing the game events though action taken in the game frame, referees must also incorporate things external to the game environment—e.g., the addition of new players, the absence of regular players, or the desire of the gaming group to end a scenario:

> I have just entered an *EPT* gaming group which has been continuing for some time and I roll up as my character a priest of the Temple of Vimuhla, the temple to which most other players belong. However, I have no place in the game social structure. I ask the referee to be allowed to speak to the high priest of my order, which is arranged. This high priest (a nonplayer character enacted by the referee) tells my character that he will see if he can arrange for him to have a position at the palace (where the other players are located). The high priest takes my character to the lord of the city (a player character) and his wife (a nonplayer character), and asks if "this young adept" can have a place at the palace. The lord's wife (also enacted by the

> referee) responds that they are sure they can find me a place in learning the rituals of the Vimuhla sanctuary. Thus my character is quickly incorporated into the structure of the game through the intervention of the referee in conducting a conversation between two personae, played by him. [Field notes]

> Tom is not present and his character, a fifth-level priest, cannot be incorporated in the game. Jack (the referee) comments, "Tom [Tom's character] is back in his chamber." [Field notes]

> Our *C & S* party has been heading for a set of ruins for several hours (real time). Finally about 1:00 A.M. (real time), players are getting tired and one says that he is ready to leave. Brian, the referee, says in an attempt to bring closure to the game, "OK, you go directly to the ruins. You see lying on the ground a large gold ring studded with jewels." Each member of the party says that he is running to pick up this valuable treasure. We roll dice to determine who reaches the ring first. Andy does, and Brian says that when he touches it he gets a sharp electric shock. It turns out that the ring is an illusion perpetrated by a will-o'-wisp.[11] We quickly defeat the will-o'-wisp and the game ends for the evening. [Field notes]

These examples suggest that the shaping of game events is not solely a function of the internal action of the game, but reveals the referee's sensitivity to the constraints that tie him and his players to the "real world." Although this is fantasy, it is a fantasy negotiated through the lens of pragmatic considerations.

Controlling Chance

In fantasy games, as in life itself, events have unpredictable outcomes. When describing "real life," we can cite determining features of an environment that produce events, with a multitude of such explanatory variables possible. In fantasy gaming this does not apply, since background forces do not exist in the imagination. Dice are rolled to determine outcomes. Characters who battle monsters or human enemies must roll dice and, depending upon the rules for battle (or the referee's judgment), may hit their opponent, inflicting damage points. In turn, the

opponent can attack the character, and, if successful, inflict damage points himself. Thus game outcomes (particularly those that are life-threatening) are supposed to be random, with the criteria for hitting and damage dependent upon such things as the strength of the attacker, the type of weapon used, and the experience the attacker has with that weapon. This procedure, though a reasonable simulation of natural events, poses problems, since it can shift the game in directions in which the players and the referee find undesirable. For example, a party of adventurers may be burnt to a crisp by a particularly fiery dragon. Both players and referee act so as to decrease the significance of chance. Because of the different positions of players and referees in the game, these techniques are dissimilar.

Players

Decision-making involves the player's influencing game events from his character's position within the game structure. It is his role as a character that influences the social construction of fantasy. Controlling chance, however, involves actions taken by players outside of their role as characters, although these actions are treated as if they were grounded in game events.

It is not the chancy roll of the dice per se that players most object to. Rather, it is the location of this chance in the game. Rolls are particularly objectionable at critical junctures in the game when they may result in severe negative outcomes. For nonessential events, players sometimes roll the dice even when they clearly have the right to speak for their characters, for example, how much alcohol a player will consume or what to say to an attractive female character.[12] However, this overplaying of the chance factors is rare and it is far more common for players to deny the implications of chance through folk beliefs and through cheating.

Folk beliefs about control over dice. One way that players reduce the feeling that the game is based on uncontrollable forces is through believing that the rolls of dice are not actually random. These beliefs focus on features of the dice that cause them to roll well or poorly and on the individual player—some players are considered (and consider themselves) imbued with luck, while others are considered unlucky. Obviously there is considerable importance attached to dice rolls and, since the dice reflect the

laws of probability, a high degree of uncertainty results. In situations characterized by uncertainty and importance, one expects there will be attempts to reduce the uncertainty. This is the basis of Allport and Postman's (1947) law of rumor—that the intensity of rumor is a multiplicative function of ambiguity and importance—and the basis of Malinowski's (1954) theory that magic is the result of salience and uncertainty. Studies of baseball players (Gmelch 1971) and craps players (Heslin 1967) indicate that contemporary ritual is also connected to these two factors.

The beliefs of game players are akin to belief in magic. The centrality of the dice in determining the success of characters in the game generates these beliefs:

> Dice are so important to a role-playing game. Just about everything gets controlled around the dice. So you tend to start hoping and you look for a set of dice that'll roll things that you want them to roll and set those aside. Maybe we're all crazy, I don't know. [Personal interview].

These beliefs have two focuses: the differences among dice and the differences among players.

Dice Beliefs

As judged by their actions, most players believe that some dice are lucky, or that some dice will roll higher numbers than others. This belief, however, is difficult for many players to accept because it has no clear physical explanation. Players recognize that this is a "superstitious" belief; yet, because they need to control the uncertainty, they do believe, at least within the context of the game. This and similar beliefs, are "engrossment beliefs," legitimate within the involvement context of the game but held only dubiously otherwise.[13]

Players present fairly unconvincing reasons why some dice may be better than others. Dice may be "loaded" or made in such a fashion that they are unbalanced. I have never heard a player seriously accused of using "loaded dice." Although the charge of "loaded dice" was never seriously made, it was often brought up jocularly:

> Dennis has been rolling for our party for whether we surprise the parties we encounter. In order to be successful one needed to get a low number on a six-sided die. Dennis

has rolled four "ones" in a row. He says, jokingly, of his dice, "These dice are loaded." [Field notes]

Whenever dice rolls *appear* to go against the laws of chance, the claim of loaded dice may be used. While the rhetoric does not mean that the speaker believes the dice are *actually* loaded, such talk indicates that for the players, randomness consists of a *mix* of high and low numbers. Yet players recognize that chance does not always operate in this way, and charges of dice fixing are seen as improper. The only case of an actual accusation against someone carrying loaded dice was told as a cautionary tale against making similar accusations:

> [Tom] got in trouble down at the shop [a local hobby center] because he was rolling such high dice that [the owner] once accused him of fixing the dice. And [Tom] said, "But they're your dice! They're the shop's dice!" [Personal interview].

Poorly made dice are sometimes given as the explanation for good or poor dice, but, like the charge of "loaded dice," this seems to be a *post hoc* explanation for a string of successes or failures. I never witnessed a player demonstrate that the manufacture of a die affected the numbers that it rolled, although that would have been relatively easy to prove.

The most common "belief" about dice rolls, and the only one that is not used as *post hoc* rationalization, concerns a vague special power of the dice, often tied to its color. Players are superstitious about their dice, and many players bring dozens of dice so if one die becomes "unlucky" it can be discarded. These dice provide security for players:

GAF: Why do you think other people believe in lucky dice?
Brian: Well, they're superstitious. . . . They don't assume that it's just luck or maybe they just control it themselves, but it's just the dice. The dice are friendly with them. . . . It's like Linus and his blanket. [Personal interview]

Players are reluctant to use others' dice and sometimes won't let others use ("contaminate") their dice (see Henslin 1967:324). These dice are the gamers' weapons, as is evident in the statement by a gamer, who having forgotten his dice at home, remarked, "I came unarmed."

Players ascribe qualities of luckiness to dice, particularly in the case of unlucky dice. Negative events are typically more salient than positive (Kelley 1967), although this is not inevitable:

> Ted had rolled a character the previous week in a *Traveller* game that wasn't interesting or powerful, and he was dissatisfied with it. Ted learned that Howard, the referee that evening, had just rolled up a powerful nonplayer character in the mobile infantry. Ted repeatedly asked Howard if he could exchange his character for the one Howard rolled up. Finally Howard said, "If you roll double sixes, you can have him." Ted, to everyone's surprise, rolled double sixes. Ted then insisted that those dice were particularly lucky, but after a short period of time the dice stopped rolling well, and the matter was dropped. [Field notes]

> George (the referee) is rolling to confirm whether Jerry's character still has acrophobia. George says that Jerry needs a 40 or less using two percentile dice to be rid of this phobia. George, however, has only one die, and so rolls it twice. Jerry immediately objects to George's rolling the die this way, so George finds another die and rolls two simultaneously, but Jerry still gets above a forty:

Jerry: Don't screw me out of it.
George: I'm not going to screw you out of it.
Jerry: Indeed? For one thing you've been rolling shit dice for me.
George: What can I do?
Jerry: Really shit dice. [Field notes]

The belief in the efficacy of dice is so ingrained that players deliberately change dice when the dice are not performing well, in the belief that there are luckier dice:

> Ted comments about a set of my dice he had gotten some poor rolls with: "I don't like them," and he refuses to use these dice for the rest of the evening. (Field notes)

> George begins to roll up a character, but after a few poor rolls he says to the group, "I don't like these dice. I'm gonna start the whole thing over." He selects new dice and rolls his character over. No one in the group objects. [Field notes]

One wonders how a player "knows" that dice are good dice or poor dice, particularly since records are not kept of the dice rolls. What is the process of labeling or attribution that leads to superstition? As Kelley (1967) and other attribution theorists have noted, individuals are particularly likely to make disposition attributions in instances in which behavior is consistent across time and modality, or is especially notable. Both of these factors operate in the labeling of dice. Consistency as a basis for attribution is readily apparent. If, on the basis of a "scientific" test, we were to find, as one player did, that in 130 rolls a six-sided die did not roll a "one", we might consider that die lucky (if we didn't want "ones"). However, the importance of the roll also affects how dice will be labeled, on the implicit assumption that the dice are aware of the issues involved. One regular player comments:

> The more important the event would be, the more likely [players] would be to consider the dice to be bad on a given throw. If it was a less important event, they may say, "Well, you know, this just happens sometimes." [Personal interview]

A die that has caused your character's death is considered unluckier than a die that has only caused a loss of five gold pieces in gambling.

So far I have only considered methods of selecting dice based upon the dice rolls. However, players also have personal favorites for reasons that do not directly depend upon performance. Some dice are imbued with symbolic significance for players. Color is a primary factor that leads to attachment to dice:

> Randy tells each player in his game to choose two dice. After George claims the green dice, Randy comments that none of the players chose white dice; he says everyone always chooses colored dice. [Field notes]

On occasion, the color has significance for the character's position in the game, or for American cultural symbolism generally. The former is particularly true in *Empire of the Petal Throne*, in which each player worships one of twenty dieties, each with its own color symbolism. One worshiper of the Lord Vimuhla liked to roll one red and one black die—the colors of his temple. In games other than *EPT*, color isn't as symbolic. Yet several

players use black dice—called "killer dice." It is believed that these dice have considerable power:

> Randy has a set of black dice that he calls "Morte." A lot of people won't play against him when he's using those dice 'cause they're just paranoid about them. . . . He is unbelievable with those dice. There's just something about them. [Personal interview]

By choosing the dice colors to symbolize God (in *EPT*) or death, one is employing the Frazerian principle of homeopathic magic—that like produces like: black dice produce death for opponents, dice with colors associated with God produce power. However, this analysis must not be overstated since players do not "really" accept the potency of the dice. While many players do believe, to some extent, that different dice have different qualities, they typically do not accept that the color of the dice directly affects their success. These game rituals add to the magical tone of the game, yet, unlike true magical behavior, the engrossment belief is an example of "game license."

Beliefs in Personal Luck

Along with beliefs that some dice are better than others are beliefs that some players are better at rolling dice than others. As in the belief in efficacy of dice, this belief poses problems for players because it implies either the player's skillful dishonesty in altering chance or a belief in some extra-scientific power. Thus players have to explain the "engrossment beliefs" that they do have, but which they feel they should not have as educated people. These are beliefs that make sense when situated in the involving context of the game, but which are embarrassingly mystical when removed from that setting.

Players develop stereotypes about those who are good rollers and those who are not. A physics graduate student comments:

> You will find many of us who think they are particularly lucky or think that somebody they know is particularly lucky. Or, vice versa, may think that they are particularly bad at luck. I consider myself unlucky, even though I'm aware that if the dice are proper, they're completely individual events. I have no control over them. [Personal interview]

Some dice rollers are almost legendary; one player in particular was commented upon in three interviews:

> Some people are famous for being able to roll high dice. Tom, for example . . . is so renowned for being able to roll the dice, and get the right numbers that people sort of use him as, "Oh yeah, you're just like Tom." . . . He becomes a symbol. . . . I'm not a very good dice roller, but, if I'm teamed with Tom, he rubs off on me and I can roll the most wonderful numbers. This is maybe fantasy, but it seems to be reality. [Personal interview]

These beliefs have behavioral implications, particularly when one player is rolling for the entire group or for an absent player:

> Gene had been rolling for Tom's character, while Tom himself was absent. One roll in which Tom's character was attacking a giant bloodsucker, Gene rolls a low number. Charles tells him: "Next time I will be making the throw for Tom," with the clear implication that he will be more successful than Gene. [Field notes]

When dice have to be thrown for the entire party, debate focuses on who rolls best and, if the roll turns out to be unsatisfactory, the roller may be blamed.

Two types of explanations are offered for the perceived success of some players with dice—a physical explanation involving technical skills and an extra-normal explanation based on concentration or psychokinetic powers.

Skill. Players have various explanations of physical control of dice. These beliefs are as close to traditional magic as any element in the game. Some players believe that throwing the dice high in the air helps them get higher numbers (another example of homeopathic magic). However, the most common belief concerns placing dice in one's hand and then shaking them:

> You start the die with a certain position, give it a certain crook, you'll get a six. [Personal interview]

Good dexterity is necessary to keep within legitimate dice rolling practice. Commenting on fair throwing, one player notes:

> They have to roll or bounce or something. That's a typical ruling. But, if . . . you tried setting them up, say like you set up two boxcars [sixes] in your palm and did a flip roll,

> and you kept doing that, somebody would insist that you don't do that anymore. Basically you don't do anything that looks like you're trying to set the dice to roll a certain way. [Personal interview]

As this gamer suggests, the determination of what is honest is a collective decision, rather than one based upon absolute criteria.

Extra-normal control. Some players seriously accept that other players, or they themselves, have an inexplicable control over the dice—whether it be called fate, divine intervention, or telekinesis:

> When I need the dice rolling my way I can control it to an extent. I don't do it manually. It's just lucky . . . You just concentrate and hope. And it happens. . . . I might say, "Come on, dice, oh Jesus, come on, dice." [Personal interview]

This belief in personal efficacy relates to one's attitude toward the physical *act* of rolling the dice. On one occasion a player brought a calculator that he had programmed to generate numbers randomly from 1 to 100, eliminating the need for percentile dice. Players pushed a button and the number appeared on the screen. After a few trials, everyone returned to using two twenty-sided dice, because they felt that they had more control over the outcome. One player said, upon returning to his dice from the calculator, "I trust these dice better."

Another example of the belief in personal efficacy is found in the desire of players to know whether a roll needs to be high or low, in the belief that this knowledge will affect the outcome. Referees take this so seriously that some refuse to say whether the player needs high or low, or only determine this after the player's roll. As one referee commented during a game:

> I'm not sure if you can control what you roll on your dice. I rather doubt it, but I've seen it happen often enough to know that it can happen. [Field notes]

Players see these beliefs relating to their control over the outcome of the game events. While these beliefs do not directly affect game structure to the degree that conscious decisions about the actions of one's character do, they affect the player's belief in his ability to control chance. Clearly this belief is insufficient.

Despite the need for controlling randomness, dice still roll low sometimes; thus, players may resort to a more active elimination of chance from the game by cheating through misreporting dice rolls.

Cheating. Perhaps surprisingly, cheating in fantasy role-playing games is extremely common—almost everyone cheats and this dishonesty is implicitly condoned in most situation. The large majority of interviewees admitted to cheating, and in the games I played, I cheated as well. The ubiquity of this behavior is commented upon by many players:

> Everybody cheats. They all cheat to some extent . . . on almost any situation. I mean the guy rolls a dice and I said, "Well, what did you get? What did you roll?" "Ninety-eight." [Of a possible one hundred] And I say, "Oh, come on, man," you know. . . . And sometimes, of course, they're being honest, but there are cases I know in nearly every single player's existence. [Personal interview]

However, this does not have the same effect as cheating in other games. Lueschen defined cheating in sport as "the act through which the manifestly or latently agreed upon conditions for winning such a contest are changed in favor of one side. As a result, the principle of equality of chance beyond differences in skill and strategy is violated" (1976:67). Since FRP players are not competing against each other, but are cooperating, cheating does not have the same effect on the game balance. For example, a player who cheats in claiming that he has rolled a high number while his character is fighting a dragon or alien spaceship not only helps himself, but also his party, since any member of the party might be killed. Thus the players have little incentive to prevent this cheating. The few who do not cheat are relatively disadvantaged compared to the rest of the party, and may be accused of having "bad luck" with the dice. Thus there is pressure to lie about one's rolls, a tendency that is not a result of personality or background[14] and is parallel to studies of informational control in natural interactions (Turner, Edgley, and Olmstead 1975; see Simmel, 1950:315). Regular cheating by only one player destroys the power balance in the group, and as a result other players may become upset. However, as long as *all* players are cheating, the game structure remains in balance.

Cheating is grounded in the importance and uncertainty associated with a particular dice roll, and this is consistent with Lueschen's assertion of the positive correlation between uncertainty and cheating (1976:70). One study of preadolescents found that cheating is a compromise between the desire to compete fairly and the need for omnipotent control (Meeks 1970). This suggests that players will attempt to justify their dishonesty and place their action within the rhetoric of normative play. One player comments:

> The first game [I played] I rolled everything honestly, and that was probably the last time. So what happens is that for a long period, you kind of go in a gray zone between actually cheating and actually doing it straightly honest, and the gray zone is, for example, rolling up and saying, "Oh, well, that doesn't count because I wasn't ready" or rolling both the green and red dice, and then taking whichever one is higher. . . . One other thing about the way I justified moving into the gray zone. I was saying that's what life is about. In order to get ahead, you have to compromise, and this is even more realistic than just taking what fate has given you. If you take what fate has given you, you get nothing. But part of the game is trying to cheat. In this game [*Traveller*] where there isn't any religion or morality, the game is basically self-oriented. So it's very easy to justify it. [Personal interview]

One might ask why roll dice if they are going to be disregarded; yet rolls are important, even when ignored, because they provide a backdrop of chance that can be altered when necessary. The game events are not totally decided by the player, but the player must make an adjustment to the "iron law of probability":

GAF: Is anything done to prevent cheating?
Jerry: No. I don't see why it should. Because I don't see really how it affects the game.
GAF: Why have rolls in the first place [if they will be ignored]?
Jerry: They still have rolls.
GAF: But they may lie about them.
Jerry: They're not random rolls. You mean when they roll up a three, they put down seventeen. What's wrong with that? You still have rolls to play. [Personal interview]

One might say that the players are searching for a "controlled randomness." While refusing to be constrained by chance, they insist that the events are not totally under their control.

Cheating is particularly likely to occur in "must situations"—occasions that will influence the character for the rest of the game (as in rolling up characteristics) or which are a matter of "life and death" (Holmes 1980:93). Players ask why they should let chance prevent their enjoyment, particularly when it doesn't directly affect anyone else.

Cheating, though necessary to some extent, is not formally legitimate. Successful cheating requires gaming competence (Lueschen 1976:73), and requires knowledge of what the range of expected dishonesty is. Duplicity changes the balance of power in a relationship (Bok 1979:23). While we may tolerate some outright lying, other lying alters the balance of power—in this case between player and referee (or player and player) too significantly to be ignored.

The decision as to when to cheat is essentially a pragmatic concern. Referees may, on occasion, encourage or permit cheating:

> You know, if you get in a bad luck streak . . . your dice are not rolling right . . . sometimes the referee does let you cheat, "I didn't see that. Roll it again." So they have to be understanding to an extent. [Personal interview].

If the roll is sufficiently important, the referee may be tolerant even if he is aware of the actual roll. Occasionally a player will ask a referee if he can change his roll, and occasionally the referee permits this.

At other times cheating is not permitted. Specifying the features that distinguish one type of situation from another is difficult because mood, social status, the significance of the game event, the referee's style, and the reactions of other members of the party influence the construction of situated meaning. Referees always have the right to ask players not to touch the dice so the referee can look at them. While this option is in principle always available to the referee, it is used infrequently since it can lead to the recognition that a player has been cheating and thus undermine the trust in the game. While I heard of one instance in which a player was "formally" discovered cheating, I have never seen it happen.

Players do fear that when they "really" roll a very high number, no one will believe them. Players on such occasions insist that others view their dice before they touch them. This, of course, leads to the prevalent belief that when a player rolls the dice, claims a high number, and doesn't show others the dice, he is cheating—a problem common in situations of expected deviance. Despite this recognition of dishonesty, players are on a "honor system" and are treated as "honorable men." This honor system is bolstered by a belief among some players that cheating doesn't pay:

> I've done it [cheating] myself. Of course, I tend to pay for that by having my character killed off. I don't know if that's divine retribution or something I have inside of me. [Personal interview]

Misreporting dice rolls does no good, because, as one game creator says, "the dice never lie" (Holmes 1980:88). Only when cheating is so obvious that it cannot be ignored is it criticized, such as after a lengthy string of very high rolls, quickly and clumsily sweeping up one's dice, or hiding one's dice rolls behind a wall of books or papers. Typically cheating on dice rolls is seen as a legitimate and necessary means of structuring game events by the players and necessary in maintaining the players' power in the face of the terrible monsters and demons they must face.

Referee

While the players wish to deemphasize chance, referees do not have the same perspective. Although most referees are players on other occasions and share these attitudes, as referees their perspective is different. Dice are not central for referees. For example, I did not observe any referee change dice while refereeing.[15] This may be a consequence of the belief that the referee is not playing *against* the players, and his rolls are not supposed to be significant to him—he only administers them.

However, referees do use dice, and the rolls have implications for the game; their rolls may even push the game in inappropriate directions. For example, referees roll for the number of monsters the characters encounter, for the reaction of the monsters, and for the monsters' success in battle.[16] Because creating an enjoyable scenario is seen as more important than enforcing the laws of chance, referees, like players, alter their

rolls. Although players who have never refereed claim that referees change rolls to "screw" players, my observation is that changing dice rolls derives more from mercy than from sadism. Since many referees roll their dice behind a screen, preventing players from observing them, changing the dice rolls is easy. Further, because this alteration is not for the benefit of the referee, it is not considered cheating, but *discretion*—an indication of the effect of perspective on labeling.

Every referee interviewed admitted to occasionally altering the roll when the results were "wrong," and this happened in my own refereeing without my deliberately deciding to change the rolls. One did what seemed best in the rush of the game. Actually, few dice rolls by the referee are explicitly required. More frequently the referee gets an idea for an event that *might* happen in the game (such as a storm blowing up when the party is at sea) and then rolls to determine if that "actually" occurred. Not only are the locations of rolls left to the discretion of the referee—so is the outcome, in that the referee has to decide whether he needs to roll high or low and what are the criteria for a particular action to occur. As a consequence, there is an ongoing process of adjusting the dice rolls to the game reality by assigning them meaning:

Jack: I often roll the dice as people talk. "How did you like this food?" I roll the dice. "Doesn't taste good." I roll the dice again. "As a matter of fact, you're feeling kind of an icky, coppery, bitter taste on your tongue."
GAF: And so your reactions would be based on the numbers that you get and you invent what's happening as you're going along.
Jack: Yeah. It goes with the scenario, and has to do a lot with what the possibilities are. [Personal interview]

Thus the referee *uses* the dice rolls to construct what makes sense in that situation. If he gets a roll that doesn't make sense, he ignores it, or rolls the dice again to "reconfirm" it.

Two related rationales are suggested for the referee's legitimate right to use his discretion: to keep the game plot logical, and to keep the game balanced in terms of having player-characters face only that level of foe they can reasonbly be expected to handle.

Logic. The referee has the responsibility of weaving a coherent, aesthetic plot (Simbalist 1979), while incorporating the

desires of players and the laws of chance. However, both players' demands and chance may prevent a good story; the manipulation of the latter is of interest here (the former will be discussed later). Referees recognize a need to preserve the logical basis for a game scenario:

GAF: To what extent do you think referees use the actual rolls they get to determine what happens?
Brian: For basic reactions I find that I use, and most referees use, logical rolls.
GAF: What do you mean?
Brian: They use logic above the rolling, unless the rolling agrees within the limits of the logic. You know, you give a peasant, a beggar a couple of gold pieces, he's not gonna try and kill you . . . he'll be grateful. But I mean in the rolls you can technically get a roll that will allow the beggar to attack on sight, and kill you after you've given him the money. . . . And that's kind of unrealistic. . . . The referee uses his own discretion, and the dice rolls just back up his ideas, you know, just make them more definite. [Personal interview]

GAF: To what extent do you think the referees use the actual rolls they get?
Chuck: It's pretty much you just kind of swing your own way. You kind of roll the dice, but you're just doing it for sound effects. [Personal interview]

> I know that a lot of times I reject rolls. If I don't like what they're gonna do to the game, I throw it out. . . . I think that's necessary because if you stick to the die rolls all the time, the game turns into random chaos. . . . The rolling is really a tool for him as I see it. . . . I think the reason why the dice are put there is because . . . it's like a crutch, it's a tool he can use, that he doesn't have to rack his brain every time to think of what happens next. [Personal interview]

Yet sometimes the dice are not ignored, and the referee in order to establish the randomness of game events uses the real rolls:

> Now if a man attacks you with a dagger and suddenly does you great damage, I roll two twenties in a row, for example, which is an instant kill. . . . The idea is that this is a

> sudden lucky blow, and sometimes I will simply say, "You're dead," and I'll lean over and grab one of the players and say, "Look at the dice." 'Cause I really do also want to have the players' confidence in me. [Personal interview]

The dice are used in *conjunction* with the logical structure of the game, although most referees give the aesthetic logic priority.

Balance. When players and referees talk about discretion, they refer to fitting the level of challenge in the game to the ability of the player-characters to meet that challenge. As a player portrays a character in several adventures, the character gains experience points, and when the character has amassed sufficient experience points, will advance to a higher skill level. As a result, the character becomes more difficult to kill and may gain weapons skills, endurance, or magical powers. As a consequence of increasing levels, the character is able to destroy more powerful enemies. In order to have a successful game, the referee must shape the monsters to the character—if the opponents are too weak, the game will be boring; if too strong, the characters will die and players will find other referees who are more reasonable. A moderate level of challenge produces optimal enjoyment. If the referee stocks his own dungeon this can be achieved easily; however, if the referee depends upon dice rolls to determine monsters (or is playing a game, like *C & S*, which suggests this procedure), the dice may produce outrageously mismatched situations.

Referees recognize this and believe they have the right to change or ignore their rolls:

> [The referee] evens out the play balance. 'Cause some referees, if they play completely out of the rolls, you got a party of first-level adventurers that run into a chromatic dragon or something, and they know that they can't handle it, even if they're lucky. So that's where he has to have leeway. . . . Most of the time what I roll up, I roll up. I don't feel, however, that if a party's just been hit and they all have one hit point left, unless they've given me sufficient reason to kill them off, if I roll up a balrog, I'm not gonna send a balrog in after them. If they're not strong enough to handle something, I'm not gonna throw it at 'em either. I'm gonna throw something at them that isn't quite

> so strong, that they can beat if they really think. But if they don't, then, sure they're all gonna get killed. So most of the time I do use the rolls, but under certain circumstances, I'll change them. [Personal interview]

> [Referees] follow the rules, but they do have some leeway. Like they can say that "No, this monster will kill off the whole party," and, you know, if it's not sporting, they usually won't let this monster go in. And you have what's called a first-level character, who is very weak, go up against a very strong monster—some [referees] will say, "No, I don't want to do this," and they will reroll and get a different monster. [The referees are] always supposed to . . . if a monster is supposed to be gotten, they [the players] get it, but they [the referees] may use their leniency to get a weaker monster, so it's more of a sporting chance. Now, of course, you also can get some [referees], and it may be an alter ego kind of case where it may be the same [referee] doing it—in one case being nice and giving you an easy monster, and five minutes later you maybe called him a name or something, or just didn't like what he did, and all of a sudden . . . a monster will come up that is extremely hard, [he will] go by how the dice were thrown—this time he's not gonna take it back. He's gonna say, "Yup, you get it." [Personal interview]

This last example suggests that the game negotiation is not confined to the structure of the game itself, but is responsive to external circumstance, such as how the referee is feeling toward the party. The content of the game may be secondary to the interaction between the participants as persons, rather than as referee and character.

Interpersonal Social Control

Players

Fantasy role-playing is not always placid; players and referees often argue and bicker about a logical point or technical nicety in the rules, as each attempts to dominate the other in a continuous struggle for influence. Although theoretically the referee is in charge, most referees are not totally domineering and disputes do occur. In disputes the players, usually selfishly out for their characters, try to convince the referee that they are correct—by means of references to history, the rules, or "com-

mon sense." The referee in turn tries to assert his authority, which he derives from his position and from the fact that players are sharing his fantasy. As I have noted, players jokingly refer to the referee as God, but, like any god, if his demands get too imperious, he may find himself without believers. Players have the ultimate control—by leaving the game. Disputes rarely reach this point, and the issue is how the parties exert social control in shaping the game fantasy. How do they negotiate their "reality," however fantastic it may be? In this instance players are acting as persons, not merely acting through their characters.

In game rules players are advised to accept the decisions of the referee. For example, the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Players Handbook* instructs players:

> Cooperate with the [referee] and respect his decisions; if you disagree, present your viewpoint with deference to his position as game moderator. Be prepared to accept his decision as final and remember that not everything in the game will always go your way! [Carr 1978:2]

However, this advice is honored more in the breach than in the observance, for players feel little compunction in arguing vigorously. Gamers employ four basic strategies to negotiate the game reality with referees. Each of these strategies is related to an issue within game structure, and while on occasion the strategy will be used for other issues, there is a relationship between strategy and issue, although of course strategies may be used together. Players use internal game logic, an appeal to the game rules, an appeal to compassion, or anger/withdrawal to change the referee's mind on the following set of potentially disputable issues: violation of implicit understandings about the nature of the game reality, technical understandings of the game structure, ignorance of the rules, and life/death issues.

Internal game logic. Considerable discussion between players and referees derives from their different perspectives on game events—the scene being enacted in one's mind's eye. Because most referees do not describe the setting in detail, there is often confusion as to the precise situation; as a result of this confusion a player may announce that his character will do something that is appropriate given *his* understanding of the situation, but which has negative consequences based on the referee's understanding. A player may argue based on his assumptions of the scene. This

difficulty led one gamer to comment that clarity was a hallmark of an outstanding referee:

> Referees have to make everything clear to players; yes, they were waiting for you outside the door and, yes, their swords were drawn and, yes, they did surprise you, and they're only that far away. So you can't tell me they were sixty feet down the hallway. You can't tell me they were not listening at the doorway; 'cause they were. You have to make everything clear to the players so they can't contradict you. [Personal interview]

Frequently the physical location of the characters is the issue—where they stand in relation to other characters. Both referees and players are required to state precisely where the characters are located, and what they and others in the situation are doing. This is not a question of the game rules, but is related to the establishment of a consensual game reality. Because characters have no physical presence, the construction of a "reality" is essential. It is a reality without sensory cues, a reality created by talk that is external to the frame. Disputes occur when what appeared to be a shared understanding suddenly becomes problematic.

Although players are supposed to tell referees everything their characters do, they do not express "obvious" and "routine" actions. When the referee refuses to allow a player's assumption, disagreement results:

> Jerry becomes annoyed with Howard, the referee for our continuing game of *Traveller*. Jerry hadn't brought his space map with him, and this becomes important when Jerry wants his character to return to a planet visited the previous week. Jerry is peeved that Howard won't tell him where the planet is. Howard says, "Your library [computer] program [in your spaceship] was not on." Jerry retorts, "My library program was *always* on." Howard: "Not this time." As a result, Jerry says his character wants to commit suicide, but he is talked out of it. [Field notes]

Players and referees are adept at recalling aspects of the scenario that had not previously been central, and they structure their arguments in the name of "legitimate" understandings between players and referees. These disputes can last thirty minutes or more, distracting the players, and leaving the characters to fend

for themselves. Each side waits for the other to become so frustrated with the protracted debate that it will give in. One referee, commenting upon his willingness to concede, when he can be convinced, recognizes that this does not always happen:

GAF: To what extent, when the ref says something and the players object, would the ref change?
Jerry: I think if the players put up a semi-reasonable argument why they want something changed. Of course, if you're a die-hard ref like Don—will not change anything that he's done. He always can construct some logical facade. Sometimes it's on the mark, but sometimes it's a little farfetched. [Personal interview]

Much of the referee's willingness to negotiate with his players and to change his position stems from his age, experience, and self-confidence. In one game a young, inexperienced referee was continually able to be talked out of his decisions by the older, experienced players:

> Our party of doughty adventurers spot a party of hobbits and we proceed to attack them; however, the referee (Bobby) says that most of the hobbits run away, and we only capture two. Alfred claims his character captures one of the hobbits' green banners, but Bobby claims at first that the hobbits ran away with it. Alfred denies this, saying they wouldn't have time to grab it in their haste, and Bobby finally agrees. Later, Bobby claims that one of the captured hobbits "runs for freedom," but we insist that we had tied him up, and Bobby gives in again. We had captured a pistol from the hobbits, which we promise to return to one of the hobbits if he leads us to our destination. The hobbit does; we release him and return the pistol. Bobby says that the hobbit turns and fires at us, but Don insists that we never provided ammunition, and Bobby again gives in. Just to be safe Brian announces that his character takes his crossbow and kills the hobbit. [Field notes]

A referee who changes his mind as a result of social pressure from the players admits that he has been wrong, and implicitly that he has been a poor referee; consequently referees are reluctant to change their positions because of player insistence. When they do, they often use dice rolls to determine which side was correct—a gaming version of *nolo contendere*. The dice roll,

however, may not end the dispute if the roll does not go in the player's direction:

> Our party, consisting of several warriors and one dragon (Jerry's character), is fighting orcs. Mark, the referee, says that one of the orcs got through and slit Jerry's dragon's throat, killing him. This ruling, which presumably came from the dice roll, provokes a long and heated controversy, lasting over fifteen minutes, with the players arguing that an orc could not get through because of the swishing of the dragon's tail. Mark, although adamant in his belief that the orc could have killed Jerry's dragon, is swayed by the players, and rolls again. Jerry's dragon dies again, and Howard (another player) says to Jerry, "All right, you're dead." Jerry continues to argue, eventually enlisting Howard's support again. However, although Mark rolls again, Jerry's dragon still dies. Finally after five rolls and much arguing, the dragon survives and the game continues. [Field notes]

As a result, Mark could claim that he had not changed his mind, but that the dice had produced a different situation; yet the way the dice were used made it virtually certain that the desired result would occur.

Game rules. The games we are considering all have complex sets of rules, each over one hundred pages. Further, each game has spawned considerable supplemental material. Thus for every game world there is much material from which to draw—some contradictory or incredibly complex. The overabundance of rules leads to debates and arguments as to how to play the game, particularly when players are novices (Hughes 1980). One gamer recalled the early years of *Dungeons & Dragons*:

> 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. [Shapero 1979:11]

Players with a legal bent may try to interpret the rules so as to be most advantageous to their characters:

> In my boardgaming group, accustomed to exploiting every possible loophole, the players spent a lot of time arguing just what the rules did say. [Swanson 1979:15]

This situation is complicated by each referee's idiosyncratic interpretation of the rules, and players must abide by the "house rules." A player in a group for the first time may discover that the rules he knows have only a modest bearing on the game he is now playing, and he is thus obliged to argue with the referee:

George: I want to create a beam of ice.
Jerry: [the referee] No, I don't think you could do a beam of ice.
George: Yeah. I could.
Jerry: Beam of ice? That's like a beam of rock.
George: In other words, what they would do is cast a beam. It's just a missile. That's all it is, really.
GAF: [as a player] Yeah. He could do that.
Jerry: OK, I think that would be . . .
George: One-half of the caster's range.
Jerry: Yeah. [Field notes].

Referees, in theory, do have the right to modify the rules in whatever ways they wish, in that it is *their* world and *their* fantasy. Gary Gygax, co-author of *D & D*, comments about his use of rules:

> You're supposed to be providing entertainment for yourself and all of your players, so I don't allow arguments at all, and sometimes [the players] will show me my own rules and say, "Look, it says this in the book," and I say, "Who cares? I just told you otherwise. It doesn't make any difference what the book says." [Personal interview]

Yet, despite the claims of referees that they control the structure of the rules, the printed rules are used to overturn the referee's original decision:

> Barry is rolling up a character in *C & S*, and rolls an '84' for race, which according to the *C & S* rulebook means that he has the choice of being an elf, dwarf, or hobbit. George (the referee) wants him to be a dwarf, while Barry wants to play an elf.

George: I don't let it be player's choice.
Barry: That's not what it says.
George: That's the way I play.
Barry: That's not fair.
After more discussion, George gives in and Barry plays an elf. [Field notes].

Similar to negotiation generally, it is structural conditions rather than the substantive content generally that produce the resolution (Strauss 1978:5). Although in theory the referee has absolute control, in practice his power is modified by his need to have players enjoy the game and esteem him. However, when players are dogmatic, the referee can refuse an otherwise legitimate request:

> *GAF:* Do players ever win the arguments with referees?
> *Andy:* Not when they're pushy about it. They do if the player sits down and gives the referee good enough reasons, "Well, look, here's how I interpret the rules . . . and explains it. Then sometimes I go, "Oh, yeah, it does seem the rules could be interpreted like this." Fine, but . . . if the players go, "No, it is like this. It has to be like this! It is imperative that it's like this!" then the referee automatically says no. [Personal interview)

Although referees do not always refuse to give in to angry protest, Andy correctly recognizes the existence of rules for arguing about rules (metarules), even if these rules are sometimes disregarded (see Hughes 1980).

Compassion. When new participants are learning the complicated game rules, they often have their characters do something that will harm them, and then complain when they learn the consequences of their decision. Their only recourse is to ask for compassion from the referee:

> Our party asks Howard (the referee) to roll to see whether our planets have had any technological breakthroughs—which he had said he would do since we were devoting 20% of our planet's annual budget to technological breakthroughs for Sam and Hal who had just started to play that evening. Howard announces that their planet had just discovered gravity belts. Sam and Hal had known nothing about this rule and had not set aside 20% of their budget for technology. At first Howard tells them that they are out of luck, but gives in after we convince him that they would have set aside money in the budget had they known to. [Field notes]

The referee has considerable discretion when dealing with player ignorance in constructing the game plot and treating players according to his personal relationships with them. Players en-

courage the referee to be compassionate, but they have no legitimate argument in this matter. Here more than in other areas the referee can transcend both rules and logic to keep his players happy.

Anger/withdrawal. Players vigorously contest the decisions of a referee when they affect the life and well-being of their characters (a time when cheating also occurs). This quarrelsomeness is a function of the considerable identification of players with their characters. Although no rules are violated and no logical assumptions are broken, these arguments generate considerable heat, for they reflect an intense frustration on the part of players which cannot be relieved through rational discourse. Some players jocularly threaten the referee before the event itself has occurred:

> At one point when Howard's character is in danger of being killed, he comments, "If [the referee] kills my character, I'll break his right arm." [Field notes]

Chance events that cause death and injury are seen as the moral responsibility of the referee, since he rolls the dice and structures the situation so that the attack is possible.

Obviously, not all disputes are bitter. The referee has the authority to alter game events, and he does this to keep his players satisfied. Many referees permit players to change or rearrange their character traits if the traits are poor. Similarly, a referee may allow a player who has been killed to roll the dice again to keep his character alive. As when dealing with the player's ignorance, referees have discretion in altering negative game outcomes. Some referees are known for backing down, insisting that they dislike seeing players unhappy or characters dead, while others insist—as a rhetoric—in following the rules to the letter:

> Don (the referee) insists that we play the characters we roll up without changing their traits. George asked Don if he could roll over some traits (e.g., his *C & S* character had a bardic voice of 3—inarticulate). Don comments with some annoyance, "Of course not. What do you think this is?" George apologizes and says, "I was just asking. Some people let you do that." Don sarcastically responds, "Some people let you do anything." [Field notes]

However, no referee follows the rules completely, and all have compassion which they display selectively.

Despite the power of the referee, players have the ultimate weapon to control those referees they consider to be "sadistic"—refusal to play. The sadistic referee may find no one to control, forcing him either to change his style or give up refereeing. If a game has not been going well, players may end the game by having their characters commit suicide, although this action expresses only their own frustration, and is not appropriate given their characters' position in the game:

> When Howard arrives at the Golden Brigade, Jerry tells him that we don't want to continue in his *Traveller* universe. Howard looks disappointed but says, "OK, but I have some things to finish up." He asks George, who had previously said he was bored and frustrated with Howard's universe, what he wants to do about the invasion his planet is facing, and George says casually that he is going to commit suicide. Howard says, "That's too bad, because you might have been able to talk your way out of it." George says, "I still want to commit suicide." [Field notes]

To provide a meaningful basis for gaming the referee's fantasy must be shared, and when players are not interested in his world and what is happening to their personae, the shared world will be disestablished or altered radically.

The techniques of scenario control described in this chapter allow players to acquire some measure of control over the referee's world. These techniques insure that the fantasy construction will be shared rather than the idiosyncratic musings of a single imaginative individual. At the same time referees use interpersonal techniques in addition to their rule-given responsibilities to control players and to shape their universe.

Referees

The referee has two related tasks. First, he must ensure that the scenario is proceeding satisfactorily, and, second, he must control a group of four to twelve young men, each of whom has his own goals in the adventure, each of whom has a slightly different notion of what is occurring, and several of whom may have competing side-involvements outside the game.

In dealing with situations that regularly emerge in gaming groups, referees employ several techniques to maintain order and to permit the mundane organizing of the gaming world so that

fantasy may emerge. Three techniques facilitate the referee's control. First, he can rely upon the strength of norms grounded in social expectations, not restricted to the gaming world. Second, he can rely upon the possibilities for controlling action inherent in his position as referee. Finally, he can use the fantasy structure of the game itself to control players.

Social expectations. Although referees (and players) do not often rely on expectations of proper behavior to control players and structure a game, this can be done if players "act up." A player may become so engrossed in the problems of his character that he forgets there are other players who want equal time to participate. Often a reminder of this basic rule of fairness and courtesy adequately controls behavior.

However, players occasionally become so involved in their own position in the game that they must be called to task, even by threatening to exclude them from the game:

> Barry is behaving immaturely in claiming that his character had met a necromancer as a child. Jerry (the referee) becomes increasingly annoyed because Ted and George are waiting outside the room while Jerry explains some information to Barry and me. Finally Jerry says, sharply, "You know, those guys want to have some fun, too." Barry continues to fool around and Jerry tells him to "knock it off or we won't let you play." Finally Barry does quiet down. [Field notes]

Using societal norms explicitly is a last resort in the game, since an overt normative reference makes explicit the danger of the game's disintegrating as a social event. When the same point can be made covertly (as through humor [Fine 1983]), the game equilibrium is less threatened. Just as players may resolve to leave an unsatisfactory game as a last resort, so may referees threaten to remove them, though I have never seen this threat carried out.

Position of authority. The referee has the right and obligation to set the scenario for the players. He does this through the rules of the game, the information he releases to the players, and his decisions when to roll the dice.

One of the cardinal "metarules" of FRP gaming is that there are no "rules"; the rulebooks are only guidelines. The rulebooks for *D & D, C & S,* and *Traveller* agree on the mutability of the rules:

> Even the most important material herein can be altered and bent to suit the needs of individual campaigns. Where possible, true *guidelines* have been laid down to provide the barest of frameworks for those areas of the campaign which should be the most unusual and unique. [Gygax 1978a:6][17]

> *Chivalry & Sorcery* provides the guidelines by which players may easily create the kinds of worlds they want, and does not attempt to "dictate" in any way what must be. [Simbalist and Backhaus 1977:1]

> [The referee] must settle disputes concerning the rules (and may use his own imagination in doing so, rather than strictly adhering to the letter of the rules). [Game Designers' Workshop 1977a:3]

This is echoed by gamers who claim that no two games are alike. In the early stages, a novice referee plays according to what he *thinks* the rules are; later, when he is more knowledgeable, he creates his own rule variants.

The referee can cope with problems by the simple expedient of creating a rule. One gamer suggests that many of his rules are pragmatic constructions:

> What do I do when players find a hole in my system? I plug it up as best I can. I always warn my players before a campaign begins that about half my rules are experimental and are subject to change at the drop of a hat—if it becomes obvious to all that a change is necessary. [Seligman 1979b:1]

Rules can be changed permanently or temporarily in order to solve a problem for the referee. A major difference between an experienced and an inexperienced referee is that the former will admit to manipulating the rules to control the game, whereas the inexperienced referee is embarrassed by a "failure" to know the rules:

> Mark, a veteran referee, comments, "I've come up with a new way to handle dragons. On each turn I will roll for morale in the party." Jerry objects, playing a friendly dragon, saying "I've outfitted the party and saved them from danger innumerable times." Mark says this doesn't matter;

> merely being around a dragon can be depressing. [Field notes]

> Jerry is going to referee me for the first time—one of the first times he has ever refereed. He tells me that he tries to follow the rules but he doesn't know them all so he has to make up rules as he goes along. He warns me that he won't be a very good referee. [Field notes]

Although all referees manipulate the rules to structure interaction within the game, and to control the power of characters (e.g., Mark and the dragon), this is defined differently depending on the extent of the referee's socialization into the gaming subsociety. Referees also use their role as the storyteller to structure game situations through the control of information. By giving the players information, even if it has no significance to the game at that point, the referee can direct the players. A referee who suddenly remarks, "You hear nothing in the forest," leads his players to think about what is in the forest they might *not* hear and thus to prepare for it. If a party is led to believe there is a secret passage in a wall and cannot find it the first time, they may give up searching rather than try again. As a result, referees may insure that the characters do succeed the first time if they are doing something at which the referee wishes them to succeed. Referees are also advised to insert rumors and legends into a game scenario as a means of channeling action (Sering 1978:27). Since players have only a partial knowledge of the referee's fantasy world, the referee's role in directing their actions through information is considerable. Information revealed by the referee is assumed by the players to be significant and to have been planned by the referee for their benefit, whether it actually was. It is because of this web of informational control (see Goffman 1969; Wilsnack 1980) that information can shape the gaming interaction. While this is *shared* fantasy, the design of the world is in the mind of the referee and it can only be known through him.

The last of the referee's techniques resembles information control in that it presupposes a "closed awareness context" (Glaser and Strauss 1964) between referee and player. This is the referee's use of dice to influence players' behavior. Here the issue is not (as above) how referees interpret dice rolls, but their use of the dice rolls as events in themselves to structure a situation. For a referee to roll the dice suggests to players that

something is being checked—that something is about to happen. The continual rolling of the dice prevents the players from discovering when the important events will occur. One gamer comments:

> Always keep your dice rolls secret and roll the dice often, even if not needed, to keep the players guessing what you're rolling for (and to prevent them from knowing when you are rolling for wandering monsters, traps and secret doors). [Crane 1978:7]

However, dice do more than divert players' attention from the important rolls; they also take priority over talk—whether on events outside the game frame or intraparty bickering. Dice rolls are signals to players that they can ignore the game only to their detriment. The possibility of danger redirects attention.

Referees can achieve the same end by requesting that players roll the dice—without explaining why. One veteran referee comments:

> I'll just have them roll the dice and I'll note it down, and I'll keep track of them. I won't tell 'em what they got. Or I'll just have them roll the dice and I'll say, "OK, nothing happened," and they'll ask, "Well, what was going to happen?" Now, I'll pull that a lot of times when nothing is happening . . . they've sat around for the last ten minutes procrastinating about what to do and I point to someone and say, "Roll the dice" and they roll the dice and "Hoo, hoo, hoo." "What are we rolling for?" and I say, "Nothing happened," sit back and they all look at each other horrified. [Personal interview]

The referee is able to manipulate the tempo and interest in the game as a result of selecting the frequency and temporal location of dice rolls.

Use of game events to constrain action. The third type of control the referee can exert on his group is grounded in his ability to manipulate the content of the game. A referee can make use of nonplayer characters (NPCs) or game events to exert social control, or may incorporate action from outside the game into the game.

Several referees consciously employ nonplayer characters to control the action or tempo of the game (Ward 1978:10; Price 1978:7). These characters are played by the referee and, while they are a supplement to the content of the game, they also allow

the referee to control the development of game events and limit the power of the player-characters. In one *EPT* gaming group the referee created an NPC named Makesh who was the palace doorman. All players had to pass by him in order to see the local lord, a player-character. Makesh was a mechanism by which the referee could prevent his players from meeting, and information could be transmitted either to the lord or to other characters from the referee.

A nonplayer character of superhuman strength is a common technique to control players, to give them advice, or to put them in their place. Such were the characters of Adam and Sir Fang:

> I have a guy [an NPC] who is a wizard, whose name is Adam, and he is the original Adam, and he's the deviser of everything . . . so his level is kinda off the record. . . . I wanted a character in my world [who] could appear at times of need and guide people where I wanted them to . . . he'd be able to guide them around, you know, like Gandalf. [Personal interview]

> I will sometimes terminate an expedition by having something appear to drive [the players] from the dungeon. I use a character called Sir Fang, an unknown level supervampire, [who] crushes crucifixes with his bare hands and is otherwise invulnerable, and having bagged more than a few players who were stupid enough to stay there. . . . They want to fight and they know it's hopeless and they die, that's tough. But if they run away, generally that's a pretty good indication; keep running and I'll chase them out. [Personal interview]

By manipulating what players must deal with, referees can end an adventure or give hope to one that seems doomed.

A second technique used to structure gaming is to punish the character of a player who is causing trouble. A player may suddenly learn that his character has come down with the plague or laryngytis. This humorous social control is less harsh than enforcing the societal moral order. For example, one player continually complained about the "rotten" character he had rolled up; after a while the referee finally declared that his character had the plague and thus was not to be spoken to by any other character unless that person also wished to catch the plague. When players were twirling dice rather than attending to

the game, the referee stated, "All your characters are down two dexterity points"—being exhausted from rolling the real dice. On another occasion, the referee controlled an obnoxious player (Barry) through the threat of additional phobias:

Ted: Jerry [the referee] has the right always to roll to see if one of the characters has an ailment or new phobia . . . some psychopathology. . . .
George: [to Jerry who is rolling to see if Barry has any new phobias] Ah, don't give him anything.
Barry: Come on, that's not fair, Jerry.
George: Don't do it right now . . .
Jerry: [to Barry] Then shape up. [Field notes]

Referees also use game events to reward a player. When Ted makes a remark that makes Howard (the referee) laugh, Howard lets him roll up a new character and gives him immunity from the plague for two months' game time. Referees regularly use game events to influence the interaction of the gaming group, even structuring game events to kill off a disruptive player's character.

The third way in which referees use game events to influence players is by incorporating statements that players make *as players* into the game. Many referees have a rule that all comments may be incorporated into the game ("If you say it, you do it"). However, this threat is often not carried out or is carried out only in a humorous way. This policy is designed less to structure the plot than to remind players they must pay attention. One player commented:

> The referee is fully proper in holding a player to whatever he says. If [a player] says that he is going to hit one of his buddies in the back of his head for doing something dumb, the referee can take it literally and hit him in the back of the head. Or not. Or the referee can take it as a joke which usually is meant, and just let it slide by. And in some cases, it varies during the night, if all the players are kind of losing interest in the game, or just starting to goof off too much, [the referee] may crack down for a couple of minutes just to try and restore order. [Personal interview]

This may have serious consequences for the player's character, although it only is likely to have these consequences when the player has been making side comments regularly:

Greg: Anything you say that I hear, my NPCs hear and will react to. It's been amazingly hard on a lot of the players who can't keep their mouths shut.
GAF: Any examples of that?
Greg: OK. Bobby. . . . He mumbled something about a fortieth-level NPC wizard being slightly insane. The wizard heard that and took offense to it and blew him away. It's as simple as that. Because the wizard *was* insane.
GAF: What was Bobby's reaction to that?
Greg: He didn't care for it, but it wasn't the first time it had happened to him. Bobby had a very big mouth in our world and he tended to mouth off to the NPCs. And when he does that I roll reactions. If they don't like it, he'll pay for it. [Personal interview]

What is most distinctive about fantasy games is the culture and history that participants create. As this chapter has demonstrated, this process is shaped by a system of checks and balances between players and the referees. While this process is unique in many ways, it does reflect the existence of power in all parts of a social system. Even the "powerless" are not without their resources. In a voluntary activity such as fantasy gaming, part of this power derives from the fact that the powerless (players) can prevent the powerful (the referee) from exercizing his power by withdrawing from the activity.

Further, because surveillance is not complete, the players can do things that are disapproved by the referee, such as misreporting their dice rolls for their own gain. Because this "dishonesty" does not undermine the structure of the system, the controllers can allow it to continue. Such activity may be likened to the sanctioned deviance found in the lower levels of many organizations—where, for example, organizational theft is tolerated and covertly winked at because it keeps workers within the system with little loss to the organization.

Finally, the powerful referee can enhance his position by giving in to his subordinant players. This compassion indicates that he has the power to change his mind and still keep his structural position of power. Rather than representing weakness, if done as a result of the discretionary rights of his position, this only solidifies the referee's strength. This process, which is so evident in fantasy gaming, is also seen within many other social spheres. Players can "play upon" this sense of *noblesse oblige* to

get their way. Thus the components of legitimate authority, limited surveillance, and voluntary participation shape the way in which power can be used by players to affect a referee's decisions.

While the players are striving to constrain the referee, the referee has problems of his own—controlling the players and organizing the environment in which the action takes place. In fantasy gaming, unlike many worlds, the referee has the power to alter the environment in whatever ways he feels are most effective, although this may be difficult in the heady rush of game events. The referee can change the fantasy environment to punish players' characters, in ways in which many real-world controllers can only envy. He can claim that the probability of behavioral outcomes is whatever he says it is. The potential power of the referee is enormous, but, as I have noted, the actual power available to him is constrained by other features of the situation. Although the balance of power and the checks and balances in fantasy games are unique, because the fantasy has no real-world moorings, the existence of a balance of power and a system of checks and balances is parallel to social organization generally.

Four

hlónkoi dáhlte dóm tlayésh másun, tlatsolyáni, né?[1]

Fantasy role-playing games are cultural systems. They are finely woven worlds of magic and belief. They have social structure, norms, values, and a range of cultural artifacts, which if not physically real, are real to those who participate in them, and presumably (if I can stretch the metaphor) are real to the characters that inhabit these fantasy worlds. In their extent they differ from many cultural systems, but in the seriousness with which the culture is created they are not so different from many microcultural systems.

In this chapter I shall focus on two levels of fantasy culture that operate in these gaming societies. The first concerns the fantasy system of one of the four games: *Empire of the Petal Throne.* I shall examine the content of this mythos, the social implications of the creation of fantasy, and how this mythos is used in games directed by the game creator, Professor M. A. R. Barker, and by other *EPT* referees. My focus is on the mythos and how gaming involves a mythos substantially different from that of the society in which it is embedded.

I shall then explore small group cultures, particularly the techniques by which gaming groups develop small-scale culture, the content of this culture, and how the gaming culture relates to private friendship cultures of individuals. I shall analyze the gaming culture on the level of the small group—what I have called "idioculture" (Fine 1979). Finally, I shall examine linkages between the fantasy mythos of the *EPT* world of Tekumel and the way in which this culture is interpreted and shaped by players.

The goal of this chapter is to describe the ways in which these games serve as cultural systems for players.

Empire of the Petal Throne

Few fantasy worlds are shared and enjoyed by persons other than the creator. Everyone has fantasies, yet few express them in a form to which others can respond. Most public fantasies are markedly unsuccessful, although there have been notable exceptions—Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. However even these creations do not permit others to participate in them. The closest literature comes to permitting an engrossment that transcends mere reading or viewing is the vision of Middle Earth created by J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* (1966; orig. 1937) and in the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1965; orig. 1954, 1955). Tolkien's Middle Earth, populated with hobbits, dwarves, elves, humans, and various friendly and hostile monsters, is immensely appealing to adolescent males, whether because of the sharp contrast between good and evil (and the almost inevitable triumph of good), because of the escape to a new world, because of its almost entirely male orientation, or because of its adventure. By the mid-1960s a cult had developed, particularly in the United States, focusing on Middle Earth (Carpenter 1977: 260–1), although as far as I know no one has attempted to live out a Middle Earth fantasy. However, Middle Earth did inspire considerable loyalty from readers, including the formation of Tolkien study clubs.

Prior to the publication of *The Hobbit* a young boy was growing up in rural Idaho. This boy was to become Muhammed A. R. Barker. He was then Phillip Barker, the son of a Idaho school superintendent, an American of English descent. Phil Barker, like Tolkien, created a fantasy world, which, if not as popular as that of Tolkien, has provoked as much loyalty among its followers. Indeed, the two men are comparable, although Tolkien never envisioned a game based on his world, and Barker has not as yet completed a novel. E. Gary Gygax, Barker's game publisher, commented in his foreword to *Empire of the Petal Throne*:

> I must ask the reader to view the world of Tekumel in comparison with J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth. A study

> of the background detail and society of each will force the reader to the conclusion that the former work is, if anything, at least as painstakingly and lovingly detailed as that of the acknowledged master of the fantasy world in toto. [Gygax, 1975:v]

Barker himself modestly denies any similarity to the master storyteller. Yet their backgrounds and interests are similar. In discussing the roots of Barker's fantasy I shall not provide a full biography, but only indicate some social features that influence the creation of fantasy and this particular fantasy. Before I discuss Barker, I shall briefly sketch this remarkable fantasy creation, borrowing heavily from the rulebook.

The World of Tekumel

Tekumel is a planet approximately the size of our Earth, though somewhat hotter. Many ages before the written history of Tekumel the planet was visited by spacemen from Earth. Terraforming was necessary and human technology wiped out much of the deadly vegetation, and most of the hostile fauna including two fierce races, the Ssu and the Hlyss. Yet some remained. The earthlings transported alien allies to help colonize the planet and build trade, including the Pe Choi and the Pachi Lei. Eventually the planet was transformed into a world resembling Earth.

What followed is now only vaguely recalled as the "Time of Darkness"; there were

> upheavals beyond comprehension, a time when the stars went out, and volcanoes, earthquakes, and tidal waves rolled across the land. It is clear now that through some freak of space, some fault in the fabric of Time itself, the solar system of Tekumel was cast into some great other-dimensional "hole in the sky." . . . The stars had gone out forever, and with them went all communication and commerce with the suns of Humanspace. Now the planet, its sun, its moons, and its four uninhabited sister worlds flew on alone into the terrible dark. [Barker 1975:3]

The Time of Darkness ended with Tekumel cut off from any possibility of contact with earth. Most human technology was destroyed, and mankind slipped into barbarism. When machines stopped working, they were not repaired, and one can still find remnants of the old machines from before the time of darkness.

Along with the decline of technology came the rise of the Ssu and Hlyss, and, although they were unable to achieve dominance, they gained enough strength to be dangerous to any humankind descendant who meets them.

Tekumel recorded history dates from after this period. Barker provides a short history of this lengthy period (25,000 years), and refers to records (fantasy records, of course) where a more detailed history is kept.

"Currently" Tekumel is divided into a number of regions, which can be called nations. In the game, one of these nations, Tsolyanu, is central, and virtually all of the game action takes place in this land. Tsolyanu is now governed by an emperor, the sixty-first in a chain that began 2,354 years before. The original emperor of the Second Imperium established himself upon the throne of Bey Sy, using as his insignia of power the Great Seal of the Empire. From this seal the emperor gains his legitimate authority, and it has been passed from ruler to ruler.

The Tsolyani have a custom dating from the early years of the Second Imperium of keeping the emperor in total seclusion after he (or she) is selected through many trials from among the offspring of the preceding emperor. After seclusion in the mighty fortress of Avanthar, he or she is served by a corps of deaf and dumb underlings, the Omnipotent Azure Legion. In Avanthar, the emperor sits upon the Petal Throne, "a gloriously carved seat in the form of a many-petalled flower, made from a single block of translucent jade" (Barker 1975:7).

The government of Tsolyanu can best be described as a massive bureaucracy. The society itself is tightly structured by classes: nobles, skilled tradesmen, and workers. Further, Tsolyani social life is organized by an intricate clan system. Virtually everyone in the nation is a member of one of approximately five hundred clans; each clan has its own traditions and its own social status—the Tsolyani are very interested in social distinctions. Clan rules govern all aspects of social life, such as marriage (it is a classificatory kinship system), trade, and customs. Unlike many fantasy systems, Tekumel is not an entirely male-dominated society; women can choose Aridane status, which means that they have the rights and responsibilities of males.

Barker describes at considerable length the current political situation in Tsolyanu (the emperor is aging and a power struggle seems near) and the fragile relations between Tsolyanu and its

neighboring states. Although this is important to the nation, in the interest of space I shall neglect this aspect of the fantasy.

A final element in Tsolyani society is religion. There are two groups of deities, five "good" gods (the Tlomitlanyal) and five "evil" gods (the Tlokiriqaluyal). Each of these gods has a lesser god, or "cohort," associated with him or her. Although these twenty deities are classified as good and evil, the ethical distinctions are not identical to those in our society. As one gamer said:

> The difference between good and evil is that the evil guys [the worshipers of the evil gods] like to sacrifice humans every day, while the good guys do it only once or twice a week. [Field notes]

A more precise distinction is between the gods of stability (the Tlomitlanyal) and the gods of change (the Tlokiriqaluyal). Often gamers choose characters who worship one of the gods of change, without considering themselves to be "devil" worshipers. Those who worship the "evil" gods are as "moral" as those who worship the "good" gods. The five "good" gods are the Supreme Principle of Good (Hnalla); the Lord of War (Karakan), the Lord of Wisdom (Thumis), the Mistress of Heaven (Avanthe), and the Lord of the Excellent Dead (Belkhanu). The "evil" gods are: the Supreme Principle of Evil (Hry'y), the Lord of Fire (Vimuhla), the Ancient Lord of Secrets (Ksarul), the Five-headed Lord of Worms, Master of the Undead (Sarku), and the Green-eyed Lady of Sins (Dlamelish). The party I played in were worshipers of Vimuhla and his Cohort, Chiteng, and our particular enemies were worshipers of Avanthe, Thumis, and Sarku. While to Western earthlings distinctions between good and evil may seem clear-cut, the same moral standards do not apply on Tekumel.

In addition to the human society there are also a large number of alien races and native Tekumel races that have their own social structures, and many animals, plants, and monsters, since Tekumel is now a planet of lush jungles, deserts, swamps, and underground caverns. The tight social structure of the Tsolyani contrasts with the mysterious environment that surrounds the cultivated and civilized areas of Tsolyanu. The planet still has many mysteries that have not be uncovered, but which lie in wait for the adventurous party.

Barker has already published a 130-page Tsolyani-English dictionary, and he is fluent in Tsolyani, which he speakes to amuse his friends. Two other Tekumel languages are mostly completed, and several others are in the process of development. Barker has also described Tekumel religion and demonology in the *Book of Ebon Binding* (Barker 1978), and he claims that he is able to describe the important persons in the major cities of the empire.

Barker has created perhaps the richest, most detailed setting for action that can be imagined, far more detailed than the Shire (*The Hobbit*) or Aquilonia (*Conan*). Whether Barker can write an epic suitable for his epic backdrop remains to be seen. Yet, for gaming purpose, the detailed setting allows players to generate their own plot; each scenario is an embryonic, evolving novel (Taylor 1981:4C).

The Creator

The creation of Tekumel was not a sudden product of one brilliant evening; the world has been germinating in Barker's mind since he was ten. Barker started his fantasy, as many children do, when playing toy soldiers, but he felt confined by the tradition that each piece represented an American, British, or German soldier. He attributes this need for intellectual stimulation to having grown up as the child of educated parents in a community of illiterate Idaho "hillbillies," refugees of the depression. He turned inward, seeking in himself the stimulation that he could not get from peers.

Eventually, through his toy soldiering, he developed the Tekumel nations of Tsolyanu and their neighbor Mu'ugalavya. When he found an imaginative friend he would introduce this child to his fantasy world. This fantasy continued when, in his early teens, he moved to Tacoma, Washington. Because of poor eyesight he was bookish and turned to reading science fiction, fantasy,[2] and ancient and medieval literature, from which many of the aspects of Tekumel environment and social structure developed.

Barker suggests that his interests in language stemmed from his formative years in Idaho:

> We were next door to a family of Basques. In Idaho the Basques are a major community, sheep farmers and so on,

> and their kids could talk a language that nobody else could talk. I suppose it made me jealous to have them whispering their secrets in a language that I couldn't understand. [Personal interview]

In high school Barker decided that toy soldiers were too imperfect a vehicle for his fantasy, so he began to create hundreds of carved figurines to depict his fantasies more precisely. He again gathered a peer group of nonathletic, science fiction fans with whom he could share his fantasy world. Originally the figurines were a play aid for fantasy battles, but eventually Barker and his friends developed stories and histories for each of the figures:

> The earliest battles we ever fought were simply battles fought with a pair of dice. You shook the dice and the high guy won and the low guy lost. . . . And pretty soon this became a complex system of gaming. [Personal interview]

By the time Barker attended the University of Washington he had a strong interest in the Ancient Egyptian language. At Washington, growing out of these interests, under the guidance of Melville Jacobs, a prominent folklorist and anthropological linguist, Barker became interested in the linguistics of the Indian subcontinent. Under Jacobs's guidance, Barker applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to study languages. So, by his twenty-first birthday Barker found himself in the Indian jungles studying languages as "exotic" as Basque had been to him as a child. He attended Berkeley for graduate work in linguistics and wrote his dissertation on the Klamath language (a vanishing Native American tongue). From the study of these diverse, non-European cultures, Barker acquired much material that was to influence Tekumel.

At Berkeley (during the mid-1950s) Barker was introduced to war gamers. Adapting the techniques of war gaming to his Tekumel fantasy, Barker rediscovered his maps from high school and began to create a gaming system. While he was becoming a professional linguist, he expanded on the languages of Tekumel, a project begun during high school, incorporating elements from Welsh, Mayan, ancient Egyptian, and Hindi.

From the 1950s until the early 1970s Barker virtually ignored Tekumel, while he became prominent in his academic speciality, South Asian linguistics. In 1972 he arrived at the University of

Minnesota from McGill University to chair the Department of South Asian Studies. Shortly after his arrival he became interested in the university's war gaming club as a hobby. Barker learned to play *Dungeons & Dragons* but was frustrated by its lack of social structure. Barker decided to use the *D & D* gaming system developed by Gygax and Arneson as a basis for a game based upon Tekumel, a game with the developed culture and social structure that were lacking in *D & D*.

Tolkien and Barker

Striking parallels exist in comparing the two fantasy masters, Tolkien and Barker, and these similarities may shed light on how fantasy is created.[3] Both men were involved in fantasy worlds at an early age. Barker claims that by the age of ten he had established the rudiments of the *Empire of the Petal Throne*. Tolkien, too, as a schoolchild had a lively imagination—at age seven he composed a story about dragons. Both boys were given fantasy books to read and this literature had a profound effect on their imaginations. In addition, as children both acquired a profound interest in languages. Barker claims he was jealous of the local Basques for their ability to communicate "secretly." Tolkien's introduction to languages came from Welsh railway cars near where he lived. Then,

> later in childhood he went on a railway journey to Wales, and as the station names flashed past him he knew that here were words more appealing to him than any he had yet encountered, a language that was old and yet alive . . . he had caught sight of another linguistic world. (Carpenter 1977:28)

Like Barker, in high school Tolkien was creating languages.

This early interest proved central for both men, who built impressive scholarly reputations on descriptive work in linguistics, Tolkein in Old English, Barker in Indian and Pakistani languages. Perhaps significantly, neither scholar has been much interested in abstract linguistic theories.

Both men are essentially private. Although it is unfair to suggest that either is a loner, they seem to prefer a small group of close friends to share their fantasy, both in childhood and in adulthood. Further, these chummy groups are largely male. Although both men have stable marriages, neither wife is in-

volved in her husband's fantasy world. Tolkien, of course, was a member of the prominent Oxford fantasy-literary group, the Inklings, while Barker has gathered around himself a group of young men whom he referees.

Both men have a strong commitment to a religion other than the one they were born into. Thus they made a theological choice, considering alternative theological systems. Barker was brought up by a father who was an outspoken atheist and an agnostic mother. In 1951, on Barker's first trip to India, he became a Moslem:

> I adopted Islam while I was over there, for purely theological reasons. It seemed like a more logical religion. [Personal interview]

His commitment can be seen in his decision to change his name from Phillip to Muhammed, an act of considerable faith, considering the reaction it was likely to receive from his American acquaintances. Tolkien deserted the Anglican religion because of the conversion of his mother when he was eight. He became a devout Catholic, and postponed marrying his wife-to-be for several years because of the objections of his priest; when they eventually married, she was received into the Catholic Church. He actively proselytized, and was a major influence in C. S. Lewis's conversion to Catholicism.

Possibly more significant than these background features is the similar way in which the two men view their fantasy creations. Both men describe their fantasy histories, languages, and mythologies as being *real*. I do not suggest that either is delusional. They separate their "belief" in their creations from their belief in the existence of the world in which they reside. Yet they treat their creations *as if* they are real, maintaining their "fabric of belief," and that they themselves are only historians, writing the record of a civilization. Carpenter describes a visit he had with Tolkien in which Tolkien is concerned with an apparent contradiction in *The Lord of the Rings*:

> He explains it all in great detail, talking about his book not as a work of fiction but as a chronicle of actual events; he seems to see himself not as an author who has made a slight error that must now be corrected or explained away, but as a historian who must cast light on an obscurity in a historical document. [Carpenter 1977:4]

Barker also has this attitude toward Tekumel. This is reflected in his claim that he can picture the major figures in Tsolyanu, and it is further evident in his preface to the Tsolyani book of religion and demonology, *The Book of Ebon Bindings*:

> The introduction is itself a translation from the work of one of the writer's oldest friends and mentors, Tsémel [roughly = "Cardinal"] Qurén hiKétkolel, High Ritual Priest of the Temple of Lord Ksárul at Béy Sü. In response to questions put by various foreign students resident in the Tsolyáni capital, Tsémel Qurén has kindly summarised the series of lectures which he regularly gives to acolytes entering his priesthood. He has modified this summary somewhat so that it will be suitable for those unfamilar with Tsolyáni mores and beliefs. The writer wishes to extend his thanks to Tsémel Qurén, as well as to other friends in the Temple of Lord Ksárul for their kindness, patience, and willingness to explain the intricacies of their faith. [Barker 1978:v; brackets in original]

These worlds are living realities for these men, and engrossment is possible to a degree that most of us find impossible in our own daydreams.

Both men are so involved in their worlds that they painstakingly create documents proportedly from Middle Earth and Tekumel. Tolkien made a facsimile of "The Book of Mazarbul":

> a burnt and tattered volume that (in the story) is found in the Mines of Moria . . . he had spent many hours making this facsimile, copying out the pages in runes and elvish writing, and then deliberately damaging them, burning the edges and smearing the paper with substances that looked like dried blood. [Carpenter, 1977:245]

Barker also has created intricate documents relating to his world, including illuminated lettering. (Barker 1978:22).

Two case studies do not provide sufficient evidence on which to draw conclusions about the features involved in the creation of fantasy worlds; one needs to expand the focus to include those who never publish their worlds, give them up, or, like many science fiction writers, create several different worlds. What makes these two men special is that they have continued working on a single fantasy world from childhood, and seem to revel in the detail, history, and *reality* of that world (see also Linder 1955:223–93).

Three background or structural factors appear central to the growth of these two men's work: their background knowledge, their social relations, and the opportunities for expanding their fantasies. While these factors are not necessarily causally related to the creation of the fantasy, they are connected to its development:

Background knowledge. Access to background information is necessary for cultural creation. Culture is not created *ex nihilo* but rather is the combination of previously familiar events in a novel form (Hebb 1974). The experiences of these two men combined with interests in mythology, history, and languages, predisposed them to create the worlds they did. Each language and world can be traced to its author's interests and experiences.

Social relations. Both men are cliqueish. Each has a few close friends with whom they could share their fantasy; others shared their enthusiasm, provided esteem for this enterprise, and probably contributed to the fantasy.[4] I do not claim that the group was the cause and the fantasy the effect; boys who dream of bands of adventurers might be predisposed to find such groups in their own lives to live out their fantasy in some measure. However, fantasy and male friendship groups seem to be supportive of each other.[5]

Opportunities. Barker is and Tolkien was a professor, an occupation that, once tenure is received, leaves one with considerable discretionary time. Although neither man misused his university affiliation (the South Asian Studies department which Barker chairs is considered one of the finest small departments at the University of Minnesota), the job does allow for free summers and a flexible schedule. Thus Barker schedules classes in the afternoon and on certain days, which permits him to game late into the evenings and to work on his fantasy material for extended periods. Other more tightly scheduled occupations do not facilitate the creation of an extensive fantasy world.

Despite personal similarities, the two men have created quite dissimilar fantasy worlds. Tolkien has described a fantastic transformation of English culture; indeed, Tolkien's hope was to create a distinctively *English* mythology (Carpenter 1977:100), and he drew deeply on his own culture's roots. Barker, on the other hand, wished to create a world alien to middle-class American culture. While the roots of Tekumel culture derive from the Indian subcontinent, the creation is uniquely Barker's—

even more than Middle Earth can be called uniquely Tolkien's. Among the major content differences between the two worlds are the importance of sexuality on Tekumel[6] (Middle Earth is essentially a world without women—a British gentleman's club world), the importance of religion[7] (also missing in Middle Earth), and the barbaric nature of evil in Barker's creation (as contrasted to the clean evil in Tolkien's world).[8] Despite these content differences, we can describe Barker and Tolkien as two titans of personal mythology.

Game Tekumel and Real Tekumel

In game form Tekumel is available to anyone who cares to spend the $30.00 necessary to purchase it. Yet the game is not identical to Barker's fantasy world. The game *Empire of the Petal Throne* has the same relationship to Barker's fantasy that a game based upon "reality" has to that reality—as a magnification of social interaction (Coleman 1968) or a cultural model (McLuhan 1964). *EPT* is a magnification or model of life on Tekumel (which in itself is a transformation of certain earthly themes). As Barker notes:

> Games abstract, simplify, and simulate only those parts of "reality" which the designer feels are crucial. [Barker 1977:21]

Like Monopoly, which simulates the Atlantic City real-estate market, *Empire of the Petal Throne* simulates life on Tekumel, allowing players to construct a scenario despite the impossibility of full simulation. Barker emphasizes that the two "realities" are not identical. Because of the desires of game players, "game" Tekumel has more magical devices, more money, and greater ease for advancement than is "true" in "real" Tsolyani society:

> All of these things, plus the ever-useful Divine Intervention, make it a LOT easier to succeed in the game than in "real" Tsolyanu. [Barker 1977:21]

Players in *EPT* wish to be successful and powerful, and the game must be constructed so that this need is frequently satisfied. Barker himself has a decided preference for "real" Tekumel, and his games are more detailed and oriented to the social characteristics of life in Tsolyanu than are games others referee.

The incredible richness of detail in the "real" Tekumel poses problems for those who wish to play the game not under Barker's guidance. The game has been criticized as being too personal:

> *Empire of the Petal Throne* has a great society, but it uses *D & D* mechanics and there is always this nagging feeling that only Prof. Barker can run it right. [Swanson 1979:16]

However, Barker points to other *EPT* gaming groups that succeed nicely without his guidance. He argues that once players have purchased the game they can create their version of Tekumel as an alternative universe:

> I've told people . . . "You bought the game; now it's yours. If you want to kill the emperor or marry the princess, I don't care. That's your world, you bought it, you do it. You build on my foundation, if you like, and if you don't like my foundation, you kill off whatever you don't like and put in your own creatures. If you don't like my choice of monsters or whatever, put in your own monsters, and bring in *D & D* monsters, Tolkien monsters. Mingle the two. I don't care. It's up to you." [Personal interview]

Barker suggests that "game" Tekumel can be expanded or altered, as long as it suits one's own fantasy. Gamers who referee *EPT* cite the need to transform the game to make it their own creation:

GAF: How easy did you find it to get into *EPT*?
Geoff: You can get into it. You have to make a lot of different decisions than Barker does. He gives you this framework to work with, but if you get into it and think, "well, these characters are gonna act like that, because they worship this god, or they're of this clan, or of this kind of a society," you can get along pretty well. . . . I've made a lot of different assumptions than Barker did.
GAF: Like what? Is there any specific thing you can point to?
Geoff: Yeah. One thing that comes to mind is that they have a lot of demons. Barker uses a lot of demons. I . . . use very few demons. Mostly just straight monsters. [Personal interview]

Each gamer must take the basic structure of the world, and shape it so that it feels comfortable. The realization that the "real" Tekumel is a personal construction sometimes makes

players embarrassed, as well as awed by the creative magnitude of the whole system.

Having explored how the fantasy culture on which the game *Empire of the Petal Throne* was constructed, I shall change focus to the level of the playing group and examine how a local gaming culture is constructed. Following this discussion I will return to a discussion of a group that plays *Empire of the Petal Throne* under the direction of Professor Barker to examine how the Tekumel culture is operationalized by a group of gamers.

Fantasy Idiocultures

Every group develops a culture which I have termed its idioculture (Fine 1979).[9] An idioculture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs peculiar to an interacting group to which members refer and employ as the basis of further interaction. Members recognize that they share experiences and that these experiences can be referred to with the expectation that they will be understood by other members, and can be employed to construct a shared universe of discourse (Hollingshead 1939:816).

Gaming groups are particularly amenable to analysis as idiocultures in that they explicitly deal with the construction of a shared culture through game events. Gaming groups develop a culture for members within the game itself, and simultaneously as a friendship group they develop traditions. These two levels are not isolated from each other—the within-game cultural content can affect the friendship culture and vice versa. Huizinga (1959:12) asserts that playing together, through the development of shared community, promotes the establishment of a social group even after the game.

In order to focus on the culture produced by gamers, and the levels on which it can be analyzed, I shall discuss one group in particular. This group was the first continuing group that I participated in at the Golden Brigade club. After two months I was invited to play with them at a member's home. Although the membership of the group varied, depending on where and when we were playing, the group consisted of seven members, aside from myself: (1) George, a twenty-seven-year-old seminary student, (2) Jerry, an eighteen-year-old college freshman, (3 and 4) Barry and Paul, both high school seniors, ages seventeen and

eighteen, (5) Howard, a taxi driver, in his mid-twenties, and (6 and 7) Mark and Ted, both fifteen years old.

I shall discuss first the traditions of this group in terms of their friendship culture, then focus on the gaming culture, and finally I shall discuss how the two cultures were integrated.

Friendship Culture

As with most groups that voluntarily spend six or seven hours a week together, the members of our group developed affective bonds with each other. After the group had been playing together for approximately seven months, George left the Twin Cities for additional Bible training. As any similar group of friends might do, we held a going-away party for him, at which time Jerry, Barry, and Ted sang a song of their own creation to fete George, and we collectively purchased a miniature dragon as a remembrance.

Jerry, Barry, Ted, and Paul knew each other before they began gaming—Barry and Ted are brothers, and Jerry, Barry, and Paul had been school friends. The rest of us were strangers who got to know each other while gaming at the Golden Brigade club, and it took time to learn each other's idiosyncracies. Howard, for example, loved peanuts, and each Friday he went into the bar next door to the Golden Brigade and returned with a basket of peanuts. These peanuts became part of the group's idioculture, as Howard generally refused to share his peanuts. One week I brought a large bag of potato chips, which Howard almost completely devoured. Later, after Howard had brought his peanuts, he left our table to talk with other friends, I ate some of his peanuts. Jerry jokingly warned me that Howard "knows each of his peanuts." Although I continued to consume Howard's peanuts, no one else dared.

Howard, the most qualified referee in the early stages of our group, was a chain-smoker. This bothered Jerry, particularly when he blew smoke toward Jerry, which Howard often did once he learned that Jerry disliked smoke. Howard suggested to Jerry that he should learn to smoke cigarettes. When Jerry suggested that he would break Howard's cigarettes, Howard retorted, only partially in jest, "If you do, I'm gonna break your arm." Howard's cigarettes became a central cultural element for the group as long as Howard participated. After about three months others in the group learned to referee, and Howard drifted away

from the group. Yet references to peanuts and cigarettes occurred throughout the existence of the group. In another group long-stemmed pipes (called elf-pipes) were smoked by many members, and their common smoking patterns were commented on by those inside and outside of the group.

Cultural elements also involved other members. For example, George fell in his bathroom and broke his jaw. The following week George arrived at the Golden Brigade with his mouth wired shut—able to eat only through a straw. This salient "triggering event"[10] produced considerable comment and several recurring cultural elements, at least during the six weeks that George had his mouth wired. At one point the group was joking about forcing dice down people's throat, and George said, "You can't do that for me." I responded: "We'll grind it up and feed it to you through a straw." Jerry, referring to George's recent purchase of an Osterizer, added: "We'll put it in an Osterizer."

One peripheral member of the group, Sam, first arrived at the Golden Brigade wearing a t-shirt bearing the word "Buttercup" in large yellow letters, and from then on, he was known as "Buttercup." We began to develop a culture based on the salient features of each member. I was often teased about being a sociologist, and supposedly only interested in the "sociological principles" in the game. On this level our culture did not differ markedly from the culture of any similar group of friends, tender and aggressive in turn, but grounded in the perception that we were a cohesive group, and could joke about each other.

Gaming Culture

Because of our participation in fantasy role-playing games we were more than a group of friends sharing experiences. We were actively engaged in creating a culture. This shared culture of gamers is a distinctive feature of this subsociety. Ed Simbalist, the co-creator of *Chivalry & Sorcery*, comments:

> To play FRP is to engage in the creation of a group fantasy, to produce the Grand Illusion of a world ethos by the deliberate suspension of one's disbelief. . . . But even as the [referee] spins his web of illusion, the players themselves add to the performance by playing their roles. . . . The story-telling—for FRP in a very real way is a story-telling activity—becomes a group creation as the imaginary life experiences and actions of each player/character are

> added to the basic concept provided by the [referee]. The *experience* is itself the thing, and once begun it becomes a group happening! (Simbalist 1979b:23)

Game events can be meaningfully referred to by the group as a gaming history develops. While a historical focus applies to all groups to some extent (McBride 1975), in gaming groups this historical focus is particularly salient, because the game events continue from week to week, and the gaming episode is seen as having a history of its own. Episodes in which characters act humorously or successfully overcome impossible obstacles are recalled. The existence of the group history distinguishes group members from outsiders (Bales 1970:153–54). As Paul commented:

> I think our group can relate to past games, you know, about their characters, and then, if someone joins them he wouldn't know what's going on. [Personal interview]

The following episode from a previous game was spontaneously brought up by Jerry:

> In a game refereed by Howard about three or four weeks previously, the characters played by Jerry and Ted were attacked while on an asteroid. The people on the asteroid saved them from certain death. When the characters left the asteroid, Ted's character forgot to tell the residents of the asteroid that they were taking off, and their spaceship went through the top of the dome covering the city on the airless asteroid, killing everyone in the city. [Field notes]

References to previous game encounters are common, and may have a "referential afterlife" of months (Goffman 1976:289). These references fall into three classes: (1) reference to the actions of the entire party—particularly to the party's overcoming an impossible obstacle, thus indicating group solidarity; (2) reference to an attempt by a player to receive attention in the game; and (3) teasing reference to an embarrassing or incompetent action by a player.

Group events. In our group references were repeatedly made to adventures in our first joint *C & S* game. In that game our party of five humans and one dragon had to fight one thousand orcs, surviving only because the dragon rescued us. Reference was also made to when we killed a gorgon and then defeated ten giant

mosquitoes. These references typically occurred when our characters found themselves in danger, and indicated that we had survived more dangerous encounters.

Need for attention. Players may emphasize a game event to focus attention on themselves:

> George, Barry, and I were having our characters learn magical spells. Ted's character, a fighter with no magical abilities, had nothing to do while this was happening, and complained to Jerry (the referee) that this wasn't fair. After a while, Jerry told Ted "OK, you learned Froginese, so you can talk to frogs." Ted took this comment seriously, and his character found a frog to talk with. Jerry thought this was rather foolish, and said that Ted's character would have to get rid of the frog, but Ted insisted that his character wanted the frog. Finally Barry's character turned Ted's frog into one-twentieth its normal size, so Ted's character could carry it on the ship. [Field notes]

By negotiating the cultural elements in the game structure, a player can change his character's status in the party and his own centrality in the game. However, as in this example, others may object to this change either because it decreases their power or damages the aesthetic quality of the game, turning it from high adventure to low camp.

Teasing. In informal groups members often engage in banter. This involves one member attempting to put down another through references to the foolishness of his character. These attacks are not made deliberately to degrade the other or to lower that person's status. Rather, the primary goal is to increase sociability, with the attendent loss of status being secondary. Such efforts are humorous, and, like most humor, require a butt to be successful. The player's character (and implicitly his identity) serves as that butt:

> While the rest of the party went to sleep, Barry decided that his character, an elf, would stay up all night,[11] and thus he would have more playing time. Barry's character was exploring in the forest, looking for adventure, when Jerry [the referee] told him that he sees two large creatures moving in the shadows. Barry said that his character hides until they go away. After they had left Jerry announced that they were two polar bears, which Barry's character could have killed easily. This episode was humorous be-

> cause these animals were totally out of place and Barry's reaction was inappropriate in retrospect. When our party met a group of travelers, we asked them: "Did you see any polar bears?" Jerry, speaking for these nonplayer characters, joked: "No, but we saw a couple of penguins." Jerry added: "[Barry's character] was under the covers sucking his thumb." [Field notes]

Aside from ragging Barry, the continued reference to this event also indicated to players that they should be adventurous and not flee from danger.

Through these three techniques players shared a fantasy culture and *used* their past history for strategic ends. Because of the importance of shared events for the game structure, this construction of a group history plays a significant role in ongoing interaction.

In addition to regular references to game events, traits of individual characters become central focuses of group interaction. Just as players' characteristics may become the focus of discussion, so may the persona assumed by game players. References to salient features of characters are, like references to gaming history, a consequence of status and a desire for attention.

There is a strong tendency for a player to choose several of his character's many traits to symbolize his persona. In doing this he ignores or plays down others. The choice of which traits to emphasize is a consequence of those traits that are the most extreme or unusual, those that relate to needs of the party (strength, intelligence) or the referee's interest, and those that are consistent with the social status of the player in the group.

In one game the seven characters were characterized by the following sets of traits and statuses: (1) the king, (2) an eight-foot-tall warrior whose tongue had been cut out, (3) a very strong giant, (4) great strength, (5) diminutive stature, (6) extreme aggressiveness, and (7) noble status. These salient traits derive from several dimensions—occupation, social status, physique, personality, and physical prowess. Such characterizations constrain the possibilities of behavior for the characters. In another game, a poor bardic voice is a cause for joking: "On a good day you can't understand him. On a bad day you think he's insulted your mother." Or a character is strong but lacking in intelligence, such as Zorba the *Geek*: "He's big, but dumb as hell. He picks his

teeth with a vorpal blade." What is significant about these themes is that they are repeated frequently and help structure interaction.

When a player has a weak character he attempts to discover some characteristic on which he can build a role for himself, and from which group culture can be generated:

> Ted had a poor character and was frustrated by the lack of attention he was receiving. The only thing unusual about Ted's character was that his father was a chef; when he rolled to discover how good a chef, he rolled 99 [out of a possible 100]. As a consequence, Ted made his character's skill at haute cuisine a central theme. When Greg, the referee, said that we had a poor dinner, Ted insists that that was not possible, and Greg rolled the dice again and discovers that it was a good meal. Later we kill a wild boar; Ted says: "Boar à la King. I look in my recipe box." After killing a wolverine, Ted announces that he is serving "wolverine chops." We make references to Ted's character fixing "non-cholesterol viper steaks" and "wasp stew." [Field notes]

Although most cultural references to character traits are to features important for group survival, other attributes are used to gain attention and to promote satisfaction.

Mixing Levels

In addition to those idiocultural elements that are based on friendship and those that describe fantasy events, a third set of cultural elements overlaps the two areas. This relates the player's behavior to a game event, or a game event to some attribute of a real-world relationship. Such cultural elements suggest the close relationship between the fantasy world and the natural world, as each is used by group members to comment upon the other.

Redefining game events through real events. Much culture, particularly that which is intentionally humorous, is the result of grounding fantasy elements in contemporary social activity. Medieval phenomena are given contemporary implications, and if a cleverly incongruous fit exists between the two, the reference may be repeated. For example, several players created a series of parodied magical spells that became a regular part of the group's joking culture. Thus instead of the feared black magic spell, Finger of Death, employed only by evil necromancers, players suggested a spell entitled Finger of Hiccups. The mock-spell Wall

of Fungus replaced Wall of Water. Finally, the spell Chaotic Landscape, a spell of illusion in which the target hallucinates that the world is changing shape and color, was replaced by Chaotic Breakfast, which had the same effect on one's morning repast. Players contrast game mysteries to mundane existence. When George finally obtained an "ego sword"[12] that had the highest possible level of intelligence and wisdom, Jerry called it the "Albert Einstein of swords; it's a theoretical physicist."

Characters may be treated similarly, as when we turned Barton's character into a loaf of bread:

> Barton (age twelve) has been being silly and making irrelevant jokes all evening. Finally Roger, who is playing a magic user, says: "I turn him into a piece of bread; I may toast him." This precipitates a continuing joke cycle for several weeks. This specific decision seems to have been triggered by George's Celtic cleric's previous action in dividing five loaves of bread (note the connection to Christian tradition). Barton is treated for the next five minutes as if his character had been turned into a loaf of bread. Someone in the group calls him "Wonder Bread" and Barton says, "Somebody squeeze me to see if I'm fresh," to which I respond, "We know you're fresh." Three months later when another young player talks too much, Ted reminds us: "Remember when we turned that kid into a piece of Wonder Bread." [Field notes]

The looseness of the game structure permits this breaking of frame; particularly salient examples of frame-breaking are used by group members for social ends—in this case social control.

Redefining real events through game events. The content of fantasy gaming can be used by players to categorize natural interaction. As one gamer comments:

> [People say,] "You klutz, now you're acting like what you acted like when you were in the dungeon" . . . they do a lot of times dig up things that you'd rather forget about your character. [Personal interview]

One peripheral player in our gaming group was known as "the Mad Dwarf King" because he liked to play dwarves in the game, and because he himself was very short. Once when we were playing at Jerry's home his dog began howling, and Jerry remarked: "It's Dandy in his lycanthrope phase." Or:

> Jack related a humorous story about two game players in one of the groups he has been refereeing. Dick and Laura had gone out on a "date" together. Dick had asked Laura out, and that evening nothing went right—they couldn't get tickets for the theater and then his automobile broke down. Jack said that when he mentioned the story to Brad, Brad commented: "My spell worked." [Field notes]

Gaming groups have two levels of meaning from which they can construct culture. Idioculture grounded in one level may be used to comment on events on either level. A gaming group, composed of friends, is also based on the cultural system of the game. In order to explore the relationship between the idioculture and the cultural system of the game I shall return to *Empire of the Petal Throne*, and discuss a group refereed by M. A. R. Barker.

Idioculture and Cultural Systems

Every referee can be said to construct a cultural system, and each group of gamers reacts to this system in creating its own idioculture. Most referees' cultural systems are loosely based upon someone else's imaginative system: a game designer's world, the Tolkien mythos, a science fiction novel, or a dungeon created from a knowledge of popularized medieval mythology. Gamers construct a personal gaming culture around this "world." They blend elements of the referee's world with their sense of what is and should be. For purposes of this discussion I will examine a group that M. A. R. Barker referees, because his "world" is relatively complete and highly distinctive. Barker's "world" has existed for forty years, but this mass of background information does not prevent members of his group from creating their own group culture, which expands and modifies his ideas.

Like all groups, this gaming group had a unique friendship culture. Players revealed opinions of others, jokes recurred, and certain weekly rituals emerged, particularly relating to food and drink. However, these elements are not directly relevant to the playing of *Empire of the Petal Throne* under the direction of Professor Barker. For this discussion I shall not consider aspects of the group culture that do not directly relate to the players' discussion of Tekumel.

Players can be described in two ways: as individuals who happen to be playing a game, carrying with them real-world interests and values, or as animators of a persona—in this their

personal views are not relevant, only their characters' orientations (as they interpret these characters). Both approaches—one focusing on the player and the other on the character—shed light on the creation of gaming culture in this group.

Player Orientation

Players have personal orientations to the game which are reflected in the group's perspective. Although each individual has a unique constellation of personality traits, my interest is not with their idiosyncrasies, but with those orientations that characterize this group of players as a group. Whether through the creation of group norms (Sherif 1936; Sherif et al. 1961) or the power of differential association, members of this group shared orientations to the game.

At the time of the research Barker ran two separate groups, one on Monday and the other on Thursday. According to Barker, the two groups differed in style and orientation to the game culture:

Barker: The Thursday party is much more of a jolly kind of haha game party, where you have adventures, and you go and you meet people and do things, and you don't take it all that seriously. And they follow the game much more as a game. Whereas the party that comes on Monday night [the group I played with], Roger and Dick and Ian and those guys, all come here particularly because they're interested in the reality of Tekumel. They don't care if I ever open the book or ever use a table out of the book, they want to know how it really is on Tekumel. . . . The Monday group is composed of much more aggressive people. The Thursday group are more gamer-type, fun-type people, and my Monday group considers them, I think the term is "nerds." . . . They consider the Thursday group to be goody-goody people who are too straight and too honest and too simple-minded, they're not devious enough, they're not . . . manipulators enough. So the Thursday group doesn't get very good marks from these Monday night folks. And vice versa. The Thursday group considers the Monday night people to be too devious.

GAF: Have they played together?

Barker: Uh-uh. And they [the Thursday night gamers] don't want to, they're not battle gamers; they're not the kind of people who say "O.K., come on, your character against

mine." That happens a lot on Monday night. . . . They're not as aggressive or social, religious, political-minded as the Monday night people. [Personal interview]

As Barker remarks, the Monday group has traits that distinguish their gaming culture from other groups. They are aggressive, and this sometimes expresses itself in aggressive sexuality, as reflected in the hostile attitudes of these gamers toward members of the Avanthe (warrior-priestess) temple ("Eat raw seagull, you bitch"; "Stick a hot rod up their orifice", "Pull up your shirt, baby, you're gonna die"). In addition to reflecting an extreme caricature of American sex roles, these young men display a subtle regard for the nicities of politics, social structure, and class relations. Players spend hours on minor aspects of the game structure, such as the sending of a letter to a Tsolyani superior, or the planning of a meeting between members of rival temples. A desire to recreate the "real" Tekumel motivates this group, and directs their actions in the game. Their group culture incorporates a vast amount of seemingly trivial information (e.g., local histories, population figures, clan structures). This eagerness to learn about Tekumel and Tsolyanu doesn't stem from their game positions, but from their collective orientation toward the game reality. Other groups, with different participants, emphasize other aspects of Tekumel—e.g., monsters, treasures, or foreign lands.

In addition to this selective interest in the game mythos, players have attitudes toward others in the group. One member of this group says of Barker: "He is almost a perfect Tsolyani citizen." Another player says to a compatriot: "I know what sort of orders I get from you. [Meaning he is likely to be killed]. So I'll fight as hard as I can not to go with you" (field notes). These characterizations provide structure for the group culture.

Character Orientation

Several players in this group have been playing under Barker's direction for several years. For example, Ian's character was created for the first adventure on Tekumel. Many of the other characters have also been "alive" for several years, and the characters are nearly as well known as the players. Because of the longevity of the characters, players identify with them deeply,

and the orientations of *characters* shape the culture of the group. This shaping occurs by means of three aspects of characters' experiences on Tekumel. First, what the characters know and need to know; second, what they have done and whom they deal with on Tekumel; and third, the characters' perspective on the game world and their position in the society. Because these characters "live" near each other and experience the same events, these three aspects are similar for all characters.

Before discussing how the characters affected the group culture I shall briefly describe the game situation while I participated. The setting is a small fiefdom in northwestern Tsolyanu near the Chaka Forest, where there have been disturbances by the Pe Choi, a nonhuman race, currently allied with Mu'ugalavya, Tsolyanu's sometimes hostile neighbor. Further, there have been rumblings along the northern border of Tsolyanu where a series of battles have been fought against Yan Koryani soldiers. Although the nations are not at war, the situation is tense, and war may erupt at any time.

The incumbent fiefholder is Lord Ahanbasrim hiTokalmy, a player-character (Roger) recently appointed by the emperor. Lord Ahanbasrim, while a good administrator, is not from the region and natives are suspicious of him and his supporters, particularly since he worships Vimuhla, Lord of Fire, in an area in which the major deities are Ksarul and Avanthe. The main town of the fief, Tu'unmra, has a population of 52,000 (a small city by Tsolyanu standards), and is the headquarters for the Legion of the Sapphire Kirtle, a light infantry legion maintained by the temples of Avanthe and Dilinala. Since his appointment, Lord Ahanbasrim has been trying to remove these warrior women from town; so far without success. When I left the game there was no official state of hostilities, but our group had raided and desecrated an Avanthe sanctuary, and it is likely that this act will have consequences.

Recently Lord Ahanbasrim discovered that underneath his palace are numerous underground rooms and passages, and he has begun exploring this area, hoping to find metals, treasures, and important religious artifacts for the Vimuhla temple. All of the characters in this group are worshipers in the temple of Vimuhla or the temple of Vimuhla's cohort (divine companion-servant), Chiteng.

The search for knowledge. As players enact their characters in Tu'unmra, they discover that there are many details of life of which they are ignorant. Once they ask Barker, these cultural elements—whether created spontaneously or dredged from the recesses of his remarkable knowledge about this planet—enter the game structure. For example, one morning Lord Ahanbasrim and his wife (a nonplayer character) were eating breakfast, and a priest (another nonplayer character) who had just entered asked Lord Ahanbasrim if he could have a glass of spiced buttermilk, which Barker explained to the group was a common breakfast drink in Tsolyanu (other nations on Tekumel eat different breakfasts). On another occasion a character needed to know how to give someone "the finger" in Tsolyani. Barker explained that the gesture consists of raising one's index finger and pinky. Further, the gesture is a Tsolyani sign of affection when done with a person of the opposite sex, who put their index fingers and their pinkies together. When a player inquired about the Tsolyani word for "Oy!" for use in a particular situation, Barker responded that the Tsolyani would say "La, La," and another term entered the group's repertoire. Examples of the acquisition of such cultural knowledge could easily be multiplied. We learned how to gamble in Tsolyanu, the devices used to prolong one's sexual excitement at a Tsolyani orgy (a white wafer), the alcoholic beverages commonly consumed (Mash brandy), and how to play the card game "Narku." Whether he had been aware of these mundane details before, and just waited until we asked to explain them (a truly remarkable knowledge of his fantasy culture), or whether these were created spontaneously from Barker's assumptions of what would make sense given other Tsolyani customs, is not clear in any given case. Whatever our characters required we were told, and thus the culture of the group was shaped by the Tekumel environment.

Characters' experiences in Tsolyanu. Culture is created through the activities of characters. Characters share experiences that are referred to as the group emphasizes and expands on certain aspects of Barker's fantasy world. For example, several characters served together in a battle against Yan Koryani troops in the Atkolel Heights, and the details of that battle are often recalled by players. The location of activity in northwestern

Tsolyanu means that certain traditions will be emphasized, such as the rituals of the temples of Vimuhla, Ksarul, and Avanthe.

Nonplayer characters also affect the group culture. For example, Oyaka hiTlekolmy, Lord Ahanbasrim's strong-willed, powerful, intelligent wife, has a central position in the culture of the group—even when her husband or her husband's animator is not involved in the game. All players know of her, her abilities, and her personality from having to deal with her. She has nearly the same reality as her husband.

Players mentioned another nonplayercharacter, "Old Two Torch Pete," on several occasions. "Pete" was a slave who grabbed the torch of a another slave who had been killed. He would always come out of an underworld adventure alive, even if player-characters had been killed. At one point Barker tells the group: "Finally we made a player-character out of him and he plays in Schenectady."[13]

All characters know and have had to deal with Makesh, another nonplayer character. Makesh is Lord Ahanbasrim's palace guard and doorman. Makesh has a well-deserved reputation as a wheeler-dealer and extortionist. In each adventure Makesh had some role—a source of comic relief and low buffoonery. Whenever a character wished to see Lord Ahanbasrim, he had to deal with Makesh, which meant in practice bribing him with kaitars (the Tsolyani currency). Makesh was known as well as most of the player-characters, and was treated as if he were a "real" character. Through Makesh, Barker could advance or retard the plot by having Makesh suddenly bring news from other nonplayer characters or by refusing admittance to those whom he (Barker/Makesh) didn't wish to see the lord. Makesh also structured the group culture. He is a symbolic representation of the bureaucratic and inefficient government of Tsolyanu. His behavior is used by players to comment upon aspects of the Tsolyani society—greed, rapaciousness, or inefficiency (or efficiency when properly bribed). Makesh's central position in the group's idioculture indicates how the group, through their characters' positions in Tsolyanu, have emphasized certain features of the Tsolyanu culture. The events and people that the characters have dealt with create their version of the Tsolyani culture, and these events and people are grounded in the players' interests as persons, expressed through their decisions in animating their personae.

Characters' orientations. In addition to the events and people that characters have experienced, their orientations to "real" Tekumel are a result of their position in the Tsolyanu social structure.

For example, Lord Ahanbasrim, attempting to raise troops, desperately searches for steel and iron, scarce resources on the planet, necessary for quality weapons and armor. Thus Roger says: "All I want is bong, bong, bong. Iron." and later "I have a one-track mind. All I think about is steel." If Roger's character did not wish to raise an army, the shortage of these metals in Tsolyanu would not be an issue. Because of his character's goals, metal has a central role in the group's culture, and dungeon adventures turn into hunts for these metals, valued more than gems, glory, and magical weapons.

Because of these characters' positions in the game world their interest is focused on three temples: Vimuhla (the temple that the characters belong to), Avanthe (associated with the Legion of the Sapphire Kirtle, their arch-enemies) and Sarku (whose head priest is a major personage in Tu'unmra and a rival to Vimuhla among the Tlokiriqaluyal).

Because of their characters, players wish to learn the Vimuhla rituals. When my character entered the game, it was pointedly suggested that he should worship Vimuhla, and when I decided to become a priest Roger instructed me in the Vimuhla ritual. Another character wanted to have a private Fire Ceremony, a major ceremony of the Vimuhla temple; while this event did not occur while I was present, the fact that players seemed well aware of the ceremony revealed that the characters' perspectives on the game world affected the group culture. That the players were worshipers of Vimuhla channeled the group culture.

The shaping of idioculture through the characters' positions can also be seen in the orientation to gods hostile to Vimuhla. In one sense the other nine gods are hostile, but for reasons based on the game structure two were discussed by players most commonly. In discussing the role of women in these games (in chapter 2) I indicated the extreme hostility toward the worshipers of Avanthe. Part of the antagonism in game terms (forgetting sex roles) stems from the political situation in Tu'unmra, in which the Avanthe warriors were causing trouble for Lord Ahanbasrim. Tom tied his hatred of Avanthe warriors to his character's

personal situation, saying, when asked why he hated them so passionately, "They wrecked my gonads" (field notes).

The temple of Sarku also has a major position in the culture of this group. The high priest of Sarku in Tu'unmra is an important figure (perhaps because Barker has shaped his power to fit players' interests), and characters often must interact with Sarku worshipers. Characters in another group Barker refereed worshiped the god of the dead. And finally, the underground temple of Sarku is located next to the Vimuhla temple. These factors led to Sarku's being a focus of our idioculture.

Because of the importance of Sarku, players speak of Sarku ritual traditions, including the "Fourteen Acts of the Worm." Players comment upon the difficulty they would have in purifying a Sarku temple for use by Vimuhla worshipers, covered as it is with "ritual slime." While our party is desecrating the Avanthe refractory, Roger comments: "I want to carve a symbol of the Worm in the floor," and Lord Ahanbasrim does so. He does so in part because this represents the ultimate desecration of a holy area (because of the symbolism of Sarku), and also so that Avanthe worshipers might believe that Sarku worshipers had desecrated their shrine, precipitating a conflict between the two temples.

In this chapter I have analyzed the fantasy culture of one individual (Professor Barker), and then examined the idioculture of one group. In this last section I have indicated how these two levels of analysis intersect to show how a cultural system is grounded in interaction. If we can assume that Barker's world of Tekumel is equivalent to a societal culture (which it is in some ways), then our discussion of how members of this particular gaming group used that culture in constructing their own meaning system, has parallels to the means by which all individuals acquire a culture (particularly a second culture). One learns a "version" of a cultural system, a version that is affected by interests and experiences. Even the fact that the game players are learning the culture through assumed personae may not be that distinct from the acquisition of a second culture, in that in such a situation the learner assumes a role for learning (student, businessman, migrant worker), a role that may not encompass the entirety of a person's self.

Obviously profound differences weaken the analogy. In learning Tekumel culture this group had a single font of knowl-

edge—Professor Barker. Were the culture to be more permanently embracing we might see the beginning of a cult here, and clearly the dynamics of cultural creation are similar. While players can and do create their own cultural elements relevant to Tekumel culture apart from Barker and his writings, this is relatively rare.[14] Further, the fact that roles are fantasy suggests that players have a greater option to select only those items that they wish to become engrossed in, ignoring knowledge necessary for mundane existence. Since Tekumel is a fantasy creation, players avoid areas of the culture. Although these weaknesses have parallels in the acquisition of any second culture, they are exaggerated in the formation of a group culture around Tsolyanu life, and one must be cautious in generalizing. Further, the fact that we have examined a group culture limits generalizability, since the group setting is not the only setting in which culture is acquired.

Despite these limitations, we always examine how a version of a culture is acquired through social interaction—for we never learn *culture*, but only a *rendering* of that culture.

Five

Game Structure

Thus far I have discussed gaming groups as though they were remarkably cohesive. Yet, like most social worlds, this one is fragmented—cliques, subgroups, rivalries, and hatreds develop. Within a gaming party characters have different goals. Even if this were not so, there would still be a need for a structure to allow the group to organize itself rather than having each player make decisions for the entire party.

In this chapter I shall discuss the role of structure within the gaming subsociety and within particular gaming groups, and examine the effects that this structure has on the game. I will first describe the "real-world" fragmentation in this supposedly homogeneous social world. This involves primarily the examination of age roles. Fantasy games are often composed of players of diverse ages, and while this may add to the game, it also can cause tensions. What is it about age (and maturity) that produces this strain? How do the differences in the way that various ages view fantasy influence the structuring of the game, and why is there a need for a homogeneous fantasy?

Second, I shall examine the social structure of a party of adventurers in the game itself—particularly how the structure of the gaming party reflects the status structure of the players and how this is negotiated given the fact that low-status players may animate high-status characters. This involves the permeability of the fantasy to real-world concerns, and conversely the permeability of reality to fantasy concerns. The game is a distorted (but recognizable) mirror of reality, just as reality is a distorted mirror of fantasy.

Structure and Fantasy Gamers

Even though this is a relatively small social scene, considerable fragmentation exists. Although the number of hard-core fantasy role-play gamers probably does not exceed 5,000 persons, schisms are common. I noted in chapter 1 the strident criticism between Gary Gygax of TSR Hobbies and the amateur gaming magazines. Even those who contribute to these amateur magazines are internally split, as a result of personality or gaming orientation. Feuds regularly appear in these journals; one short passage will indicate the intensity of feeling:

> I will concentrate on your libels (malicious disregard of the truth). . . . Between repudiating your own remarks and ascribing statements to me that I have never made, I can only conclude that if you're not morally irresponsible, you must be mentally irresponsible. [Sacks 1979:1]

This tone is not typical, but neither is it very unusual. The gaming world is not made up of individuals who love and respect each other. Gamers have their own styles of playing and their own moral standards; those who cross these boundaries may be attacked in the gaming press. I do not intend, however, to analyze the national politics of committed gamers, other than to suggest that what is found locally is duplicated nationally.

The Referee and Group Leader

The most obvious example of status in the gaming world is the power and prestige accorded referees. I have noted that the referee is referred to (jokingly, but significantly) as "God." Within the structure of the game world he *is* God. More to the point, outside the game this individual is likely to have high status.

This parallel between the referee's position in the game and his position in the group is not surprising in light of the requirements for being a good referee. Most important is a knowledge of the game and its rules. This requires that the referee have gaming experience; often he is an older group member. The imagination, role flexibility, intelligence, and verbal skills that are characteristic of many referees are also related to high status generally. When I first attended the Golden Brigade club it was clear that the regular referees were accorded high status. These young men

collected names and addresses of new players for the club's membership list, and I subsequently learned they were the officers of the club. Within a few weeks I could recognize a clear status hierarchy, a supposition verified by other club members. Whenever the two highest status members would agree to referee (which they did not do frequently, having their own private gaming groups), other referees participated in their games. On the nights that one of these high-status individuals was to referee the attendence might be 50% above normal.

These few referees (essentially five) claimed special privileges, and were generally accorded them by others:

> The group I am with is sitting at the large table in the back of the Golden Brigade community room. As we are preparing to play, Don (a high status referee) comes over and tells us that the table is reserved. While some in our group protest at first, we quickly give in. Don also takes Ted's chair, which is the most comfortable chair in the room. Ted objects at first, but then gives Don the chair. [Field notes]

Similar preferential treatment determines who will referee. Although all referees gain status because of their structural role, some referees are recognized as being better than others, and players change referee during a game if a more talented referee arrives:

> Brian arrives at about 8:00 P.M., and tells Don that he must work tonight. He says that he will be back about 9:30 P.M., and Don says that Brian should referee when he returns. Brian agrees. Before Brian returns Chuck begins to referee our group, although Don does not tell him that Brian will be refereeing later. When Brian returns, Don tells Chuck that Brian will referee because Brian had been "promised." Chuck moves over to let Brian referee. [Field notes]

The power of the referee is supported, at least in the Golden Brigade, by the fact that the leading referees are good friends—a consequence of having played together. Thus three components of the interaction system support each other—the friendship ties among the central members, the structural position of the referee, and the experience and competence of the referee as a gamer.

The Status System of Game Players

In addition to the status accorded referees, a differentiated (although not entirely stable) status hierarchy defines the players as well. A general status hierarchy transcends gaming groups, and this hierarchy influences the game being played.

The referee generally heeds high-status players while ignoring those with less status. In practice this means helping high-status characters while letting low-status characters fend for themselves. Players in all groups vie for the attention of the referee with questions and comments about the game structure, but the referee responds to players depending on his evaluation of them. For example, when Howard was refereeing in the Golden Brigade group described in Chapter 4, he regularly responded to the inquiries of Jerry and George, but rarely to the inquiries of Ted and Barry. This behavior is due partially to different level of skill. However, status affects other areas into which considerations of skill do not enter:

> To determine whether our party surprised a monster (and gained an advantage in battle), Brian (the referee) calls out "Roll a dice"[1] without specifying who should roll the dice. Dan (a young player) rolls first and clearly says "Five," which meant that we did not surprise them. Then Don (an older player) rolls a die, calling out, "Two," meaning that we did surprise the monster. Don's roll was accepted by Brian, with no mention of Dan's roll. [Field notes]

Occasionally several players roll simultaneously, and generally the roll of the player with the highest status is accepted, unless the referee announces that he deliberately chose the best dice roll. High-status players most often roll dice for the group decisions (a result of their characters' usually leading the party). While less experienced players might out of fairness be given the responsibility of rolling the dice to increase their otherwise modest participation, this rarely happens. High-status players also often sit next to the referee. This places the less skilled players at the opposite end of the table, making it difficult for them to hear, to ask questions, and to participate. Of course status changes as the new player gains in experience, becomes one of the regulars at the Golden Brigade, and learns how to referee.

Special treatment. The group's social structure is not only reflected in the differential power of members, but may also lead

to a referee's or player's giving special treatment to his friends and their characters (Axler 1980).

All games at the Golden Brigade are supposedly "open," in that theoretically anyone can participate in any game, with the size of the group the only basis for exclusion. In fact, games can be manipulated so that only "desirable" players get to play. This is done by not "officially" starting the game until enough desirable players arrive so that the game can then be closed without its ever having been "open," informing low-status players that the game is "filled" but allowing others to join:

> Don seems to be choosing whom he wants in his *C & S* game tonight. When Hal and Sam (both young players) arrive early in the evening, Don tells them that there is not enough room in his game and that they should go to another table and play *D & D*. Later, when another group of young players arrive, Don tells them that they must wait until another referee comes to referee them. However, when Brian, Chuck, and Norm (all experienced players) show up, Don invites them to play in his game. [Field notes]

Don establishes the meaning of a "full game," which can range from five to over a dozen players. One player talked about this strategy of exclusion:

> There is a kind of a little clan down there that gets together and plays certain games. . . . And we'll, you know, sometimes like if we don't like the way a guy plays characters, we'll try and push him off on another referee, try and kind of convince him to play with the other referee. [Personal interview]

While some referees have organized games with twenty players, referees have the right to close their games with as few as five players.

Players often make charges of favoritism against referees, and a frustrated player can use the rhetoric of favoritism to alter the balance of power, whether or not such a charge is valid. For example:

> Bobby was refereeing *C & S* for the first time. Throughout the game it was apparent that he was paying special attention to Brian and Andy, his two best friends, and was ignoring the rest of the players. Don became particularly an-

> noyed at this favoritism, and criticized it openly. Once when Bobby went off to talk privately with Brian and Andy, Don commented to the rest of us: "This game is shit." [Field notes]

Players recognize that favoratism is common, but the acceptance of it depends on who is giving preference to whom. In the example above Don challenged Bobby for favoring relatively low-status players and ignoring him (a high-status player).

Clique members are likely to give each other special treatment when they play with outsiders:

> Ted, George, and I have become quite good friends; the effects of this friendship can be seen in a game which Mark referees. Two other players were hobbits, and Ted was an elf. As Ted is rather quiet, he did not participate much. At various points George and I say that Ted should roll to see if his elf could detect any secret doors in the dungeon, instead of the hobbits. (Both character types have the ability to do this, so this was reasonable in terms of the game). On some occasions Ted did roll, gaining experience points. [Field notes]

Friendships do affect game-related behavior, a finding that is consistent with the nonrational ordering of reward systems in everyday life, but here transcending the real world and affecting the content of fantasy.

Deviants and outcasts. While most players are accepted into the group, a few players are seen as unsuitable gaming participants. I knew two players who were placed in this class: Leo and Mark. Leo was widely considered to be disagreeable, and players made every attempt to discourage him from playing. Although not personally disliked, Mark, a young player, was thought to be arrogant and "sadistic" as a referee. Unlike Leo, players did not exclude him from games, although many players did not like to play in the games he refereed. They made jokes about him, collectively termed "Markie jokes." Players treated Leo as an outcast and Mark as a tolerated deviant.

The outcast. Leo is a young man in his late twenties or early thirties, cursed with a domineering personal style and a sense of humor others consider warped. When he arrived at the Golden Brigade, he often found all the games "filled up." Only twice did I see him play a game, once when I was playing. Players breathed

a sigh of relief whenever he gave up searching for a game and left the club.

When playing Leo insisted on being in charge whether or not the party needed a leader and whether his was the most appropriate character to lead. He ignored suggestions that he thought inappropriate, and did whatever he wanted—which in practice meant having his character or other characters behave recklessly, and getting characters killed. This was particularly disturbing when I played with him, because he arrived well after the party was into its adventure. As soon as he became aware of the situation, he directed the entire party, claiming it was disorganized and needed leadership. Since it was late in the evening, the disgruntled players quickly ended the game rather than try to control his behavior.

Once Leo literally picked up a young player without any warning or explanation or without any indication that he knew this boy. One can imagine the feelings of this youngster being raised off the ground by an adult stranger. Another time he grabbed a player's cap and flung it into the air. The high-status players attempted to avoid him, while they told others about his reputation:

> At about 8:30 Don arrives and is thinking of going to the back alcove to play with whomever was refereeing there—as that was usually where the high-status players congregated. Brian sees Don heading back there, and says: "Leo is back there. Do you really want to go back there?" Don replies, "Noooo." (Both laugh.) Alfred, a young gamer, asks: "Is that the famous Leo who put shit on a paper plate?" Brian replies "Yup." (All laugh.) Later in the evening Bobby finds three chairs in the back alcove broken and reports this to Don. Don tells him, "Leo broke them." Bobby: "What did he do?" Don replies, laughing: "He ate them." [Field notes]

Leo's reputation even spread to Barker's *EPT* group:

> Barker says that Leo had called asking about what was going on in Tekumel, and Barker claims that he told him "nothing." Roger suggest that he should tell Leo that Tekumel had been destroyed. [Field notes]

Whatever Leo's personality, he was not accepted as a legitimate role-player because of his reputation, which appeared

to be partially justified by his behavior. Of greater significance was that he served as a "bogie" figure for the group, instructing players by implication about the norms of gaming behavior, and serving as a source of solidarity in that all gamers could share in the stories about Leo. It is interesting that these fantasy gamers should need to create a real-life monster. The problem for Leo, and for labeled deviants in general, is that behavior that might be accepted by others (such as tossing an acquaintance's hat in the air) is defined as further proof of his moral culpability.

The deviant. The use of labels to warn against deviant behavior is represented by reactions to Mark. No one seriously considered Mark to be a psychopath. Mark was simply a fifteen-year-old who had very definite ideas on how to play fantasy games, was not afraid of expressing these ideas, liked to referee, particularly with older and experienced players, but yet, being fifteen, had not acquired the respect of the older players. As a result, Mark's behavior was a standing joke, even though many people liked him personally and respected his knowledge of medieval history.[2]

Mark's difficulty stemmed from his age taken in concert with his belief in his gaming prowess. Mark comments:

> I'd like to show people how *C & S* really should be run, damn it! While I'll accept advice from Don, I think Don understands now that I probably know more about *C & S* than he does. Because he was asking my help during one point on how to deal with magic users. While I'm not trying to boast, I think it's true. [Field notes]

Whereas Mark's analysis might be accurate, his propounding it does little to help his reputation, especially with Don. Although Don did ask for Mark's advice on that occasion, he generally thought little of it.

Mark often found it difficult to get people to play in his games because he had the reputation of being a sadistic referee. His name was used as a local slang expression for a referee who was too bloodthirsty.[3] Greg commented about his own refereeing: "I may not be a perfect ref, but I'm not another Mark"; Bobby concurs that Greg is "not another Mark" [Field notes]. One gamer commented about Mark's refereeing:

> I only played with him on one or two games . . . he seemed like an OK person, but when he got to referee he

> almost seemed to go, not crazy, but go into such detail about the world. Talking about the groin hits; he'd do things like that . . . .he . . . played it for all the gory details he could get out of it. It seemed that his games are always a little more violent than other people's that I've played with. [Personal interview]

Mark's style of refereeing had a reputation among those he gamed with that might not be entirely fair in terms of its actual content. However, his reputation developed because he was not seen as having the *right* to kill the characters of older and higher-status members.

Once when Mark was refereeing *Traveller*, his players became disgruntled with the campaign and decided to commit suicide en masse (which is, as was discussed in Chapter 3, an extreme form of social control). Mark describes the situation as follows:

> About four player-characters decide to commit suicide en masse. Reason: "I'm tired of the campaign." Well, you see, the thing is that that rather annoys me, 'cause that's rather in poor taste. . . . I put some time and effort into setting up a situation for you and you're saying, "Well, I can't take it." And this bugs me. Being tired of the campaign is one thing, but saying that you find too many obstacles is something else. [Field notes]

Players don't like to find their characters facing impossible odds. By singling out one person as a "sadistic referee," players warn other referees to structure their games appropriately.

Players' attitudes toward Mark's refereeing are reflected in attitudes toward him as a "character." One player says of him: "Mark is so ugly he frightens off balrogs," and another says when he hears that Mark will join the game, "the first time Mark comes in the game, kill him." In fact, once in the game Mark was accepted, and the suggestion of killing his character was taken as a joke—but one that reflected feelings toward Mark's refereeing. This attitude was expressed during a judicial trial in *Traveller* in which Mark's character was the prosecuting attorney. The players whose characters comprised the jury passed around a sheet with the heading "Mark Is" on which each member of the jury filled in a humorous insult about Mark, such as "gay," "a big mouth," "a rust monster," "an ugly orc," and so forth. One

player wrote "Mark is Mark," suggesting that Mark's name had become an insult in itself.

Attitudes toward Mark and Leo reveal the structure of these gaming groups, as does the submission to high-status players. Up to this point I have discussed only the positions of individuals in the gaming world, but members are treated categorically, as a consequence of age; age is a major mechanism by which gaming groups are structured.

Age and Fantasy Gaming

During much of the period in which I participated at the Golden Brigade, the casual observer would have been struck by the wide diversity of the players' ages on any given evening. Originally the Golden Brigade was attended primarily by older adolescents and young adults, but a newspaper article publicizing the club (Kern 1977) broadened its appeal to youngsters interested in science fiction and fantasy. Thus the small, tight-knit group rapidly gained members, several of whom were preadolescents. The tenor of the club began to change with the influx of young members (aged ten to sixteen), inexperienced at fantasy gaming and without background in war gaming. To an outsider the setting may have seemed a rare example of multi-age play (as several parents believed). However, the older players became annoyed[4] at the change in membership and consequent change in the level of sophistication of the games.

The older players resented that they were being used as "babysitters" by parents who wanted to "dump" their children for the evening. On one occasion a player made this point explicitly, if jokingly, to a parent:

> Sam's mother came for him at about midnight. Howard, who has been refereeing this thirteen-year-old all night, said to her jokingly, "We should charge you $1.50 an hour for babysitting." She attempts to maintain a good face on what she seemed to recognize was resentment on Howard's part, saying: "He is too old for that." [Field notes]

Older players would groan when they saw a station wagon pull up at the the Golden Brigade, because it meant another load of children for them to teach the game to and referee patiently.

Within six months after the original article (June), the players at the Golden Brigade had changed almost completely, with the

median age decreasing from about twenty to fifteen. Of the five high-status referees who figured in the earlier research (December), by June only one attended regularly. Players who still participated were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the club. Both Don and Brian claimed that the problem was "the type of people who come now," not the number of people. The reference was to the younger players.

In an informal meeting late in June the older players attempted to reassert their right to play sophisticated scenarios without being compelled to simplify them for the younger players. The outcome of this gathering was to reorganize the club by having a "central attraction" game each week, in which participation was limited to those who knew how to play. A list of featured games was prepared and posted at the local game shop, and it was hoped that this system would bring back some of the older players.

Although this system provided some stability, ensuring that someone would be prepared to referee, it did not bring back the older players. The younger players still attended, and now defined themselves as knowing how to play the game. With some of the college students out of town for the summer and with high schoolers and junior high school students able to stay out late on weekends, the average age of players decreased still further.

In late July, Don approached me (as a regular and older player) to ascertain my opinion of placing an age limit on club participation. I tried to be noncommittal, but not negative. Later I overheard Don talking to several of the other regulars about the same matter. He informed me that several former regulars would no longer attend because of the presence of young gamers. In two weeks he informed players that the officers (it was not clear who these individuals were) had decided that henceforth there would be a 9:30 P.M. curfew for anyone under sixteen. Don presented two rationales for this action, neither of which mentioned the dissatisfaction of the older gamers at the way the club had "degenerated." He claimed that the club was "not a babysitting agency," and further that the club might be held responsible if something happened to one of the younger players after dark. He noted that Minneapolis had an official curfew for children under sixteen of 10:00 P.M., and the 9:30 gaming curfew would allow these players to reach home by 10:00. In fact, this curfew is never enforced. The rule obviously was designed to protect the interests of the older players, rather than stemming from a concern for

the welfare of the younger players. Eventually the rules were modified so that younger players could stay until 10:00 P.M., and that the curfew would be disregarded if a player had written permission from a parent. However, the ruling had its desired effect as many of the younger players (especially those under fourteen) stopped attending, as parents were pointedly informed of the decision.[5]

This decision restored the control of the older players, and eventually they let some younger players stay later, because the presence of these few younger players was no longer perceived as a problem.

Don's decision to press the issue generated some hard feelings in the younger players and their friends. Jerry (eighteen, but a close friend of Ted, fifteen) bitterly remarked that he disliked Don's autocratic attitudes: "He thinks he's always right, and that everyone else is always wrong. People who are always wrong, like me, don't like that" [field notes]. However, despite the discontent of the younger players and their friends with the decision and with Don's attitude, the policy remained in force.

What is it about age that makes this variable so important among all the others that might be used to differentiate players (e.g., social class, residence, or social dominance)? Obviously it is not chronological age itself that is crucial, but those attributes that are correlated with age. Different ages have different fantasies, as well as more obvious differences in role-playing skills and in understanding the rules. First, younger players like their fantasy games to be easier and their characters to be in less danger than do older players. The idea of death seems too frightening for the younger players, and so they object to (and have their characters run away from) danger. Second, younger players' views of the settings (medieval or science fiction) are much more sketchy than those of the older players, who almost revel in the layers of detail that they can build up about these social worlds. Related to this is that older players, because of their broader experience and education, have a larger body of references from which to draw in creating a fantasy. Third, older and younger players enjoy different fantasy content. Older players regularly include grotesque violence and explicit sex, while this would be inappropriate in games with younger players, who like cleaner, more genteel fantasies.

The difficulty that older players have when playing with younger players is that they must alter their fantasies to appeal to the younger player. When an older player referees one younger it is rare that he will include sexual references. Older players, rather than playing their own game no matter who is present, see themselves as having a moral responsibility to alter the game to suit those younger. Thus in this sense younger players have more control over the game than they might ever imagine. The fact that this perspective is so totally accepted by the older players and that they do not feel it is morally appropriate to change, makes them resentful of the presence of the younger players, in addition to being frustrated over their lack of rule-knowledge and role-playing skills.

Every open gaming group that attracts a wide range of participants must face similar issues; the gaming world, like any social system, is a political world in which participants vie for rights and privileges that must be achieved at others' expense by the use of power. The resolution of the dispute will be a consequence of the local circumstances; however, once a problem is defined it must be handled or it will lead to the group's disintegration.

The examples of the social structure presented here emphasize that gaming groups are social worlds with status systems, with status assigned to individuals and classes of individuals. What is significant about the gaming world as a social system is that not only does a social structure exist that incorporates players' natural interactions with each other, but a social structure also exists in the fantasy world, as characters form adventure parties, and these parties must negotiate a social order through the positions of characters in the fantasy world.

Structure and Fantasy Gaming

Fantasy gaming is designed to be cooperative, unlike most games, in which competition is central. Players claim there are no losers, and that everyone can win (Gygax 1979:20). The game pits the players against the fantasy world created by the referee. Ignoring the rivalry between players and the referee (see Chapter 3), games are designed so that all players can participate in a spirit of cooperation.

The existence of social stratification among players suggests that this picture of intragame harmony is an ideal, but is somewhat misleading as a depiction of game reality. Although cooperation is emphasized in many parties, one finds rivalries among players, a leadership structure, and the mirroring of the external social structure within the fantasy reality.

Cooperation and Rivalry among Characters

The rhetoric of gamers stresses that intraparty cooperation is an important feature of fantasy role-playing. Players are advised:

> Co-operation amongst party members is a major key to success, particularly when the characters are relatively low-level . . . survival at lower levels is usually dependent upon group action and team spirit. (Gygax 1978a:107)

In those games in which moral alignment can be chosen by players, they are advised to choose a common alignment to permit cooperation (Gygax 1977c:5). A need for cooperation is also recognized by the players who typically form a single party for the sake of unity and strength.

Cooperation is also expressed when players feel that they are a "team" against the referee. Players do not report each other for cheating, and more importantly, players are not supposed to give the referee information that may make it less likely for the party to succeed. The existence of this expectation can be seen on those instances when it is violated:

> Sam wants to learn what kind of trap a will-o'-wisp has set for us, and he says his character will use the spell Detect Traps, which technically cannot tell him the kind of trap he is facing.

GAF: [as player] Your spell is not specific to allow you to determine what kind of trap.

Sam: You're on our side. [Meaning I should cooperate in convincing the referee that this spell is possible to use here.] [Field notes]

> We had put some monsters asleep, and shortly thereafter our party must pass by them again.

Doug: [to the referee] Are the Hra[6] awake?

Charles: You don't remind the ref how to hose you down [i.e., kill you]. [Field notes]

The greatest unity in a party occurs when players are facing a foe whom they all must attack to stay alive, i.e., when they have a superordinate goal (Sherif et al. 1961). Ill-will and rivalries emerge immediately *after* adventures, especially when dividing up indivisable spoils (such as magic swords or magical amulets) and making new plans.

The rivalries that emerge from intraparty interaction are of two types: *role rivalries*, in which *characters* rival each other because of the characters' interests, and *personal rivalries*, in which the rivalries stem not from the positions of the characters but from the positions of the players. The first type of cooperative breakdown is legitimate in the game, if rare; the latter type is in theory inappropriate but occurs often. On occasion these personal rivalries are masked as role rivalries, with rival players attempting to construct a reasonable rationale as to why their characters could be competitive. In discussing rivalries I do not imply that most games include overt competition, but a significant number of games do involve interaction contrary to the cooperative model suggested by gaming rhetoric.

Role rivalries. Players attempt to form their characters into parties in which all characters have the same alignment and in which all are after a single goal. However, in some games the scenario is structured so that the party is fragmented or the party decides to fragment itself:

> Our party is composed of a group of hobbits and dwarves, and a group of humans. Ted, playing one of the humans, makes a joking comment that hobbits were at the bottom of the list of creatures, and that he was going to eat them. As a result of this, Bobby, playing one of the hobbits, begins talking secretly with the other hobbits and dwarves. Our group of humans, thinking that they are making plans, decides to rob the hobbits when they are asleep and run off. As we are supposedly all asleep, the referee announces that the whole party is attacked by brigands, and that both groups are just pretending to be asleep. We easily kill the brigands, but by now the party is so unstable that any further collective action is impossible. The party splits up, with the idea that if the two groups of characters meet, bloodshed will result. [Field notes]

Tim: I've found [at the convention] interesting ways of playing that I've never seen before. Like this morning we played in *D & D*-Barsoom.[7] And that was, wow, so different. I've never seen anything like that . . .

Geoff: You had a task. And a lot of people's apparent role was not their true role in the game.

GAF: What do you mean?

Geoff: OK. I was in command of some mercenaries searching for a kidnapped princess. One of the mercenaries was not really under my command. He was an assassin. He was supposed to kill one of our party. And he didn't know who.

GAF: Was that a player-character?

Geoff: Yeah, that was a player-character. So he's sitting there trying to figure out who he's supposed to kill.

Tim: The guy who he was [supposed to kill] was an underground prince.

Geoff: Right. The undercover prince was really desparate to find this princess, because he's really crazy about her. Now, there's this other guy who's an ordinary fighting man, but he's crazy about the princess too. And after we successfully completed that mission, having captured the princess . . . we're getting away, and all of a sudden we're just getting into all of these fights, because I think this one guy's an assassin, and he's the guy who really likes the princess, and he's trying to get next to her, and we're fighting it out. The assassin thinks I'm the prince, he pulls out his gun and shoots me, and I'm laying there dead, and it was just utter pandemonium. Finally this one guy, his mission was just to kill anyone he could and try to kidnap the princess, wound up walking off with everything, he killed everyone, he got the princess, he got away. . . .

Tim: Usually when we play *D & D* we tend to stick as a party.

Geoff: Yeah, we're usually tight.

Tim: And you would never stab anybody in the back. . . . In *D & D* you're usually pretty loose about the members of your party as far as not worrying about them stabbing you in the back. It happens. [Personal interview]

As these players suggest, such role-based rivalries are rare, although they occasionally do occur. They require considerable role-playing skill, since such a situation typically implies a closed awareness context in which a player must appear to play a role to the other players (or some of the other players) while actually playing a significantly different role. These scenarios transform *D*

& D (or the other FRPs) into competitive games rather than exercises in collective problem-solving and collaboration.

More often a party has undercurrents of mistrust, which may erupt if the situation calls for it, as in one *EPT* campaign:

> The party stays close together, but there's always these undercurrents, like Roger and a couple of people will always look on Charles as being too mercenary. They'll tell the nonplayer characters, "don't trust Kutamay," Charles's character's name. [Personal interview]

More often, the rivalry is grounded in personal mistrust, on the desire of one of the players to gain control of the party, or on a different style of play. Although the formal rewards in the game are not based on the defeat of another person, there are interpersonal rewards—being thought to be a good player or gaining the attention of the referee—and players compete against each other for these rewards.

Personal rivalries. Generally personal rivalry involves competition for scarce and desirable resources that one player does not want another player's character to obtain, unless his character can get the same or better:

> Jerry has offered to give Ted's character a war-horse, and George (the referee) rolls the dice to determine the quality of war-horse Ted's character will get.

George: [to Ted] It's a medium war-horse. Write that down someplace.

Jerry: Wait. Why would I give him a medium [war-horse] and keep a light for myself?

George: Because that's a horse you've had for a long time.

Jerry: It should have certain percentage points advantage in working with me.

GAF: It's a sentimental attachment.

Jerry: I mean, I'm not gonna give him a better horse than I have.

George: It's not necessarily better, for crying out loud. It can turn better, it's just as fast. So, in fact your horse is faster . . . it will go just as far. It just can carry less, that's about the only thing, it can take as much damage. OK? [Field notes]

Rivalry also surfaces in decision-making—in determining what characters can and cannot do, and what is legitimate in a

particular situation. Players engage in a power struggle within the context of the fantasy situation:

> Our party meets a magician, whom Jerry's character decides to kill, essentially without reason since he has done us no harm. The rest of the party objects to Jerry's plan, particularly when Jerry claimed that he killed this high-level magician with his Blast amulet. The other players thought this action was out of character for Jerry's character, and we knew that this action might change the power balance in the game since Jerry's character obtained all of the magic objects and weapons the mage was carrying. [Field notes]

A struggle for power may also occur when determining who will make decisions for the party:

> Mark and George, through their characters, constantly discuss who will make decisions for the group. Mark suggests that the party stay on the first level of the dungeon and hunt orcs and look for treasure; George wants to descend several levels looking for greater treasure and magical weapons (generally found on the lower levels), and incidentally meeting more difficult monsters. Here the party agrees with George. On another occasion the two players argue about who should attempt to pick a lock, and Mark wins. At one point George decides that his character will peer behind a waterfall and Mark asks the referee, "Does his armor rust?" Later Mark comments to the rest of us: "There's a certain rivalry between Max [Mark's character] and him [George's character]. They're kind of equal." [Field notes]

This rivalry did not develop out of the nature of the two characters, but from the desire of both Mark and George to dominate the game; both wished as *persons*, not characters, to make decisions.

On most occasions other gamers and the referee exert sufficient social control that these power plays do not interfere with the operation of the game. However, characters sometimes enslaved others (on Tekumel, where such things are permitted), tried to commit mutiny, placed magical spells on other characters, and attempted to get characters excommunicated. In one extreme situation this led to one player-character killing another:

> Our party had captured a group of human prisoners, whom we had some difficulty controlling during the game. Stew

> wanted us to free them, while Chuck insisted that we keep them. Stew and Chuck both say that their characters are fighting and yelling at each other. As a result of the fight Chuck's character kills Stew's character, and Brian (the referee) says that during their fight all the prisoners escaped. [Field notes]

Brian's decision to allow the prisoners to escape was a means of punishing Chuck for his character's behavior in the game, in that his goal in the fight was thwarted. While rivalries do rend the game fabric, those not party to the dispute typically attempt to control it, to restore order to the game, either by constructing a compromise that allow all parties to be reasonably well satisfied or by insisting on a new formulation that allows the game to proceed. To this end the referee must work with his players to achieve a meaningful situational definition—by punishing those who overstep game boundaries or by convincing those who feel wronged that in fact they were not. It is not that these disagreements can be prevented, but rather that they can be resolved through rationalization, revivification, or rewards. After the battle between Chuck and Stew, Stew's character was brought to life by a clerical miracle, and the game scenario continued, with several prisoners being recaptured.

The use of culture to promote social control within the party is striking in that in theory the fantasy culture is distinct from the ongoing life in the game. Yet, as these examples have demonstrated, quite the opposite is true. Fantasy is utilized as a form of rhetoric to persuade others to accept the normative requirements of the game. The game structure with its dangers to characters provides a particularly effective set of techniques by which referees can control players. The violence that is typically hidden in most interpersonal forms of social control (as a last resort) is projected into the fantasy scenario, and stands for the ultimate source of power in informal social control.

Leadership

Just as the gaming subsociety has a decision-making structure, there is a need for the establishment of decision-making procedures within each game. As discussed above, characters may have quite different goals within a game, so mechanisms for determining what action the party will take needs to be agreed

upon—explicitly on occasion, but more often implicitly. Four approaches to leadership may be delineated: (1) the single leader, (2) task specialization, (3) group consensus, and (4) anarchy. These styles are ideal types that rarely occur in their pure form, but as ideal types they correspond to leadership styles in other collective task-oriented situations.

The single leader. Many parties, oriented to killing monsters and gaining treasure, opt for a single leader, a person who is known as the "caller" since he is supposed to "call out" to the referee what the party is doing. This method of decision-making is particularly evident at tournaments in which players give the task of successful adventuring precedence over the socioemotional rewards of gaming. For example, the party that won the *D & D* tournament at Origins '78, the large national gaming convention, was described as operating in this fashion:

> This team developed a remarkable ability to work together. Playing together for a number of years certainly helped, but even those that didn't know the others worked well together. They all knew how to follow the appointed leader when necessary, how to disagree with him quickly and accurately, so that the flow of the game was not slowed unnecessarily. [Kask 1978:3]

A leader must not be too autocratic or his group will rebel at his directions. The legitimate decision-making power of the caller must be recognized by the other players. In other words, the caller must receive his authority from the members of the party. Authority can be imposed democratically by a collective decision; it may emerge naturally, with one player recognized as most competent to lead the group through adventures; or it may emerge from the social order of the game with the player whose *character* has the highest prime requisites, highest level, or the highest leadership skill or charisma becoming the group leader. Players who attempt to assume leadership of the party without these attributes are frequently rebuffed by the other members of the group.

In Barker's *EPT* scenario Roger usually exerted leadership, not so much because he was the most qualified player, but because his character was the local fiefholder, and it was natural for the other characters to take orders from his character. In this group oriented to role-playing, other players did not object to this

structure, often addressed comments to him, and let him roll dice for the whole party.

The major virtue of the single-leader model is that, aside from its obvious efficiency, this individual can reconcile the conflicting interests of players and characters in way that, if done well, can increase enjoyment for all:

> If you have a group in which you have at least one leader figure, who has played a number of games, who knows what goes on, so he has an idea of the relative strengths of [characters], where to put people, he will decide the basic formation that [the characters] will move around in. Now, if this group that is with him has worked with him before, typically he has established a kind of rapport so that he just goes up to the blackboard or on sheets of paper and puts down what characters go where and what formation. Now, usually it turns out that somebody will complain a little, like he doesn't want to be up in the front rank. He wants to be in the back rank. The leader will, depending on what type he is, he may explain why that person is best qualified to be in the front rank, or, if he's more of the strong-arm type, he may just say "That's the way it is." [Personal interview]

Yet there are problems in a group led by single leader. Obviously there are difficulties when the leader doesn't know the rules well, but dissatisfaction and dissension also occur when a dominant player, such as Leo, "assumes" the leadership of a group and will not accept feedback. A third difficulty with a single leader is in ensuring the involvement of all players. A party with a single leader can disintegrate into the involvement of only one player, while the others only observe. In the satiric view of one gamer:

> Usually, someone is appointed the Leader. For the rest of the expedition, only this nerd . . . will know what's going on. The rest will just listen with half an ear, or talk among themselves, or whatever. . . . The only time that one gets to be in the act is when they either assert themselves, which can lead to feuds in the middle of the expedition which are fun for few, or the [referee] points at them and says, "What do you want to do?" and the player says, "Huh? Where are we? Is it soup yet?" and must be lec-

> tured on the past hour's events and how they effect [*sic*] him. [Seligman 1979a:3]

A balance must be maintained between the task-orientation goals of the characters and the socioemotional needs of the players—a precarious balance that is not always achieved.

Task specialization. Some of the problems inherent in the single-leader model can be dealt with by establishing a division of labor in the party. This division of labor is typically based on the specific strengths of the characters, which often are related to the interests of the players who role-play these characters.

Characters and players have interests and strengths related to the game structure, and a successful party should have a range of character types and player types. To be successful a party needs a mix of characters types in order to ensure that the full range of powers will protect the party. One player suggests:

> Have a combined arms operation, more or less. Like you don't go down [in a dungeon] with everybody a fighter, because if you come up against a monster that uses magic, you're wiped out before you get close enough to attack. You also don't go down there with a lot of magic users, because if somebody surprises you right next to you, you're almost certainly dead, because the magic user doesn't have any armor. [Personal interview]

This structure does not *inevitably* produce a leadership system based upon specialization or a division of labor, but, since different players have characters with different functional roles in the campaign, they can develop specialized skills. Players also have specialized skills. Some gamers always wish to play magic users and may develop expertise in the complicated system of magic devices. When something relevant to magic occurs in the game context that player will take command. Other players like being hobbits, and these players may acquire leadership when something must be stolen, as hobbits are skilled at thievery. Likewise, some players (not necessarily their characters) may have a particular interest in economics, and these persons have charge of making business deals for the party; other players may be particularly verbal and they may be in charge of addressing nonplayer characters (played by the referee).

When a party is composed of equally skilled players and of characters with different specializations, this model of leadership

is effective. However, this presupposes that all players recognize the expertise of the other players and characters; unfortunately, this is not always the case—other members of the party sometimes feel that they are equally expert, and show no reluctance in claiming this expertise.

Consensual leadership. Many groups attempt to operate with democratic leadership and the free flow of ideas. In this model all players have a right to suggest what a character or the party as a whole should do; eventually through discussion a consensus will emerge. In theory the majority chooses the plan that seems to be the most practical for the group. In reality the idea chosen often depends on whomever is the most insistent at the moment, or on friendship patterns in real life or power relations in the group (see Sherif and Sherif 1953:252).

The consensual model is often found when a game is small and informal, and achieving task goals is secondary to having a good time. As one player recognized:

> I think when you have a smallish group the referee can talk to everybody, so you don't need a speaker [caller or leader]. If you have a smaller party everyone can take a part. . . . I think that on the whole it should be that everybody has an equal say. [Personal interview]

When consensus can emerge easily, this is a desirable model of gaming. Yet it almost requires a small group of good friends who have considerable informal social control over each other, so that it becomes more important to give in when facing the opposition of the group than to continue holding a position.

This desire for consensus may explain players' feeling that small groups are the best size for gaming; parties that are perceived as too large sometimes split up. The belief that a party is too large may be the result of a lack of group consensus. In the scenario discussed above, in which the group of human characters was arrayed against the dwarves and hobbits, the lack of consensus led directly to the division of the party (see also Lortz 1979b:41). Gygax suggests that three to five players are the optimal number to referee because it promotes cooperation among players (personal communication). This belief reflects actual group size. In the *Judges Guild Journal* survey respondents were asked: "How many players usually participate in your sessions?" The median number of players was 4.7 with a mean of

5.5. For cooperative gaming, then, a small number of players is necessary, and this group structure is conducive to participation by all players in reaching consensual decisions.[8]

Group anarchy. Groups that do not opt for a formal procedure of decision-making leave themselves open to anarchy if the structure of the group prevents consensus from emerging—typically when the group is large, when there is no accepted leader, when players do not know each other well, and when characters have markedly different goals in the game. Pure anarchy does not occur very often, because players typically know each other well, and mechanisms of informal social control constrain the actions of group members. However, in one gaming group anarchy was quite dramatic:

> Randy is refereeing a large *Traveller* game in which the dozen or so players are space marines attempting to capture a hostile planet. The players in this game for the most part don't know each other, although there are a few pairs of friends. Ross plays the character with the highest military rank in the game. However, Ross is a young player who is not very sure of himself, and does not want to be a leader. He frequently refuses to decide until the older players have reached a consensus. Because of the size of the group and the lack of familiarity among group members, coupled with different orientations to military tactics, the group cannot decide on tactics. One older player tells Ross that he can ask for advice, but that he must make the decisions himself. Ross agrees with this, but lets the debate over tactics continue. Finally Randy tells us that the enemy has spotted us, our ships have been attacked, and all our characters have been killed. [Field notes]

This anarchy was a consequence of the failure of the single leader (Ross) to take command, coupled with the failure of the consensus model of leadership. However, this situation is rare in gaming groups, as it is rare for the referee suddenly and without warning to have the entire party killed.

Whatever leadership strategy is decided upon (and whatever its effectiveness), players must select some mechanism by which they can organize the adventures of their characters. Since characters cannot animate themselves, decision-making is ultimately grounded in the "real world," although the fiction remains that the decisions exist on the characters' level of exis-

tence. These decisions, like group decisions generally, are affected by participants' statuses. In addition, the particular features of the fiction of danger and the need for quick response in crises often lead to players' desiring to reify their decision-making structure, thus creating the illusion of immediate response. Both the age and homogeneity of players influence the content of the decision-making structure that can be produced by players.

The Structure of Parties and the Reflection of Real Life

Relationships in gaming parties tend to reflect relationships in the real world. This suggests that affective ties are difficult to transform radically in fantasy. Stated differently, fantasy is constrained by social structure. On occasion siblings decide that they will be brothers in the adventuring band. Similarly, in one game an unmarried couple played in our group—the man played a male human, the woman a female elf. During the course of the game he spent the night in her tent, even though relations between humans and elves are rare (or impossible) in fantasy literature. Yet a real-world assignation was reflected in the gaming tryst. Close friendships may also be reflected in the optional decisions that players make concerning their characters. For example, two good friends in Barker's *EPT* scenario signified their close relationship by both belonging to the Golden Sunburst clan and both worshiping the same minor deity, Chiteng.

Players who have a hostile relationship in the real world may find themselves bickering or fist-fighting in fantasy:

> Brian and Mark are constantly nagging at each other and cussing at each other and arguing. . . . Brian is a little bloodthirsty; he does like to go out and lead a rowdy life, while Mark just kind of likes to sit back. . . . The characters hate each other . . . they simply hate each other because the two people disagree on something; they have some personal disagreements. . . . I really seriously don't think people can say, "Well, I hate this person, but I'm gonna be nice and buddy-buddy to him in this game." I really don't think anybody can do that. [Personal interview]

Thus hostile relationships as well as friendships become part of the gaming structure. When there is no congruence between the personal relations and game relations the situation is inherent-

ly unstable. This was clear in the game described above when Ross was supposed to be in charge of our marine party but was unable to lead successfully. This was even more apparent in a party in which the most powerful *character* was animated by a twelve-year-old boy who found it difficult to lead because of his lack of knowledge of the game. Fortunately for the progress of this game, the party used the consensus model so that the more experienced players had the major impact on the decisions.

It is important for the effectiveness of the game structure that the status characteristics of players be positively correlated with the status characteristics of their characters. In situations in which the characters are not rolled up anew, this typically poses no problem because the more experienced players have more experienced characters, who are the natural leaders of the party. However, on occasion alterations are made in a character's attributes in order to bring them in line with the abilities of the character's animator.

This alteration (or special treatment) may occur through the auspicies of the player, his fellow players, or the referee. The first is the least common motivator of change since most players like to have an important character and thus an important role in the game. However, there are occasions in which a player does not feel comfortable or capable of leading:

> Howard (the referee) decides that, since he has never run a *Traveller* starship battle, he will run a battle with each of us (GAF, Jerry, George, and Ted) having one starship to command and with him taking four spaceships which would oppose us. Howard says that each side will have a 1000-ton cruiser, a 600-tonner, and two 400-ton starships. We roll to determine who will get which ships. Ted rolls highest and receives the 1000-ton ship, George receives the 600-ton ship, and Jerry and I have the two 400-ton ships. Ted, however, is unsure of how to play the game, and he offers to trade with Jerry, so that Jerry controls the largest starship cruiser. [Field notes]

Players sometimes convince other players to accord them special treatment in keeping with their personal status. For example, Don asked me, when it was my character's duty to stand guard one night, to wake his character up first, even before my character awakened the "leader" of the party. This was seen

as a legitimate request because Don had a higher group status than Brian, the party's official leader.

Finally, the referee, through his discretionary authority, can alter a character's status to correspond to his status within a group or his relationship with the referee. Typically this is achieved by giving a player more authority than his character would "naturally" deserve within the fantasy scenario:

> [This referee] favors his friends a lot. . . . For example, once we were playing in his campaign, and a character I had in *Traveller* had a social level of sixteen, and one of his friend's character had a social level of nine, and his friend's character got a ship [usually reserved for] royalty, and I didn't. [Personal interview]

This was considered deviant in that the status system that referee used was not the one shared by all his players. Referees who accord special treatment to characters in the game role-played by players who are generally conceded to have high status have little difficulty with other players' objections. In one game episode, for example, my character was raised a rank in the navy so that a younger player with higher characteristics would not be captain of the starship on which both our characters were stationed. On another occasion a referee raised the education of a high-status player so that he could command, since his knowledge of the game surpassed that of the rest of us. Such changes were frequent but typically subtle, as they often involved the referee's allowing some players to reroll their character traits and not allowing others to do the same thing.

Obviously the social relations of players as persons influences their relations as fantasy characters. While there is an informal perception that it is legitimate to kill gorgons, harpies, chimeras, and manticores,[9] it is considered improper for a fourteen-year-old to lead a party of adventurers in which there are twenty-year-olds. Maturity is a variable so central to these players that it is virtually impossible to transcend it even in fantasy (i.e., an immature person cannot play a mature character and so cannot lead a party). Fantasy content can only be organized within the limits of what is seen as possible in terms of the expression of players' characteristics. Religion was twisted and transformed in most groups, because most young adults I played with didn't take their religious beliefs seriously in this

setting. Fantasy is constrained by members' perceptions of what variables cannot be transcended by players and their characters under any circumstances (e.g., intelligence and maturity). These perceptions organize the display of power in these fantasy worlds. Fantasy role-play gaming provides a socially structured world in both the relationships among players and in the relationships among characters. Even in players' wildest flights of imagination we find the obdurate social reality of the "real world."

Six

Frames and Games

I have conceived of fantasy gaming as a social world, a universe of discourse. In this chapter I will examine the implications of this view for understanding the players' interpretations of their experiences. Central to this approach is the assertion that human beings reside in finite worlds of meaning, and that individuals are skilled in juggling these worlds. I will use fantasy gaming data to explore some implications of Erving Goffman's discussion of frame analysis.

Sociologists and philosphers have long recognized the existence of finite worlds of meaning that have the potential for allowing human beings to become encapsulated in them. William James (1950; orig. 1890:287–93) addressed the existence of "various orders of reality" grounded in the paramount reality of the "world of 'Practical Realities'." Similarly, Alfred Schutz asserted that people make sense of their perceptions through multiple realities:

> All of these worlds—the world of dreams, of imageries and phantasms, especially the world of art, the world of religious experience, the world of scientific contemplation, the play world of the child, and the world of the insane—are finite provinces of meaning. [Schutz 1971:232]

According to Schutz these worlds have a particular cognitive style, are internally consistent, and have a "specific accent of reality" (Schutz 1971:232). Goffman describes social worlds as constituting frames of experience. He defines a frame as a situational definition constructed in accord with organizing prin-

ciples that govern both the events themselves and participants' experiences of these events (1974:10–11). Extending the work of Schutz and James, Goffman examines the linkages among frames of involvements, how individuals pass from one frame to another, and how they become entangled and involved in frames, which are grounded in the social order. *Frame Analysis* is original in its invocation of the social organization of interaction to uncover perceptions of experience.

Games seem particularly appropriate to the application of frame analysis because they represent a bounded set of social conventions, namely a social world. Goffman's 1961 essay "Fun in Games," with its concern for the boundaries of play, can be seen as the logical precursor to *Frame Analysis*, which also relied upon gaming examples to depict the foundations of experience. This choice of topic is significant because it reminds us that frames of experience may be conscious. Unlike dreams or madness, these worlds have a logical structure, recognizable as parallel to the mundane world.

Games are quintessential examples for frame analysis because of their capacity for inducing engrossment. That is, voluntarily cutting oneself off from other realms of experience distinguishes this world of meanings from those primary frameworks (or the paramount reality) that individuals "naturally" inhabit. Games—at least those that are judged as successful—provide alternative social worlds in which individuals can become involved. The significance of gaming resides in the shared nature of the engrossment (see Riezler 1941) and in the supportive recognition that others are equally engrossed:

> As far as gaming encounters and other focused gatherings are concerned, the most serious thing to consider is the fun in them. Something in which the individual can become unselfconsciously engrossed is something that can become real to him. Events that occur in his immediate physical presence are ones in which he can become easily engrossed. *Joint* engrossment in something with others reinforces the reality carved out by the individual's attention, even while subjecting this entrancement to the destructive distractions that the others are now in a position to cause. [Goffman 1961:80; italics in original]

Yet Goffman does not here recognize the oscillating character of such engrossment. Although perhaps contrary to common sense,

people easily slip into and out of engrossment. Frames succeed each other with remarkable rapidity; in conversations, people slip and slide among frames. Engrossment, then, need not imply a permanent orientation toward experience. This point is consistent with Goffman's discussion of talk as a "rapidly shifting stream of differently framed strips" (Goffman 1974:544).

A weakness in *Frame Analysis* is its insistent shifting of examples. The reader never learns enough about any one social world to understand the dynamics of the frames embedded in that world and the dynamics of keying in that "universe of experience." Through a discussion of fantasy gaming I intend to examine several issues that Goffman suggests are characteristic of all human experience. It is not my intention to use my ethnography of fantasy gaming to explicate Goffman's approach point for point. Rather, I will attempt to ground these data in my own rendering of frame analysis. My analysis, then, is heavily influenced by Goffman's writing, but is not an exegesis of it. I wish to expand two features of frame analysis that, I believe, have not received sufficient attention: the extent to which different frames of experience are stable, and the relations among the framed selves of the individual—in other words the extent of awareness allowed between frames.

Fantasy Games and Frame Analysis

Like many social worlds (acting, storytelling), fantasy games produce a "make-believe" world set apart from the everyday world. By playing fantasy games, participants implicitly agree to "bracket" the world outside the game. Yet ultimately all events are grounded in the physical world. As Goffman notes:

> Fanciful words can speak about make-believe places, but these words can only be spoken *in* the real world. [Goffman 1974:247; italics in original]

Furthermore, our understanding of the rules of framing and of organizing game experiences are acquired in the "outside" world, and are required for the structuring of a play world [Goffman 1974:249]

Every play world has a set of transformation rules that indicates *what* is to be treated as real and *how* it is to be treated as real within the make-believe framework. In acting, the what and

how are typically bounded by the footlights. For games, such as bridge, meaning-relevant actions have a particularly artificial patina:

> [Players] do not treat the fact that the other player withdraws a card from his hand and places it on the table as the event "putting down a pasteboard" or "effecting a translation of position of a card," but rather through the translation of the card's position the player signalizes that "he has played the ace of spades as the first card of the trick." [Goffman, 1961:26, quoting Garfinkel, unpublished paper, n.d.:7]

The rules of the game and the meaning of these rules imbue the game with its meaning (Riezler 1941). Games, through the transformation of events embedded in natural interaction, constitute world-building activities (Goffman 1961:27).

This assignment of meaning through transformation applies to fantasy gaming, but because of the attempt to simulate a world of interaction, the properties of this transformation are somewhat more complicated than those of other games, such as bridge, chess, or backgammon. In those games the simulated actions have an arbitrary relation to naturally occurring events. Putting down a card has symbolic meaning in the game world, but it has no regularly expected meaning in the nongame world. In fantasy gaming the relationship between the meaning of an action within the game and natural interaction is closer.

In board games, such as backgammon, dice determine the outcome of sequential action, but in fantasy games, unlike in backgammon, the dice generate actions that *could* occur in the real world. A roll of six in backgammon means that the player's piece gets to advance six spaces on the board; that same six in fantasy gaming means that a player's character successfully bashes an opponent. While both of these actions are unreal, they are unreal in different ways. In backgammon, the pieces do move six spaces—a physical movement of a material object—but the spaces have no inherent meaning. No physical movement occurs in fantasy gaming, since the actions of characters are internally represented; however, within the framework of the game the bash is a real one, and the character who is bashed is really injured. The world of fantasy gaming and the rules that structure that world do not have physical effects, but the consequences are

close simulations of natural interaction. The action is a direct simulation of a hypothetical world rather than, as in backgammon, an indirect simulation enacted in a physical world.

Because fantasy gaming does not have winning as a clearly defined goal, what is the reason for playing? In some ways fantasy gaming represents a pure game in that engrossment in the game world is the dominant reason for playing. One can play bridge to win and not really care about the cards. Even in a semi-role-playing game such as *Diplomacy* one may have no interest in the scenario of the game; however, the structure of fantasy gaming requires such engrossment in the created fantasy world. If the player doesn't care about his character then the game is meaningless. Thus players can incorporate anything into the game world provided that it increases their engrossment in the fantasy. Additional frames beyond the players' primary framework must be seen as desirable alternatives in order for the game to continue.

Frame Levels in Fantasy Gaming

It is neither realistic nor useful to provide an exhaustive list of the types of frames available to individuals. As Goffman notes, frames are embedded within frames, and the structure of these framing devices, either keyings or fabrications,[1] may be complex. In fantasy gaming, there are keyings (and sometimes fabrications)[2] nestled within the original frame. Characters sometimes find it necessary to trick others by pretending that they (the characters) are someone other than who they "really" are. This can be achieved by invoking a magical spell ("Transmorph," "Disguise"[3]) or by playing one's character as if he were someone else. Characters pretend to be weary strangers while they are actually the foes of those they attempt to deceive. In one *EPT* scenario, our party visited a dungeon in which several characters were trapped in a magical mural that contained "fantasy" figures with whom our "real" characters had to deal in order to escape. Our characters were doing this at the same time that other characters were in the room watching us trying to escape from the enchanted mural. The activity in the mural was a keying from our status as characters, which in turn rested on the keyings of the gaming framework, further based upon a keying of the primary framework of the players.

It is not important to present a list of the schemas of belief that are possible in the gaming world. What *is* important is that transformations of realms of action do occur, and vary greatly in content and structure. I shall simplify matters by focusing on three levels of meaning, drawing on the vast tangle of other possible keyings and fabrications only when necessary for explication.

First, gaming, like all activity, is grounded in the "primary framework," the commonsense understandings that *people* have of the real world. This is action without laminations. It is a framework that does not depend on other frameworks but on the ultimate reality of events.

Second, players must deal with the game context; they are *players* whose actions are governed by a complicated set of rules and constraints. They manipulate their characters, having knowledge of the structure of the game, and having approximately the same knowledge that other players have. Players do not operate in light of their primary frameworks—in terms of what is physically possible—but in light of the conventions of the game.

Finally, this gaming world is keyed in that the players not only manipulate characters; they *are* characters. The *character* identity is separate from the *player* identity. In this, fantasy gaming is distinct from other games. It makes no sense in chess to speak of "black" as being distinct from Karpov the player (although one can speak of Karpov the player as different from Karpov the man). The pieces in chess ("black") have no more or less knowledge than their animator. However, Sir Ralph the Rash, the doughty knight, lacks some information that his player has (for example, about characteristics of other characters, and spheres of game knowledge outside his ken such as clerical miracles) and has some information that his player lacks (about the area where he was raised, which the referee must supply when necessary). To speak of a chess knight as having different knowledge from its animator might make for good fantasy but not for meaningful chess.

Each of these three levels has its own structure of meaning (and its own shared understandings). Thus in chapter 4 I discussed the friendship culture of players, which corresponds to their primary understandings, and their gaming culture, which corresponds to the player's information about the game. I might have pushed the point and argued that the characters in the game

(like characters in a play) have their own "culture," but that analysis would have had the effect of pushing culture far from its behavioral moorings—although in theory such an analysis might have been justified.

Awareness Contexts

Every frame has meanings associated with it, but these meanings are not necessarily shared with figures (persons, players, characters) operating in other frames. Building on Glaser and Strauss's article, "Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction" (1964), I wish to extend the construct of awareness to the understanding of levels of meaning and experience. Contours of awareness coupled with engrossment permit us to speak of frames as being different from each other. Thus a joke is considered funny even though its content is "seriously" known to be false. The joke provides a circumstance in which the shared awareness of the "true" falsity is set aside to permit engrossment in the joke. Engrossment implies the setting aside or ignoring of alternative awarenesses.

Glaser and Strauss (1964) distinguish four structural types of awareness contexts (examined through dyadic relations). An open awareness context is present when each interactant is aware of the other's identity and his own identity as seen by the other. A closed awareness context occurs when one interactant does not know either the other's identity or his own identity in the eyes of the other. A suspicion awareness context emerges when one individual suspects the identity of the other or one's own identity in the eyes of the other. Finally, a pretense awareness context applies when both parties are aware but pretend that they are not. Glaser and Strauss's analysis is limited to the awareness of *others* and does not examine the awareness of *selves* and the knowledge of selves in other frames.

Numerous activities involve the enactment of several selves by the same individual. Actors, storytellers, spies, experimental confederates, con men, and of course fantasy gamers all have multiple selves lodged within the same body. These would seem to require open awareness, since both "figures" are the same physical being. However, this reasonable assumption is misleading about the nature of frames of experience. In few cases is there open awareness between frames, because open awareness entails

denying the existence of the other frames as realms of experience. Open awareness denies the engrossing character of fantasy. Closed awareness contexts and suspicion awareness contexts seem equally rare; split personalities or recovering split personalities are examples of these states, but these psychotic states gain their clinical significance by their rarity. Dreaming, hallucinating, or hypnotic trances represent temporary closed awareness contexts. More characteristic of framing is the pretense awareness context; the existence of frames outside of primary frameworks depends on the individual's being willing to *assume* an unawareness of his other selves. The actor's character pretends to know nothing of the actor's self and knowledge, but it is only a pretense of ignorance for nondissociated individuals. In the game structure players must play by the rules and refrain from using other devices that are illegitimate. Likewise, the character must *know* only that information which is available within the game frame and not what the player or the person knows.

The character is supposed to operate under the constraints of a closed awareness context with regard to his animator, although this of course is a pretense. Because player, person, and character share a brain, this separation of knowledge on occasion is ignored. Characters do draw on their animator's knowledge of contemporary reality when their character could not have this knowledge, or they can draw on their player's knowledge of game events outside of their own knowledge. Also players and persons are unaware of the specialized knowledge that their characters have. These problems arise when one upkeys from one's primary framework. That is, it is not considered a problem when persons admit knowledge of the game structure or actions of characters, and no dispute arises because players know what their characters know. Only in situations that in theory are closed awareness contexts but in reality are pretense awareness contexts (in which advantages are to be gained in the application of awareness) do difficulties occur. I shall examine each of these problematic components of awareness contexts, and then discuss their implications for frame analysis.

Character awareness of person reality. Characters use knowledge of late twentieth century America to select and evaluate game options. Technically this is considered poor role-playing, but it is functional within the game context because it gives the character an advantage not otherwise available. This

issue is most relevant to the two games based on medieval Europe, *C & S* and *D & D*. For a character to know about advanced weapon design or the laws of physics gives him an advantage, unless all in that situation (including nonplayer characters) share that knowledge. The slippage of awareness poses a problem for the referee, who must distinguish the character's legitimate knowledge from his animator's knowledge of a more technologically advanced age (see Ward 1979:7). Referees sometimes allow this tainted knowledge in the game in order to expedite game events, but they may exclude information if characters seem to know too much:

> Sometimes they'll try to apply twentieth-century knowledge to a medieval situation. . . . They love to invent the airplane. . . . A lot of people want to be clever; they'll invent the cannon. And I'll say, "Fine, what metallurgical processes do you wish to apply to refine the iron ore to this quality?" and they go, "Huh? Doesn't somebody know?" They don't really know themselves how to do it. . . . You know, you're acting out of character, so I'm not going to give you the benefit of the doubt. [Personal interview]

Players' incomplete knowledge allows referees to restrict the awareness of characters, and to prevent the pretense awareness context from shifting too obviously to an open awareness context. Referees can merely disallow knowledge, but this raises questions when the character does "in fact" know what he claims to know. In these situations the referee and player must determine the extent of the character's knowledge. This is complicated by the fact that referees create worlds that are *not* historical replicas of the European Middle-Ages. In fantasy, it is *possible* for the characters to know *anything*. Despite this flexibility of fantasy, both players and referees recognize that medieval characters should not have too much information gleaned from contemporary scholarship and technical training.

Character awareness of player reality. Typically, a player does not leave the gaming area when other players' characters are adventuring outside of the physical presence of that player's character. It is expected that a player can shield the information he receives from his character. Here again players operate in a pretense awareness context—the characters must pretend not to

know something the players know. It is in the interest of characters to use this information, although it contaminates the role-playing.

When the information gained might directly influence the game (often when some characters are attempting to devise a fabrication to trap others), the referee or other players may insist that players leave the gaming area:

> Howard (the referee) tells our party to leave the table while he is refereeing another spaceship which misjumped into a planet controlled by our enemies, fearing that we would find out too much about their military system. [Field notes]

The integrity of the distribution of information precludes participation by all players. In this instance, our group waited for forty-five minutes while Howard resolved the scenario.

Referees typically do not insist that players leave the gaming area, but they do try to prevent players from using the information. Enforcement is difficult because a character may act in a legitimate fashion but do so because of information he has acquried "illegitimately." If a player discovers that a particular dungeon room contains a very hungry dragon with a very small treasure, the player's character might choose another door. The character *might* have done that anyhow, but this information makes the possibility a certainty. Similarly, if a player learns that another's character plans to steal his treasure, he will take precautions to protect his wealth—precautions that he might not have taken otherwise. Players often use information this way, and referees can do little about a player who makes cynical use of his pretense awareness context.

However, referees have some power in controlling the spread of information among frames when the source of that information is obvious. Thus we find the following debate among players about a character's personal knowledge of another character:

Barry: I'm going to see my father in the Great White Lodge [a magical lodge that other characters have mentioned, and which he knows about as a player—but not as a character—of which his father is the leader].

George: You don't know anything about the Great White Lodge.

Barry: I've heard about it.

George: Well, you might have heard about it.
Barry: In mythology, you know.
George: That's about all you've heard. You don't even know there is a leader there.
Barry: Yes, I do.
GAF: You certainly don't know it's your father.
Barry: No, but I always wanted to see him.
George: Well, but everybody wants to see somebody important. That doesn't mean anything. [Field notes]

Although Barry as a player knows of the Great White Lodge, this information must be shielded from his character; he is forced to adopt a pretense awareness context, even though some leeway is allowed. This slippage in awareness is also seen in the following example from *EPT*:

> Roger has been informed by other players that a party his character was not in had met some Ru'un[4] in the dungeon of his castle, but his character, Lord Ahanbasrim, had not been told. Roger keeps making reference to these creatures, and finally the referee tells him (Lord Ahanbasrim): "You don't know these Ru'un are there, so stop pretending that you do." [Field notes]

Some referees extend their concern with the degree of players' awareness and suggest that, as in "real life," characters should not know the probabilities in the game world (the rules of the game with their percentages of success). This secretiveness—keeping the player ignorant so that his character will be ignorant—adds to the verisimilitude of the simulation according to some referees:

> I have long felt it best for the players *not* to know all the rules of the game they are playing. Even if a [referee] utilizes a particular set of [role-playing] rules, she or he should change the rules (characteristics of "monsters" or magical items, etc.) just to keep things interesting. [Sustare 1979:21; italics in original]

Most referees find this approach cumbersome; it's easier to give in to players' demands for complete awareness. As one player commented in an adventure in which this rule was enforced, "Don't you just hate not knowing what's going on?" As a result, many referees permit slippage between character and player knowledge.

Slippages of awareness indicate the fragility of the role-playing enterprise—it can easily be subverted. I emphasize, however, that although this subversion damages the nature of the role-playing, it does not destroy the game. This extra information gives the characters an advantage that they would not have if the fantasy situation were the primary framework for their characters—it tarnishes the illusion of the "real fantasy" world, but it doesn't make the game less of a game.

Player unawareness of character reality. The game illusion is that players are enacting the roles of personages who lived during the Middle Ages or who will live in the far distant future. This implies that the player must play the character. Yet the player is portraying this character *in a world*—a world created by the referee, of which the player knows little. Thus a character who is a knight would know many of the nuances of armed battle with which the player is totally unfamiliar; the Tsolyani priest would be aware of the details of his religion; and the starship commander would know how to command a starship. This means that players and referees must *assume* the details of existence within the worlds that the characters occupy. Down-keying from the character to the player involves a closed awareness context. In game terms it is assumed that the character exists independently of the player—the player only animates his character. In practice, the character must rely either on the knowledge of the player or on the assumption of the referee that the character does know the nuances of "mundane" fantasy life. However, in addition to ensuring that the character does not fail because of the player's lack of "obvious" knowledge, the referee must ensure that the players are aware of things that the character would definitely know:

> Our *EPT* party is thinking of going to M'relu, the regional capital, to trick the regional commander into giving us permission to hunt for treasure. The referee suggests that our characters probably couldn't deceive him, saying, "he's a man who's not stupid," but he suggests that we might be able to bribe someone in his entourage. He adds, "You'd know this; this isn't telling you anything." [Field notes]

This is significant in that the players did *not* know this, and had no way of knowing it; the referee is providing advice to the players and through his advice is opening the closed awareness

context. The claim of legitimate knowledge is also used by a referee to justify giving a player special treatment:

Barry: [when George (the referee) and Jerry are exchanging notes] Back and forth with the notes.
George: He's not asking me anything really important to tell the truth.
Jerry: Just for my own information.
George: Which he would actually know; he would know anyway.
Jerry: My character would know, but I wouldn't. [Field notes]

This not only represents the opening of a closed awareness context (by down-keying information from the character to the player) but also indicates the boundaries of information between one character (for whom this information was central to the plot) and the other characters in the game. Unlike the previous examples of awareness contexts, which were influenced by the simultaneous operation of frames and in which the problem was too much information in the system (the character knew more than he ought), here the problem is too little information (the player does not know enough). Generally, roles that have fewer keyed laminations are "legitimately" aware of up-keyed roles; roles with more laminations are less "legitimately" aware of down-keyed roles. Simultaneously, portrayers of roles with more laminations have less information about their keyed roles than those who portray roles with fewer laminations. Put simply, the closer one is to one's primary framework, the wider one's pool of knowledge is, and the more one can draw upon all the other worlds of knowledge.

Awareness context of the referee. Although the referee has created a world, it is a world that he does not know well. Typically, the referee creates a bare outline of the world. Thus the fantasy world the referee has created is very different in scope from the world he inhabits. As referee, he is not the same as God, despite the metaphorical linkage. If we think of "God" as being a keying of the game organizer's role, we can see that he is in a somewhat similar position to players who find that their characters know more than they do. The referee has a world to run, yet it is an opaque world, and he has no one to consult to give it form except himself, although at times he may become so engrossed in his world that he temporarily forgets that only he can create it (Holmes 1980:93).

This means that the referee must create the world as the game proceeds, according to the needs of the characters. Since referees can't plan the details of their world too far in advance, they may have nonplayer characters give the player-characters less information than might reasonably be expected:

> Our party in *Traveller* runs into several Gilgemeshers (huge merchant ships). Although the commanders of these ships are friendly, they (as portrayed by Howard, the referee) refuse to give us any information about neighboring planets. The reason for this becomes clear when we see Howard's map of space. Although he has the planets located, he has not yet given them any characteristics, and therefore does not know enough about them to answer our questions. [Field notes]

The referee as animator of nonplayer characters is not aware of all of the information that he implicitly has by being "God." This structure of awareness has implications for the operation of any universe.

Awareness context and frames. In examining relationships among the roles that individuals adopt while interacting, I have suggested that there are difficulties in the awareness that persons have of other keyed roles. My interest is in the relations among an individual's selves (and the information controlled by selves) in different frames. This suggests that there are different contours of knowledge, and participants must ensure, if they are to stay within frame, that the pretense of awareness is maintained—for it is the pretense of awareness coupled with the possibilities for engrossment that comprise the basis of behavior within a frame.

I have suggested that three basic frames operate in fantasy gaming and that each of these has a world of knowledge associated with it—the world of commonsense knowledge grounded in one's primary framework, the world of game rules grounded in the game structure, and the knowledge of the fantasy world (itself a hypothetical primary framework). The individual has the right and responsibility to know about the first two, and typically can learn about them if he wishes. The third world is in theory known only through the character and in practice is known through the referee and through action in the game. This knowledge is, then, often inaccessible. This situation is not unique to gaming, but applies to all role-playing—acting, spying in disguise, or doing

comic impressions. While the person *is* the person he is playing, he only knows a limited amount of information about that person and is unable to generate more knowledge. Further, if the role-playing is effective, he is limited to knowing *only* what that individual knows. This is what makes role-playing difficult: the player must block information about the game and the contemporary world that the character would not know, while simultaneously not letting his own ignorance of the fantasy world affect the successful action of the character. Using awareness effectively is intimately connected to the keying of social worlds.

Every social world has its own structure of meaning. It is my contention that although the specific structure of fantasy role-play gaming is unique, the processes being examined here characterize other social worlds as well. Consider spying. Here we find espionage agents acting under cover, portraying the roles of other (real or fictitious) individuals. At least two levels of awareness operate here: the spy in his "real" identity and the spy in his "assumed" identity (see Goffman 1969). The spy knows only those details about his "assumed" self that he is told and cannot recall other "biographical facts." Thus the spy is like the player portraying a fantasy character. Likewise, the "assumed identity" cannot know those things that the spy would know (as the medieval character cannot know about modern technology). The spy-in-disguise can be uncovered if he knows things that the person he is portraying couldn't know—as well, of course, as not knowing things he would surely have known.

Acting and storytelling provide similar instances of several personae being enacted by a single individual in different frames. The actor and storyteller must make sure that the character doesn't learn what the animator knows, and in turn the animator can't peek into the character's world to learn just a little bit more (other than through the use of imagination, grounded in the "real" world). Yet the "assumed" persona must be real to the audience. Whenever we step out of our primary frameworks into new "selves" for extended periods (even in dreams, reveries, or the like), the issue of "self"-awareness must be addressed.

The examples presented represent the actions of professional keyers and fabricators, but what about everyday life? The dramaturgical analogy suggests that we are all keyers and fabricators. The person consists of a bundle of identities that are more or less compatible, but which when enacted must presume a lack of

awareness that other identities are possible. The identity enacted is grounded in the assumption that that is the "real" identity, although often the enactor is well aware that this identity is chosen for purposes of impression management. The task of self-presentation does not merely involve manifesting an appropriate and coherent identity, but also involves concealing those other identities that are either incompatible or differently keyed. Even when awareness of the impression management is not wholly conscious, the structural relationship between selves is still present. Admittedly, the identities enacted in everyday interaction are less distinct from each other than those found in the more dramatic examples.

Switching Frames

Frames have different levels of stability. By that I mean that some frames oscillate rapidly—up-keying or down-keying frequently—while other frames are comparatively stable. The actor must remain in the part of his character continuously while onstage; similarly, the spy-in-disguise cannot switch frames without some danger. In other situations (e.g., put-ons, playfulness, fantasy gaming), frame switching typically poses no substantial problem for participants.

The extent of frame switching can be seen as a function of engrossment (Goffman 1974:345). Games are designed to provide "engrossable" systems of experience in which participants can become caught up. In fact, individuals do get "caught up" in fantasy gaming; however, this engrossment is a flickering involvement—it depends on events that occur in the game world. Players do become involved when they face a monster; but once this encounter is completed, they may return to "mundane" discussions about politics, girlfriends, or the latest science fiction novel, even though the game continues.

In addition to the recognition that engrossment is essential for the stability of the fantasy frame, one should consider the effect of the voluntary nature of the frame and the "fun" that is embedded in it. Voluntary frames, i.e., frames in which persons are not constrained to stay, are more likely to be rapidly keyed than are mandatory frames—although this is, of course, a matter of degree. It is not only the amount of engrossment that the actor finds in his character's role that stabilizes the play, but the

consequences of breaking frame. In voluntary activities, such as fantasy gaming, there are few aversive consequences for breaking frame. Frame switching is considered legitimate as long as it does not overly affect the continuation of the game:

> When one player takes time out to answer the telephone, the play may be stopped in mid-air, being transfixable for any period of time, but not the social affair, the gaming encounter, for this can be threatened and even destroyed if the absent player is held too long on the telephone or must return with tragic news. (Goffman 1961:36)

Because it is voluntary, fantasy gaming permits side involvements to take precedence—a point structurally different from how engrossed one can become in the game.

A third point relevant to the nature of frame-breaking within the gaming encounter concerns "fun." "Fun" would seem to be a *sine qua non* for gaming, but "fun" is a flickering experience, and along with it flickers engrossment and the stability of the frame. When other side-involvements are perceived to have greater rewards in terms of "enjoyment," the game will be put aside—temporarily or permanently. The search for fun also leads to players' "toying" with their play (Goffman 1961:36–37). Side-involvements, if frequent and enjoyable enough, may be incorporated as regular parts of games (such as inserting gambling with real coins within the structure of fantasy games). Both voluntary involvement and fun are related to the nature and extent of engrossment—but these are analytically separable constructs that affect engrossment while increasing or decreasing the likelihood of frame-shifting.

Mundane shifts of levels occur when the fantasy is interrupted by the pressures of the real world—the ringing telephone, the ordering (and then eating) of a pizza, or the biological needs of participants. These activities generate breaks in the game—and down-key the interaction to the "real world." The "real world" will always intrude, for the gaming structure is not impermeable to outside events. However, the extent to which this down-keying occurs is also a consequence of interest in the game. One player comments:

> From a theoretical standpoint I would guess that as the game gets more and more interesting people do less and less talking out of character. . . . I'm sure that there are

> times when [talking out of character] can be very, very frustrating to referees, 'cause like I was reffing a game once, and the players kept making comments about the room and how the water didn't taste very good. . . . I would suspect that as the game got more and more intense, people would stick more and more to the game itself. [Personal interview]

Just as games can be down-keyed, so too can reality be up-keyed to the level of fantasy, which occurs when one's primary reality proves frustrating:

> At the convention banquet the food service is very slow, and diners joke about the speed of the meal, banging their utensils on the table in imitation of rugged adventurers waiting to be served at a tavern. One diner commented: "We should have brought along dungeon rations." [Field notes]

Games may also involve the up-keying of reality. As discussed in chapter 3 in another context, a referee may take a comment made by a player outside his game role and incorporate it into the action of the game:

> We are trying to find the materials for a cabalist charm for Lewis's character. At one point Lewis's character enters a butcher shop to purchase cow's blood for the charm. The referee (Don) says that the butcher looks at him suspiciously when he asks for it, and Don, speaking as the butcher, says: "What do you want it for?" Lewis jokes out of frame: "I'm thirsty." Don says the butcher scowls, "Get out of my shop." After leaving the butcher we head back to the inn where we meet six Knights Templar who insist that Lewis's character comes with them to talk to the priest. Lewis agrees, and, while at the church, his character is killed, because they think this blood-drinker is demonic. [Field notes]

However, there is a complication. Unlike the example of the hungry convention gamers, these up-keyed comments (that is, comments given an additional meaning or lamination) are themselves grounded in the game events. They add a level to the game events by satirically giving game events relevance in the everyday world; these are then further up-keyed by the referee back to

the gaming frame. Thus the referee's action is a mocking of a mocking, which is accepted as part of the gaming world:

GAF: I notice in playing at the Golden Brigade that some referees will incorporate what people say out of character into the game structure:
Barker: I do this as a joke. For instance, somebody will make a smart crack. Like he'll say, "Bullshit," whereupon I have one of the Tekumel characters say "What's a bull?" or they'll use some particularly American idiom, say "He kicked the bucket," and so the Tekumel character says "Why did he do that?" and "What was this bucket doing there in the first place?" Just to tease them and embarrass them sort of and make them realize that you must not shift out of character. [Personal interview]

By speaking out of character, players up-key the structure of the game, and Barker up-keys it further by incorporating this talk humorously in the context of the game.

By up-keying, players and referees transform game-relevant statements into remarks that are not defined in terms of the game context but are based upon it. These remarks are distinct from secondary involvements and out-of-frame activities, which are viewed as separate and subsidiary to the game. These remarks use the game framework and can only be understood in this context, although they do not presuppose an extended framed self. As a consequence, players can make a up-keyed joke, get a laugh, and immediately return to character as if nothing had happened (if the referee or other players don't up-key the remark further). For example, a player who has a "haste" spell placed on his character will himself (as a player) talk rapidly. Or a dungeon pool of bubbling water is referred to as "Mountain Dew" or "7-Up." These comments are not disattended by *players* in that they draw laughter, but are disattended by the *characters* whose actions are being mocked. Only rarely is there confusion about the level on which a jocular statement is to be taken.

Is such fooling with frames unique to fantasy gaming? Assuredly not, although there seems not to be any generic name for its parallel in the real world, except perhaps what we might call an extended put-on or informal joking. Friends often "put-on" characters when gabbing with others, and the others in turn have the opportunity to engage in conversations with other personae or reground the joking remarks back into the primary

framework, as gamers do. These gambits have the same evanescent quality as fantasy interludes, and perhaps for this reason have been little studied (see Goffman 1974:87–89; Hall 1974).

Despite the possibilities for engrossment in fantasy gaming, frame shifting occurs frequently—both up-keying (adding laminations to the game world) and down-keying (returning to players' primary frameworks or to a discussion of the gaming rules). These keyings may be stable, chaining the frame for a considerable period of time, but often are evanescent. The implications of this are consistent with seeing interactants negotiating reality with each other—a reality that is continually in dynamic tension, subject to shifts in interpersonal definitions.

Problems in Frame Interpretation

As Goffman notes, ambiguity in the interpretation of events is not uncommon, and this produces difficulty in determining which frame of reference to use to respond to an event:

> What is ambiguous is the meaning of an event, but what is at stake is the question of what framework of understanding to apply and, once selected, to go on applying, and the potential frameworks available often differ quite radically one from the other. [Goffman 1974:304]

Although such radical shifts do not occur in fantasy gaming, we still find ambiguities of frame. We can imagine such gaming statements as "Did you kill James?" being taken in two ways, but this confusion did not occur, partly because context and paravocal clues indicated that no "real" crime was being discussed, even though "real" names were used. The misunderstandings between frames are relatively minor—more suitable to a chuckle than to a blush—and they center around those aspects of the game that have counterparts in the primary frameworks of players: name, place, age, and time. Usually the nature of the speaker (in terms of which keyed identity is talking) and the keyed identity of the audience can be reasonably well determined. However, we do find some briefly confused situations:

> George asks me: "How old are you?" Thinking of my character, I say, "Twenty-three." George: "No, in real life." I say, "Twenty-seven." He comments, "I'm twenty-six." [Field notes]

> A group of players were discussing various games that they had participated in. Sandy was explaining an event in a game he had recently played.
>
> *Ron*: Where were you?
> *Sandy*: In Detroit.
> *Ron*: No, in the game.
> *Sandy*: Over by some huts. [Field notes]

These ambiguities are resolved quickly, because the speaker will typically provide a corrective account (Goffman 1974:480) which has the effect of protecting the other from embarrassment as well as gaining the information originally desired. Indeed, if such a corrective is not given, it may well be impossible to know that a misframing has occurred.

Audiences must determine *who* the speaker is. They must discover not only the source of the words, but which of the speaker's selves is doing the talking—the person or the referee, the player or the character. The following is one of the more complex confusions of this genre:

> Jerry said that "I" [my character] had gone over to the king's capital city, and on the docks "I" [my character] had met "Barry" [Barry's character]. "Barry" [the person] shakes my hand [my real hand] and says, "Nice to meet you [the character]." "I" [in character] say, "Nice to meet you [Barry's character]" to him. Jerry seems surprised and asks: "Don't the two of you know each other?" Barry comments, "Not in this game." [Field notes]

In the game context, players or characters often refer to a character by the person's "real" name, and this practice produces a potential confusion. The "source" of the greeting becomes unclear. This was especially likely in the above example, because Barry and I had not gamed together often, and our characters had not yet met in the game. The ambiguity in this instance arose in the physical act of the two persons shaking hands. Only persons or players physically act, not characters—unless these characters are up-keying, by pantomiming their statements. Thus, had "Barry" said, "I say 'nice to meet you' and shake his hand," Jerry would not have become confused.

Another example of confusion derives from the all-encompassing culture of Tekumel:

Doug: What be the date?
Barker: It's the end of Langala.
Doug: No, in this world.
Barker: This world doesn't exist.
Doug: I know, but anyway.
Barker: August tenth. [Field notes]

This encounter is the reverse situation of the previous example. In that situation players assumed they were talking as persons; in this situation, players assumed the character was the source. Confusion may arise either from attributing an action to the primary framework or to one of its keyed alternatives. Doug's comment, "I know, but anyway," testifies to the fact that he is switching from one frame to another in mid-sentence—his character says "I know," and his person says "but anyway."

When a linkage can be made between the two worlds of being that coexist in the gaming encounter, tension (and joking) is found (Goffman 1974:77). Through humorous up-keying of game encounters participants connect the game to a version of the "natural world"—expressed unnaturally through humor. Joking happens when people are faced with a situation in which alternate perspectives can apply, or in which a sharp dichotomy exists between the player's publicly given impression and the character's attitude expressed within the context of the game. Topics in which ambiguity of attribution may be present, and hence implicit tension, are sexuality and aggression—and these are topics in which there is much humorous up-keying, as if to deny the seriousness of the topics:

Jack (the referee) reports that one soldier in Larry's character's army reports feeling ill.
Larry: Remove your clothes. Not him, you. (To Jack)
Jack smiles and gives Larry the finger. [Field notes]

Hal: What's a bash?
Sam: [joking] That means I bash you if I die.
George: This guy's [Sam's] a psychopath, he chokes people for the fun of it. (Sam playfully chokes Hal.) [Field notes]

In these examples joking occurs when players make distinctions between the character's orientation and that of the player or referee. Each example involves a play on words in which the parties to the humor are portrayed simultaneously as persons and as characters. It is this juxtaposition, in conjunction with the very

different attitudes toward sex and violence between free-wheeling characters and rather repressed (nonaggressive, nonsexual) persons, that provides the tension that results in humor.

Fantasy and Other "Realities"

The world of fantasy gaming as a framed world is both typical and unique. It is unique in the particular experiences it creates and the rules necessary to create these experiences. At the same time it is typical of other forms of social life in that it permits the rapid shifting of frames and requires the enactment of several framed selves. While not every situation is characterized by both oscillation of frames and pretense awareness, the former is found in many situations of play and informality and the latter is found in situations in which the person "acts" a role other than the one to which he feels entitled (not only acting and espionage, but many forms of impression management). In other words, the performer recognizes the existence of several selves that must be juggled, hidden, or exhumed when appropriate. Both, then, characterize "everyday life" as well as this pastime.

The point, of course, is not that we can generalize directly from the description of fantasy gaming; rather, fantasy gaming provides a setting in which the dynamics of framing are particularly central to the enterprise and are evident to the participants. In this chapter I have attempted to extend Goffman's argument by specifying two components of frame analysis: (1) the relationship among identities generated in different frames, and (2) the stability of frames. If we assume, as I do, that these issues transcend the narrow social scene I have described, they open the way for further investigations of the relationships among frames, engrossment, and identities, which Goffman only hints at.

Specifically, I have argued that frames have different stabilities. Some, such as in fantasy gaming, mock fighting, and informal talk, are flexible, while others, such as the dramatic frame or malicious fabrications, typically are more stable. Central to the stability of frames are the level of engrossment possible within them and the external (social or political) consequences of up-keying and down-keying. The possibility of the rapid oscillation of frames suggests that frame stability and change should be conceptualized as an interactional achievement of members rather than as a function of stable situated meaning. Since partici-

pants commonly and cooperatively shift frames in the same situation, frames are not merely a shared individual schema that is triggered by the objective properties of a situation; rather, they are part of a dynamic consensus that can be bracketed, altered, or restored through the collective action of the participants.

The other focus of this chapter is related to the first. On occasions in which some frame switching occurs, actors must deal with the knowledge that adheres to each of the "nested" identities they present. In some cases, as in fantasy gaming, this may pose interactional difficulties, particularly when up-keyed figures know both more and less than their down-keyed counterparts. This leads the actor to adopt a pretense awareness context *among his own selves*. The implications and generality of this "inner espionage" remain to be explored in depth, although it would not be unreasonable to assume that regular pretenders have distinctly different interactional styles than those who engage in such activities less frequently. Following interactionst theory I have conceived of persons as collections of selves or identities. However, such selves typically are seen as operating sequentially and in isolation from each other; frame analysis suggests that we need to examine the effects of simultaneously activated selves on worlds of meaning.

Seven

Role-playing and Person-playing

A central feature of fantasy role-playing games that distinguishes them from other leisure-time activities is that they, as their name reminds us, involve role-playing. In all games successful players must be skilled at "role-taking"; they must accurately predict and react to the actions of the other participants. Yet the fantasy game player does not only take on a role.[1] In fantasy role-playing games, he not only determines what others will do, but does so while playing a character—a hypothetical person with attributes, fears, emotions, and goals. In chapter 6 I argued that selves operate on three levels—the primary framework, the gaming frame, and the fantasy frame. The first two are directly connected to the person, while the third is in an important sense a role sharply distinguished from the person (Turner 1978; Goffman 1974:269–74).

The characters that players adopt are *figures* in much the same way that Goffman talks of actors and actresses:

> When an actress takes on the stage part of Celia Coplestone, she animates a make-believe person, a stage character. By using much the same physical configuration—her own body [or in the case of these gamers, their voice]—she can . . . project entitites of other realm status; a historical personage, a goddess, a zombie, a vampire, a fleshy mechanical woman. [Goffman 1974:523]

Fantasy games are similar to the theater, but with the difference that the games are improvisational. Significantly, one of the claimed benefits of these games is increased thespian skills. In

addition, it is sometimes suggested that these games are similar to psychodrama—that form of psychotherapy developed by Moreno (1934) in which participants act out reactions to psychiatrically significant events. These renditions are of course fictionalized, although symptomatic. The ability to adopt a persona is central to gaming. Ed Simbalist, the codesigner of *Chivalry and Sorcery*, is particularly articulate about role-playing in role-playing games:

> It is a means of personal expression on a highly creative and imaginative level. It is the spontaneous creation of a "living novel" or a "psychodrama," interaction amongst players on many different levels as they create *alter egos* in the persons of their characters and so enter into imaginative and excited realms of existence denied to them in their everyday lives. The more fully they themselves capture the spirit of their characters and imbue them with rounded personalities, backgrounds, and motivations separate from their own, the more the players become "actors" on a stage of their own making. . . . If one is going to create a world that is "alive" and charged with real adventure, role playing is essential. One must get *inside* his character, see what motivates him and makes him unlike any other, breathe life into him as an individual, and above all surrender one's twentieth century self to the illusion and *be* that character—see, feel, think, and act as he would. Only then will the activity be more than counting gold or bodies or experience points. . . . We are all playwrights and actors and audience rolled into one. If it is a good performance, we are highly gratified and, though limp with repeated adrenalin surges, we make plans to meet for the next foray into "Our World." [Simbalist 1979:22–24; italics in original]

Simbalist's rhetoric, however, should not disguise the fact that role-playing is difficult, and players do not always role-play well. As Goffman notes, latitude exists in role-playing in the degree to which a person submerges his own self in a role, adopting the identity implied by the role. This relation between person-self and role-self in fantasy gaming depends upon the player, the components of the role, and the expectations of the group. Sometimes the gamer plays *himself* as his character, on other occasions the gamer essentially becomes a different person. Despite the ability of some players to *become* their characters during the game, these roles are too temporary and compartmentalized for us to

speak meaningfully of a role-self merger in the fashion of Turner (1978). Players engage in role embracement (Goffman 1961:106) rather than role merger.

Two strategies in role-playing can be analytically disentangled which, while extremes, suggest a dimension on which gamers can be distinguished and distinguish themselves:

> *D & D* players can be divided into two groups, those who want to play the games as a game and those who want to play it as a fantasy novel, i.e., direct escapism through abandonment of oneself to the flow of play as opposed to the gamer's indirect escapism—the clearcut competition and mental exercise any good game offers. [Pulsipher 1977:16]

The gamer plays the game as himself, while the player who wishes to lose himself to the fantasy is the true role-player—he plays the character.

Gaming as an Extension of Self

One motivation for gaming discussed in chapter 2 is the desire to immerse oneself in a strange environment and test oneself to determine if one could have survived in that perilous time. This approach implies that one will use all of one's personal abilities, even though they may go beyond the traits or knowledge of one's character. This type of gamer does not separate the information which he (as player) possesses from that known by his character—the pretense awareness is a smoke screen that disguises the open awareness between player and character. He is goal-directed—oriented to succeeding in the game scenario rather than to role-playing.

Some players admit that they or others play themselves. Younger, less-skilled players are particularly likely to adapt the traditional gaming posture of winning however they can:

GAF: How much do you identify with your character?
Barry: I don't even think of my character at all, all I think about is myself in the situation, but the question really isn't how much you identify with the character, but how much you identify with yourself. . . . I still play my same character regardless of who I roll up. [Personal interview]

> I have seen few people who role-play. . . . When we play you can see no difference between that person—who he really is—and the [character] that he has taken on. [Personal interview]

In one game a "devout" cleric gambled and cheated others out of gems. While others joked about this player's role-playing, his actions were within the rules of the game and no action was taken to prevent him from behaving like that.

Some players argue that one plays a character as an *extension* of one's person—one's person in a more extreme fashion:

> I never forget my character. You always kind of play your character in the way you think he might . . . and they're usually traits that you have . . . but you're playing them in a more exaggerated form. [Personal interview]

In other words, one compromises between one's "real" self and one's "role" self:

GAF: When you say players are being themselves, do you mean their personal selves or their character selves?

Andy: Well, with the people I play with, it's mainly a mixture. They're trying to be the character they rolled up, but it's hard to totally lock out your own feelings. [Personal interview]

Even for players who attempt to cauterize their real selves so that they don't affect their characters, the best they can hope for is a transformation of their nonfantasy selves into their character selves. Barker comments about the difficulties that players have in role-playing Tekumel characters:

> Some will try to play the role, but their native attitudes show forth far too strongly. Like there's a guy named Ed who used to be a Tekumel player and he had a priest who was supposedly a devoted priest to one of the gods and he, however, would always show up as basically Ed, who was in it for himself. And although he tried to play the role of the priest, his native desires for self-aggrandizement and power over other players would show up. He'd always want to have control over the other players and the non-player environment in which he was, and when he didn't have control, he was very frustrated. [Personal interview]

This difficulty also is indicated in the case of a female player whose real phobia influenced her gaming:

> I have one girl . . . she was playing a character, she was attacked by giant spiders. It happens she loathes spiders. Ahh! Ick! And I kind of felt bad. I mean I didn't really know she was so freaked out by spiders. . . . I would have changed them into giant centipedes or something, but, well, she was killed, which didn't, of course, help her at all. "Ahhh! They got me!" Usually I'll go into some gory description of how they're putting you in a cocoon and dragging you off, and you spend the next two years being drained of your life. I skipped all that. [Personal interview]

The individual's role-playing skills are, of course, not the only factor that determines whether one will role-play or will attempt to maximize game success. One's character traits also influence this choice. Players are more likely to role-play when their characters have traits that are similar to their own, inferior on nonessential dimensions, (e.g., personal appearance or voice) and superior in ways that can be masked by the fact that players only speak for their characters, and do not act for them (in displays of strength, endurance, or dexterity).

When one's character's traits are notably higher than one's own, it is in the interest of the player to use these traits, even if he is unable to play the character because of his own "inferiority." This is particularly evident with regard to intelligence and wisdom, since a character can be only as wise and as educated as his player—one can pretend to have high social standing or speak as if one were extremely strong, dexterous, or handsome, but since intelligence and wisdom are known primarily through their verbal representation, the character is limited by the insight of his player (Axler 1980). However, at least a player *attempts* to play the role of his character.

When one shares attributes with one's character there is little difficulty in portraying the character, once one has understood the setting in which the character is operating.

Players may choose to use their own characteristics rather than those of their characters when the characters have a markedly different philosophical outlook, i.e., alignment, or have a poor attribute that is considered important for survival, i.e., intelligence.

Alignment. When players must choose the alignment of their character (in all games but *C & S*) they usually choose a good, devout, or lawful alignment which allows them to have their characters think like themselves. In other words, they evaluate a

situation as they themselves would, rather than by guessing what an immoral person would do. While there are some exceptions, approximately 80% of all players in my observation (excluding *EPT*, where good and evil have different meaning)[2] choose "good" or "lawful" characters. As one gamer noted for his own group:

> Interestingly, only one player amongst all those who ever started to play (perhaps fifteen) chose to be Evil. Apart from him, the worst was a shady neutral, and there have been four or five actively good. A possible reason is that not many people can or wish to create a persona totally different from their own. [Buckell 1979:n.p.]

Even in games such as *C & S* in which a chance roll of the dice determines alignment, some players (though not all) portray their characters as if they had a good alignment:

> If you have a character that's chaotic, if I had one, I wouldn't play it as a chaotic person, I'd probably try to play his alignment more neutral or good rather than chaotic. [Personal interview]

This sentiment is reflected in characters' activities in the game. For example, players ask that their immoral characters drink in "good" taverns, because they themselves would feel more comfortable there. Only when such players are reminded about their character's perspectives do they choose more appropriate settings for their characters. Players who do not get deeply into their roles may be reluctant to kill those who have not attacked them, since they see "themselves" as committing the murder, rather than their characters, and cannot justify their actions by claiming self-defense.

Intelligence. Players claim it is difficult for them to play incompetent characters. One gamer reports that "most players aren't very intelligent playing an idiot. It's kind of hard to get down to that level" (personal interview). Important characteristics are often altered by players (through changing or misreporting dice rolls) or by the referee. If this attribute is played (when the roll is public and the referee is inflexible), typically the trait is referred to jokingly, but does not influence the character's actions. I have myself been justly accused of playing a character as myself in order to succeed, whereas my character might have failed:

> I have seen a lot of cheating as far as characters acting out of character. . . . The best example I can think of is one Dr. Gary Fine, who constantly uses every intellectual power he has to just swing the course of the game his way. . . . Some people just use far-out logic. . . . There is some logic to it, but it's so far out, it's not believable. [Personal interview][3]

Players regularly ignore the negative traits of their characters. As one player commented:

> Alfred played his character like a geek. Most people play their characters like geniuses, even if they're geeks. [Field notes]

If the object of the game is defined as "winning"—gaining treasure and conquering monsters—then role-playing is secondary to using all one's abilities when those abilities are higher than those of one's character. This can most easily be done with intelligence, which does not affect the outcome of dice-based battles (as do strength or dexterity), but influences the public statements and voluntary actions of the character. It is a difficult moral decision for a player not to use a solution to a problem because his character would not have thought of it. There exists tension between the requirement to role-play and the need to succeed.

The Construction of Character

Although one goal of fantasy gaming is to have one's character succeed, most gamers recognize that what makes these games unique is that a player portrays a figure distinct from himself. This perspective is particularly prevalent among hardcore, long-term, older gamers, who disdain the success-at-any-cost approach of their younger comrades. These distinct gaming styles, while not explicitly mentioned as part of the tension between younger and older gamers, may be a contributing cause—allowing the older gamers to believe that the younger gamers don't play well and the younger gamers to believe that the older gamers are unfairly trying to kill their characters.

The talk of most committed gamers reflects this emphasis on role-playing, even to the point of claiming to become "another person" or "schizoid":

> Many people literally become different persons when playing an *FRP* game. [Jacquays 1979:26]

> Maybe [a gamer is a] deeply involved schizoid. When he's playing that character, he almost is that character. [Personal interview]

> I like to say that I'm one of those people who will play a character like a character in a play or in a story where he is a separate entity from myself. . . . I think when you're playing role-playing games you're not trying to be yourself, you're trying to experiment. You're trying to see what you can do. Why be yourself, when you can have the fun, and the risk, of being someone else. [Personal interview]

This implies that the character may do things that the player would not himself have done:

> 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. [Kanterman 1979:10]

The strain between role-playing and game-playing is particularly evident in convention tournaments, where success is determined by the number of creatures killed and goals accomplished. This contrasts to many private games, in which success is connected to how one plays, not just how many enemies one defeats. A player who is role-playing a character who is not oriented toward killing but succeeds without mayhem cannot win such a tournament. Attempting to talk one's way out of danger or choosing a less dangerous route does not lead to success. As one frustrated participant commented, a player may receive more credit by playing his character incorrectly.

If one is in a regular gaming group that aims for character realism, one is rewarded by the group rather than by the results of the game. On the one occasion that I gamed at the University of Minnesota club it was clear that players were attempting to play their characters—in one case the deliberately "rash" actions of a rash character led to his demise. This emphasis on realism is also recognizable in Barker's *EPT* group, where players remind the referee to consider things that might hurt them, or comment out of frame that they recognize that a particular action is counter to their character's best interest, even though they believe their character would act that way. Barker comments about his group:

> My players tend to try their damnedest to put themselves into the role. . . . [Roger will] say when somebody does something he doesn't agree with, he'll say "You're not thinking like it's Tsolyani." . . . He'll say "I'm trying to be who I am in this game" and he says "I have to react in certain ways. Now you're gonna do this and you're showing that you're just an American. You're just here to go along and try and get money or something like that out of the situation and you wouldn't think like that if you were on Tekumel." So sometimes they get into arguments of this nature and the other guy will respond "Well, I'm in this for myself and I'm sure there are people on Tekumel who think like that too." So you get into an argument as to who is more Tekumel than the other guy. [Personal interview]

The constraints on character behavior are defined by the group, and particularly, although not exclusively, by the referee.

Although players may attempt to role-play their characters, note the form that this "role-playing" takes. The game does not imply action by the players; also it does not usually involve "speaking" in the voice of the character. The implications of this are evident in terms of action. Since one does not physically "hit" another character (which is physically impossible—one could only hit the player), one must say "I hit him" or "I swing at him." This indirect reference extends to references about characters' talk. Thus a player may say: "I go, 'Who goes there?' " rather than simply saying "Who goes there?" This of course minimizes confusion as to which level the action is on—the real world or the fantasy level—but it can also be taken as an indication that the player has not become deeply implicated in his role. According to one player who participates in groups that are not oriented toward role-playing:

> I've noticed that speaking in character, like a conversation in character, very seldom occurs in a natural vein. [Personal interview]

While groups differ in the emphasis they place on natural conversation, this gamer correctly recognizes that very few conversations consist of characters "directly" talking to each other. That involves greater role-playing skills than most players, even experienced ones, possess. Rather than conceiving of gaming as improvisational acting, a better metaphor might be storytelling

—with each storyteller having authority over one character—producing a collective fantasy.

The style of this talk is also significant. Although several of these games are grounded in medieval romance, in which ornate, flowery language was expected, most of the talk of characters is mundane. This does not mean that players never use flowery language; they do. However, this style of speech is used infrequently to add atmosphere to the game, and even experienced players do not use it regularly. Indeed, flowery language as a counterpoint to the natural language of players is used as a joke to suggest the dichotomy between the fantasy frame and the natural order of everyday life:

Aaron: [to a well-dressed nonplayer character] Prithee, dear Sire, can you direct me to the Merchant's Quarter?
Maury: [the referee] Sure, why not? [Field notes]

This dialogue suggests that flowery language is not perceived as the norm in these games; it is something inherently notable and subject to be keyed into a humorous frame. Players do not make speech style essential to the successful role-playing of a character, whereas the content of one's talk and the actions that one takes are essential.

Players who attempt to role-play, unlike those who use their characters to game, are less concerned with whether the characters' actions match their own beliefs. Instead they are concerned whether the actions necessary for their character to survive can legitimately be fitted into their character's persona—a persona constructed from the traits of the character, his past experiences, and the understanding the player has of the setting in which the character is located.

Whichever perspective is used, a player (gamer or role-player) identifies with the character, either to achieve his own goals as a player or to invest his person in an alter ego.

Identification

Players must identify with their characters in order for the game to be a success. Put differently, players must invest their characters with meaning. This applies to both types of gamers in that even the gamer who plays his person does not play his twentieth-century person but a transformed person consonant

with the game setting. For identification, the character must have attributes that permit a player to esteem that persona. This does not require that all traits be admirable, but either some traits must be admirable or an explanation must be found for the character's worthiness. A truly average character who does not redeem himself by having an important role in the game social structure is worse than a poor character who can at least be enacted as a parody of successful characters.

Theoretically, every character is playable—in fantasy, one character is as much of a challenge as any other. However, in practice this is not so. Average characters and weak characters are rarely played:

> Obviously, it is possible for a player to generate a character with seemingly unsatisfactory values; nevertheless, each player should use his character as generated. . . . Should a player consider his character to be so poor as to be beyond help, he should consider joining the accident-prone Scout Corps (in *Traveller*), with a subconscious view to suicide. [Game Designers' Workshop 1977a:4]

Players do kill off their characters before the game has even started:

> Much of the game consists of preliminaries such as rolling up characters, a time-consuming process. Frank said that he had to "kill off" several characters whose prime requisites [traits] he didn't like. [Field notes]

In addition to committing suicide, players can cheat or ask the referee to let them change their characteristics or roll up a new character. Most referees allow some leeway for players to do this—if, as one said, the character is "a little gross." Such characters have little for players to identify with —nothing on which they can construct an identity.

Players must construct a Gestalt—a conception of what their character is like—that is necessarily highly stereotyped, and then play according to that conception. For example, one gamer describes his favorite character:

Mark: A fellow by the name of Hrolf Haakenson. I sat down one day and I couldn't believe the rolls I got. Strength of 17 (of a possible 20), Dexterity 19, Constitution 18, Personal Appearance 13, Bardic Voice 19, Intelligence 20, Wis-

dom 16, Charisma 23 (20, plus three bonus points), Personal Combat Factor 17. He's a better commander than anybody else in the army. He's 6'8", weighs 300 pounds.

GAF: How did you choose the name?

Mark: Well, I rolled for his appearance. Got blond hair, blue eyes. Height. I also asked the referee, "Say, could I see if he has ice-blue eyes," you know, I had picked it up someplace. And the referee rolled a set of percentile dice, "Yeah, OK, he's got ice-blue eyes." Hrolf Haakenson, yeah, got it down. He was probably my most favorite character. [Personal interview]

Mark uses his traits to construct a character he can identify with, but at the same time goes beyond these characteristics. Constructing an identity from partial information may also be a collective process:

> The character I had rolled up was a thief with an alignment of three (meaning he was a "good" person). I asked Don about this saying that it didn't make sense. Don looked at my characteristics and said that it made "perfect sense" in terms of my Wisdom of 3 (of a possible 20—"Foolish"). Don comments, "You always do what you consider right, but sometimes you have difficulty deciding what is right. Daddy was a thief and you feel that if Daddy does it, it must be right because Daddy is a good guy and only steals from bad guys." [Field notes]

This process has been termed social constructiveness (Bartlett 1932). Players working from scant, sometimes contradictory information attempt to construct a meaningful identity. Family background and personal experience are crucial for building self, and many players create a personal history for their characters. This identity construction—grounded in the game interaction—may appear trivial, but is important for a player in giving himself an identity. For example, some players who portray hobbits do so by using a high-pitched voice. Other characters have unusual hobbies:

> Chuck comments that his hobbit collects teeth. He says he has the teeth of a werewolf and the teeth of a kobold.[4] Whenever our party defeats a foe, Chuck says that his character removes its teeth. [Field notes]

Another example of this identification with salient aspects of a character involves the character's race (in *C & S* and *D & D*). Chuck, for example, likes to play dwarves; George plays elves whenever possible; and Bobby specializes in hobbits. One gamer comments:

> Some people. . . develop a liking for a particular type of character. Like myself, I go for elves. I mean, they have the ability to fight and use magic. [Background voice: Dwarves! Dwarves!] OK, so he likes being a dwarf. But people like certain characteristics and they prefer that type of character. So in my case I might roll up [in *D & D*] a set of characteristics that would dictate that he'd be a little better off as a human fighter, but he could also be an elf. I tend to choose an elf, because that's the type I like. Somebody else would choose the human fighter. [Personal interview]

Players search for identification—ways in which they can come to know their character. However, this identification is only partial; players are not expected to combine their role and their person totally. Role distance is necessary to combat overinvolvement.

Overinvolvement

Clearly, a player can identify strongly with his character. In playing a character for a long time, identification grows and the player begins to feel what his character "feels":

> As our character grows in experience and memories, so does his depth of personality, becoming more individualistic and unique. . . . As a player defines his character's desires, his hopes and fears, weaknesses and vices, his commitment to him becomes deeper and this investment leads the player to more dangerous but satisfying exploits. [Filmore 1977:10]

This strong identification is evident when players sign letters or questionnaires with their character's name—Thor the Dwarf, Smother the Red, or Aargh! the Insane. Such identification may get out of hand when it merges too much with real-life activities or when it interferes with the game.

While I have rejected a parallel between fantasy gaming and *folie à deux*, players may become so engrossed in their character that, although capable of separating themselves from the grip of

this fantasy creation, they prefer not to do so. One player exaggerates:

> I know a few people . . . who seem to think that the fantasy world is real and that the real world is fantasy. . . . They seem to think that *D & D* is real; that's their whole life—nothing else, and that this world is just something we put up with in order to go into these games, which to me is a very scary thing. [Personal interview]

Another player comments in the same vein:

Brian: I know a lot of people that, especially when playing . . . it's sometimes even gets difficult to tell them apart from the character, when they're playing. There are certain people that continue on with the character even in day-to-day living.
GAF: For example?
Brian: Well, there's one guy who just, he got a little carried away with *D & D* and he used to like throw magic spells at us while we were doing our schoolwork. [Personal interview]

This happened to me at a convention when a young man walked up to me, waved his hands as if to cast a magical spell, and said "you've disappeared." In some cases players feel guilty about the actions of their characters—even when these actions were determined by the dice and not by a personal decision:

Tim: Before the convention ends you have to meet my friend, Ralph, because to him this is a real life-or-death reality. . . .
Geoff: [One] time he was fighting someone and he scored a critical hit in the groin. [The location of the hit is determined by the dice.] He stabbed this guy in the groin with a dagger, and he was upset, really upset that he stabbed someone in the groin, for at least a week or so.
Tim: He'd call me up and tell me how bad he felt.
Geoff: He felt it was a low blow. He couldn't see himself doing that and he was upset that he did that. [Personal interview]

Although arguments stemming from the extent of identification with a character can deal with many subjects (the division of treasure, the control of a Pegasus, or the theft of a character's war-horse), arguments are particularly likely over the death or injury of a character, or the threat of death or injury:

Tim: When you play with a character for a year, every week, you get mad when that guy starts dying.
GAF: You play with the same character for a whole year?
Geoff: I've played with a character for several years.
GAF: Really? What kind of character?
Geoff: Magic user. Tenth level. *Dungeons & Dragons*. I haven't played it for a while, but I've played him for about three years. I'd be, if he died, if the [referee] got him killed off, I'd be very unhappy. Very upset. Because it took a lot of work. It took a lot to accomplish that.
Tim: 'Cause those are your goals in the game.
GAF: To keep a character alive?
Tim: To keep alive, and to achieve experience and fortune.
Bert: And they just go beyond that, and sometimes it does transcend into their life. [Personal interview]

> If you played enough in *Dungeons & Dragons*, you do identify enough with your character, you don't want him killed out of hand. If you realize it was a mistake, he shouldn't've gotten killed, you say something. I mean, you don't sit there and just sit back, "So what, he's just a fake character." You're in for the game, you're trying to come out with it. You're identifying somewhat with your character. So, if you realize you have something to argue—you may be wrong or not—but if you think you have some way to argue, because you're considering all this yourself. You're thinking, "this is me down there." [Personal interview]

In fact, such situations can provoke intense depression (Holmes 1980:93; Schlesinger 1979:54) or more often anger and bitterness, as I experienced when, as referee, I allowed a player-character to kill another player-character. This individual objected vehemently and was annoyed for days after the game, even though it was a character he had rolled up for the first time that evening, the murder was "logical," and he was subsequently able to get back into the game with a new character. This is also seen in *Empire of the Petal Throne*:

GAF: When characters get killed in the course of the game, how do players react?
Barker: Depends. Dean's group, if they get killed, are unhappy and cry, "Oh, shit!" and various other expletives, but they take it more or less. Other people tend to become . . . angry and bitter. Very upset. Roger and Larry's characters

> got killed at one point, a couple of years ago. Their first characters got killed off and there was no way to stop it, there was no way to revive them. . . . Well, Roger accepted this. He pouted for a little while, but he accepted it, and went on to start a new character. Larry accepted it, but he was almost angry about it for a long time, and didn't really want to start a new character, and he . . . kept saying, "Well, you did this. You killed me off." [Personal interview]

This strong identification also is revealed when the character, although not killed, is permanently disfigured, as if this disfigurement were a stain upon the identification that players have with their characters. This emotion draws heavily from the shame and identity loss that individuals feel when their own bodies are disfigured:

> I know a guy who recently had a magic user who was turned to stone by a basilisk.[5] And one of his friends thought, "Well, we've got this bottle of strange greenish liquid, so why don't we try pouring it on his hand to see if that will turn him back into the way he was." So they poured a few drops on his hand, and his hand dissolved. They finally got the guy fully recovered, back human, breathing, the whole bit, then he notices, "Well, my hand's gone. My hand's gone!" And he freaked out. The player himself, not the character, the player just freaked out about it. "What am I supposed to do? I'm a magic user with one hand? That's not cool." And you know, that sounded really unrealistic because . . . with a character you should be able to overcome these things. [Personal interview]

Only when players no longer care about the survival of their characters and thus no longer identify with them—separating their sense of real self from their character self—do players not care what happens to their characters. In some instances they either hope to be killed or behave so recklessly that death is the likely result.

Players often feel that death is unfair when they believe that the death is not their fault—when it appears to be determined by unfair circumstances or by the roll of the dice. Deaths typically are legitimate only when the character has brought it on himself (see chapter 3). For this reason there is a prohibition against having characters go on expeditions when their players are not

present to oversee them, and presumably to take responsibility for anything that might go "wrong":

> I mention to Roger that Doug (who is not present) might want to have his character come with us to gain experience points. Roger says, "He can stay in the temple. Player-characters get highly resentful if you kill them off." [Field notes]

Only when a player no longer attends regularly and his player-character thus becomes a nonplayer character can he be used in his player's absence. The status of the character is redefined with the continued absence of the player, with the assumption that his identification with the character is diminished.

The problem of a character's being killed when the original animator was absent led to the development of resurrection—an important strategic mechanism for preserving game harmony. Dave Arneson, co-creator of *D & D*, describes the development of that concept:

> We had one character, in fact the oldest character in the campaign, who at one time hadn't shown up for an evening and it was in the middle of an especially precarious situation. I was still planting my feet as a referee. I would never allow that to happen now. But I let someone else who was new control his character so we could finish up the situation. Well, to make a long story short he got killed. I was a little upset because the gentleman who had caused this character's death had really bungled it badly. I could never conceive the real player doing that. . . . There was a lot said by the other players. . . . A lot of them said, "You gonna allow that?" What can I do? . . . When the [player] found out about it, he felt it was somewhat unfair; he was not going to have my head on a platter or anything, but he was upset. He then had the honor of being one of the first players ever to be raised from the dead and put back together as it were. I made up a little scenario. "Well, if you want him brought back to life, guys, you're all upset by it, then we'll make a little quest out of it." . . . [That was] the first time I'd really done it, and so they went off and they did it, and he came back. [Personal interview]

This innovation is an important tool by which referees can preserve harmony in their parties, since players can revive their characters *if* they (or the other members of the party) can gain

access to a friendly cleric, and they get favorable dice rolls. Significantly, it is typically the player of the deceased character who rolls for resurrection rather than the cleric. Although in any game that continues for several sessions most characters get killed, few remain dead. Barker estimated that Roger's current character had been killed fourteen times and resurrected as often. Another referee claimed that, although in his games most characters die, only about 10% are permanently killed. The period between death and resurrection tends to be filled with tension for the player and, when the death and the resurrection occur in two different gaming sessions, the player may bring up the issue in other contexts. One player commented:

> I remember for about a week [in real time] I was clamoring at the referee. I don't suppose he appreciated it much. . . . I just sort of called him and said, "When are we going to get around to it? I want to get this done and over with. I want to get him back alive." [Personal interview]

This anxiety is a consequence of the identification that players have with their characters—a sense of unity that transcends the framing boundaries of the game structure. The significance of resurrection is also reflected in a somewhat less dramatic form in the spells designed to cure wounds and the fact that, as in cartoons, even serious wounds heal without delay.

Role-Distance

Providing a contrast to identification is the ability of the participant to distance himself from his role in order to indicate that a failure of his character is not to be taken as his failure (Goffman 1961:112), and that the outcome of events affecting his character doesn't really affect the pleasure that he can derive from the game. That this role distance is often absent suggests the considerable engrossment inherent in gaming. Yet, as identification is part of the rhetoric and behavior of players, so is role distance. As one player recognized: "To be a good player-character you have to be mellow" (field notes). In other words, you must not become too involved in protecting your character and must be able to respond to the total situation. Some players are so concerned about their characters that they neglect to do those things important to the success of the party as a whole:

> Many players get very caught up in the game, they identify so much with the character that they don't want to put them in any danger. . . . They may be the strongest character there, and they want to be in the middle of the group, so that everybody's around them, protecting them, so that monsters are going to have to kill everybody else to get to him. [Personal interview]

In fact, many players fear their character's death. Those who can't achieve a sufficient role distance may force other characters to enter a room first, so that if there is a monster waiting behind the door, the other character will be attacked.

Players seem to engage in an internal dialogue. They recognize that they are portraying a *character* and so there is no danger in the virtue of bravery in the face of death, but still the attachment to the character is real. One player nicely stated the dilemma:

Brian: I had a character, a seventh-level knight, and he was doing great things. . . . All of a sudden he fought this small war party of orcs and the leader lopped his head off. That depressed me through the rest of the night.

GAF: Did you complain to the referee?

Brian: Well, no, I didn't. I understood. I had watched all my rolls and they hadn't been too hot, and I had my shield out there and he kept hitting the shield and I kept hitting him 'cause he had no shield and, finally, one time he just went right through the shield and got me. Wow, life's tough! There's nothing you can do about that. I wanted to bring him back alive because I wanted a neat character, but if [the referee] wanted him dead then, all right. I'd just as soon leave him dead; there's no problem there. I did, however, feel remorse over losing him. [Personal interview]

Of course, the manner of role distancing differs depending on style of play. Gamers who play their characters as themselves are particularly able to distance themselves from situations in which their characters find themselves. For example, these players typically do not react to insults from nonplayer characters, in that they do not see the insult as an attack on a self that is important to them; the attack is on the character, not the person. Role-players, however, are more likely to consider such insults to their character's esteem to be serious because they identify with the character's self-concept and, as a result, an attack on that self-concept must be answered.

Role-players, on the other hand, can distance themselves more easily from acts by their characters. Since they are not playing themselves but enacting a persona, a cold-blooded murder is not defined as a cruel act that they have committed. Gamers who are playing themselves recoil from the thought of killing (as did the player, described above, who felt guilty about a groin hit he had inflicted).

Referees and Role-Playing

Identification does not mean the same thing to referees that it does to players. Although referees do not play a single character, they do portray characters (nonplayer characters [NPCs]); typically these characters are only pale representations of selves, do not exist for long periods of time, and often are killed by player-characters. Identification sometimes occurs, but it must be guarded against because of the nature of these nonplayer characters:

> There will be many times that you will develop a kind of attachment to one of your human or inhuman monsters but one cold, hard fact that every referee must face is that all your creatures will eventually die. [Krank 1979:3]

Although there is attachment between the referee and his NPCs, it is not like the identification that players have with their characters.[6] The referee has several choices in the game: he can identify with the player-characters in the game, the enemies of the player-characters, or attempt to balance the two; he can suppress all identification and be neutral; or he can attempt to create the most aesthetically pleasing story line possible.

Some argue that it is impossible for a referee to be impartial. In adversarial games the referee plays creatures whose goals are to kill player-characters. Some referees say they should admit their stance—to the players and to themselves:

> In his role as *adversary*, as the forces of the dungeon which are to deny players the game tokens which mark their success, the [adversary-style referee] *must take sides*. The game calls for him to oppose the players and he cannot shirk that duty. Given the facts that he has designed the dungeon, stocked it, booby-trapped it, calls the action, knows the player/characters' capabilities and resources,

> makes secret random determinations and *interprets* the rules, it is a very self-aware [referee] who avoids hitting the hapless party with the proverbial kitchen sink. [Simbalist 1979d:3; italics in original]

Simbalist suggests that referees must be reflexive, realize their structural position, and attempt to ensure that their dungeons are scrupulously fair.

In practice, different types of referees exist. Some identify with the players and are easy referees, sometimes called "Monty Haul" referees (the pun being quite intentional), other referees identify with those monsters who oppose the party; the extreme version of this latter group is reflected in those who run "Dungeons of Death."

Both styles of refereeing pose problems if the scenario gets out of control:

GAF: What are some of the problems with poor referees?

Arneson: On the one hand, some will try to bribe the players, give them goodies all the time, allow them to progress rapidly on enhancing their character. It's hard to get mad at somebody who's making a millionaire out of you.

GAF: What's the problem with that kind of ref?

Arneson: Well, you can't keep them happy forever because there still is always some limit. There's only so much gold in the world; you can only have so much power, even in a fantasy world.

Friend: Too much of getting everything is kind of boring. No challenge.

Arneson: When I worked in Wisconsin [for TSR Hobbies] we got a letter once from a gentleman who had been allowed to take a nonhuman character, it was a Balrog, and had become an eighty-third level Balrog, and was disappointed because he was literally to the point . . . where he could destroy galaxies with a wave of his clawed hand, and he was . . . upset because there were basically no new worlds for him to conquer. . . . This is the Monty Haul style of reffing. The other extreme is the Death Dungeon where you have a sadistic individual who thinks nothing of "you make one false move and you're dead." You literally walk in the room, you walk into the dungeon, because you walked in the right instead of the left, the roof fell on you, even if there might not be any indication. You're just out to get the players. And sometimes they're not sophisticated in how they do it. [Personal interview]

This is not solely a question of what the referee wants to do (although personal inclination is a major factor), but also how much the other players will encourage him or allow him to get away with.

Dungeons of Death. The referee who runs a "Dungeon of Death" or is "sadistic" tends to be a referee who is very interested in the world he has created. He identifies with his world, including all of the hostile forces within it. It may be incorrect to claim that this individual is sadistic; he is more likely to consider himself "realistic." It is, after all, not unreasonable to assume that in ten fights the player will win five and lose five; in some of the victories he will kill his opponents, and in some defeats he will be killed by them. Although the relative size and strength of the parties is important, it is clear that players lose far less frequently than one might expect if the laws of chance were operating. Referees who are considered sadistic are less likely to give players special advantages. These referees stock their worlds with creatures without ensuring that these creatures can be defeated by competent characters. Mark, considered a sadistic referee, comments that many referees are too easy:

GAF: What about poor referees?
Mark: Well, I think the most common type is the Monty Haul type of referee. . . . One has to exercise complete disinterest. I see that entirely too much, that referees will just be too nice. [Personal interview]

These referees define themselves as being neither kind or unkind, but in effect (and in comparison with other referees) this makes them seem miserly in the amount of treasures available and cruel in the number of characters killed.

Such referees often reinforce the belief that they see themselves as competing against the players by flippant and cynical talk. Players comment that they know they are in trouble when a referee rolls the dice secretly and then smiles. The following snippet of dialogue is not unusual:

Player: I missed [hitting a monster].
Referee: Heh, heh, heh. [Field notes]

High-status referees and those who emulate them adopt a flippant style; this style in conjunction with the commitment that these referees typically make to balance their world lead players

(particularly those less experienced) to believe that these referees are sadistic.

Monty Haul. In contrast to sadistic referees are those who run giveaway games—likened to the famous game-show emcee Monty Hall. These referees identify strongly with the players in the game and avoid killing characters whenever possible. They emphasize that they dislike killing characters—that they are not sadistic, often contrasting themselves to cruel referees. One such referee commented: "I'm disgusted with killing. That's why some people consider me a pushover ref" [Field notes].

This referee did not consider his world to be very important; he was more interested in ensuring that the players had fün in their adventuring than he was in maintaining the logical integrity of his world.

Referees may switch orientations if they sense that a particular game is not going well, sometimes in the middle of a gaming encounter. The fantasy reality being created is a product of the shared social construction of players and referees:

> One of my friends had built his own dungeon . . . and this guy for a while was extremely hard, anybody who would go down there would die. It was almost automatic suicide. OK, he got enough complaints about this and all of a sudden it seemed like he changed. You'd go down there and it was almost like he gave you things. He stocked the rooms with massive amounts of treasure with very weak monsters, and then some of us complained that it was too easy, and then all of a sudden in the middle of a mission, one night we went down there he was still showering things on us; some of us started to complain again that it was too easy, and all of a sudden he more or less reverted back to his nasty self, and some monsters came up that were hard on the party, and he let them come through, whereas earlier in that mission he would reshape them and make it a little more sporting. [Personal interview]

The approach that a referee takes to his game is a consequence of his perception of the orientations of others, integrated with his own need for identification with some part of his world or universe.

Obviously, these two orientations are as variable as the two modes of play that I suggested characterize players. Each player or referee constructs his own unique style of play from his past

experiences and the understandings that he has of his group's expectations.

Whether one plays oneself in another historical (or fantasy) period, or role-plays another person with quite different traits from oneself, one still must deal with the issues involved in portraying a self that is in the center of action, subject to death, killing others, and receiving great treasures. Likewise, the referee, while he can use the rhetoric of being an impartial administrator, identifies with the game. He either identifies with the player-characters fighting against the world he has created, or he identifies with the world itself, which constrains the actions of the characters and eventually destroys them. His orientation to the game may be implicit, explicitly emotional (in that he admits his personal desires), or may be fundamentally aesthetic, in that he claims that his actions are designed to do nothing more than to create the best possible story, given the settings and characters at hand.

The fact that the environment that people are enacting is a fantasy allows considerable leeway in the interpretation of a self. After all, in fantasy anything is, by definition, possible. This means that forces that constrain persons to remain within their roles are less evident in fantasy games than they are in more mundane spheres of reality. Even though some of the processes of person- and role-playing, and the relations between them, are similar to those found in other spheres of activity, differences are worth noting as well. First, role flexibility is expected and allowed. Second, the consequences of stepping out of role are relatively light (and sometimes it is in the player's interest to do this). Finally, participants regularly treat others as two simultaneous coacting personae—character and person/gamer. These features remind us that games are not work, and are fantasy, not reality.

Eight

The Reality of Fantasy

It is now possible to expand the focus from this small subsociety to ask what principles have emerged from this study and what this social scene can tell us about other sociological problems, different in scope, setting, or content. Were this study relevant only to the world of fantasy gaming, one could place it on the shelves with other descriptive urban ethnographies—a product of curiousity, now resolved. My intention in this research was that it would have implications beyond the confines of this particular group; the ethnographic detail was necessary to provide a basis for more general observations.

I researched fantasy role-playing gamers because they seek to develop new and unique cultural systems. Whereas all groups create culture to some extent, most of these cultural systems are limited in scope. Fantasy gamers, on the other hand, are explicitly concerned with the development of a cultural system; they judge their satisfaction with the game by the vigor of the culture they have created and by the degree to which they can become personally engrossed in it. For a sociologist interested in the interactional components of culture, few groups are better suited to analysis. While I do not claim that these groups are representative of small groups in our society in terms of the extent of cultural creation or in terms of their self-consciousness of this process, fantasy gamers reveal the boundaries of the possible. The dynamics of this process of cultural creation may be similar among all groups.

I shall here focus on five areas in which I think this research has implications, stating both the principles and observations that

emerge from this study and its similarities to and differences from parallel phenomena. These areas are: fantasy, games, subculture, small groups, and everyday life.

Fantasy

Most psychologists conceive of fantasy as the product of individual introspection with the daydream as the quintessential form of fantasy. Fantasies can reflect an individual's motives, needs, wishes, desires, or ambitions through their unreality (Kureshi 1975:1; Moore and Fine 1968:46). Although this research does not indicate that this psychological/psychiatric approach is useless, it does suggest an alternative way of examining fantasy, which avoids some of the problems of introspective methodologies.

As is true for those who examine any internal phenomenon, those who study individual fantasies must assume that the reporting of fantasy is a fair representation of the internal perception of the fantasy. This issue can be stated directly and bluntly in regard to dreams: Do psychoanalysts study dreams or reports of dreams? Is the account the disguised traces of unrepressed memory or a good story performed to impress a therapist? Whatever else a report of a fantasy is, it is not the fantasy itself. In some respects the collective fantasy that evolves in these gaming groups may be closer to personal fantasies than are the reports given to psychotherapists. In fantasy gaming the responsibility for the fantasy is diffused, and there are no analysts present to impress or to be defensive toward. Players are both the actors and the audience. While censoring occurs, the censoring that occurs among peers may be significantly different from that found in the analyst/analysand relationship.

Because each individual's fantasy is set in the context of fantasy themes created by others, it may be easier to discern what is distinctive about any individual's fantasy. One need not examine an individual fantasy in a vacuum; one can see it in contrast with the fantasies of others. Variations from general themes may provide a clue to individual psychological needs.

I have emphasized the collective creation of fantasy in this research. While not all fantasy is collectively produced, some fantasies clearly are. These fantasies perhaps represent the externalizational of the "internal dialogue" that George Herbert

Mead discussed as central to the creation of meaning (Mead 1934). Much collective fantasy is produced by children (Opie and Opie 1969), but adolescents and adults also occasionally produce collective fantasies when they share a set of joking references (Hall 1974:36), when they collaborate on a novel or screenplay, when they reminisce about the way things might have been, or discuss how they would like things to be. Even established social groups have fantasy themes (Bormann 1972), which recur and are expanded in interaction. This recognition of the existence of collective fantasy in many spheres of social life helped to guide the research.

Fantasy gamers, in common with other fantisizers, construct a world imbued with meaning. Theirs is a social world that is not inherently meaningful but is *made* meaningful by the significance given to it by its participants. In this sense, I contend that collective fantasy is a prime example of the symbolic interactionist approach to the construction of meaning. To the extent that all meaning is shared, the study of collective fantasy has implications for the creation of other worlds of meaning, recognizing of course the lack of impact of this social world on other spheres of life.

Because of the extensiveness of the meaning system created by fantasy gamers, I argue that these fantasy worlds constitute a "social world" in a Schutzian sense. The fantasy content, shared by participants, coupled with the complex subsociety of gaming, suggests that this truly constitutes a "universe of discourse." The social construction of a game scenario through the negotiation of players is parallel to building meaning in any social world. Since language allows people to talk about things imagined or not present, fantasy is simply an extension of what we often do with language in other circumstances. Fantasy provides a graphic example of this process in that the external constraints that affect other social worlds (physical possibility, social acceptability, and temporal organization) do not affect fantasy so directly; anything is possible, given the belief that it should be possible. In collective fantasy individuals have a greater control over its content than they do for other fantasies, which are directed biologically (dreams) or through social suggestion (hypnosis).

Because this fantasy is socially constrained by the presence and expectations of others, the themes that are expressed will be shared rather than idiosyncratic. Thus the sexual images we find

in these games tell us about more than one young man's psyche; they reveal the perspectives of the group. Likewise, the aggressive motifs, so often found in these games, reveal the deep ambivalence toward violent action of these American males. These games, therefore, are collective Rorschach tests, communal TAT cards. Despite the structure of the game, it is still fantasy and as such can tell us about basic, emotional images. Public themes reflect private concerns.

Games

Fantasy games are games, but they are a particular sort of game. I noted in chapter 1 that games typically are structured to be zero-sum—in other words, the victory of one side precludes the victory of that side's opponents. Games typically have unequal outcomes for players. Fantasy role-playing games suggest that games need not be competitive. They are among the "new-age" noncompetitive games (see DeKovan 1978). It is entirely possible for all players in a fantasy game to "win"—to survive and advance in levels of experience. The game is perhaps more like a society than like the traditional game.

Although the structure of the game might be seen as pitting players against referee, not all referees see the game in this light. Referees who share this competitive model see the players as battling their world (and them). In this, the game is similar to blackjack, tag, or Simon Says. Yet there is a difference, even with this model of the gaming world. In those games player oppose the controller individually rather than collectively. Perhaps a better model of fantasy games is Twenty Questions, in which participants collectively attempt to discern the hidden answer to a puzzle posed by the "referee."

Other referees, as I discussed in chapter 7, do not see themselves competing with the players. Their model is that of the television game show host who organizes the game structure but does not root against the players. Perhaps it is significant that these referees, often generous to their players, have earned the collective moniker of "Monty Haul" type referees. In this version of the game players are not competing against the referee; they are, if anything, competing against the game environment. This, again, suggests the similarity between these games and the "game of life."

Fantasy role-playing games are not like all games in their structure, but they are good examples of a class of game that requires players to cooperate with each other against an environment. In this they approximate the autotelic quality of pure play; yet this autotelic quality is coupled with a complex set of rules. This research reminds us that the class of activities termed "games" is broad, and can include cooperative as well as competitive activities. Further, as described in chapter 5, there are mechanisms by which cooperation is enforced, in light of the naturally competitive urges of individuals. Players are joined together in a common goal—that of enjoying the fantasy and this overrides other considerations. These fantasy games, then, provide a natural laboratory in which forces of competition and cooperation can be examined.

As a result of the emphasis placed on cooperation, fantasy gaming provides an opportunity for the development of collective sociability. This sentiment is necessary for the party to succeed in the fantasy environment, and provides the legitimation for various leadership structures to emerge. These leadership structures are found in any "team" game, but because of the explicit need for party organization in fantasy gaming they may be more obvious here. Yet the forms of leadership described in chapter 5 have parallels in team sports such as baseball, volleyball, or even a team scavenger hunt. The groups must come to terms with a division of labor—what is efficient in terms of the task at hand and simultaneously what allows each individual to feel that he has a significant role. The twin goals of task-fulfillment and socio-emotional satisfaction must be dealt with by all groups in their decision making.

Like play and games generally, the central purpose of fantasy gaming is the creation of "fun"; "fun" being the only legitimate justification for this use of leisure time. This desire to have "fun" dwarfs all other expressed motives. This means in practice that the official "rules" are less important than the informal decisions that promote engrossment in the fantasy. For the game to work as a game, players must become engrossed, willing to accept the fantasy world which is provided as a "real world." This means that all fantasy must be shaped to what is considered engrossable by the players—and humor, references to sex, and aggressive behavior all contribute to this. This emphasis on the importance of engrossment is more characteristic of what we term "play"

than what we term "games," which typically have "victory" as the main outcome. Despite the existence of highly technical rules, these rules are secondary to the desires of the players.

Yet the existence of the rules provides a basis from which players can construct their own engrossment. Each of the games discussed includes a set of rules of over one hundred pages, as complex as they are long. If games are simulations of some segment of social life (Coleman 1968), then fantasy role-playing gaming with its meticulous attention to detail can almost be said to be a simulation of life itself. The rules can be likened to the oft-ignored norms of social life. Although the physical acting-out of events is not required and certain of the mundane aspects of life are ignored, gaming does try to simulate the whole of existence. It is significant that on occasion an hour in the fantasy world may take much longer than an hour in real time, whereas in most simulations the opposite is the case. Part of the engrossing character of these games is the sense of power that gamers derive from controlling a "world"—the power to make the world as one wants it to be. While we attempt this control in many social scenes, typically there exist sufficient constraints to prevent much change; a fantasy game whose only constraints are those placed on it by the players provides a "possible utopia"—a utopia in which evil is continually overcome.

We find a tension in these games between the richness and detail of the rules and the desires of players to alter these rules toward their own ends. This tension also seems characteristic of gaming generally (and by implication of life situations as well). Rules are regularly negotiated by the participants. Even in such a "formal" game as chess with its elegant rules, players, aiming to have fun, can and do alter the rules by means similar to those found in fantasy gaming. Players can take back moves, or, if the players are unequal in skill, the poorer player may be given privileges or the stronger some restrictions. While we conceive of games as being constrained by their rules, all rules are capable of being treated as they are in fantasy gaming—as guidelines, to be used or ignored when necessary. Thus in chess rules are negotiated, as when a person has in fact made a "move." In some chess games if a player touches one of his pieces, he must move that piece; in others the move is determined when a piece has been moved to another square and the player's hand removed; in still others the opportunity for one player to change a move has not

ended until his opponent has moved. In other games, less precise and formal than chess, the latitude for action may be even greater. In a softball game among friends, rules are often changed to increase enjoyment. I have participated in games in which the number of outs in an inning was decreased from three to two because time was running out; another time a poor batter was given four strikes. Game rules are not absolute, whatever their formal designation, and fantasy gaming provides a particularly graphic example of this negotiation of rules. This attitude toward rules can, of course, be extended to nongame situations. In all situations there are expectations, but these expectations can be ignored or revised by participants when that seems conducive to the occasion. Thus committees can put aside the nicities of *Robert's Rules of Order* in their desire to achieve harmony and consensus. What is necessary for this bypassing of rules is a shared sense of goals and the common realization that the rules are not the goals. Whether engrossment, fun, or agreement is the desired outcome, often the ends supercede the means.

An extension of the negotiation of rules can be seen in the role of cheating in fantasy games, especially in its wide acceptance. Although cheating in fantasy games does differ from that in most other games, in all games there exist normative boundaries that limit and channel the behavior of players. In fantasy gaming these boundaries permit cheating without much fear of negative sanction—cheating is almost expected. Such cheating is perhaps connected with the engrossment that players strive for in the game—they want to be placed in exciting, rewarding situations, and if the only way that this can be achieved is to bend events, then so be it. The good story is more important than the sanctity of the rules. When we examine the goals that players have in their play, it is easy to understand why cheating is so common, particularly when the structure of the game prevents other players being hurt by a "cheat."

This flexibility toward cheating is not as common in other games, but in all games the boundaries that separate legitimate play from cheating can be and are negotiated. For example, in card games, players may discuss how much talk and what kind of talk they can get away with. In marbles, children debate what happens when one accidently drops the marble he is about to shoot. In baseball, players must decide how far outside the batter's box one has to stand in order for a time-out to be

recognized. Only through ethnographic investigation and in-depth interviews can we discover the rules for such games in their behavioral—rather than formal—context (Hughes 1980). What is ostensibly dishonest according to the "official" rules may be expected in terms of how the rules are used.

Thus fantasy gaming is instructive for our understanding of what is meant by games both through its similarities to other games and through its distinctive differences. By seeing fun and engrossment as the sine qua non of games, we can understand the necessary flexibility that is part of all games as well as of many of the less formal and constrained aspects of social life.

Subculture

I argued in chapter 1 that fantasy gaming meets all the criteria of a subculture. It meets both the traditional criteria (segmental importance and shared ideas) and the interactional criteria (opportunity for interaction among subsociety members, identification, and recognition by those outside of the community). Since it is a voluntary subsociety rather than a social category that one enters by reason of birth, age, or gender, recruitment is necessary. This recruitment occurs through the alteration of the culture of a previously existent group (a mass conversion, in a sense), a recognition of shared interests, and/or the opportunity for interaction with members already in the subsociety. These processes of recruitment seem generally valid for voluntary subsocieties. Consider, for example, the feminist subculture. The same type of analysis would indicate that today there exists a distinct feminist subculture in contemporary American life—in terms of its segmental importance, shared ideas, opportunity for interaction, in-group identification, and recognition by nonmembers. I contend that the same processes of recruitment explain membership in the feminist subsociety as explain membership in the fantasy gaming subsociety. Groups of women may collectively decide (particularly in the early stages of the movement) that a new style of political activism and a more militant social critique is morally justified and politically necessary, and as a result participants may alter their orientation from being, for example, an auxillary group to a male organization to adopting feminist beliefs and pressing for the enactment of these beliefs (see, for example, Evans's [1979] discussion of the growth of feminism

from civil right and antiwar groups). In addition, a set of shared beliefs is necessary for recruitment—or at least a predisposition to accept these beliefs—as is the opportunity to interact with members of the subsociety. These methods of recruitment apply to the growth of all voluntary subsocieties, not merely that centered on fantasy gaming.

Fantasy gaming is not only a subculture—it is a *leisure* subculture. It is an aggregate of individuals that is without political motivation and significance and is likely to remain so. Being a leisure subculture it is unlikely that it will eclipse the other subcultures that a person accepts. Most individuals participate in subsocieties that involve more economically and socially central issues (e.g., occupational or ethnic subcultures). Fantasy gaming provides for a sense of community with other similar individuals in an urban environment, but simultaneously it permits and recognizes the existence of other social ties, other communities. In this fantasy gaming is an example of the urban scenes described by Irwin (1977)—areas of encounter that permit the development of partial communities but which do not insist upon total commitment. Typically, those who participate in fantasy gaming groups develop a social network consisting of other group members; over time this segment of an individual's social network can become quite dense, as members of these groups become acquaintances and then friends. However, it appears that these social ties often do not transcend the gaming settings; gaming friends need not be, and frequently are not, friends outside the gaming group. The interaction between one's gaming network and one's outside friendship network is surprisingly small, despite some overlap. Gaming groups, like other urban leisure activities, are a means of escaping one's social network and finding another, based on common interests, segregated from the interests that one has in the workaday world. Although members do recruit their friends into this social world, friends who do not choose to participate remain friends. Furthermore, the recruitment generally occurs individually. Although gamers bring friends to their gaming group, it is less likely for them to bring the game to their friendship groups. This voluntary membership with its distinct social network may be common to other social worlds, where admission is voluntary and not socially pressured.

The final point to be made about this subsociety is that it is distinctly masculine. Although American sex roles have changed dramatically during the past two decades, there still exist many groups, organizations, and gatherings that are overwhelmingly male; this sexual segregation seems particularly evident in leisure activities. In part this is a consequence of the different interests of men and women, but in part it is a result of patterns of recruitment and acceptance. Fantasy role-playing is a clear example of a male group, for not only is it male in terms of its participants—it is male in its topics of talk and content of fantasy themes. To the extent that fantasy is an appropriate area for the study of implicit motives and fears, these games, with their detailed and explicit male chauvinism, reveal male attitudes among that group of males one might expect to be "liberated." While fantasy gamers frame their beliefs in terms of "fantasy" relationships, the content indicates basic conceptualizations of all male-female relationships. These attitudes are also found, although in a somewhat attenuated or disguised form, in softball teams, bowling leagues, army barracks, summer camps, fishing trips, poker groups, and bachelor parties. Sex role attitudes have changed, but not as much as some might hope.

Small Groups

Subsocieties consist of an interlocking network of small groups (Fine and Kleinman 1979), and thus each subsociety is fundamentally a set of small groups that is characterized by unique, although somewhat similar, cultures. This recognition of the role of idiocultures (Fine 1979) suggests that these gaming groups are similar to all small groups, although the culture produced may be considerably more extensive than that found in most small groups of similar duration and intensity.

All small groups exist within the context of the larger cultural system. As a result, every small group can be said to be an interpreter of this larger culture. No group creates a cultural system entirely from its imagination; rather, it shapes and adds an additional level of meaning to certain cultural elements that are part of its members' background knowledge. This can be conceptualized as a process by which members of a group contextualize the culture of society, giving it special meaning for their interaction and creating a system of mutual relevances. I hope this

monograph (particularly chapter 4) has indicated that this process characterizes fantasy gaming groups—as regards both their fantasy culture and in their friendship culture. The social construction of a cultural system involves the manipulation of cultural elements. It is not that groups *have* culture, rather they *use* culture to imbue the events in their world with meaning and to create newly meaningful events.

What makes *these* small groups particularly interesting as examples of this form of cultural manipulation and creation is their self-consciousness about the fact that they are dealing with cultural elements. Further, this self-consciousness operates on several levels. The fact that players are role-playing characters makes them reflexively aware of the culture and social system that these characters are embedded in and are constructing, and simultaneously aware of the fact that they stand outside these worlds. The extensiveness and richness of this culture, as described in chapter 4, indicates the potential of small groups as "world-builders." Although few groups reach this level of creative finesse, parallels can be found in acting groups and other creative units (including groups with a deviant worldview, such as the Manson family or the People's Temple).

This study also indicates the importance of the social structure and status hierarchy of fantasy gamers in the creation of culture. This effect operates on several levels. First, social structure operates through the game structure—i.e., the role distinctions between players and the referee, which constrain the creation of culture. Second, status affects culture on the level of the gaming group itself, with some participants having higher status than others, and being able to use their status to influence the direction of play. This particularly reveals itself in the role that age plays in gaming groups; fantasy cannot transcend chronology. Third, culture is based on the structure and status of characters, as their actions and talk direct cultural creation.

An idioculture results from the negotiation of members with different amounts of power within the social system; as a result, this culture is a melding of the imputs of members weighted by status and power, the normative requirements of the group, and the perceived needs of individual members. The creation of culture is not solely the consequence of the operation of a free marketplace of ideas; sociologically, we must recognize that there exist social constraints that channel cultural systems. In

fantasy gaming these include age, knowledge, expertise, verbal ability, and imagination.

However, in addition to the structural constraints on culture, we must not ignore the aesthetic components of a small group culture. Referees and players attempt to create an aesthetically pleasing, engrossing, and exciting story; this story derives from the story formulas that participants have previously been exposed to—in school, on television, and in reading for pleasure (e.g., science fiction and fantasy). The aesthetic component adds another constraint to the structural constraints described above. These two factors are present in the development of all group cultures. Despite the overlay of fantasy themes in these groups, fantasy cultures are more similar to than different from the cultures of work groups, family groups, and friendship groups, although the constraints that affect these factors differ from group to group.

Everyday Life

Finally I turn to the implications that fantasy role-playing games have for everyday life. One might be tempted to suggest that there are few meaningful parallels that can be drawn from this rather exotic hobby. Although parallels *are* somewhat inexact, I believe that fantasy games have implications for the phenomenology of everyday life.

The fact that individuals engage in a variety of different activities, some of which are keyed from their primary frameworks, such as teasing or storytelling, suggests that the issue of frame oscillations is of general relevance. During fantasy gaming movement among frames occurs rapidly, with participants able to operate on several levels nearly simultaneously. The proper frame in which to interpret any action or utterance is acquired through interpreting ongoing interaction. Simultaneous orientation to several frames can occur with little confusion between levels, and the ambiguity that occurs can be easily clarified. Although the world is a complex arena in terms of the potential range of possible meanings, human skill in judging meaning from context is typically sophisticated enough to ensure smooth interaction. Gaming provides a notably complex example of the clash of meaning systems, but the issues raised by this game can be generalized to mundane experiences.

Fantasy gaming is also similar to those occasions in which keying is accompanied by the enactment of an additional or alternative identity. The most obvious instance of this is in the theatrical world, but it applies to any occasion in which individuals, as part of their role, must put aside that self which they consider their "real" or primary self. The relationship between the game player and his character has its parallel in the relationship between an actor and his stage persona. The character does not have the right to know what the performer knows, and must maintain a pose of pretended ignorance about that primary self. In addition, because the character is a hollow artifice without any base from which fresh knowledge can be generated, the animator can only know what is supplied by whomever is scripting the character's world. Although the relationship between selves is in theory not overlapping, it often is in practice. This distinction between theory and fact permits game characters to use their "ill-gotten" information to their own advantage in the game, a trait they share with those involved in espionage.

When one takes on a role that is distinct from one's primary role, one must decide how to embrace it. How should one manifest identification with that new self? Should one play the role or play oneself in the contours of the environment in which the role is set? As described in chapter 7, fantasy gamers differ along this dimension. Once again, references to the stage are unavoidable. In "serious" productions, the actor typically attempts to play the role, and in "method acting" may attempt to blend his "primary self" into the role—letting the role embrace him. However, the "star" may descend upon a production to play himself in a variety of situations—notably in skits on television variety hours. The extent of "getting into" a role, and the subsequent ease of "getting out," constitute a dimension along which secondary roles vary—whether of golfer, student driver, blind date, or nude model. What is necessary for this kind of identification is the self-conscious realization that the role to be assumed is different from the "real self" but is nonetheless important to one's own self-image as a role-taker.

Although fantasy games are not precisely like everyday life, they share the fact that both are experienced, and a sociology of experience should be able meaningfully to incorporate both types of experiences in its theoretical purview. All action is generated from knowledge contours, awareness, frames of meaning, and

identification. In this sense research with fantasy gamers speaks to those in all walks of life.

Conclusion

I believe that it is not sufficient merely to provide a descriptive ethnography of a social world, but that we must attempt further to comprehend the dynamics by which it operates. Through an understanding of these dynamics it is hoped we will acquire insight into other social systems in which the same or similar processes operate. Fantasy gaming is, to be sure, a unique social world, treasured for its uniqueness, but like any social world it is organized in ways that extend beyond its boundaries. Just as the mechanics of the wheel can explain tractors and dune buggies, lazy susans and escalators, so does the understanding of one social world provide sociologists with the tools necessary to understand others, which may have no more than a tangential similarity. Fantasy gaming, then, has the potential to open the door to a universe of meanings, if only we would enter.

Methodological Appendix

Perhaps the term "participant observation studies" is a misnomer. Typically these projects involve little "participation," in that the participant observer takes on the clumsily defined role of "sociological observer" (for an example of this methodology, see Fine and Glassner 1979). The researcher is essentially engaged in "unsystematic observation" or in Gold's (1958) classification, "observer as participant." Because the researcher's role is outside the interaction system of the group, it is impossible to be reflexive about members' knowledge (see Rabinow 1977). Frequently participant observation studies read like studies based on in-depth interviews, with a few observations of behavior thrown in. While different problems require different solutions, I have attempted to overcome what I see as traditional weaknesses in participant observation research, while at the same time weakening my own study in some important areas.

In this appendix I shall address not only the mechanics involved in conducting qualitative research, but the other issues that derive from incorporating a reflexive account of my own experiences.

Entrance

I first learned of fantasy gaming groups through informal conversation with a colleague. Because he knew that I was interested in the sociology of culture, he mentioned that his son was an active war gamer, and had recently been talking about a new type of gaming, similar to war games, which he called role-

play gaming. He mentioned that recently an article had been printed in the *Minneapolis Tribune* about these games (Kern 1977). I had some interest in war games in high school, and I obtained a copy of the article. Although the article was not specific, it did describe the local gaming club and indicated the location of its meetings. I decided that I would attend one Friday evening. At this stage I was not planning on doing research, but was only exploring to see whether the site would be appropriate for research.

Three months previously I had completed collecting data from a three year participant observation study of Little League baseball teams (Fine and Glassner 1979; Fine 1979; Fine 1980) and while I was satisfied with that research, one glaring weakness was obvious for someone interested in the sociology of culture. The culture of Little League teams, although certainly present, is a partial culture. Preadolescents said that Little League baseball was important, yet much of their *culture* consisted of either the mechanics of playing baseball or cultural elements selected directly from their non-baseball lives, rather than new cultural elements created especially in that social scene. To understand the social construction of culture, I needed to examine a more robust cultural system. These gaming groups, in which members constructed fantasies, seemed appropriate for this goal.

A few weeks after the publication of the newspaper article I attended the Golden Brigade club for the first time—at that time not as a sociologist, but as an interested member of the public. It seemed that there was no organization to the group: there was no membership chairman, no one that one had to meet to gain access; one simply walked in and spoke to whomever was organizing a game. Many months later I discovered that the Golden Brigade did have formal officers, but they had little impact, and many peripheral players were unaware that this structure existed. Players accepted me that first evening, and I was invited to play several games of *Traveller*, then the most popular game. I played that evening, and for the next few weeks, without even having read the game rules, as they were out of stock at the local hobby store. It is an indication of how peripheral the rules are to the game that I (and others) could play without destroying the game. That first night I felt that I could use this group to study cultural dynamics. While I did not commit

myself to this project until two months later, I did begin typing field notes after that first meeting.

Access to the public group posed no difficulties; I was accepted immediately, although as a neophyte gamer (and a poor one at first) I did not have high status. This position suited me since I was still learning the rules. Also, being allowed to ask foolish questions aided my research at several points. However, the lack of structure, while convenient in some regards, posed difficulties once I had committed myself to conducting research in the setting. There was no one from whom I could ask permission, no one seemed to be in charge, and the individuals I did ask were unaware of any structure. Thus there was no person from whom I could gain official informed consent. This was complicated by the fact that few gamers attended every week; most attended once or twice a month. The lack of structure was coupled with high turnover, as former members drifted away from the group, sometimes to play in private groups, and other members were recruited. As a result, I had to inform individuals in a piecemeal fashion that I was a sociologist studying fantasy gaming groups. Fortunately, members did not object to my presence. Informing players of my intent continued until the time I left the setting a year after I began to play. Some peripheral players never did learn that I was studying them.

In one of the first *Traveller* groups in which I participated the referee requested that someone in our party keep a "starship log" for his records, to enable him to keep track of his fantasy universe. I offered to do this, and developed a system whereby I made a carbon copy for myself, as well as writing additional notes. This continued for a month, and after this scenario was no longer played I continued using the journal note pad for my own records, finding that it was unobtrusive and common enough to prevent comments from others.

About two months after I began attending the Golden Brigade I began to feel limited by being refereed by the same people in the same location. Also, I had not developed any close research friendships. Fortunately I gained access to a private gaming group, consisting of a twenty-eight-year-old ex-navy man, a college freshman, a high school senior, and a junior high school student. This group met at the college student's house on Sunday afternoons to play *C & S* and they were eager to have a fifth member join them. One member of the group had asked to

borrow a science fiction book that I owned; I told him I would be happy to lend it to him. I had learned that he and his friends ran a private group, and I asked about it; he courteously invited me to join them. I accepted and the group met sporadically for the next ten months—a major source of data.

I gained access to a second private group in July, and participated for two months in their weekly *Empire of the Petal Throne* games. I had heard of this game, and I made a special point of contacting Professor Barker, the leader of this group and creator of *EPT*, asking if I could participate in the group while observing it. He agreed and said that he would have to check with the regular members of his group. The following week, he told me that the other members agreed, adding that he hoped I wouldn't be writing a "psychological profile" of them. After assuring him that this would not be the case, I participated in this group as a full, though novice, member.

Finally, I extended the substantive "theoretical sampling" (Glaser and Strauss 1967) by examining fantasy role-playing at conventions. I attended one national and one regional convention. Access to both of these open events posed no difficulties, and I was readily accepted by the players and organizers.

Learning the Ropes

As I have noted in earlier chapters, the serious gamer must digest an enormous amount of material. Although one can play these games without having read the rules, one's playing ability will be limited. Learning the ropes in any setting is crucial for the participant observer. Before I began to play each of the games, I purchased as much of the material for that game as I could and read the rules thoroughly. Even so, I found myself learning new ways to play these games as I participated, because of both the sometimes confusing and ambiguous rules and my inexperience. My character was killed at least three times because of stupid decisions that I could have avoided had I understood the rules better. I overcame my ignorance of the rules in time, but even after a year I was only a passable player (competent enough not to have my characters behave in ways that would kill them and embarrass me).

In addition to the rules, there was much background material to which I had little exposure. Many gamers have an extensive

knowledge of medieval history, science fiction, fantasy literature, and war gaming. My own war gaming background was confined to a year or so in high school, at which time I had played several Avalon Hill board games. My study of European history ended in high school, although I still recalled the historical outline of the Middle Ages. Most importantly, I had read little fantasy (since *Alice in Wonderland*) and my science fiction reading was confined to "intellectual" science fiction (writers such as Ursula LeGuin, Samuel Delany, Stanislaw Lem, and Arthur Clarke), literature not particularly relevant to these games. I had not even read *The Lord of the Rings* when I started gaming. Many gamers were avid science fiction and fantasy readers, who read what are called "space operas" or "Swords & Sorcery" fiction—fantastic literature of adventure, rather than ideas. I spent many evenings racing (not plowing) through this pulp fiction. Among the authors necessary for understanding these fantasy worlds the following stand out: Robert E. Howard (and his *Conan* series), Edgar Rice Burroughs, Michael Moorcock, Jack Vance, H. Beam Piper, Gordon Dickson (*The Dorsai*), Larry Niven, and Robert Heinlein. While not all of these authors can easily be classified together, their works were favorites of the groups in which I participated, and from them I gained a science fiction education.

In addition to the background information needed for competent gaming, I also had to learn the structure of each game world, what was considered normative, and what was deviant. Many of these worlds had been evolving over months and years. I recall a player once asking me, "Guess how many gold pieces I got?" then telling me that he had 27,000 gold pieces. My first reaction was to wonder whether he meant for me to consider this a miraculously high number or a disappointingly small amount. I assumed the former, and was correct. But the question indicates the range of assumptions that one must share.

During the first few encounters in any gaming group one becomes acculturated, learning the language and cant, and beginning to feel comfortable with a new group of people. This applied particularly to my first few experiences playing *Empire of the Petal Throne*, built on a scenario so complex that it was impossible to digest all at once, and played by long-time gamers.

The gaming world is definitely a specialized universe of discourse; it is one to which anyone can obtain access, but in which learning the ropes is difficult for the potential member who

does not share the background interests of other participants.

Problems of Membership

Over the course of a few months—with regular attendence at games and considerable remedial reading—I became a passable gamer, accepted as a full member of the groups I was observing. However, membership posed problems. In the early stages of this research I was simply an interested party—the true "participant" role; later, as players began to know my purposes, I emerged as a "participant-as-observer" (Gold 1958), in that I was a player with approximately equal status to the other players in the game. This role meant that I was expected to adhere to the group's expectations.

One of these expectations was that games stretch late into the night. A typical game begins in the early evening and ends after midnight—at times as late as four in the morning. We played these games on Thursdays and Fridays, and, since I worked those days and was not accustomed to twenty-two hour days, the schedule took its toll, even when I could sleep late. In order to stay alert during the gaming night, I consumed large doses of caffeine in the form of cola, coffee, and tea. But despite some professional guilt, I had to leave early (2:00 A.M.) on some evenings, and didn't contribute much (or take many notes) near the end of some others.

Another problem I had was participating in the aggressive and sexual culture of the groups. I dealt with the former by letting myself express my fantasies freely. I was as "sadistic" as most players, and I was responsible for several major massacres—wiping out an entire party ruthlessly ("Take no prisoners!") and then having my character search the bloodied corpses for gold, weapons, amulets, and other objects that might prove useful. I was quite surprised at how aggressive I acted, since I consider myself a pacifist (and/or coward). Defenders of these games made the defence against charges of militarism that the aggression is situation-specific. However, I must conclude (as I did in chapter 2) that because I was able to submerge myself in the violence of the game and participate in these killings "naturally," aggression—and its repression—has an important role in my makeup. More than just participating, I enjoyed the murderous actions of

our party, although reflecting upon my actions and those of my friends I felt chagrined.

I was also troubled by the male players' treatment of female characters. Players often indulged in sexual banter (described in chapter 2). Unlike aggressive talk, I was never fully comfortable discussing sexual topics in the "male" vernacular. While I did not interfere with this interaction, I did not participate much; the subliminated sexual desires reflected were not well subliminated, and were grossly exaggerated caricatures of American male sexual mores. With the exception of a naked woman I deliberately placed in one of my dungeons (to gauge the sexual attitudes of the players in my party—one of them had intercourse with her), I didn't much share in the male camaraderie as it related to sexual matters, except to smile politely or laugh genuinely when I could. Thus my reaction to aggressive material and sexual matters was quite different, although I behaved appropriately enough in both cases as not to be thought "weird."

Reflexivity

With the exception of observations at conventions, I chose to be as much a regular game player as possible, given the constraints of my note-taking. Generally I was fully accepted by the groups I participated in. I wanted to learn what it *felt like* to contribute to a fantasy world, how I would structure my contributions, and later, when I became sufficiently competent, what it was like to referee a fantasy role-playing game and how a referee constructs a world and a scenario. Although this ability to experience directly (*verstehen*) the nature of an activity is often given as one rationale for doing participant observational research (Douglas 1976:5), it is rarely done. A sociological study of medicine does not require that one become a medical student, but to observe them. This can be appropriate as a research method, but one can understand more by confronting the same problems that participants do. This true participation (e.g., Douglas, Rasmussen, and Flanagan 1977; Davis 1959; Roth 1963) allows the writer to gain a more intensely personal understanding of the behavioral dynamics of this social world, and, one hopes, permits the reader a similar experience. Following the tradition of personal participant observation, I included my own experiences primarily as supplementary material, under the assumption that

descriptive data reflecting the behavior of others is in some sense more believable, in that it is not as subjected to my feeling what I need to feel in order to make sense of sociological theories. I am not sure that this need be the case, but it is how qualitative research is read. I have used my own experience to learn what to look for and what questions to ask, and to examine certain internal states when they were the most relevant data. I hope the traditional ethnographic data coupled with my own self-reflexive insights contribute to my examination of this subsociety.

In addition to playing the game, I created my own world (two of them, actually) and refereed approximately half a dozen games of *Chivalry & Sorcery*. By solving problems that other referees faced I learned how referees deal with these pressures, in ways that I might not have suspected and probably would not have learned from referees had I not known the questions to ask. Since I know that I didn't use the dice rolls as a referee (indeed, I could not, given the difficulty of creating a fantasy while on one's feet with eight noisy players clamoring for a response), I assumed that other referees responded to similar situations in similar ways. I could ask others about this using my own experiences as a basis for comparison. Until I had refereed I did not realize how much discretionary power referees had, and later discovered that, if anything, I was less flexible than most referees.

I learned that refereeing and playing "felt" different. Playing was exhausting, and even boring at times. By the end of an evening of playing I felt drained. Yet when I refereed I was energetic throughout the entire evening without needing caffeine. Refereeing is energizing, although after the game is over one suddenly feels totally exhausted. Other referees also felt this way, and I might not have discovered this had I merely observed or just played the game. Creating a culture system requires energy, but the experience of being the focus of a group's attention for the evening provides a sufficient adrenaline boost to overcome exhaustion during the game itself, although with time this feeling might diminish (Marsh 1979:14–15).

Influencing Natural Behavior

Sociologists have criticized all forms of participant observation, but particularly those projects in which the researcher participates as well as observes, claiming that one's presence

inevitably alters behavior. Most participant observation texts advise the researcher to adopt a passive role (e.g., Bogdan and Taylor 1975:41). However, as a participant, I felt it desirable to learn the ropes as a full member. I felt no qualms about participating, although I avoided becoming a dominant member of the group, the only leader in a party, or involved in lengthy arguments. I managed to approximate these goals, except for a few occasions in which I became so engrossed in the game that I lost sight of my rationale for being present, and wondered, for example, how my character could get revenge on that other character who freed my Pegusus. Even that extended argument was useful in indicating how involving the game could become, and how close identification between self and character could be. Generally I was not concerned about my impact, and recognized that I was influencing the games, but was influencing them as a fellow player and not as a sociologist. Since at the beginning of the research I played these games without others' knowing that I was a sociologist, I was satisfied that the behavior I witnessed after I announced my intentions was not a consequence of a reaction to my occupation.

The only time I acted as a researcher was when I was refereeing. I occasionally planned encounters that might permit me to understand the dimensions of players' behavior. Thus, as mentioned above, I had characters meet a naked woman in the dungeon to see how they would react; on another occasion (described in chapter 2) the party met a group of children to test how aggressive players were. On still another occasion I introduced suspicion into a party to see the effect of disunity on the social relations of characters and players. These mini-experiments proved successful in allowing me to test the boundaries of behavior. I controlled the fantasy situation to test the effect of a single, preplanned, theoretically relevant encounter upon a party. While one can hardly call these single cases a "test" in the formal, experimental sense, they provided insight into the dynamics of the gaming group culture. I believed that as long as I recognized the effect I was having on the group, and as long as I could compare their actions with actions from groups in which I only observed (conventions), the bias from these "natural" manipulations would not affect the quality of the other data collected, since the players were unaware that the event was

anything other than a normal gaming encounter in a normal scenario.

One problem at the Golden Brigade club that eventually induced me to cease attending was that with each passing week I was becoming a more and more central and powerful person within the gaming structure. I found myself unable to take a minor role, as new players increasingly came to me for advice about the game, since I was an experienced, veteran player. I found myself teaching the newer members about the game, which meant that I couldn't observe their socialization (although I did learn about my knowledge of the game and my socialization through the way I taught them). I slowly found that a group of younger players gathered around me, having found someone who would pay attention to them, listen to their ideas about gaming, and play with them—things many of the older players were unwilling to do. As I mentioned in chapter 5, character status is often correlated with player status, and I found my characters being given power, which was one of the features I hoped to avoid. Eight months after I began to attend the Golden Brigade club I found that I had reached the point of diminishing analytic returns, and soon stopped attending, focusing instead on private groups. After a while these groups were discontinued, and at that point it seemed appropriate to leave the field to think, continue reading, interview key individuals in the gaming network, and bring the research to a conclusion.

I hope I have been able to capture the flavor of this subsociety in this monograph, as well as deal with some of the interesting questions of the social construction of fantasy. I have no illusions that all the possible questions about these groups have been dealt with; these gaming groups offer a rich field of study for those who are interested in urban cultural traditions and who are not afraid to get their hands dirty by participating in bloodshed and carnage.

Notes

Preface

1. One is comforted by Sturgeon's law. When asked to comment on the state of science fiction writing, Theodore Sturgeon, himself a noted science fiction writer, commented: "Ninety percent of all science fiction is crap; but then ninety percent of *everything* is crap." (My paraphrase)

Chapter 1

1. Some recent FRP games, such as those based on the American West (*Boot Hill*), permit players to enact historical personages in historical periods.

2. I use the term "referee" to designate the individual who structures the game players' adventures. Each game has its own title for this individual, but the term "referee" is applicable to all of the games.

3. These simulations can even in extreme (but harmless) forms simulate physical battle conditions. In one account protected players fire flour grenades and BB guns at each other in the bayous of Louisiana (Weathers with Donosky 1979:55).

4. The playing of war games is nearly universal—particularly if we define them broadly to cover the strategic deployment of two rival forces. Murray (1952) cites war games in ancient Greece, ancient Rome, England, Ireland, Lapland, Iceland, Thailand, Poland, Switzerland, Iran, Sudan, Japan, Turkestan, Spain, Wales, France, Denmark, Palestine, the Malagasy Republic, Bengal, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Korea, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Liberia, Siberia, Somalia, Ethiopia, India, China, Java, Italy, Dahomey, and Hawaii. Even the supposedly noncompetitive Zuni Indians are said to play war games, as are the Micmac, Hopi, and Aracaunian Indians.

5. A widely known example of the predictive accuracy of war games for military decision-making is the Japanese defeat at Midway:

> On the same day that Vice Admiral Kondo communicated his doubts concerning the Midway venture to Admiral Yamamoto,

> combined Fleet Headquarters initiated a four-day series of war games designed to test various operations already planned or tentatively planned for the second phase of the war. . . . In the tabletop maneuvers . . . a situation developed in which Nagumo Force underwent a bombing attack by enemy land-based aircraft while its own planes were off attacking Midway. In accordance with the rules, Lieutenant Commander Okumiya, Carrier Division 4 Staff Officer who was acting as an umpire, cast dice to determine the bombing results and rules that there had been nine enemy hits on the Japanese carriers. Both Akagi and Kaga were listed as sunk. Admiral Ugaki, however, arbitrarily reduced the number of enemy hits to only three, which resulted in Kaga's still being ruled sunk but Akagi only slightly damaged. To Okumiya's surprise, even this revised ruling was subsequently cancelled, and Kaga reappeared as a participant in the next part of the games. [Fuchida and Okumiya 1955:94–96]

Unfortunately for the Japanese, they could not prevent damage to their real warships as easily, and they lost Midway in a manner predicted by their simulation. Because of the accuracy of these military simulations, some have suggested that when countries wish to go to war they do so through war games rather than through the lives of their youth.

6. Figures on the current number of war gamers range from 250,000 (Reed 1978) to 500,000 *regular* players (Peterson and Kesselman 1978). Estimates on sales place the annual figure at around $8–10 million, making this a relatively small, though potentially lucrative, segment of the American leisure economy. In Great Britain war gaming is said to be the largest indoor sport (Peterson and Kesselman 1978:52).

7. *Diplomacy* (created in 1961) has caught the interest of the diplomatic community in the way that more conventional war games have done for the military community. For example, Henry Kissinger is an avid fan (Randall 1978:50).

8. This engrossment received press coverage in the sad and grotesque case of James Egbert III. Egbert was missing from home for several weeks and was believed to have been trapped in a network of steam tunnels under the Michigan State University campus. Egbert "had talked of roaming the tunnels in a 'living' version of *Dungeons & Dragons*." (*St. Paul Pioneer Press/Dispatch* 1979:4). Eventually Egbert, a gifted, but troubled youngster, was found alive with friends but press reports indicated that this use of underground steam tunnels by gamers is not uncommon (Weathers with Foote 1979). A year later Egbert committed suicide, although by all accounts the suicide had nothing to do with the game. Still, many parents ask game store owners about the dangers of the game (Brotman 1981:12).

9. Fantasy worlds can be quite seductive, as they provide a realm of action in which one's heroic desires can be met (see Linder 1955:277–293).

10. Children's fantasy is recognized as being shared, as in "playing" house, soldiers, cops and robbers, doctor, or rocket ship. Collective fantasy is seen as childish, even when one wistfully regrets the pressures

that cause one to put aside such "foolishness" for the requirements of the workaday world. This childish tradition of collective simulation provided a basis for the development of these "adult" games. The rulebooks and price tag provide legitimacy for what one did for free and freely in vacant lots, tree houses, and public parks.

11. A complication in this analysis arises from the fact that the rights to *Dungeons & Dragons* have been under legal dispute. Although the two co-authors (E. Gary Gygax and David Arneson) were interviewed in this research, for legal reasons those facts under dispute were not discussed, although both men have given their side of the debate in print (Gygax 1977:7; Arneson 1979:5–7; see also Kuntz 1977:51). However, there are several points on which there is no dispute about the chronology of the game creation and these are the early events, most relevant for our analysis.

12. An alternate method is for the player to role four six-sided dice, and to take the combined number of pips on the three highest dice. Some referees allow players to switch the dice rolls around, so they can choose which of their attributes willl be most impressive.

13. In *Chivalry & Sorcery* attributes are determined through rolling a twenty-sided die. These dice have two of each number from 0 to 9, with 0 counted as 10. Players will paint one set of numbers, and these will be the numbers from 11 to 20. Thus in *D & D* it is far easier to get a prime requisite of 10 than 3 or 18; in *C & S* a 1 or 20 is equally as likely as a 10—making extreme attributes more likely. Since pairs of twenty-sided dice are used to determine percentages, they are called "percentile dice."

14. All names of gamers and nonprofit organizations are pseudonyms. For obvious reasons, the names of game designers, writers, game companies, and magazines are accurate.

15. During this research I played with and observed approximately two dozen referees; I also refereed several games to understand the problems of creating an adventure and directing players.

16. Texas A & M University's Student Center recently passed a resolution outlawing all-night games because of their rowdiness.

17. Gordon does discuss groups with "group cultures" as having segmental importance, but it is clear from his writing that subcultural units as he defines them have greater segmental importance. According to Gordon's distinctions, fantasy gamers fit in between groups and subsocieties, although according to most writers they would be classified as subsocieties.

18. One active gamer reports this phenomenon explicitly:

> I . . . read as much of the A & E [*Alarums & Excursions*, a 150-page amateur magazine] as I can. On top of this I have 2 friends who also read a lot of the A & E. No one else of our group is really interested in A & E to read it. Those indirectly effected [*sic*] number 24. This totals 27 people directly and indirectly effected [*sic*] by A & E in our group. [Jacobson 1979:4]

19. By 1981 the average monthly sales of *The Dragon* totalled 45,000 copies.

20. After the completion of this research the main gaming shop in the Twin Cities moved to a larger location, and the Golden Brigade club moved from the community room to the new store.

21. The most significant of these groups is the Society for Creative Anachronism, whose members strive to recreate medieval Europe not as it was, but as it should have been (Hammack 1979). Some of those involved in war gaming and fantasy role-playing are active members of the SCA. The connection with science fiction is also strong; the well-known science fiction author Poul Anderson was one of the founders of SCA in the mid-1960s.

22. Golems are powerful monsters created by a magic user. The Iron Golem is the most powerful of all golems, and one of the most powerful monsters in the game. A saving throw is the dice roll that determines whether a character has been saved or killed.

23. To understand this transformation of a traditional ethnic joke one must recognize that players with low-level (weak) characters often try to gain experience points (which help them to raise their level) by taking partial credit for the actions of powerful, high-level characters.

24. One apa editor has estimated that fifty such magazines were being published in the United States and Canada as of January 1979.

25. The quality of these magazines is a matter of heated debate. E. Gary Gygax has been the most forceful of their critics, feeling they harm the hobby. He comments: "Now APAs are generally beneath contempt, for they typify the lowest form of vanity press. There one finds pages and pages of banal chatter and inept writing from persons incapable of creating anything which is publishable elsewhere" (Gygax 1978b:16). Gygax explains the motivation for the attacks as stemming from a desire to have them control their excesses:

> I took out pretty heavily after fanzines and APAs because I'd really like to see them squared away. If hatred for my attacks upon them makes them clean up their acts, good. Then I think it's worthwhile. . . . The way that they're currently structured now I think that they're quite destructive because all they're doing is propagating material which is generally detrimental to the campaign. And if there's one good, useful piece, there's probably nine destructive pieces to more than counterbalance it, and most of the DMs that are going to read it will not be capable of distinguishing what's good and what's bad. This wasn't initially true when the game first came out, 'cause most of the DMs [referees] were really top flight, they're sharp people, but the more people you get playing the game, the less discretion they're going to be able to show, the less judgment they'll be able to exercise. [Personal interview]

Fans hold their own in this dispute, painting Gygax as a diabolical figure. An editor of one 'zine returns the fire:

> TSR has claimed the role of protector of quality of fantasy role playing. They threaten legal action on the slightest pretext. They

> libel the entire hobby of amateur writers on fantasy role playing, many of whom are incapable of publishing anything so bad as *Snit's Revenge!* [a comical game published by TSR Hobbies], secure in the knowledge that there is no class action libel suit possible. And after crying bitterly how other companies and amateurs are harming fantasy role playing, they publish *Snit's Revenge!*, doing more harm than all their competitors and all the amateurs combined. It's almost as if the Pope has authorized a Satanic Rite within the Catholic church. He would soon be a pariah. [Sacks 1979a:2]

When the acrimony is set aside, one recognizes that the apa 'zines do vary considerably in literacy and value. The difference in evaluation derives from the different perspectives of the principals of the debate. Hard-core gamers are interested in the range of variations developed by others, and do not care particularly about the sanctity of the game. Gygax has a product to protect, both in terms of copyright and in terms of the product's good reputation, and as a result wishes to insure that quality control is maintained.

26. He facetiously answered seventeen. A hippogriff is a beast whose head and upper torso is that of a great eagle and whose hindquarters are those of a horse.

Chapter 2

1. Recent figures suggest that the average age of players is between thirteen and fifteen (Holmes 1981). TSR Hobbies reports that as of 1981, 75% of the purchasers of their games were under the age of seventeen. In talking about the characteristics of gamers I shall rely on my own research from 1977 to 1979.

2. In the Metagaming survey 57% of the sample were students.

3. There is some evidence that the number of women in the hobby is increasing, although they are still a small minority. At the GENCON XIV (1981) convention approximately 15% of the participants were female.

4. Science fiction fans apparently feel the same way, as expressed in the "Fans are Slans" movement of several decades ago (David Axler, personal communication, 1981).

5. One player commented that gamers don't necessarily have more knowledge, but

> they apply it more often because it's part of the hobby. You have to apply a basic knowledge of history; you have to apply that all the time, you know, regardless of what you are and so you usually use it all. [Personal interview]

6. Some of the accusations aimed at war gamers can be humorous, especially when the writer is trying to disprove the stereotype by employing other images, equally stereotypical:

> They are good people. Not, as one might presume, Hitler youth on an outing to the local Judengasse. . . . The ambiance is sober,

> academic: bashful eyes magnified through several thicknesses of lens. Private people meeting other private people. [Mano 1972:181]

Or:

> Who would be amusing himself in this way, vicariously sending thousands to death and damnation? The question answers itself, right? Military kooks, retired generals, professional drinkers of young blood, members of secret paramilitary organizations, Birchers preparing for the last battle with the Commie foe. Sorry, wrong. There's hardly a short haircut, a clenched jaw, or a brass button to be seen. . . . Jeans and T-shirts sag on pale, unmuscled bodies. Long, lank hair, beards, bitten fingernails, acne, abstracted expressions. Brains, grinds, oddballs. . . . The tone of the convention isn't just nonmilitary, it's entirely anti-military. I didn't find a single player who had been in uniform. Most of them were dedicated pacifists. [Buckley 1976:31]

These quotations indicate that one can always find a hook on which to hang a story, and that manipulation of journalists (and sociologists) is a continuing danger. While the original stereotypes are misguided, the public image that the gamers give should not be taken at face value.

7. Science fiction fans call these people "mundanes" (David Axler, personal communication, 1981).

8. Sutton-Smith suggests that games are models of decision-making. Fantasy role-playing games, which involve characters negotiating with each other, seem particularly amenable to being treated in this manner. The *Judges Guild Journal* survey asked players whether they prefer the game as primarily individual competition among all players as opposed to collective problem-solving. Of the 172 responses to this question, 68.6% preferred problem-solving games, 22.7% preferred competitive games, and 8.7% had no preference. While each approach involves decision-making, problem-solving games are more explicitly based on decisions.

9. Bainbridge (1976) noted this clannishness in his examination of the science fiction subculture. This clannishness of subcultures is consistent with small group theory. Bales has noted: "Most small groups develop a subculture that is protective for their members, and is allergic, in some respects, to the culture as a whole. . . . They [the members] draw a boundary around themselves and resist intrusion" (Bales 1970:153–54).

10. Science fiction fandom has been cited as a haven for adolescents with arrested social/sexual development (see Carter 1977).

11. The Golden Brigade meets publicly and thus is committed to open membership (at least above a certain age); however, this doesn't mean that there is no status hierarchy or that all are accepted equally (see chapter 5). Private groups that meet in individuals' homes provide a means of regulating the membership of a group.

12. Red Sonja is a female warrior originally created in Robert E. Howard's *Conan* stories.

13. Conan, created by Robert E. Howard, is the prototype of the lusty, primitive, male warrior.

14. Gandalf is the powerful (male) wizard in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the prime instigator of the action in these works.

Chapter 3

1. At least one player reversed the connection, claiming that he conceives of God as a "game player" who runs human beings on the board of life.

2. The same point has been made about fantasy literature in general, and the Oz writings of L. Frank Baum in particular (Attebery 1980:85–90).

3. Along with the principle of unlimited good there is also a principle of unlimited evil. When one evil force is defeated, others will arise.

4. Remember that for many of these gamers rape is not seen as nonnormative or evil within the game context.

5. A wyvern is a legendary creature, distantly related to a dragon; it is smaller than a dragon, but just as fierce.

6. In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* a balrog guarded Moria's east gate. It is a huge spirit of fire and shadow and carries a flaming sword (see Noel 1977:146–47).

7. In the case of the science fiction game *Traveller*, the issue is somewhat different since *futuristic realism* is impossible. One either refers to how well *current* space technology is extrapolated into the game framework or how well the world or scenario follows the premise of the science fiction work on which it is based. Realism is less frequently discussed in *Traveller* than in the medieval games. In the case of *Empire of the Petal Throne*, the key issue is whether the referee's version of the game reflects the mythos of M. A. R. Barker.

8. This last point does not apply to *Traveller*, which does not have experience points or character levels.

9. This Tekumel demon is Hes, He Who Laughs Forever, the One Whose Joy is Pain. Thus the party had to deal with their shoelaces being tied together, hotfoots, and other unpleasant drollery. In *The Book of Ebon Bindings*, a Tsolyani text on demonology, Hes is described as a "small human, rotund and jolly, but with hands and feet which do not end [?]. His features are also not those of a man, being bestial and cruel, with tiny eyes set beneath a ridge of bone or horn, a vast toothed mouth, and no discernible nose or ears" (Barker 1978:70; brackets in original). Hes was invisible while he bedeviled us.

10. This is a parody on the monster, the Black Pudding (Gygax 1977:10), a slimy, evil mass of protoplasm found in dungeons.

11. In *C & S* the will-o'-wisp is a spirit that haunts deserted places. His general appearance is that of a ball of lightning that can be light or dim, or disappear entirely. The will-o'-wisp tries to lure his victims to his

lair which he can do through his ability to create illusions. Only "cold iron" weapons can be used to vanquish this being (Simbalist and Backhaus 1977:124). One should note the differences between this game creature and its legendary counterpart. The creatures in these games are not exact representations of medieval monsters, but loose reconstructions.

12. In these two examples, and in several others not cited, the players let their dice say what they might be uncomfortable saying because of embarassment about drinking and sexual potency. Players might not wish to admit to a desire for either, or, alternatively, might not wish to be seen without a desire for them. Thus the decision of how to play these problematic options can be solved through the chance roll of the dice.

13. These engrossment beliefs do not only apply to fantasy role-playing but are sprinkled thoughout life. For example, we can explain a person making a remark in a conversation implying something that he would normally find disagreeable as a result of engrossment in the conversation. "Locker room talk" by some males might fall in this category. So, too, would the pillow talk of an excited swain in the pursuit of a mate. It is not that these individuals have been caught in a "lie," rather they have become so engrossed in the situation that a different set of folk ideas prevails. Thus, in the attitude-behavior consistency controversy, inconsistency may be due less to demands of the situation than to the actor's involvement in it.

14. Some research has found that males cheat more than females (Fakouri 1972; DeVries and Ajzen 1971). While there is some research on the effects of personality and moral development on cheating (Johnson and Gormly 1972; Leming 1978), the extent of the cheating that occurs in the game world, coupled with its relative acceptance, suggests that this would not be very fruitful for understanding these behaviors.

15. Referees, like players, have favorite dice. However, magical powers of the dice are not mentioned.

16. The things for which the referee must roll differs according to the game and according to the referee's conception of his role in the game. In *D & D*, with its prestocked dungeons, referees have relatively less leeway than in the other games in which players may explore unexplored areas. Some referees like to role-play all of the nonplayer characters in the game, while others prefer to let the dice do the "talking" for them.

17. Despite this view, Gygax has been criticized by some gamers for the perceived inflexibility of TSR Hobbies' approach to rules. One gamer, writing in an apa magazine, states:

> I will play most any type of wargame . . . but fantasy role-playing is my main interest. Note, I said FRP *not* D & D. I feel that I have progressed from that, taking D & D as being Gygaxian, non-deviational from the rulebook(s). [Dyche 1979:1]

Chapter 4

1. This Tsolyani phrase translates as : "Can anyone here speak Tsolyani?" (Barker 1978, part 1:45).

2. Barker cites the writings of Jack Vance, H. G. Lovecraft, and Edgar Rice Burroughs as having contributed to the Tekumel mythos.

3. There are linguistic difficulties in comparing one man who is very much alive (Barker) to one who is deceased (Tolkien). Does one use the past or present tense to describe their common features? Neither serves well. I have chosen to use the present tense, since it seems more grammatically equitable to resurrect a dead man than to murder one living.

4. McHenry and Shouksmith (1970) found that highly creative ten-year-olds are more open to peer suggestion than whose who are not as creative, a finding consistent with this relationship between fantasy and peer-group involvement.

5. A need for a male peer-group seems to have affected fantasy writer Richard Adams, the author of *Watership Down*. He recalls:

> I was a rather solitary little boy with an enormous fantasy life. I imagined myself to be a king of an imaginary country and I had quite a lot of comrades. Clearly, this reappears in the band of rabbit brothers who cross the countryside in 'Watership Down.' [Cooper 1975:77]

6. Barker contrasts Tolkien's orientation to sex with his own:

> Tolkien is not a sensual person at all. I mean his sensuality is very delicate . . . it's very, very, very beautiful, but to me being raised in the grubby old American sex epic tradition, Rita Hayworth and all this other kind of stuff, when I was a kid, and raised with our American movie traditions and our comic book tradition, *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* . . . and planet stories where every month the cover was a little more uncovered. This kind of stuff was very interesting to me, and so I figured that sex being a major thing in most human societies, it ought to be a major thing in mine. [Personal interview]

7. This difference in religious orientation in the two fantasy worlds may be attributed to the nature of the religious traditions to which the men adhere. Barker notes:

> Tolkien had this Britisher's sort of attitude that religion is something you do in church, and . . . it doesn't really do that much to your daily life . . . whereas I'd been living and working in societies where religion is just permeating the atmosphere. . . . Even the simple villagers are behaving in ways that they consider related directly to religion, rather than to secular politics or something like this. [Personal interview]

8. Barker's views on the nature of evil in Tolkien as cited in chapter 3 contrasted to the "depravity" that one finds on Tekumel.

9. The term stresses the localized nature of culture; culture need not be part of a demographically distinct subsociety, but rather is a

particularistic development of an interacting group. "Idio" derives from *idios*, the Greek root for "own" (not "ideo").

10. A "triggering event" has been defined as an action or statement that produces a response in a group that becomes a cultural element (Fine 1979).

11. In *C & S* an elf does not require sleep, and thus Barry's action is consistent with the rules of the game.

12. The *C & S* rulebook defines an Ego Sword as "a blade literally possessed by a type of Demonic force. The personality of the sword (IQ, Wisdom, Alignment) is determined as for a person . . . if the IQ and Wisdom scores are over 12, the Sword may acquire the power of speech" (Simbalist and Backhaus 1977:79).

13. There is a large *Empire of the Petal Throne* gaming group operating out of Schenectady, New York. A playful rivalry exists between the Minneapolis group and the New York group.

14. These dynamics also characterize cultural creation in the cultish Manson family (Fine 1982).

Chapter 5

1. Players usually use "dice" as both the single and plural of the word "die."

2. One of the ethical dilemmas of doing a participant-observation study is that one cannot disguise subjects to themselves. Thus Mark may recognize himself (from several years back). The extent to which he knew or knows of his reputation is not entirely clear; hopefully this passage will be taken only in the light of his reputation at one time in one social world. Since he is one of the players who was most helpful to me in this research and one of the gamers whom I personally liked best, I feel ambivalent about this section, but feel that its importance for understanding the social structure is sufficiently important to outweigh whatever temporary embarrassment to Mark himself. For a similar example, and a discussion of some of the problems this issue raises, see Douglas (1976:138–39). Significantly, I felt no compunction in writing about Leo.

3. Ironically, this is something that Mark most condemns in other referees, and he claims that he would never go out of his way to kill a player-character—that he tries to keep them alive. In my experience in games that Mark has refereed I think that this is a fair statement, though Mark is perhaps somewhat less likely to bend the rules or to change dice rolls than are other referees, and he earns his reputation by playing according to his perceptions of historical accuracy.

4. This apparently applies to other gaming groups, such as one in New York:

> Re: Munchkins.
> It has been mentioned by a few [members] that there are far too many youngsters who, while they are the fantasy gamers of the future, seem to delight in nothing more than making huge amounts of noise, getting in the way of collation [of the magazine

> *APA-DuD*], and generally making nuisances of themselves. [Lidofsky 1979a:1]

Gamers at conventions have told me that one of the problems with convention play is that there is too wide a range of ages for consistent (and competent) play.

5. It appeared that the complaints of older players that they were being used as a baby-sitting service had some justice, as younger players mentioned that their parents would pick them up after dinner and a movie or after a party. A 9:30 curfew would mean that these evening outings would be impossible, and thus parents stopped bringing their offspring.

6. The Hra are huge Tekumel bloodsuckers.

7. In Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carter stories set on Mars, Barsoom is the Martians' name for their planet.

8. Small group research indicates that small groups are generally preferred by members to larger groups (Hare 1976:216), with small groups developing closer relationships between members and having more opportunities for members to interact. Research indicates that the optimal size for discussion groups appears to be five members in terms of interaction satisfaction (Bales 1954; Slater 1958).

9. A gorgon is a creature whose lower torso is that of a reptile, whose upper torso is that of a female, and whose hairs are poisonous asps. To look upon the face of a gorgon turns one instantly to stone. The most famous gorgon of mythological history was, of course, Medusa. A harpy is a monster whose lower half is that of a great eagle, and whose upper body is that of a woman. A chimera has the forebody of a lion, the rear of a goat, the wings of a dragon, and the tail of a serpent. A manticore has the body of a lion and the face of a man, with a long tail ending in a stinger like that of a scorpion or in a spiked ball of iron. All of these creatures originally derived from classical Greek mythology and were modified for *C & S* and *D & D*. These descriptions are based on the *C & S* rulebook.

Chapter 6

1. By a "key" Goffman means the "set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (Goffman 1974:43–44; see p. 45 for a more complete and formal definition). A fabrication for Goffman involves the attempt by one party to induce another party to have a false understanding of what is going on (Goffman 1974:83), in essence a keying in which there is incomplete information and a closed awareness context.

2. Although "make-believe" is keyed from one's primary framework, within this make-believe fabrications are possible—as in the content of drama and stories.

3. The "Disguise" spell provides an illusion that causes others to believe that the character is someone or something else. "Transmorph"

involves actually transforming the "physical" existence of the character into another size or shape.

4. The Ru'un are animated, humanoid, bronze demon-automatons, about seven feet tall. These creatures have high intelligence, although they refuse to talk to humans. Their bodies are covered with a fine network of thin wires that give off a powerful shock to those who touch them.

Chapter 7

1. For the distinction between the often confused terms "role-taking" and "role-playing" see Coutu (1951). "Role-taking" refers to the ability to place oneself in the position of another, to share a perspective. "Role-playing" involves acting as another (real or hypothetical) might.

2. The distinction between good and evil in *Empire of the Petal Throne* can be better represented as the distinction between stability and change. Most players in *EPT* opt for adherence to one of the good gods. This is, however, not the case in Barker's groups, where worshippers of evil predominate.

3. This comment, while accurate, should be taken to indicate the situationally grounded character of play; on other occasions I attempted to play my characters as characters. Another interviewee commented:

> The question is have we ever seen a case where a player has actually played his character, and the response was the one person who ever did it was you [GAF] in the first few games. [Personal interview]

4. Kobolds are the smallest creatures in the goblin race, related to orcs and bugbears. They are evil creatures, attack for no reason, but fortunately are easy to kill.

5. A basilisk is an eight-legged reptilian monster whose gaze and breath turn characters to stone.

6. With the exception of super-NPCs, such as Adam or Sir Fang, described in chapter 3.

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