

# DUNGEONS

&



# DRAGONS

## ADVENTURES IN THE LIBRARY

PHOTO CREDITS: Nikol Price

NIKOL PRICE

Can teens become heroes and slay dragons in the library? That's what they do during this actual **Dungeons & Dragons** game session:

*"Kyllick's arrow rips through the dragon's wing, doing some serious damage but not enough to take the beast down. Biso the dragon is flying low and headed right for you. What is your barbarian going to do?"*

*"Argghh! I don't have any ranged weapons, and he's about twenty feet up, so I can't hit him with my axe! I pick up a rock and throw it."*

*"OK, roll to hit."*

*Teens jump out of their seats and everyone whoops as Biso rolls a natural 20 and slays the injured dragon with a simple rock before the dragon can take anyone out with its breath weapon.*

I have been playing **Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)** since sixth grade. The game has given me so much in terms of learning strategy, diplomacy, creative thinking, and just plain *fun* that I wanted to share it with teens in my community. Now I'm the Dungeon Master for a series of teen **D&D** sessions in my library in Glendale, Arizona, that just might never end.

### WHAT IS DUNGEONS & DRAGONS?

**Dungeons & Dragons** is one of the oldest role-playing games in existence. Created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, it developed from a group of friends playing military strategy games who wanted to add the magic used by characters in fantasy books. They formed a

company called TSR and published the first edition of **Dungeons & Dragons** in January 1974. So far, **D&D** has gone through five incarnations. First was **Basic Dungeons & Dragons**, next was **Advanced D&D**, and then came the second edition of **AD&D**. At that point, a company called Wizards of the Coast (famous for creating the collectible card game, **Magic: the Gathering**) purchased Gygax's TSR company. In 2000, under the direction of Wizards of the Coast, the third edition of **Dungeons & Dragons** was released, dropping the term "advanced" from the name. In 2003, with much input from the gaming community, WOTC put out a 3.5 edition to fix the bugs in the previous version and make the game more playable. The 3.5 edition is the current one in use.

How is the game played? **Dungeons & Dragons** is set in a fantasy world that is at the technological level of our Middle Ages, with the addition of magic and incredible creatures. To begin, each player creates a character, and the person acting as the Dungeon Master (DM) chooses (or creates) a world and plans out an adventure for the player characters to explore. The game is essentially a joint storytelling session with rules. The players do everything they can to stay true to their character concepts, and the DM adjudicates what happens as the players interact with the world. The goal is to have a good time. If both the players and the DM enjoy themselves and tell a good story, everybody wins. **Dungeons & Dragons** is not a game with a single objective or any losers.

## PLANNING A GAME

The **D&D** game sessions at my library take a lot of planning. I created my own world in which teen players adventure, using the 3.5 edition rulebooks for the mechanics of the game. To participate, each teen rolls up a character within the parameters set by the rulebooks. My job as the Dungeon Master is to give the players a world to explore and challenges to overcome. I also control the actions of the people and creatures whom they meet in the game world. The teens then choose how they will react to the situations in which I put them, rolling dice to determine random and skill-based events such as whether or not they can disarm a trap.

As a group, the players must learn to make decisions and agree on a course of action. In hairy situations, they often come up with ideas that never would have occurred to me. For example, the party fought long and hard to reach the center of an old temple taken over by ogres. They finally got there and engaged the Ogre Magi leader in combat. When the Ogre Magi was almost defeated, he used a spell



**Kristine, Bruck, Kris, and Christi show off the essential core rule books.**

to turn himself to gaseous form and escape. The teens brilliantly used a Wind Wall spell to capture the villain and finish him off. Their intelligence and ingenuity continually make me proud.

If you are not familiar with **Dungeons & Dragons** but are interested in running a game at your library, you have several options. Your first option is to read through the **Player's Handbook** to familiarize yourself with the rules. You don't need to be an expert or create your own world. Several detailed worlds are ready-made for adventuring. There are also pre-made adventures called modules. Books about worlds such as Greyhawk, Forgotten Realms, Dragonlance, and Eberron, and modules set in these worlds, can be found at gaming stores and bookstores. With a little background reading, a **D&D** novice could run a game using a published module.

A second option is to find a teen expert. Many teens play **Dungeons & Dragons**; chances are good that you could convince one of them to be the Dungeon Master of a game at your library. All you need to do is provide the essentials: space, books, pencils, paper, dice, and food. If you choose to have a teen DM run a game at your library, you might want to remain in the room during the game session and set up some ground rules. In my games, I never use demons or devils as monsters, and I don't let the characters get involved in overly romantic associations.

A third option is to find an adult willing to volunteer his or her time to perform as a DM. The owner of a local gaming store might run some games at your library, particularly if you purchase dice and other game necessities from that store.

Originally I planned a four-week series in my library, with character creation as the first session and actual game-playing for the other three. To advertise, I sent press releases to my community's local newspapers. The only other publicity was a flyer (see sample) placed in the library and a local gaming store.

The game was so well received that I offered a six-session series during the summer and an eighteen-session series during the school year (including an all-day Saturday game). I had planned to do a ten-week series for the summer of 2004, but so many teens were

interested that I split it into two five-week series for two different groups. Currently I run a four-hour gaming session every second and fourth Wednesday night, with no plans to stop any time soon.

## STAFF CONCERNS

Although the game was controversial in the 1980s, I have run into very few difficulties with the program. You might remember the suicide of James Dallas Egbert III that was sensationalized in the media of the time. Investigators determined that the young man's suicide was likely caused by depression, mental instability, and drug use, but the fact that he played **Dungeons & Dragons** was purported to be a major cause of his death. (The nonfiction book, **The Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III** by William Dear [Houghton Mifflin, 1984] is still in print.) Some religious groups also worried that playing **Dungeons & Dragons** would cause young people to believe in magic and start worshipping Satan. Over the last eighteen years, everyone in the gaming community with whom I have come in contact knows that **D&D** is a *game*. Curses and magical spells have no effect outside the game and a character's death is nothing to cry over, let alone a justification for suicide.

I sent the following description and list of the positive aspects of **Dungeons & Dragons** to my supervisor, branch manager, and director of the Glendale Libraries so that they would be prepared in the event of a complaint. To date, I have had only two complaints about the program, neither from the parent of a teen.

### DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ADVENTURE AFTERNOON

This new and exciting program is offered for teens at the Foothills Branch Library. **Dungeons & Dragons** is a game set in a medieval world that is significantly different from our own in that it contains imaginary items, events, and creatures. This program is a direct result of interest expressed by teens (possibly because of the new popularity brought on by the movie adaptation of **Lord of the Rings**). The **Dungeons & Dragons** rulebooks that the Library has purchased circulate well and we have reason to believe that this program will be well-attended. The game provides an opportunity for teens to engage in social interaction while building relationships and problem-solving skills. Specifically, **Dungeons & Dragons**:

- increases tolerance
- provides a forum for relationship building
- requires cooperation and teamwork
- develops problem-solving ability
- enhances knowledge and understanding of statistics
- promotes creative thinking
- encourages teens to use their imaginations in a way that is *both educational and fun*.

If you have any questions about **Dungeons & Dragons** or about this specific program, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

**[Author's Note:** You may use this letter to send to your administration or adapt it as necessary to meet your own circumstances.]

On a positive note, an older, gruff gentleman asked to speak with me when my first gaming session began. He wanted to know if our **Dungeons & Dragons** game still used pencils and dice or if it was all computerized. I told him that we most assuredly still use pencils and dice. It turned out that he was a retired plastics manufacturer who used to be the foremost maker of dice in the United States. After reading about the game in the newspaper, he had brought an entire trunk full of dice to donate to the library and the teens. It was a wonderful beginning to a great programming experience.

## A SAMPLE SESSION



**Bruck, Kris, Kristine, Christi, and Ken figure things out at the gaming table. Let's roll some dice!**

Half an hour before the session starts, I try to be available in the game room. I use this time to help teens level up their characters or answer questions about game mechanics that might have come up in the previous game. Ten teens are allowed to register for each gaming season (fall, spring, or summer). It is rare for anyone to miss a game. I often have additional teens observing, hoping to be able to register for the next season. On average, twelve teens ranging in age from fourteen to nineteen attend each session.

After the players settle in and the snacks have been passed around, the game starts. I remind the players about what we did at the end of the last session and they collectively decide what to do in the current situation. In a recent game, the players were able to slay a dragon that had previously robbed them. They decided to search for the dragon's lair to try to regain their lost items. It isn't easy to track a dragon because flying creatures leave no tracks. The group decided to hire a mage specializing in divination to find the dragon's lair.

It is my job to determine whether or not the characters get attacked by random creatures as they travel. I also have to decide whether or not there will be a divining mage to help them with their quest. I make some decisions myself to keep the game moving forward; I leave other decisions to fate by rolling dice. For example, I roll the dice for each morning, afternoon, and night of travel to decide if anything will attack the players. Dice play a large role in combat. Each player has to roll a die to find out if they hit a specific enemy. If they do hit, they have to roll another die to determine how much damage is done. Dice rolls are modified by



**Juan, Jace, Matt, Andy, Nathan, and Ken bring attention to one of their favorite parts of D&D: the food!**

character statistics such as Strength and Dexterity. Fighter characters have a higher chance to hit and do damage with a weapon than do magic-wielding characters. I make all the rolls for enemy combatants.

Some games are filled with combat. Other games consist almost exclusively of role-playing (solving mysteries or puzzles and interacting with non-player characters that I have created). At the end of each session, I give out Experience Points based on what players did during the game. Players use these points to level up and give their characters greater abilities. It is a challenge to get the game cleaned up and everyone out the door before the library closes.

Here are some comments from teens and one from a parent:

- "I love the interaction among my peers."
- "It's fun because you can use your imagination all you want with no consequence."
- "I like the people, and it's cool stuff."
- "I get to hang out with friends and meet new people."

- "I like it because it is fun. Nikol is great [as DM], and it helps my imagination."
- "Thank you so much. My daughters really grew and changed while participating in your program at the Library. They have met some wonderful friends. You have no idea how much you have influenced their lives."

Consider running a **Dungeons & Dragons** game at your library. Your fantasy-reading and video game-playing teens will love you for it. And so will their parents!

## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

**Dungeon Master's Guide.** Wizards of the Coast, 2003. 320p. \$29.95. 0-7869-2889-1.

*To help you run a game of **Dungeons & Dragons**, this book contains charts on random encounters, treasure, and magic items as well as explanations of how to referee combat and award experience points.*

**Monster Manual.** Wizards of the Coast, 2003. 319p. \$29.95. 0-7869-2893-X. *In this encyclopedia of creatures (good, bad, and neutral) to use in a **Dungeons & Dragons** game, each monster is listed in alphabetical order with a short description and important statistics such as armor class, attacks, damage, and special abilities.*

**Player's Handbook.** Wizards of the Coast, 2003. 317p. \$29.95. 0-7869-2886-7.

*This essential guide for the game of **Dungeons & Dragons** outlines the basic classes and races available for characters along with lists of weapons, equipment, and spells, as well as a detailed example of how combat works.*

### MAGAZINES

***Dragon** magazine and **Dungeon** magazine are both produced by Paizo Publishing. **Dragon** contains information for players on game mechanics, new spells, new magic items, and ways to customize your character to make it more fun to play. **Dungeon** magazine is meant for use by Dungeon Masters, offering short modules and maps along with advice about how to run a better, more streamlined game. Find subscription information at <http://www.paizo.com/paizo>.*

### WEB SITES

<http://www.wizards.com>

*The official Web site of Wizards of the Coast has an incredible selection of **Dungeons & Dragons** information, including the Systems Resource Document (SRD) that contains the majority of the text from all three core rulebooks. Articles by the contributors of the core books appear about once a week, explaining specific game mechanics and offering inspiration on how to use interesting aspects of the game rules.*

<http://www.3rdedition.org>

*Articles specific to the newest edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game are here, as well as reviews of new gaming products such as books, computer programs, and accessories. The site also hosts wonderful forums where you can get advice about anything related to **D&D** as a player or a Dungeon Master.*

*Nikol Price is a Youth Librarian at the Foothills Library in Glendale, Arizona. She shares her home with four magnificent cats. Her idea of fun includes reading fantasy books, playing **Dungeons & Dragons** with friends, and playing games on her computer and pocket PC. At the 2004 GenCon, Nikol was declared the Game Knowledge Master for knowing more about gaming trivia than anyone else. Questions, comments, and gaming accessories can be directed to her at [nprice@glendaleaz.com](mailto:nprice@glendaleaz.com).*