

Valiant Parents Fail in 'Dragon' Match

By ROBIN HEFFLER, *Times Staff Writer*

REDONDO BEACH—Some residents say they fought a spiritual battle at City Hall this week and that the forces of evil scored a temporary triumph.

"I don't think it's over," said Betty Grissom, owner of a Christian bookstore in Torrance. "We were defeated this time, but the Lord will be victorious."

Over the objections of some parents and preachers here and in neighboring communities, the City Council unanimously decided Tuesday to continue offering a controversial board game called Dungeons and Dragons as part of the after-school recreation program at Hillcrest Middle School.

Program Has Waiting List

To the council it was a matter of supply and demand. There is a waiting list of parents who want their 9-to-12-year-olds to participate. The game requires players to search for treasure in Medieval Europe while assuming the roles of characters who can use magic.

"In college we played all kinds of role-playing games," said Councilman Gene King. "What's the dif-

A Report From Another Area

From the South Bay Suburban Office

ference between being a witch and being a bad guy who shoots someone? We're talking about a game that makes you think. Anything that exercises the mind is a very useful thing."

Several parents testified that they think the game has enriched their children's analytical abilities. Others said the game has a darker side.

"Over a year ago when my son became involved in D and D, I was for it," said Julie Timm of Torrance. "Over the months there was a change in my son. It was very gradual. He would stay in his room for hours and only wanted to play. He was obsessed by it.

"One time he came home and said, 'Why am I living?' His depression became worse and worse. After seven or eight months he decided on his own to quit playing. Within two weeks he bounced back."

Still others said they did not mind the game's introductory rule books which are used in the city-sponsored classes. But they said the more advanced books to

which children would eventually be drawn contain lurid and gory material.

An occasional joke also found its way into the proceedings. "Elected officials are probably the biggest participants in fantasy-role playing there is," Councilman Archie Snow said.

In the last few years, the game has drawn criticism from parents and ministers nationwide who claim that it is both an obsession and worship of the devil. At least one school district—in Heber City, Utah—has banned it.

Objections were first heard in Redondo Beach in January, after the Parks and Recreation Department published its winter catalog.

Gladys Henrickson, supervisor of user-pay classes, said she received calls from Grissom and about six others who objected. The Parks and Recreation Commission asked the 18 parents who had children enrolled in the class how they felt.

"Seventeen said continue as is, and the eighteenth said substitute a similar game that takes place in outer space instead of the Medieval setting, so it was continued," said Henrickson.

Hearing Lasted 4 Hours

Opponents then protested directly to the council, which directed the commission to conduct a public hearing and report back. That emotional meeting on Feb. 11 lasted four hours and saw more than 35 people testify on both sides.

The commission recommended that the council allow the games to continue, and the council unanimously agreed.

"You do have the option of whether or not your child will participate," Mayor Barbara Doerr told the disgruntled parents who appeared at the meeting. I hate to see the option taken away from other children in the community."

Grissom said later. "If nothing else, I think this shows that parents need to be very, very concerned and careful about the things their children are being involved in. You used to be able to depend on the city and know that they wouldn't sponsor anything questionable. That time is no longer here."