

ABSTRACT

A Dungeon Master's Guide to the Satanic Panic:

The History, Sociology, and Rhetoric of Conservative Christianity and *Dungeons &*

Dragons

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The Satanic Panic of the 1980s and its relationship with *Dungeons & Dragons* has captured the curiosity of historians, sociologists, folklorists, religious scholars, and geeks for decades. Heralded as a return to form by conservative Christians, the Satanic Panic ousted occult undertones lurking in the shadows of America's popular culture. Conservative Christians subjected *Dungeons & Dragons* to the burning stake of this modern-day witch hunt. This thesis investigates the "why" and "how" of the Satanic Panic vis-à-vis this tabletop role-playing game set in a fantasy universe. Applying an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis presents primary texts and historical documents of the Satanic Panic and then proceeds to address the Satanic Panic sociologically. Finally, this thesis performs ideological criticism on an anti-*Dungeons & Dragons* text to demonstrate historical, sociological, and ideological trends in a major movement within conservative American Christianity, the influence of which reverberates to this day.

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A DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE TO THE SATANIC PANIC:
THE HISTORY, SOCIOLOGY, AND RHETORIC OF CONSERVATIVE
CHRISTIANITY AND *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

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Waco, Texas

May 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following research project would be unfeasible and frankly unenjoyable without the mentorship, criticism, friendship, and input of my thesis advisor, Dr. Whitenton. I also want to express my gratitude towards the Baylor Honors College and the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core for setting my sights on academic scholarship and critical intellectual engagement. My life, aspirations towards Christian ministry, and vocabulary are indebted to the instruction and care I received while studying at Baylor University. I am grateful to my dear friend, Benjamin Henselman, for being my best role-playing game party member, entertaining my ideological ramblings about *D&D*, and spurring me onwards towards a life of contentment and contemplation. I would also like to acknowledge Graeme Donaldson and AJ Hanenburg, two of my instructors from my secondary education who contributed to my love for knowledge and theology. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, for challenging me throughout my education to pursue knowledge with excellence as an act of Christian worship and as a pathway towards generosity.

CHAPTER ONE

Ground Zero of the Satanic Panic

Introduction

Dungeons & Dragons (often abbreviated *D&D* or *DnD*) by Wizards of the Coast, LLC, has grown in popularity in the late 2010s. Livestreams and podcasts of *D&D* sessions have flooded streaming platforms. A new generation of dungeon masters and adventurers have sprung up from board gaming communities. The cultural influence of role-playing games is no longer confined to the basements of geeks. Instead, *D&D* has claimed a place in entertainment that intersects with a broader category of people. Only one week ago, I peripherally spectated a session of *D&D* in a Panera Bread restaurant. The dungeon master, a woman in her 40s, charismatically led a group of six women as they adventured into some aquatic abyss. While this group might not look like Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas from *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016), they demonstrate the broadened player-base for tabletop role-playing games.

As a fantasy role-playing game, *D&D* consists of fantasy and role-playing elements. The game is considered a fantasy game due to the setting of the game. Most *D&D* games feature wizards, dragons, medieval weaponry, magic, and monsters. A role-playing game is any game in which players pretend to be someone else.¹ Seated around a

¹ Joseph Laycock, *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). 1.

table, players assume the roles of heroes and adventurers in the fantasy setting. While most players assumed the role of adventurers, one player is the dungeon master. The dungeon master portrays nonplayer characters and monsters. She then adjudicates the actions of the players, making sense of those actions within the narratively constructed world. For example, if one player-character wants to challenge another player-character to an arm-wrestling contest, the dungeon master will narrate the encounter and explain rules if necessary. Each player has a character sheet that provides a numerical description of the character that they have imagined. These numerical values are modifiers that apply to dice rolls that provide a degree of climactic chance and randomness when the characters undertake certain endeavors within the game period. The gaming group typically links together episodic sessions into a grander narrative, playing several hours per session.

D&D's demographic has shifted to include a wide array of players, and its popularity has climbed. Cultural inertia is not so easily halted or swayed. As a practicing, evangelical Christian, I have encountered conservative Christian parents and their ideologies my entire life. As a geek, I have found hilarity, expression, and gritty gameplay in tabletop role-playing games like *D&D*. On a Tuesday evening, while commuting back to my dorm in Waco, I held a long conversation with my friend. The father of one of our close friends had denied her request to play a one-shot session with us on the grounds that *D&D* was a form of satanic witchcraft, a dabbling in the dark arts which disguised itself as a game. Since the two of us had played tabletop RPGs for many years, we both knew that this was anecdotally not the case. However, this father's

concerns left me wondering why he would associate *D&D* with satanism and witchcraft. The following thesis is a product of that curiosity: Why would conservative Christian parents associate *D&D* with satanism. As we shall see, the answer to this question takes us on a complex journey, rich with ideologies, rhetoric, and behavioral reactions.

The Satanic Panic

The Satanic Panic (SP), a unique form of moral panic, gained momentum in varying pockets of American life. The Manson practices of the late 1960s prepared the United States for cult anxieties.² The early 70s also featured Satanic-inspired media, such as *The Exorcist* by Friedkin and Blatty, *The Satanic Bible* by Anton LaVey, and *Satan Seller* by Mike Warnke.³ Each of these texts illustrates the growing interest of the American public with demonic powers, possession, and occult practices. *The Exorcist*, while created for entertainment and horror, is an artifact that sources its depictions of demonic powers in the Christian practice of exorcism. The film theatrically brought demonic power into the public eye. *The Satanic Bible* was and is a profoundly influential

² A moral panic is a sociological concept, typically a reaction to negatively perceived incidents which are considered threats to the moral order. Some important terms require clarification. The term satanic, is used in this paper as an umbrella category. It includes a variety of forms of “occult” activities, ranging from early forms of formal neopagan religious practices to informal manipulation of magical powers. “Satanic” is used almost synonymously with “occult” in order to maintain continuity with primary and secondary texts of the historic Satanic Panic. “Cult” is drawn from Weber and Durkheim who view cults as groups who people who engage with a system of ritual activities. See, e.g., Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995).

³ William Friedkin and William Blatty, *The Exorcist*, Horror (Warner Bros., 1973); Anton Szandor La Vey, *The Satanic Bible* (Bronx, NY: Ihsi Press International, 2017); Mike Warnke, Dave Balsiger, and Les Jones, *The Satan-Seller*, (South Plainfield, N.J.: Bridge Publishing, 1972).

text. LaVey argues that God is a projection of individual personality, complementary to neopagan beliefs in the gods as variants of Jungian archetypes.⁴ Contemporary Satanists look to this text as a defining moment in the history of their religion.⁵ *The Satanic Bible* espouses hedonistic practices and individual freedom, often using the terms “God” and “Satan” interchangeably and describing Satan as an ennobling force. Instead, LaVey’s Satanic worship is a worship of personal liberty and expression rather than the worship of the Morning Star. *Satan Seller* is the debunked work of Mike Warnke, an alleged drug dealer and priest of a Satanist religious community. He writes of his freedom from Satanism and salvation by Jesus Christ, weaving together a personal history of his involvement in orgies, ecstatic rituals, and satanic worship. *Satan Seller* became a bestselling book, especially among Christian conservatives, almost immediately after its release.⁶ His autobiography was scrutinized heavily by *Cornerstone* magazine. In their investigation, they found that very few elements of Warnke’s autobiography were true.⁷ Although Warnke’s claims were discredited, the popularity of his book created a powerful stigma among Christian conservatives. He stood as an expert witness on ABC’s 20/20 show, citing his experience as specialized knowledge which the American public

⁴ Michael Strmiska, ed., *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ABC-CLIO Religion in Contemporary Cultures Series (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

⁵ James R. Lewis, *Legitimizing New Religions* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

⁶ Michael Hertenstein and Jon Trott, *Selling Satan: The Tragic History of Mike Warnke*, 1st ed (Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 1993).

⁷ Ibid

could use to protect itself against the dangers of Satanic worship.⁸ Satanism consisted of certain kinds of sexual freedom, violence, manipulation, and magical powers.

Several men previously affiliated with the Satanic religious groups have claimed to have found a relationship with Jesus who liberated them from their occult pasts.

Warnke, John Todd, and Hershel Smith share this narrative.⁹ In the 1980s, Christian fundamentalist leaders and members of the Religious Right frequently spoke about the occult. Leaders like Jerry Falwell and Pat Pulling addressed cultural issues regarding the occult issues, such as *D&D* or divination magic.¹⁰ TV shows like *The 700 Club* released content that demonstrated the ease-of-access and dangers of occult materials. *D&D* became a highly scrutinized game and pastime. In this chapter, I summarize some of these anxiety-inducing historical moments in order to paint a picture of the panic that developed over two decades, revealing the power of media and the rhetoric of the Religious Right.

Consider the McMartin Preschool incident of 1983 involving the alleged molestation of children at a local preschool in Manhattan Beach, California. Early reports claimed that the daycare workers molested over 100 children over the course of a

⁸ "The Devil Worshipers". ABC News 20/20 transcript, show #521. May 16, 1985

⁹ Edward E. Plowman, "The Legend(s) of John Todd," *ChristianityToday.Com*, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1979/february-2/legends-of-john-todd.html>; Hershel Smith and Dave Hunt, *The Devil and Mr. Smith* (Old Tappan, N.J: F. H. Revell Co, 1974).

¹⁰ Michael Hirsley, "Religion Collides with Astrology," *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1988, sec. Archives.

decade.¹¹ After the District Attorney's office was notified of an accusation of sexual abuse at the daycare, the police released the accused daycare worker due to a lack of evidence. The D.A. also mailed a letter to 200 families providing instructions for parents. These instructions included advice for parents as to the best method to draw out information about previous sexual abuse.¹² The verbatim instructions are as follows: "Records indicate that your child has been or is currently a student at the pre-school. We are asking for your assistance in this continuing investigation. Please question your child to see if he or she has been a witness to any crime or if he or she has been a victim."¹³ The letter created the space for concerned inquiry to turn into a panic. Parents and child therapists began questioning children, fanning the flames of hysteria that had already grown to a national scale.¹⁴ Media coverage only made things worse, frequently citing the allegations that the instructors participated in rituals of clubbing horses to death, child sacrifice, blood-drinking, magical flight.¹⁵ The McMartin court trials and media coverage incited accusations and investigations of daycares across the United States. The

¹¹ Ap, "AROUND THE NATION; Five Preschool Teachers Accused of Molestation," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1984, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/23/us/around-the-nation-five-preschool-teachers-accused-of-molestation.html>.

¹² Retro Report, "McMartin Preschool: Anatomy of a Panic," *The New York Times*, sec. U.S., accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000002755079/mcmartin-preschool-anatomy-of-a-panic.html>.

¹³ "Letter to McMartin Preschool Parents," accessed March 9, 2020, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mcmartin/lettertoparents.html>.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Clyde Haberman, "The Trial That Unleashed Hysteria Over Child Abuse," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2014, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/us/the-trial-that-unleashed-hysteria-over-child-abuse.html>.

accusations escalated quickly from sexual molestation to animal sacrifices and satanic rituals similar to those referenced in the McMartin incident.¹⁶ State and Local police, as well as the FBI, even spent a portion of their investigation digging underneath the preschool to search for secret passageways and animal remains.¹⁷ Media support gave weight to the prosecution's claims of satanic behavior.

This court trial is merely a component of the broader SP of the 1970s and 1980s and provides context for an investigation of the relationship between the SP and *D&D*. The McMartin Preschool trials reveal several common threads in American moral panics of the late 20th century. First, these moral panics often involve the victimization of children. The threat to impressionable children energizes media discussions, especially among conservatives with a high view of the nuclear family and moral childrearing. Second, the media has a reflexive relationship with individual incidents. While the incidents often influence the media's portrayal of the occult, satanic, or demonic threat, the media often reshapes the experience and thoughts of those directly related to the incident. As the media's coverage of the satanic ritual elements of the trials blossomed, so did the witnesses' frequency of reporting satanic activity.¹⁸ Witnesses and victims reshaped their own narratives to more closely align with or interact with the news

¹⁶ Special to The New York Times, "Abuse Case Goes to California Jury," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1989, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/03/us/abuse-case-goes-to-california-jury.html>.

¹⁷ Sarah Hughes, "American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970–2000," *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 3 (August 2017): 691–719, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875816001298>.

¹⁸ Haberman, "The Trial That Unleashed Hysteria Over Child Abuse," *The New York Times*

media's coverage of the event. Finally, satanic and occult powers were popularized into American vocabulary. While many families had probably seldom considered the possibilities of certain ritual practices, especially in their daycare centers, now families had specific symbols from new media that signal ritual activity. The growth in the horror movie genre, when coupled with trials like the McMartin Preschool case, increased American awareness and vocabulary regarding satanic symbolism, imagery, evidence, and practice. These three factors set the scene for the Satanic Panic as it pertains to *D&D*.

While not publicized as heavily as McMartin Preschool trial, the death of James Dallas Egbert III also played an important role in SP. James Dallas Egbert III part of a high-profile missing person case and died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound only a year later. His disappearance and death created tension as media coverage began to heighten fears regarding the relationship between *D&D* and occult practices. As *D&D* received a warm welcome from teenagers across America, players like James Egbert III became engrossed in the gameplay and storytelling of Gary Gygax's fantasy role-playing game.¹⁹ James was a brilliant computer science student, enrolling at Michigan State University when he was only 16.²⁰ He struggled with his mental health as well as a drug addiction. He ran away from his university, attempting to make his way south to Louisiana and created a missing person search in his wake. The missing person investigation continued

¹⁹ Gary Gygax was the owner of Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), the creator of *Dungeons and Dragons* as well as the scapegoat and face of *D&D* during the Satanic Panic.

²⁰ Robert Mills, "A Game as Real as Life," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1984, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/23/books/a-game-as-real-as-life.html>.

as William Dear, a private investigator hired by the Egbert family, gathered information from Dallas's friends, colleagues, and dormitory. The investigation even led into tunnels underneath the college campus where Dear theorizes that Dallas spent his evenings, navigating the tunnels as part of a live-action variant of *D&D*.²¹ Dear found a note during his investigation that indicated suicidal thoughts as well as some unusual behavior markers, according to Mrs. Egbert. The press concluded initially that James Dallas Egbert III might have been a murder victim in a coverup story or possibly created the hoax of his disappearance.²² An anonymous tip finally helped Dear to locate Dallas, who had stayed at a nearby friend's house in East Lansing until traveling to New Orleans, Louisiana. The speculations about his disappearance began to form around a theory about *D&D*, that "the youth's disappearance might have been connected with a bizarre attempt to act out an intellectual game called *Dungeons & Dragons*."²³ Although reunited with his family, Dallas completed his suicide one year later. A report in the *NYT* noted, "Mr. Dear also hired an expert player of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game...the investigator surprised himself by becoming completely immersed in the fantasy world of the game, an

²¹ Nathaniel Sheppard Jr ;Special to The New York Times, "Tunnels Are Searched for Missing Student," *The New York Times*, September 8, 1979, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/09/08/archives/tunnels-are-searched-for-missing-student-described-as-brilliant.html>.

²² Ibid

²³ "Around the Nation," *The New York Times*, September 14, 1979, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/09/14/archives/around-the-nation-church-documents-seizure-by-fbi-is-ruled-legal.html>.

indication of how addictive it might have been for the impressionable Dallas.”²⁴ The media was not finished with Ebert’s story. In 1982, the film *Mazes and Monsters* hit the big screens, basing its story on the disappearance Egbert and the book by the same name written by Rona Jaffe. Tom Hanks secured his first lead role as a character who eventually is lost to the imagined worlds of a *D&D*-mirror game.²⁵ The risks of the gameplay are shown, with the film concluding that the protagonist will be lost to the enticing and dangerous role-playing game. The story of James Dallas Egbert III is just one of several high-profile cases that gave *D&D* the media coverage needed to create a moral panic across the United States.

Another story which gained publicity following the search for James Dallas Egbert III surrounded the death of a child named Irving Lee “Bink” Pulling. His mother, Patricia “Pat” Pulling, attributed her son’s mental state to a form of mental disturbance, even a kind of possession. She writes,

[Bink Pulling] growled, screamed, walked on all fours, and clawed the ground. Nineteen rabbits raised by the Pullings were found torn to pieces in the last three weeks of his life, although stray dogs were never seen. A cat was found disemboweled with a knife. The internal torment which led to his death was plain, yet he had been a normally-well-adjusted, gifted young man only a few months before.²⁶

²⁴ Mills, “A Game as Real as Life.”

²⁵ Steven Stern, *Mazes and Monsters* (McDermott Productions, 1982).

²⁶ Pat Pulling and Kathy Cawthon, *The Devil’s Web: Who Is Stalking Your Children for Satan?* (Lafayette: Huntington House, 1989). 7-8.

For Mrs. Pulling, her son's "possession" was enabled, if not wholly caused, by his involvement in *D&D*. Pulling reported her son's behavior and grew angry at her own ignorance of her son's state of mind.²⁷ She channeled this anger into writings and advocacy. Pat Pulling's writings and published material provide an intriguing look at how parents and experts attempted to inspect for satanic influence. She created an occult profiling document for police investigators. Titled "*The Who What When Where and How of Teen Satanism*," Pulling profiles teen Satanists as the following:

WHO

1. Adolescents from all walks of life.
2. Many from middle to upper-middle-class families
3. Intelligent
4. Over or Under Achievers
5. Creative/Curious
6. Some are Rebellious
7. Some have low self-esteem and are loners
8. Some children have been abused (physically or sexually)

HOW?

1. Through Black Heavy Metal Music
2. Through fantasy role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons* (R)
3. Obsession with movies, videos, which have occult themes
4. Collecting and reading/researching occult books
5. Involvement with "Satanic Cults," [sic] through recruitment
6. Some are born into families who practice [sic] "satanic cult rituals."²⁸

Pat Pulling's influence was enhanced through her role in the lobbying group, Bothered About *Dungeons & Dragons* (BADD). Joseph Laycock outlines the primary

²⁷ Ibid, 7-8.

²⁸ Pat Pulling, "Interviewing Techniques for Adolescents" (BADD, Inc., September 1988), http://www.rpgstudies.net/stackpole/pulling_report.html#6F.

strategies of BADD in its campaign against the fantasy tabletop role-playing game. BADD relied on a “trophy list” of cases of teenage suicide, relying on a converge and narrative than statistical probability. If the press associates high-profile suicide cases with *D&D*, then convergence and availability heuristic will contribute to a public conviction that *D&D* functions causally in adolescent suicide.²⁹ Laycock explains that BADD appeals to federal agencies were largely unsuccessful.³⁰

BADD did not stop with federal agencies or the release of its own pamphlets. BADD attempted to alter school policies, concerned with the accessibility of *D&D* found in school libraries or in gaming groups of children that formed and played on school campuses.³¹ BADD modified its emphasis, now emphasizing *D&D* as a religious liberty issue and requiring schools to not endorse a particular religion.³² BADD successfully removed *D&D* from the library shelves and school campuses of schools in Connecticut, Vermont, New York, Virginia, New Mexico, Colorado, California, and Ohio.³³ Of course, BADD’s typical view that *D&D* caused serious harm towards children was

²⁹ Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, 2013; Laycock, *Dangerous Games*.119-120.

³⁰ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 120-121.

³¹ James T Richardson, Joel Best, and David G Bromley, *The Satanism Scare*, 2017, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1608682>.

³² Mary Dempsey, Pat Pulling, and Pat Dempsey, *Dungeons and Dragons - Witchcraft Suicide Violence*, accessed April 15, 2020, http://archive.org/details/dungeons_and_dragons-witchcraft_suicide_violence.

³³ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 121.

upheld through this lobbying process. BADD emphasized this component of their campaign more substantially when Pulling, Dempsey, and Dempsey confronted law enforcement. Including the teen satanism profiling list above, BADD released pamphlets which aided law enforcement when interviewing suspects who have some relationship with tabletop role-playing games or satanism.³⁴ One police officer, without any explicit reference to the pamphlets released by BADD, demonstrates the effects of the Satanic Panic on law enforcement. He states, “My understanding is that once you reach a certain point [in the game] where you are the master, your only way out is death.”³⁵ The lobbying efforts of BADD in law enforcement appear to have succeeded.

Mrs. Pulling’s writings and the lobbying activities of BADD are reactions to and contributors to the panicked moral climate of the United States at the time. Media and other authoritative outlets continued to amplify this panic, particularly in conservative communities. Pat Robertson of *The 700 Club* featured *D&D* and commented on its role in corrupting American teenagers, going so far as to link it to demonic activity.³⁶ Robertson’s show depicts *D&D*, rock music, and cartoons as something which will “saturate their [kids’] minds and sabotage their future.”³⁷ Robertson echoed the words of

³⁴ Pulling, “Interviewing Techniques for Adolescents.”

³⁵ This quote is taken from a news article quoted in *Dangerous Games*. The citation for this article is as follows: “Dual Deaths are Linked to Fantasy Game,” *The Record*, November 4, 1984.

³⁶ “*The 700 Club*” on *Rock Music, D&D, Cartoons (1989)*, 1989, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8E4-3f0Qcyo>.

³⁷ Ibid

other conservative thinkers. Dr. Gary North,³⁸ popular author, economist, and Christian Reconstructionist,³⁹ confronted the occult in several of his compositions. His book, *None Dare Call It Witchcraft*, later republished as *Unholy Spirits*, sketches the effects of the New Age Movement on economics, civil law, and social dynamics. North claims that *D&D* and other forms of ostensibly harmless entertainment are deceptive introductions to the occult.⁴⁰ The growth of fantasy role-playing games is the consequence of the growth of new age occultism.⁴¹ He vocalizes the paralyzing fear that the devil or the devil's evil-doing might be hidden beneath innocent or widely popular cultural artifacts. The seeming innocence of *D&D* or other role-playing games, North asserts, is a cleverly marketed gateway into the occult: "Dungeons & Dragons games are the most effectively, most magnificently packaged, most profitably marketed, most thoroughly researched introduction to the occult in man's recorded history."⁴² North's conclusions on the game

³⁸ Gary North, alongside Rousas Rushdoony and Greg Bahnsen, is considered one of the key leaders of the Christian Reconstructionism. Christian Reconstructionism and its impact on the Christian Right will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 3. North was an influential thinker and writer for conservative Christians in the 1980s. His expertise was touted in several of his works published by his own Institute for Christian Economics in Tyler, Texas.

³⁹ Christian Reconstructionism (CR) is a pseudo-theocratic ideology that spawned from the minds of reformed, conservative Christian political theorists, pastors, and economists. The goal of the CR is to reconstruct the United States of America such that all life can operate in accordance with biblical law. For more on CR, see *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction* by Julie J. Ingersoll (2015).

⁴⁰ Gary North, *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism* (Tyler, Tex: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

⁴¹ The New Age movement is an intersection of neopaganism, eastern philosophy, and subsets within western religious traditions like Christianity. North crafts a polemic against the deceptive familiarity of the New Age movement.

⁴² Gary North, *None Dare Call It Witchcraft* (New Rochelle, N.Y: Arlington House, 1976).

increased fear among Christian parents and clergy. Minister and theologian, Peter Leithart, worked with pastor George Grant to compose *A Christian Response to Dungeons & Dragons: The Catechism of the New Age*.⁴³ Their 1987 pamphlet reports that *D&D* is the most impactful and dangerous occult assault. They write the following:

“The chief weapon used in this spiritual raid on our children is a game -- just a simple little game. It is called *Dungeons & Dragons*. Even more than all the cartoons, toys, comics, books, videos, and music, this simple little game has served to make our children a ‘generation at risk.’”⁴⁴

Their argument centers around the inherent risks associated with the gameplay and finds those consequences damning for TSR (the business entity which owned the rights to *D&D*) and the fantasy role-playing game. The violence in the game is gratuitous and sexualized. They critique the game’s emphasis on power through the role of the Dungeon Master and the leveling system. They note that “fantasy power is a strong attraction to many people who feel powerless in the real world.”⁴⁵ They do not openly state that *D&D* is the source of demonic powers like several of their contemporaries. However, they do attribute the moral depravity of players to the kinds of freedoms offered by the game. The game is called a form of “obsessive escapism” that “is virtually equivalent to schizophrenia.”⁴⁶ The authors were also deeply concerned by the usage of

⁴³ Peter Leithart and George Grant, *A Christian Response to Dungeons and Dragons: The Catechism of the New Age* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Dominion Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ Leithart and Grant, *A Christian Response to Dungeons and Dragons*, 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 8.

spells in the game and their connection with occult spellcasting techniques. Ultimately, they conclude that D&D has become a kind of catechism. Namely, *D&D* “contains a summary of the principles and an introduction to the fundamentals of the occult.”⁴⁷

Their pamphlet contains several extremely influential ideas regarding Christian response to *D&D*. These ideas are summarized as the following: the reality of spiritual powers, both divine and demonic, is downplayed in the real world as fantasy; fantasy role-playing games suggest a dualistic universe with equally powerful forces of good and evil, law and chaos. Furthermore, Leithart and Grant believe that the Christian scriptures prohibit experimenting with or practicing witchcraft.⁴⁸ Each of these concerns is of extreme importance to conservative Christians like Leithart and Grant, warranting scrutiny and criticism.

Grant, Leithart, North, Pulling, Robertson, pastors, journalists, and newspaper publishers all latched onto the strange cultural phenomena of *D&D*. TSR’s fantasy role-playing game was not alone during the era of the Christian Right. Rock n’ roll music, cartoons, comics, movies, and video games all fell underneath the microscope of the occult-concerned Christians in America. *D&D* came into the limelight in the disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III. With the classic fantasy role-playing game briefly on the mainstage of American news reporting, the Christian fear of the occult

⁴⁷ Ibid, 10

⁴⁸ Leithart and Grant, *A Christian Response to Dungeons and Dragons*, 10-11.

fixed its gaze on *D&D*. As stories and expert accounts circulated, fears pertaining to *D&D* coagulated into an ever-growing monster.

Conclusion and a Look Ahead

These sentiments against role-playing games did not die in the 1980s. They persist in conservative Christian circles even as the 2020s begin to take shape. These suspicions, fears, and anxieties are the chronic symptoms of a rumor panic which began almost 40 years ago. A well-reasoned, logical explanation of the “innocence” of the game might prove interesting. However, these arguments already exist in bulk from Christian and non-Christian sources alike. Instead, an investigation into how rumor panic theory applies to the 1980s, how Christians ought to respond to cultural artifacts, and how fantasy role-playing games break categorical and typological norms is the true thrust of this thesis.

This thesis proceeds in the following manner: In Chapter Two, I analyze the Satanic Panic from a sociological perspective, concentrating on theories of rumor-panics and symbolic interactionism. In Chapter Three, I dissect the express and implied elements of an anti-occult text, the ideological consequence of Christian conservatism. Chapter Four continues my argument by coalescing the elements of this anti-occult text into several ideologies, presuppositions that drive conservative Christian suspicions about *D&D*. The final chapter summarizes the main arguments of this thesis while reflecting on the status of *D&D* and the Satanic Panic today.

I now turn to the notion of moral panics from a sociological perspective and demonstrate how the Satanic Panic relates to rumor-panic theory.

CHAPTER TWO

Rumor-panic Theory and the Satanic Panic

Introduction

The previous chapter depicted the Satanic Panic and several significant historical moments and figures. Considering the Satanic Ritual abuse of the McMartin Preschool incident, the deaths of Egbert III and Bink Pulling, the lobbying of Pat Pulling through BADD, and the writings of Christian Reconstructionists, our investigation now turns to sociological modes of inquiry. The aim of this chapter is to present several socio-psychological models that can help to explain the initiation of and expiration of the moral panic of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Satanic Panic was informed by alleged memories of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA), which purportedly revealed a hidden world of Satanic rituals and dangerous philosophies. As a matter of definitions, this chapter frequently refers to threat rumors and rumor panics synonymously. Bill Ellis has defined rumor panic sociologically as “brief but intense events in which rumors about a menacing person or group circulate in a community. This menace involves some eminent act against humanity, and the only

defense is a strong offense by concerned citizens.”¹ In what follows, I adopt and adapt Ellis’s work in order to explore potential causes and effects of the Satanic Panic.²

Rumors, which constitute the fuel for a moral panic, spread through SRA accounts sourced in experiences including but not limited to tabletop role-playing games and daycare centers. Parents, law enforcement, and religious leaders feared a Satanic force and often derived these fears from alleged memories of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA), such as those reported by Michelle Smith and Lawrence Padzer in *Michelle Remembers*.³ The book recounts the childhood experiences of Michelle Smith, a

¹ Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

² From a sociological perspective, the Satanic panic is typically categorized into two different phases. While these phases overlap in subject matter, time, and social groups, the overall emphasis of each phase is loosely identified by date and origin of the rumors which spurred on the panic. The Satanic Panic can be delineated into two distinct waves. One phase of the panic focused on public “cults.” Cult is a contentious term in sociology and is best described as an oppositional social phenomenon. Bromely (David G. Bromley, “Satanism: The New Cult Scare,” in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley (Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991) applies an oppositional definition in his descriptions of cults within the Satanic Panic (1991, 1). The oppositional model, which is proposed by James Richardson in “An Oppositional and General Conceptualization of Cult” in the *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, states the following definition of cult: “A cult is usually defined as a small informal group lacking a definite authority structure, somewhat spontaneous in its development (although often possessing a somewhat charismatic leader or group of leaders), transitory, somewhat mystical and individualistically oriented, and deriving its inspiration and ideology from outside the predominant religious culture” (31). In “Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative” in *Review of Religious Research*, Richardson notes the appropriation of the term cult into a new connotative function. Rather than serving as a neutral term to describe religious developments from the sociological perspective, the term cult acquired a negative value through media and moral panics. Referring back to the two distinct waves within the Satanic Panic, the initial “anticult” movement confronted identifiable religious practitioners, such as the Manson group (see Bromely 1991, 55). In other words, these fears pertained to individuals with public names or reputations. The second movement targeted “Satanists,” an underground religious group whose alleged influence spread from adolescent gaming groups to powerful politicians. While there were small practicing groups of Satanist, there certainly were not many publicly recognized groups (see Victor, 9).

³ See also my comments on the McMartin preschool trial, detailed in Chapter 1, which is perhaps the most iconic instance of SRA in American history.

psychiatric patient of Lawrence Padzer.⁴ Ms. Smith allegedly witnessed a ritual sacrifice, animal sacrifices, and sexual rituals as a child. While many readers have scrutinized the legitimacy of Padzer's psychiatric practice and the accuracy of the book, *Michelle Remembers* remains important for propagating rumors of SRA.⁵

SRA is characteristically difficult to verify. Court hearings and accusations of ritual abuse relied on medical evidence.⁶ As was the case in the McMartin trial, the corrections of "child-abuse pseudoscience" permitted unreliable witnesses to take the stand during trials who presented "misdiagnoses as fact."⁷ Sparse evidence filled the case briefings in SRA allegations, with most defendants receiving acquittals after lengthy and expensive trials.⁸ Yet the subjective quality of these memories in no way excludes their relevance to sociological inquiry. Reports of SRA constitute many historical and ideological imaginings of the hidden Satanic influence in American society, often drawn from children who are allegedly the victims of Satanic abuse or influence.⁹ However, memory is subject to the influence of a wide array of factors.¹⁰ Cultural frames can shape

⁴ *Michelle Remembers*. (Place of publication not identified: Book On Demand, 2012).

⁵ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*. 104.

⁶ Debbie Nathan and Michael R Snedeker, *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (New York: Authors Choice Press, 2001).

⁷ Nathan and Snedeker, *Satan's Silence*, 346-347.

⁸ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 105.

⁹ Frankfurter, David. "The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious-Studies Data" in *Numen* publ. Brill Vol. 50 No. 1 2003, 108-117

¹⁰ E.g., Padzer may have influenced Michelle Smith through the process of "remembering" her Satanic experiences. See Laycock.

and color memories, even of experiences with multiple reliable witnesses.¹¹ Typically, the research of SRA experiences has focused on discerning history from contrived accounts.¹² *Michelle Remembers* received this kind of treatment.¹³¹⁴ Smith and Padzer's book, along with reports from experts at "professional symposiums," helped to craft language and define symbols that contributed to a confirmation bias in memory and analysis of SRA accounts.¹⁵ Symbolic redefinition included the interpretation of the lyrics and stylings of punk rock music, obscure ritualistic images (certain polyhedral shapes), and images and narratives within *D&D*.¹⁶

A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Satanic Panic

The question remains: how do individuals from such diverse educational and experiential backgrounds latch onto theories of secret infestations of Satanism sourced primarily in memories? Sociologists have proposed a symbolic interactionist model as an

¹¹ George K. Ganaway, "Historical versus Narrative Truth: Clarifying the Role of Exogenous Trauma in the Etiology of MPD and Its Variants," *Dissociation: Progress in the Dissociative Disorders* 2, no. 4 (1989): 205–20; S. J. Ceci and M. Bruck, "Suggestibility of the Child Witness: A Historical Review and Synthesis," *Psychological Bulletin* 113, no. 3 (May 1993): 403–39, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.113.3.403>; E. F. Loftus, "The Reality of Repressed Memories," *The American Psychologist* 48, no. 5 (May 1993): 518–37, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.48.5.518>; Mary deYoung, "One Face of the Devil: The Satanic Ritual Abuse Moral Crusade and the Law," *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 12, no. 4 (1994): 389–407, <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2370120408>.

¹³ "Dismembering Michelle Remembers," 2014.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Frankfurter, "The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic," 110.

¹⁶ Pulling, *The Devil's Web*, Smith and Padzer, *Michelle Remembers*.

explanation for the Satanic Panic.¹⁷ Jeffrey Victor and Robert Bartholomew describe the SP as a threat rumor, one which produced similar memories and experiences across the broader American society. For Victor and Bartholomew, these threat rumors provide a purpose to interpersonal communications. At the sociocultural level, the threat rumor emerges in a context of (1) preexisting anxiety and is socially constructed and reified through (2) rumors and media.¹⁸ At the social-psychological level, threat rumors are a consequence of perceived, (3) ambiguous danger. They (4) paradoxically reduce anxiety by reducing uncertainty while simultaneously increasing anxiety due to increased perception. The validity of the threat rumor is maintained through (5) expert authorities, proximate relationships, media coverage, and consensual validation.¹⁹

Pre-existing Anxiety: At least two interdependent anxieties seem to support the SP: fears about the dissolution of the nuclear family and economic decline. First, according to Bromley, as more women entered the workforce, social conservatives feared that parents were losing primary influence over their children. Socialization and moral

¹⁷ Robert Bartholomew and Jeffrey Victor, "A Social-Psychological Theory of Collective Anxiety Attacks: The 'mad Gasser' Reexamined," *Sociological Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2004): 229–48, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tsq.2004.45.2.229>. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological model which emphasizes linguistic and somatic communication and discusses how subjective elements within individuals modify understanding.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁹ James Samuel Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2000); Bartholomew and Victor, "A Social-Psychological Theory of Collective Anxiety Attacks: The 'mad Gasser' Reexamined." 240.

instruction? were outsourced to daycare workers and media outlets.²⁰ These parents feared the consequences of leaving young children in the hands of daycare workers? (i.e., the McMartin preschool trial) and of allowing teenagers to experiment culturally (i.e., trying tabletop role-playing games). Making matters even more difficult to control, children and teenagers had access to *D&D* books at their local libraries, schools, and hobby shops, even if they were not allowed to play at home.²¹ Teenage counterculture participated in nominally occult themes, like magic and fantastical powers through artifacts like *D&D*.²² Conservative Christians even combatted this countercultural pull with “groovy,” socially relevant Christian advertising to college and high school students.²³ The reaction reveals the anxious tension. Family-based grassroots movements sought to reassert control over culture by nominating issues such as *D&D*, punk rock music, and pornography as social problems.²⁴ Pat Pulling’s work with BADD exemplifies the grassroots campaign against occult culture and is similar to the film *Hell’s Bells: The Dangers of Rock ‘n, Roll*.²⁵ Bromley’s argument certainly makes sense of the SRA

²⁰ Bromley, *The Satanism Scare*, 67.

²¹ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 122.

²² Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 104.

²³ Ellis, *Raising the Devil*, 171.

²⁴ Bromely, *The Satanism Scare*, 67.

²⁵ Erik Hollander and Eric Holmberg, *Hell’s Bells: The Dangers of Rock “N” Roll*, VHS, Documentary (Hollander and Holmberg, 1989) referenced as an example of grass-roots activity in Laycock, *Dangerous Games*.

accusations against daycare workers and the initial positive reception of these claims.²⁶ This anxiety towards extrafamilial socialization is demonstrated by the work of several anti-*D&D* activists during the SP who saw American children as a “generation at risk” given the existence of *D&D*.²⁷ For example, conservative Christian groups, like the Daughters of St. Paul, claimed that parents were losing legitimacy and authoritative voices in the lives of their children.²⁸ The fact that *D&D* could be played at a dining room table or in the basement of the family household amplified its perceived threat since it occurred in the physical space of familial socialization.

Economic decline also instilled a degree of nervousness in Americans contemporary to the Satanic Panic. The American economy suffered through the OPEC oil crisis from 1973-1975 and rapid inflation in 1980, finally falling into the recession related to the Iranian revolution 1981-1982.²⁹ American economic decline occurred most sharply in the “rust belt” of the United States and in rural areas, locations that functioned as hotspots in his research into the growth of the Satanic Panic.³⁰ Rumor-panics of the 1970s to 1990s, according to Victor’s study, occurred exclusively in rural areas and small

²⁶ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 103. Bromley, *The Satanism Scare*.

²⁷ Leithart and Grant, *A Christian Response to Dungeons and Dragons*.

²⁸ Louise Shanahan, “Games Unsuspecting People Play” (Daughters of St. Paul, 1984).

²⁹ Marc Labonte and Gail Makinen, “The Current Economic Recession: How Long, How Deep, and How Different From the Past?” (Congressional Research Service, 2002).

³⁰ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 65.

towns with the exception of one rumor-panic which began in Kansas City, Missouri.³¹ *D&D* rose to popularity during the late 1970s and early 1980s under the leadership of Gary Gygax, correlating with trends in American economic recessions. Victor's study indicated the influence of the Satanic panic on Pennsylvania, the same subject of research for Bill Ellis in his investigation of rumor-panic as therapeutic magic.³² The economic recessions ran parallel to the Satanic panic and added to the pre-existing collective anxiety of the United States, especially in economically challenged regions.

Fear generates a social need to spread rumors, enabling individuals and communities to confront their anxieties through a rumor-panic. Anxieties revolving around the dissolution of the nuclear family and economic decline contributed to the Satanic Panic.

Media & Rumors

The lost parental role in socialization is reified and constructed by media and rumor.³³ Consider the media coverage surrounding James Dallas Egbert's disappearance.³⁴ The linkage between the disappearance of Egbert and the role-playing

³¹ Ibid, 64.

³² Bill Ellis, "The Devil-Worshippers at the Prom: Rumor-Panic as Therapeutic Magic," *Western Folklore* 49, no. 1 (January 1990): 27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1499481>.

³³ Regarding the spread of interpersonal rumor, conducting personal interviews or analyzing transcripts of conversations in which rumor transfer may have occurred lay outside the scope of this thesis. Instead, I have focused on accounts in the media and lobbying publications, which presumably reflect and reify these rumors at a personal level.

³⁴ On which, see Chapter 1.

groups at Michigan State was highlighted on several occasions in William Dear's investigation report.³⁵³⁶

Media publications by and about BADD and Pat Pulling perpetuated the threat rumor source in the anxiety of lost parental control in a culture with evolving family dynamics. The inability to control a child's decisions at college and the risk of cult exposure fill Dear's account of his investigation. An adolescent travels off to chart his or her own course at a university. Parental control is curtailed by newfound freedom to try new activities. For Egbert, this path of self-discovery included *D&D* and live-action role-playing games.³⁷ At best, *D&D* might engender a lost sense of reality, as captured in the film *Mazes and Monsters*.³⁸ At worst, *D&D* corrupted a 19-year-old male such that he would choke, rape, and murder a girl as a "clear outgrowth of his *Dungeons & Dragons*."³⁹ As any parent would, Pat Pulling expresses her frustration with her failure to realize the internal state of her son, Bink.⁴⁰ She writes to help others identify at-risk

³⁵ William C Dear, *The Dungeon Master [EBook - Biblioboard]: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III* (s.l.: Crossroad Press, 2017), <https://www.nclive.org/cgi-bin/nclsm?url=https://library.biblioboard.com/content/80d80460-9f85-4daf-b56d-efc651cc01bc?organizationId=99410d61-7203-4fb5-a196-b2071b2c2051>.

³⁶ Dear, William C. 2017. *The Dungeon Master [eBook - Biblioboard]: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III*. [s.l.]: Crossroad Press. <https://www.nclive.org/cgi-bin/nclsm?url=https://library.biblioboard.com/content/80d80460-9f85-4daf-b56d-efc651cc01bc?organizationId=99410d61-7203-4fb5-a196-b2071b2c2051>.

³⁷ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 86.

³⁸ Stern, *Mazes and Monsters*.

³⁹ Pulling, *The Devil's Web*, 91.

⁴⁰ Pulling, *The Devil's Web*, 7.

children before they reach a place of desperation, like Bink. In effect, she provides information to help parents and authorities increase their awareness and thus control. BADD attempted to lobby for policy preventing school libraries from possessing *D&D* books and requiring school administrations to monitor and prohibit the play of *D&D*.⁴¹ These lobbying activities try to control what children do when they are out of the house, including what games they play and what fantasy worlds they inhabit through games like *D&D*.

Ambiguous Danger: The ambiguous nature of the threat heightens the sense of fear and encourages the individuals and media outlets to fill in the gaps. As noted earlier with Bromely's research, the actual threat of playing *D&D* was affirmed through a cumulative police investigation, not through medical research.⁴² There exists no medical evidence *per se* proving a direct relationship between playing *D&D* and participating in SRA activities or possessing suicidal tendencies.⁴³ The primary fear related to a subversion narrative, in which forces worked against conservative Christian family

⁴¹ Laycock, *Dangerous Games*, 121.

⁴² *Is Dungeon and Dragons Evil? 60 Minutes 1985 Special*, 1985, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yShqF1YSfDs>.

⁴³ Frankfurter, "The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic, 109.

values through television, games, and music.⁴⁴ News articles utilized *D&D*'s "Satanic" connotations (as the game contains monsters and magical spells) to interpret instances of suicide, especially of young men.⁴⁵ A 60 Minutes special on the Satanic Panic tantalizes its audience with newspaper clippings and accounts of *D&D* gamers who completed their suicide and describing them as "losing touch with reality."⁴⁶ The threat of mental illness and consequential criminal activity formed the crux of negative media coverage about *D&D*. The exact scope and nature of this subversive force moving through American youth remained unknown until media reporting and interpersonally transmitted rumors led conservative Christians to attribute these events to Satan and occult plots.⁴⁷ The ambiguity of the threat invited individuals to map their own ideologies onto innocuous (however tragic) events. Moreover, by characterizing an event as participating in the act of subversion, speakers like Pat Pulling and news outlets like the *Chicago Tribune* were able to project the Satanic effect of *D&D*.

⁴⁴ A subversion narrative is a common thread throughout anti-occult discourse. A subversion narrative is an account of reality which assumes that an unseen force is working to usurp the status quo and establish a new, chaotic order. This topic will be addressed in detail in Chapter 3.

⁴⁵ Howard Witt, "Fantasy Game Turns Into Deadly Reality," *Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 1985, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-01-27-8501050914-story.html>. The game does contain devils, demons, and dark lords which represent either lawful evil or chaotic evil monsters within the game world. Characters can interact with and fight these monsters. Certain spells and player abilities target these monsters with particular mechanic and thematic effect.

⁴⁶ "Is *Dungeons and Dragons* Evil?" 01:40-02:10.

⁴⁷ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 69. Ellis, *Raising the Devil*, 241.

The ambiguity of the threat also feeds rumors related to the threat. Local events in his New England serve as a case study of rumor panics related to Satanic cults.⁴⁸ One model depicts the clarification of ambiguous events via a rumor making and legend-writing process. The threat and associated fear tenuously relate to the reality of the threat. For example, a collection of friends and family members repeatedly shared a harrowing rumor with a young, blonde-haired, and blue-eyed woman. “The cult” was going to sacrifice a young, blonde-haired, and blue-eyed woman that evening. This woman, who otherwise would have meandered through an ordinary evening, became understandably concerned about her well-being, fearful that she might be kidnapped and sacrificed—regardless of the reality of the threat.⁴⁹ Rather, a collective belief in the ambiguous incident creates the threat rumor and steers the communal response.

Cyclical Anxiety

The threat rumor functions usefully as a behavioral response due to its provision of safety from a perceived danger; however, it fosters fear in the process of trying to assuage it. BADD did not explicitly aim to calm parents and police but to sensitize them to subversive satanic plots. BADD indirectly assuaged fears. Rumor-panics also enable communities to confront their fears through an anxious catharsis. Rumor-panic occasionally intertwines with a kind of magic, functioning for communities and individuals as a way to manipulate the perceived world. By participating in the rumor-

⁴⁸ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, . 67.

⁴⁹ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 41-42.

panic, “people were able to convince themselves that they were constructively solving the problem; they ‘named’ and hence controlled their anxieties.”⁵⁰ Rumors are an explanation, a theory about reality which attributes new meanings to incidents.⁵¹ Magic is, in part, an emotionalist tool, one that produces catharsis by giving the impression of manipulating the physical world.⁵² Magic and rumors coexist where an individual uses a rumor to achieve the same effect as magic; the coexistence occurs because the individual spreading the rumor is relying on the power of the rumor, and not their own capacities, to confront the threat.⁵³ Given that occultism is often depicted as an unseen force, the use of “magic” through rumor becomes a viable method for confronting powers beyond oneself. Magic, contained within the collective response, banishes communal anxieties and therapeutically alleviates stress.⁵⁴

Satanic Panic discourse was widely adaptable due to its dynamic qualities as a contemporary legend.⁵⁵ These legends belong to a third dimension of contemporary

⁵⁰ Ellis, “The Devil Worshippers at Prom,” 31.

⁵¹ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 12.

⁵² Reith, Gerda. "Magic." In *Reader's Guide to the Social Sciences*, edited by Jonathan Michie. Routledge, 2001.
<http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/routsocial/magic/0?institutionId=720> Note that I have not rendered magic with a utilitarian and Durkheimian lens. Magic often intersects with religion and does not necessarily belong to one reductionist account, as Reith notes in this reference textbook.

⁵³ Medalia, Nahum Z., Otto N. Larsen, and Alan C. Kerckhoff. 1965. *Diffusion and belief in a collective delusion: the Seattle windshield pitting epidemic*. Indianapolis, Ind: Bobbs-Merrill, College Division. 186.

⁵⁴ Ellis, *Raising the Devil*, 203.

⁵⁵ Victor, *The Satanic Panic*, 21-22.

reflection, a new tense of language that encompasses past, present, and future simultaneously.⁵⁶ Rather than fixed narratives, these legends emerge from ongoing communal reflection.⁵⁷ Pulling's lobbying added to the formulation of a contemporary legend. The Satanic Panic is a reflection on where the community has been, its reaction to its present circumstances, and a hope for, and fear of, the direction of the community. Legend formation is evident in Pulling's case. Folklore theorists recognize that legends are not limited exclusively to the first-person account of a given speaker. Rather, legends are intertwined with the first-person experience. The trajectory is as follows: a teller reshapes a fabulate (distant tale or story from others) into a memorate (ostensibly verifiable personal account).⁵⁸ Pulling begins her book, *The Devil's Web*, with this exact sequence. First, she calls to attention the satanic threat lurking in America. She writes, "In it [the book] you will discover the ever-growing web being spun by those who desire to lead your children into Satanism."⁵⁹ The fabulate is this tale distant from her initial place as the teller in her novel. Next, she narrates her personal experience losing her son, Bink, to the satanic influences present in *D&D*. Here she transforms the fabulate into a

⁵⁶ Ellis, Bill. "Death by Folklore: Ostension, Contemporary Legend, and Murder." *Western Folklore* 48, no. 3 (1989): 201-20. Accessed March 20, 2020. doi:10.2307/1499739. 202

⁵⁷ Victor, *The Satanic Panic*, 70.

⁵⁸ Dégh, Linda, and Andrew Vázsonyi. "Does the Word "Dog" Bite? Ostensive Action: A Means of Legend-Telling." *Journal of Folklore Research* 20, no. 1 (1983): 5-34. Accessed March 20, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/3814298, 21.

⁵⁹ Pulling, Pat, and Kathy Cawthon. 1989. *The Devil's web: who is stalking your children for Satan?* Lafayette, La: Huntington House.

memorate, giving credibility through her personal experience and narration of the incident.⁶⁰ From this point, the legend has recalled the past through the present voice and has projected itself indefinitely into the future.⁶¹ Pulling writes, “We hope, too, that the information provided here will help to dismantle the ever-growing web of occultism that threatens to entrap America’s children.”⁶² Pulling participates in the legend-making process of the Satanic Panic. Legends are distorted mirrors of conventions, revealing the best traits of society through the distorted image of its aberrances. He writes,

“The threat derives from a ‘heresy’ against sacred, traditional values, which were once the solid foundation of our stable way of life. The evil enemy’s values are the opposite of everything we cherish. Their power may derive from mysterious occult sources or ‘hidden’ connections with the power elite in our society. The evil enemy functions, just as in times of war, to confirm our society’s essential goodness.”⁶³

By providing an internal consistency for the goodness of one’s society, the Satanic Panic enables communities to move through pre-existing anxieties, like their shifting nuclear family and economic challenges. Through magic and contemporary legend, rumor-panics function to reduce fears.

These legends emulate campfire ghost stories, which frighten, excite, and subdue collective anxieties. Ostension traipses down a sociological path towards disturbing phenomena. Namely, some contemporary legends are self-fulfilling prophecies. Often,

⁶⁰ Dégh and Vázsonyi, 21-22.

⁶¹ Ellis. “Death by Folklore: Ostension, Contemporary Legend, and Murder,” 202.

⁶² Pulling, 12

⁶³ Victor, *The Satanic Panic*, 78.

legends are reenacted, a process known as ostension. Ostension explains certain adolescent behavior (such as mutilating gravesites or cattle), claiming that individuals might enact plots and motifs within a legend.⁶⁴ As horrific deeds are named and narrated, growing out of rumor exchanges, and as fabulates are transformed into memorates, these legends create copycats. Individuals act out the narratives within the stories. This implication explains several of the accounts detailed in Chapter 1. Warnke, who falsified his public image and claimed to be a survivor of the occult, engages in copycat and phony activity produced by the contemporary legend. Moreover, these criminals infuse these contemporary legends into their crimes, a process known sociologically dubbed “ostension.”⁶⁵ Legends are enacted in dangerous and harmful ways, despite the function legends serve to assuage fears. Ellis notes, “Intrigued by such stories, an individual or individuals may decide to don robes, mumble chants, and really kill animals—or humans—in some ceremonial fashion.”⁶⁶ The action becomes the message, even if the action is allusive rather than explicit.⁶⁷ For example, assume that students at a university share a rumor that an ax-murdering psychopath has attacked and will attack college freshmen in their dormitories. His victims are rumored to die scratching at their bedroom

⁶⁴ Ellis, 208.

⁶⁵ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 73. Folklorist and sociologists study ostension to understand peculiar human behavior. For example, if a society spreads a legend about aliens mutilating cattle, then individuals within that community are more likely to engage in cattle mutilation as an act of ostension.

⁶⁶ Ellis, “Death by Folklore: Ostension, Contemporary Legend, and Murder,” 209.

⁶⁷ Ellis, Bill. “Satanic Ritual Abuse and Legend Ostension.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 20, no. 3 (September 1992): 274–277.

doors. After the rumor spreads among the freshmen, some of the freshmen women frightened other students by scratching heavily against bedroom doors.⁶⁸ Ostension sociologically explains why adolescents, like the women in this story, might enact elements within a rumor. They are communicating their knowledge of and fear of the rumor. Psychological inquiry affirms this behavioral trend in adolescents through an analysis of adolescent tendencies and the use of magic.⁶⁹ The ramifications of these legends can be negative as well as positive for the overall status of fear in a society. Paradoxically, these positive and negative elements coexist in the Satanic Panic. While Victor and Bromely indicate that legends and rumors alleviate stresses, Padzer and Warnke increased the publicity of the moral panic. Transmission of rumors bred fear for individuals who otherwise would have remained ignorant of the threat.⁷⁰

Networks of Fear and Expertise: Threat rumors pass through specific communication networks in order to manifest within the broader public. Regarding the Satanic Panic, media coverage of police activities, especially in rural areas, relayed sensational claims and stories. Media explicitly noted satanic subplots and paraphernalia

⁶⁸ Grider, Sylvia. "The Hatchet Man." *Indiana Folklore: A Reader*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1980). 147-178.

⁶⁹ Bourget, Dominique, André Gagnon, and John M.W Bradford. "Satanism in a Psychiatric Adolescent Population." *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 33, no. 3 (April 1988): 197-202.

⁷⁰ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 43.

in stories of cattle mutilation, kidnappings, and alleged animal sacrifices.⁷¹ In one such report, a deputy connected the mutilations found on cattle with instructions found LaVey's *Satanic Bible*.⁷² Moreover, fundamentalist protestant clergy served as important rumor-panic nodes, junctions in the moral panic nervous system of their local communities. These church leaders passed along rumors through newsletters and bulletins.⁷³ Some clergy members also invited "experts" on occultism to address the crisis. The Marrs family, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, is just one example of these expert witnesses. Gary North indicates the importance of clergy and media intersected during the Satanic Panic, forming a powerful bond that was heralded by Christian conservatives. This intersection provided a prophetic power for dynamic changes in society. These powers included "the coming of decentralized publishing technology which is making possible a new Reformation" and "the coming of Christian television networks and popular Christian programs"⁷⁴ These forms of communication connect individuals on a broader scale and within a particular demographic⁷⁵ to the rumor-panic.

⁷¹ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 68.

⁷² Ellis, *Raising the Devil*, 268.

⁷³ Ibid, 68.

⁷⁴ North, Gary. 1976. *None dare call it witchcraft*. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House. 385.

⁷⁵ Victor, *Satanic Panic*, 68-69. He notes that this demographic especially includes fundamentalist Christians and small-town police officers which is attested to Ellis' work.

Beyond mere connection, media outlets validate the claims of individuals. Within the legend-making model, the memorate and fabulate ebb and flow. While individuals like Pat Pulling have adopted a memorate form of the story to validate their claims, media sources and trial expert witnesses rely more on the fabulate form of the legend. The genre of the text affects whether or not the memorate or fabulate form is most credible. A larger publication and subdivisions within a publication typically avoid personal reflections and accounts. Even Pulling maintains rhetorical distance in some of its chapters as part of its polemic against *D&D*.⁷⁶ Gary North is less concerned with giving a campfire account of the horrors of the occult and instead relies on economic, anthropological, and theological reflection than narration. The genre seems to shape the kinds of stories and language which can be used from a contemporary legend. Chronology also seems to affect when a memorate or fabulate might be used to heighten the rumor-panic.

Reflecting on this particular sociological model, as well as folklorist models, the Satanic Panic belongs in a category of rumor-panic and contemporary legend. It meets the expected criteria of a rumor-panic, and a symbolic interactionist framework demonstrated how communication networks meet the fear-induced needs of a society. The sociological model has helped to explain some of the “why” behind the satanism scare associated with *D&D* in the 1970s and 1980s. While this discussion has revealed the nature of some communication networks as well as the origin of and purpose of the

⁷⁶ Pulling, *The Devil's Web*, 52-64 demonstrates more use of third-person language and rhetorical distance than the rest of the book.

rumor-panics associated with *D&D* and the occult more broadly, an ideological lens will also uncover some of the complexities inherent in the Satanic Panic. Chapter 3 will explore this issue, analyzing one particular anti-occult text and providing an interdisciplinary look at a complex historical movement.

CHAPTER THREE

Discovering the Occult and Its Ideological Opposition

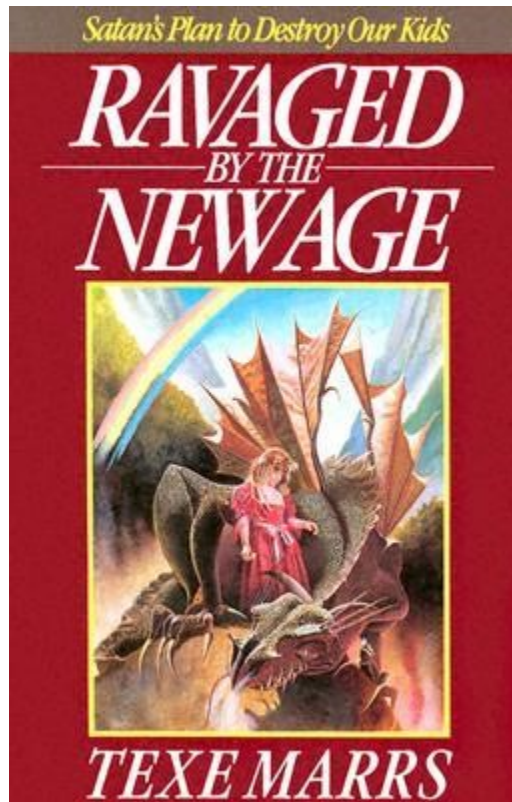


Figure 1: Front Cover Artwork by Britt Taylor Collins

Introduction

A young girl in a frilled maroon dress clutches a dandelion in one hand. She looks longingly beneath her feet, where a forked-tongued, scaly dragon wraps around her. In the background, there is a gentle rainbow resting above a mountainous valley and brushed with a forest of green trees. In the foreground, the girl and dragon stand intertwined above a smoking, red pit just beneath the rock. In the image, innocence is

surrounded by the reddish and greenish glow of a dragon, its large fangs and claws curling away from its body. The girl's vision is towards a flaming red pit, her body turned away from the curl of the rainbow and strokes of forest. The text above this image reads: "Satan's Plan to Destroy Our Kids."¹ Symbols are powerful tools of ideology.

In his book, *Ravaged by the New Age*, Texe Marrs purports to reveal the hidden plots of Satan embedded within cultural icons, institutions, and New Age publications.² As Marrs puts it, "The Lord of Hell wants our children...New Age leaders were given their marching orders by their hellish master."³ The book blends and bends genres to create a hybrid expose, theological reflection, polemic, and parenting guide, making it an ideal text for illustrating key ideological assumptions, assertions, and interactions within the Satanic Panic. In Chapter 2, I provided a sociological explanation for the Satanic Panic and *D&D*, demonstrating how symbolic worlds lead individuals and societies to act out in a rumor-panic. In this chapter, I provide the foundation for an ideological critical analysis of *Ravaged by the New Age* as an artifact of the Satanic Panic, following the methodology outlined by Sonja Foss.⁴ First, I begin with a brief discussion of ideology.

¹ This art piece is by Britt Taylor Collins and is featured on the front cover of *Ravaged by the New Age* by Texe Marrs

² Texe W Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age: Satan's Plan to Destroy Our Kids* (Austin, Tex.: Living Truth Publishers, 1989).

³ Ibid, ix.

⁴ See Foss, 2018. *Rhetorical criticism*. 243-248. *Ravaged by the New Age* was published in 1989, making it temporally remote from most of the texts that have been discussed thus far in chapters 1 and 2. However, the later publication date of this book serves two important measures. First, it demonstrates the continuity of thought among conservative Christians into the 1990s and beyond. Second, *Ravaged by the New Age* demonstrates the interconnected rhetoric and ideologies between the

Second, I summarize *Ravaged by the New Age*, highlighting what Foss calls the “presented elements” of the book, as well as those “suggested elements” connoted by the presented ones. In Chapter 4, I will synthesize the presented and suggested elements discussed in Chapter 3 to formulate the ideologies of *Ravaged by the New Age* and the functions they served vis-à-vis the Satanic Panic. The presented elements and suggested elements of *Ravaged by the New Age* depict a Western society, and many of its cultural features overrun by Satan, who disguises himself as the New Age and seeks to corrupt children.

What’s in an “Ideology”?

Terry Eagleton describes ideology as the bookends of the signification process as well as the process itself. Ideology is a system of representations visible through the discourse to produce effects linked to the signifying process.⁵ In other words, ideology exists in the realm of communication and invisibly guides individuals towards certain thoughts, actions, and beliefs based on preexisting phenomena. A “lens” analogically

Satanic Panic and conservative Christian thought. Conservative Christian response may have adjusted over time to focus on different cultural artifacts (*D&D* fell out of the main public eye by the 1990s), but the impetus and character of Marrs’s response echoes the talking points of Pat Pulling and Gary North. The strategies are similar, the argumentation predictable, and the anxiety ever-present. As such, the book is a justifiable selection for discussing the ideologies of the Satanic Panic, especially those ideologies possessed by anxious, conservative Christians seeking to make sense of an ever-changing world whose cultural and technological developments seemed to threaten their piety at every turn.

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2014), <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1746767>.

captures the meaning of ideology. When someone wears a pair of tinted glasses, Benjamin Franklin's tinted bifocals, for example, then they perceive the world in a fundamentally new way. A stoplight loses some of its symbolic meaning when it no longer appears to be red. However, most people are unaware of their ideological lenses, unaware of which symbols the lenses modify the most. These lenses are not static. Ideologies exist in an evolving ecosystem together with other ideologies.⁶ Multiple ideologies drove the Satanic Panic. By analyzing a discourse within the Satanic Panic, this chapter draws from and adds to a taxonomy of ideologies from that era.⁷

Ideology is a matter of relations between people and their contexts, according to Eagleton, since this view allows for ideology to include deceptive elements, false consciousness, and irrational appeals but not reductionistically conclude on any one of these topics.⁸ An ideology might be deceptive in legitimating the interest of a ruling class, but an ideology also might truly represent the interests of a minority group or a dominant group whose statements might be ideological but entirely true. Marxist views of ideology, predating Eagleton, argued that ideology was the centralization of power over ideas. Ideas interacted with each other in the abstract, and the dominant class's ideas ruled over

⁶ Ibid, 45.

⁷ While ideological criticism is typically applied to discourses to reveal power structures and hegemonies, the current investigation is more concerned with the meaning-making process and culture. I also recognize that power hierarchies and meaning-making are two sides of the same coin, but for the purposes of this thesis, I decided to focus on one side of the coin.

⁸ Eagleton, *Ideology*, 29.

the minority class until the next ideological revolution.⁹ The powerful class determined meaning through enslaving lower classes to its ideology, and the proletariat followed the dominant ideology, acting in subservience due to false consciousness. The proletariat, in the early Marxist account of ideology, unconsciously abided by the dominant classes meaning-making system of ideas. However, this view excluded the minority from possessing an ideology as minority classes attempted to legitimate their own interests. This definition also assumed that ideological ideas remained dynamic only in the abstract.¹⁰ Instead, Eagleton, via Althusser, proposes a theory of ideology based on lived relations.¹¹ Lived relations occur through conversation or any other social experience. Lived relations are discursive in nature and include imaginary lived relations and real relations. Rather than learning ideology from a pool of competing abstract ideas, individuals react to and learn ideologies through social relations. Ideology “expresses the way people live the relation between them and their conditions of existence.”¹² Lived relations account for the rift between perceived reality (imaginary lived relations) and their actual existence (real relations). This theory of lived relations critiques earlier materialist theories of ideology which asserted that ideology could be altered by means of empirical evidence. Eagleton adds, “Ideology cannot be transformed by offering

⁹ “Letters: Marx-Engels Correspondence 1893,” accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm.

¹⁰ Ibid, 30.

¹¹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses by Louis Althusser 1969-70,” n.d., 52.

¹² Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969). 233-234.

individuals true descriptions in place of false ones—that it is not in this sense simply a mistake.”¹³ One can only remove an ideology after a substantial element of that person’s world disappears, after a highly impactful social encounter. A list of compelling rational arguments cannot change an ideology. The person, for whom the ideology is a product of a lifetime of lived relations, constructs much of his or her world through the ideology. In this manner, ideology is not merely rational but connects with the whole, contextual person.¹⁴ To summarize, Eagleton views ideology as a process of signification, a process within an ecosystem of processes that unconsciously relates to whole persons through lived relations.

Marrs’s Attack on the New Age:

In terms of a structural framework for this ideological investigation, I follow the model proposed by Sonja K. Foss. The procedural flow is as follows: summarize the author and text, communicate ideologies present within the text, demonstrate how those ideologies relate to their ideological and socio-cultural context.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid, 30.

¹⁴ Ibid, 148.

¹⁵ Sonja K Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, 2018. 237-284. Her methodology suggests that ideological critics ought to look at issues of membership, activity, goals, values/norms, positions, group-relations, and resources when analyzing materials. This chapter looks at these various subcategories as Marrs presents them.

Structurally, the book first sets the scene for the New Age takeover of the Western world. From a harrowing introduction which details the prevalence of the New Age, *Ravaged by the New Age* transitions into discussions about the vulnerabilities of children, the active will of Satan through the New Age, and pervasive, perverted ideology of the New Age. Marrs treats his audience to a relentless dissection of many cultural features, including comic books, popular films, Satanist texts, television shows, toys, and games. Marrs ends the book with a hopeful thought and cautionary advice to parents: beware the New Age and find victory over the New Age in Jesus.¹⁶ With this summary sketch in mind, I turn to an ideological critique of Marrs's *Ravaged by the New Age*.

To reconstruct an ideology from Marrs's *Ravaged by the New Age*, we must first unpack the primary elements explicit within the text. Of the many explicit elements of Marrs's polemic against the New Age, four appear frequently: (1) The New Age infiltrated and corrupted ordinary and mundane institutions and activities. (2) The New Age is especially powerful in cultural extremes, niches within the broader cultural and spiritual battlefield. (3) The New Age proudly asserts itself through corruptions of conservative understandings of Christianity. (4) There exists a valid response and pathway to combatting the New Age and protecting the well-being of conservative Christian life.

The Corruption of Ordinary Organizations and Practices: For Marrs, the New Age has affected ordinary practices and institutions, ones that would typically have

¹⁶ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 250

abided by the status quo. Marrs re-symbolizes seemingly innocuous activities and images to demonstrate what he believes to be their hidden “New Age”/“occult”/“Satanic” meaning.¹⁷ For example, Marrs looks to decisions by and changes within the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and the Girl Scouts of America (GSA) as evidence of the New Age within ordinary, safe institutions.¹⁸ The “steady demise” of the BSA complements its removal of “language from its program and literature that defines God as a Supreme Being” in the wake of a lawsuit against the parents of an atheist member of the BSA.¹⁹ Marrs challenges the incorporation of yoga into the physical health routine of the BSA, since “the youngster who practices yoga must contort the body into a number Satanic shapes and images, including the cobra serpent, pyramid, or triangle, associated with occultic ‘power animals.’”²⁰ The non-Christian origins of yoga cast a negative light on its spiritual ramifications for Marrs.

Similarly, the GSA’s new series of patches consists of New Age imagery for New Age activities. The *Global Understanding* patch, with a depiction of a circle atop a globe, makes a theological claim about oneness.²¹ Marrs does not state whether this oneness is dangerous because it is monistic or dangerous because it implies a global world order

¹⁷ Marrs uses these terms interchangeably.

¹⁸ I use the words “ordinary” and “safe” contextually. These institutions, for example, would be ordinary and safe according to this conservative Christian [Marrs] in the 1980s.

¹⁹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 61.

²⁰ Ibid, 61-62. Similarly, the YWCA “is fast becoming a hotbed for New Age activity” because its course catalog features Tai Chi and yoga classes. See Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 70-71.

²¹ Ibid, 64.

under the New Age. The latter seems more likely given its context within the book. The “My World in My Community” badge incorporates the yin/yang symbol. Marrs explains this symbol to his audience: “it is...a circle split into two halves by a Satanic ‘S’ that crookedly snakes its way from top to bottom. Each side, therefore, resembles the number 6.”²² Marrs interprets girl scout symbols with a bias against any imagery that shares a likeness with non-Christian imagery. These symbols fly under the colors of the New Age with Satanic subtones.

Marrs also argues that the New Age corrupted innocent cultural features, including baby names and cartoons. Citing *The New Age Baby Name Book* by Sue Browder, Marrs confronts parents who would “saddle an innocent baby with the demonic name of a Hindu, Egyptian, Norse, or other ‘magical’ name.”²³ Even names like Moon and Sun are derived from “the Hindu guru whom” New Age followers worship.²⁴ The corruption of the occult affected naming conventions. Children’s television programming also perpetuated the myth and reverence of the occult and New Age. A startling episode of CBS’s *Mighty Mouse* featured the titular character snorting a fine powder. While disputed by the CBS executives (who claimed that Mighty Mouse was snorting a “mixture of ‘crushed stems, tomatoes and flowers’”), the episode encapsulates the majority of children’s television for Marrs. Television shows depict morally

²² Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 66.

²³ Ibid, 38.

²⁴ Ibid, 39.

reprehensible acts, from his perspective, and thus show the moral degradation of the New Age. He also includes the *Smurf Family* and *Thundercats* in this assessment, claiming, “It is increasingly clear that with precious few exceptions, Satan is in total charge of kids’ TV.”²⁵ For Marrs, the presence of magic, charms, incantations, and ostensibly Satanic-inspired imagery condemns a cultural artifact to damnation. Marrs’s *Smurf Family* features candles and magic, which Marrs believes refers to the occult.²⁶ *He-Man*, *She-Ra*, and *My Little Pony* narrate the myth of self-realization and construct a counter-narrative to the Christian myth. *He-Man* encourages children to seek out “the secret things of Satan, which are supernatural powers and hidden wisdom” through spirit-guides and unseen forces (i.e., Grayskull).²⁷ He-Man’s implements and powers represent occult powers utilized to defeat Lord Skeletor, whom Marrs identifies symbolically as the Christian God.²⁸

The television is an ordinary feature of American life, resting on a tv stand in most family living rooms. For Marrs, most television shows are covert manifestations of a Satanic will that seeks to destroy the Christian vision and to corrupt young minds in the ways of the New Age.²⁹ Ordinary and frequently encountered aspects of conservative

²⁵ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 204.

²⁶ Ibid, 204-205.

²⁷ Ibid, 207.

²⁸ Ibid, 207.

²⁹ Ibid, 213.

Christian life, such as children's organizations, baby names, and television, are at odds with the encroaching New Age and Satanic threat.

The Overlooked, the Niche, and the Geeky: In *Ravaged by the New Age*, the occult sprouts out of more niche cultural groupings, holding a special degree of sway over cultural fringes—comic books. These fringes stand in stark contrast to the previous artifacts (like cartoons and the GSA) since they are either less well-known, historically innocent, or attract only a small number of people. Comic books participated in the broader network of the occult. Christian conservative parents had less experience with comics than they did with television or movies, according to Marrs.³⁰ In turn, the New Age movement exploits this ignorance, using comic books to indoctrinate children.³¹

Comic series not only propagate New Age imagery and concepts, such as reincarnation and magic. They also promote specifically anti-Christian narratives.³² For example, The 24-page comic book, *Gargoyle*, narrates a druidic (re)turn away from Christianity in the British Isles.³³ Likewise, *Millennium* (DC Comics) features images of demons, ghosts, angels, mother goddesses, while *Doctor Strange—Sorcerer Supreme* (Marvel) praises occult characters.³⁴ However, Marrs's analysis of one scene in *Ka-Zar*

³⁰ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 151.

³¹ Comic books are also useful because of their powerful text-image medium and inexpensive cost of production. See Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 151-152.

³² Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 152.

³³ Ibid, 153-156.

³⁴ Ibid, 158-161.

the Savage (Marvel), issue #12, merits further attention. One “mistress and consort” to “a devil prototype name Belasco” wears a locket. On the exterior of the locket are three crosses. The interior of the locket is a “magical Satanic pentagram and the beast number 666.”³⁵ The presence of the imagery in the comic is deliberate, seeking to influence children by leaving “young readers with the unmistakable impression that somehow the crucifixion of Jesus is linked with the ages-old scheme of the devil to conquer the universe.”³⁶ The sexualization of female characters in comics distresses Marrs. Comics like *Samuree* and *Johnni Thunder* include supernatural powers, sexually suggestive images, and gory violence.³⁷ For Marrs, such content trends towards a society which “will see a shocking increase in rapes, mutilations, and other sexual crimes.”³⁸ Corrupted male assailants, in this foreboding concluding paragraph, are the primary subject. Comics are overlooked cultural artifacts that Marrs portrays as evidence of the occult through their inclusion of magical, violent, and sexual themes and images.

Marrs also addresses the issue of occult toys games, which parents overlook or fail to address due to their niche audience. Video games like *Wizards and Warriors* (Nintendo) features occult imagery: the game encourages children to overcome their obstacles through magic and sorcery.³⁹ Tabletop role-playing fantasy games, like *D&D*,

³⁵ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 160.

³⁶ Ibid, 161.

³⁷ Ibid, 171-173.

³⁸ Ibid, 174.

³⁹ Ibid, 222.

“embody Satanic symbols and instill occult and esoteric teachings into the minds of the young.”⁴⁰ Gamers and children “become demon-possessed,” “confused, demented, and psychotic after exposure” to *D&D*. The author asserts that fantasy role-playing games provide an avenue for creating original perverted fantasies, including rape and murder. Marrs similarly criticizes the game *Dragonraid*, a Christian version of *D&D*. Despite claims from fans that *Dragonraid* “is not just a fun game, it is intended as a serious discipleship system for teenagers (and adults who still have teen-aged hearts),” Marrs maintained that it still fell short of the anti-occult agenda. The reason? The game contains an image of a Unicorn, which Marrs interprets symbolically in ways that echo the author of Revelation’s interpretation of the book of Daniel: “the unicorn has the ‘little horn’ of the beast mentioned by the prophet Daniel...it does not have any relationship to God but is a symbol of Satan.”⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, officially licensed toys for *D&D* were no different.

Marrs appears to be heavily influenced by an author named, Phil Phillips who decried many toys and games in his book, *Turmoil in the Toy Box*.⁴² Gary Greenwald, a Christian fundamentalist pastor, and Phil Phillips discussed *D&D* at length in a TV interview in 1984. Phillips remarks that “*Dungeons & Dragons* is a direct quote from the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 220.

⁴¹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 228.

⁴² Phil Phillips, *Turmoil in the Toy Box* (Lancaster, Pa.: Starburst, 1987).

pit of Hell...a mind-bending game...involved with all kinds of occult and pagan religion.”⁴³ The activity of children’s imaginations places kids especially at risk regarding these pagan ideas.⁴⁴ Moreover, Phillips (and by citation, Marrs) asserts that *D&D*’s dualistic good versus evil narrative is simply “white versus black witchcraft.”⁴⁵ *D&D*’s content and toys portray an incorrect theology. *D&D* accessories resemble apocalyptic images from Christianity, such as the horses of the apocalypse.⁴⁶ Only now, these horses are alluring game pieces to an invitation to Satan’s power. Certain cultural features warranted detailed investigation above and beyond other activities, since their fantastical and fictional contents appealed to a particular niche audience. These forms of cultural expression include comic books and fantasy role-playing games which affect naïve children through alluring images and imaginative stories

The Desecration of the Sacred: Marrs struggles with the ostensible New Age corruption of Christian leaders and traditions. Marrs tracks the influence of publications by the Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE), a research and publishing organization found by Edgar Cayce in Virginia Beach, Virginia. These New Age publications which instruct “kids on the ‘positive’ meanings of occult symbols...sugar-coat and make attractive the unholy New Age teachings.” These publications allegedly

⁴³ *Deception of a Generation (Demonic Toys)*, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hnjdq32u-MU>.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 53:20

⁴⁵ Ibid, 54:28

⁴⁶ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 224.

entered into Sunday School curriculums. For example, Marrs relates a story in which he counseled a pair of Sunday School teachers in a fundamentalist Baptist church. These teachers were alarmed at a story within their curriculum that compared the surprising jolt of the Holy Spirit to stepping on a poisonous snake in the forest.⁴⁷ The image of God as a serpent is too much for Marrs, who equates this image to that of divine serpents in other faith traditions. He also challenges Reda Lucy's book, *The Lord's Prayer for Children*, for its supposed reinterpretation and theologizing about an impersonal God via a Christian prayer as part of a Satanic plot to overthrow Christianity by corrupting its children.⁴⁸ By permitting occultic influences, culturally liberal Christians cannot abide by Rom 12:9, since "lukewarm or liberal 'Christians' ... will not understand nor be able to discern between good and evil."⁴⁹ Satan attacks Christians as well as non-Christians, because, "if the New Age is to succeed, children must be provided a new environment. The traditional family structure must be abolished."⁵⁰ To permit cultural trends is to yield to this force, to cease the conservative Christian practice of teaching "children to believe that Jesus is the only way and that only their Bible is to be believed in."⁵¹ Following a particular interpretation of the Bible, Marrs argues that Christian parents must not give in

⁴⁷ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 41-42.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 42-43.

⁴⁹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 97.

⁵¹ Ibid, 96.

to culture or shifting family values, or those same parents will lose the capacity to discern what is good and evil for their children.

Marrs highlights several prominent progressive Christians. Matthew Fox, a New Age Catholic priest, “goes to great lengths to turn people away from the Jesus of the Bible and toward the ‘Cosmic Christ.’”⁵² For Marrs, Fox’s open Christianity is a hallmark of the New Age, and Fox’s references to Divine Motherhood particularly troublesome. The field of psychiatry also succumbed to the lure of the New Age, including a prominent Christian psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck. He calls for a “World Community” and challenges the over-exaggeration of Jesus’ Divine identity, as it excludes other faiths. However, in Marrs’s analysis, the new World Community is the “body of Satan.”⁵³ Effectively, the New Age affected the theology and outlooks of Christians by populating the bookshelves of Christian bookstores. He suggests that failing editors for Christian publishing companies are allowing New Age CDs and books to slip through the cracks.⁵⁴

For Marrs, priests and psychologists were yielding to new spiritual and theological trends, while Christian institutions were suffering from New Age infiltrations.

“Victory in Jesus” and the End of Days: Existential despair weighs heavily on Marrs’s sympathetic readers. Where can they look for hope and security in the uncertainty of a New Age plot to corrupt the children of America? Marrs offers a

⁵² Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 98.

⁵³ Ibid, 102-103.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 189

message of hope, exhorting his readers to look to Jesus and conservative values in response to the plots of the New Age. A few examples must suffice. First, Marrs upholds Alice Braemer, a recent convert to Christianity from a New Age church, as a sign of God's certain victory, concluding that "Satan may be alive and well on planet Earth, but not for long."⁵⁵ Eschatological hope still guides Marr's focus. He sprinkles elements of hope throughout his polemic against aspects of American culture. Second, Marrs sets the promises of Jesus Christ over against the promises of Satan.⁵⁶ While the architecture of Satan's plans is thorough and dangerous, according to Marrs, the victory of Jesus over Satan at the moment of the crucifixion outweighs the possible threats of Satan's powers. Third, quoting from Revelation 19–20, Marrs concludes with hope in the future final judgment for Satan. His hopeful vision confronts the present reality of Satan, but theologically neuters the work of Satan through a prophetic reading of Christian apocalyptic imagery.

In his final chapter, Marrs provides instruction, encouragement, and practical advice for his readers. His readers ought to avail themselves "of the incomparable power of God" as a first priority and band together as Christians" to maintain strength of numbers in the "remaining semblance of a democratic" society that is the United States of America.⁵⁷ Marrs looks to Jesus Christ as a separatist religious leader worthy of

⁵⁵ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 132.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 132-135.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 251.

emulation. He writes, “Jesus did not seek compromise with the Pharisees...so let us contend for the *undefiled faith* [emphasis original].”⁵⁸ The central Christian message is one of separation, and that division includes segregating “worldly culture” from the Church. The act of rejecting the New Age is the means by which Marrs’s participates in the radical ministry of Jesus.

True to his conservative Christian tradition, Marrs also exhorts his readers to read the Bible thoroughly since the Bible is the most powerful tool against the secret plots of Satan and the darkness of the New Age. Quoting from Hebrews 4:12, Marrs asserts that the Christian scriptures provide all that his audience needs to confront the New Age.⁵⁹ He concludes by encouraging his readers to witness to others through the critique of the New Age and praise of God, Jesus, and the Bible. The hope is explicit. Marrs gives thanks to God in the final pages and presses his readers to have courage in the face of the New Age. The war, despite the relevance of the New Age plot, was won “on the cross almost 2000 years ago.”⁶⁰ What remains is a calling to separate, resist, pray, learn, and guard in the hopes of future joy and righteous judgment.

Marrs’s presented materials include many different observations. Safe institutions like the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of America have abandoned

⁵⁸ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 252.

⁵⁹ Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Heb 4:12 NRSV

⁶⁰ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 260.

conservative values for New Age exercises and pagan imagery. Geeky and recreational activities, whether they be fiction, games, toys, comic books, or television shows all unite under the banner of the New Age. These cultural features lure children with great effect and corrupt children's understanding of conservative Christian values and norms, like sexuality, God, or magical power. Moreover, Marrs fears nominally Christian leaders and spiritual organizations which distort conservative Christian perceptions of God, nationhood, and family. Finally, Marrs depicts the triumph of Christianity over the work of the New Age and over the work of Satan, as an act of divine intervention in accordance with apocalyptic prophecies from the Bible.

Identifying Suggested Elements: Uncovering Sinews and Threads:

Beyond the “presented elements” in Marrs’s book lies an array of implied assumptions and assertions. This implied material—or “suggested elements” in Foss’s terminology—includes the following claims: (1) the New Age movement has no redeeming qualities; (2) the conflict between Christian parents and the New Age is necessarily political; (3) play and simulations are as real as life itself. By attending to these suggested elements—and synthesizing them with the presented ones—I will be able to Marrs’s distill *Ravaged by the New* into several core ideologies.

The New Age Movement has No Redeeming Qualities: That the New Age movement is dangerous to children and conservative Christianity is perhaps the most unifying theme of the entire book. However, Marrs neglects to praise any component of the New Age movement. Marrs implicitly affirms the irredeemably insidious nature of the New Age. Consider Marrs's references to the New Age indoctrination of the GSA. The phrase "think globally, act locally," a motto adopted by the GSA, prompted Marrs's criticism, is not explicitly evil.⁶¹ Marrs links this motto to the "Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose," an organization associated with "humanistic psychology," "the ultra-liberal Carter administration," and promoters of "one-worldism."⁶² He condemns the phrase by association and conceptual connotation.⁶³ One-worldism belongs to the New Age in Marrs's view. He even states that the denotative meaning of the motto is innocent and admirable, but its New Age backings leave the wholly deceptive and false.⁶⁴ Marrs does not attribute evil to the words themselves but the organization (and thereby the movement) that inspired them. As such, he condemns a motto which, in other circumstances, might be heralded as a part of a conservative mission outreach.⁶⁵ As it stands, phrases such as this one are found guilty by association. The "think globally, act

⁶¹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 67.

⁶² Ibid, 69.

⁶³ Ibid, 68

⁶⁴ Ibid, 70.

⁶⁵ For an example, see the organization "United World" Mission (uwm.org) whose name contains the same "globalist" language that Marrs condemns.

locally” motto, in brief, represents a large swathe of Marrs’s framework in *Ravaged by the New Age*. While some cultural items are inherently reprehensible for Marrs, such as violent fantasy games or pornography, others are villainous because of their sourcing. The latter is true of this GSA motto.

Marrs reiterates that the New Age is a movement away from Jesus and a conservative reading of scripture. If the New Age is “anything but Jesus religion,” then the New Age is fundamentally secular.⁶⁶ The New Age is theologically removed from the realm of anything good for culture, society, health, or well-being. Yoga might increase flexibility but is spiritually infused with the Satanic. It is unholy. A Christian yoga studio is just a lukewarm kind of Christianity.⁶⁷ Global unity is not admirable, nor can any element of it be praiseworthy if it is derived from the New Age perspective. Marrs implicitly holds a bottom-up perspective regarding the New Age. If the New Age is at the foundation or core of the structure, then every building block is rubbish. This interpretation explains why Marrs provides no positive examples of the New Age at any point in the book. To illustrate, Marrs challenges the New Age use of the term “community” as a coverup for a universalist plot against the distinctiveness of Christocentric Christianity.⁶⁸ Rather than looking at this description of corporate salvation or religious tolerance as a possibly redeemable quality, Marrs must discard this

⁶⁶ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 80

⁶⁷ Ibid, 55

⁶⁸ Ibid, 101-102.

concept despite its possible merits. It also belongs to the fallen world within Satan's clutches.

The Issue is Political: Marrs is not a political lobbyist, nor is his book primarily focused on litigation, court trials, or legal enforcement.⁶⁹ The usage of the word "community" implies one-worldism and New Age globalist aims.⁷⁰ The United Nations has left Marrs questioning the intent of this internationally politically influential organization through its adoption of similar vocabulary.⁷¹ He alludes to the influence of government agencies which adopt the agendas of "New Agers, witchcraft oriented feminists, and gays."⁷² These agencies are allegedly altering parental rights and could affect the traditional "Judeo-Christian lifestyle."⁷³ Confronting the New Age requires political action. Failing to do so means political indifference and Satanic dominance. He draws connections between liberal political agendas and the New Age, thereby implying an association between political (and theological) liberalism and Satan.

⁶⁹ Compare this with Pat Pulling's involvement with police enforcement and the lobbying activities of BADD.

⁷⁰ One world-ism, or globalism, are terms Marrs applies to describe a global New Age initiative. Politicians and organizations seeking to unite all peoples across all boundaries are globalists in *Ravaged by the New Age*. His fears regarding these initiatives are similar to what one might find in dystopian novel in which the world is ruled by a malicious world government (e.g. *Babylon 5: In the Beginning*, *Brave New World*, or *Futurama* {Earth's president is Richard Nixon's Head}).

⁷¹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 102.

⁷² *Ibid*, 104.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 104-105.

While government agencies and international politics exemplify the political nature of Marrs's claims, education forms the core of the implicit political character of *Ravaged by the New Age*. He explicitly notes that classrooms are fraught with New Age doctrines. Montessori Curriculum is filled with pagan deities,⁷⁴ influenced Adolf Hitler's educators and NAZI pedagogy,⁷⁵ and possesses a globalist agenda indicative of the New Age.⁷⁶ Marrs also juxtaposes the reality of New Age teachings in the classroom with Christian conservative political interest in bringing prayer back into public education. The influence of the New Age in American classrooms "is a violation of church and state."⁷⁷ If the government does not permit Christian prayer inside public schools, then the government ought to deny New Age practices like yoga or teachings about witchcraft.⁷⁸ The racial attribute of some New Age texts and their implications for white, conservative Christians also share a political tone.⁷⁹ For example. The New Age text, *Humanity Comes of Age*, by Vera Alder, proposes racial categories and seeks to "divert into constructive channels" the "especial differences" and "natural genius" of the races of

⁷⁴ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 140.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 141.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 142.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 144.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 145.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 147.

the world.⁸⁰ However, this text does not define race in terms of evolutionary taxonomy. Alder views race as an emanation from a psychological aura in a certain area. Christians living in New England might qualify as a kind of race in Alder's political thought experiment. Marrs believes that the New Age movement might construe Christians as a certain kind of race, whose constructive channel might exclude a Christian lifestyle.⁸¹ When it comes to matters regarding the government, political action, and the suppression of religious rights, conservatives like Marrs don armor and prepare for political warfare. In summary, Marrs does not demand that his audience become political warriors. However, the issue is inherently political, ranging from children's classrooms to the UN political stance.

The Line Between Play, Fiction, and Reality is Non-Existent: Marrs assumes a blending of fiction and games with reality. Children's novels which contain occult content are too real for children. The book, *The Headless Cupid*, which was awarded the Newberry Honor Award in children's literature, infused occult imagery into the minds and perceived reality of children.⁸² As children learned to relate to and admire the "big bad dragon" through literature such as *the Dragons of North Chittendon*, they were also learning to love Satan.⁸³ Marrs implies that Satan's form as a dragon is metaphorically

⁸⁰ Vera Stanley Alder, *Humanity Comes Of Age*, 1915, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.150435>.

⁸¹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 148.

⁸² Ibid, 179.

⁸³ Ibid, 184.

and symbolically true (citing apocalyptic imagery from Rev 12:19) and that children will love Satan by familiarity. Children adopt the wording that books depict, so the fantasy element penetrates beyond verisimilitude to infect the child directly with the powers of the New Age.

Toys and games are another realm of occult influence on children. Role-playing games that assign various characters are both conduits for demonic possession and intimate connections with the occult.⁸⁴ A child assuming a role in these games is incapable of discerning between reality and play, in this case, since they are so effectively indoctrinated by the New Age with symbols and false theology in Marrs's framework. *Wizards and Warriors* necessarily informs children that they should use sorcery and magic to overcome their struggles in real life.⁸⁵ Fantasy role-playing games like *D&D* enable children to enact dark fantasies inspired by occult imagery and ideas, which in turn has led to a generation ready to enact occult-infused violence as an act of Satan-worship.⁸⁶ The occult is too real; its presence in toys and games impacts the reality of players.

Children's films that depict magic, such as Walt Disney's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, are real invitations to real magic. For Marrs, the movie asserts, "it's quite

⁸⁴ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 220.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 223.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 228, 245-246.

alright—even highly desirable—to be a sorcerer.”⁸⁷ This is also true of *Star Wars*, the plot of which “is New Age to the core.”⁸⁸ The Force is a New Age concept, one rooted in Eastern religions. Marrs implies that children might be unable to discern between reality (a Judeo-Christian world) and fantasy (a New Age world with a force between all living things). These are only two examples among many other films that Marrs references. Marrs does not present a psychological argument that might explain the effect of fantasy and fiction upon children. Rather, he insists upon the vulnerability and impressionability of children, which he implicitly relates to the use of the fantasy genre, fiction, and games by children.⁸⁹

Concluding Remarks

I have offered an ideological critical analysis of *Ravage by the New Age* as an artifact of the Satanic Panic. *Ravage by the New Age* is a conservative Christian polemic against cultural trends, associating these trends with the work of Satan via the New Age. Next, I highlighted several primary features of Marrs’s polemic against the New Age and analyzed the implicit material which emerges from these explicit claims about culture and the New Age. On several occasions, Marrs resymbolizes cultural features such that they fit his understanding of the New Age. The New Age hails from a Marr’s symbolic world in *Ravage by the New Age*, a world that is directly linked to Satanism and belongs to a

⁸⁷ Marrs, *Ravage by the New Age*, 191.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 58.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 109.

larger plot against Christianity and children. Marrs implicitly asserts the irredeemable qualities of the New Age, the political aspect of the New Age crisis, and the dangers of reality-altering play. In the next chapter, I will distill these observations into cohesive ideologies, situated in their cultural context.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Ideological Distillation of Ravaged by the New Age

Introduction

We now face the task of addressing the core ideologies of *Ravaged by the New Age*.¹ In Chapter 3 I discussed the expressed and implied material in Marrs's book. In this chapter, I synthesize the presented and suggested elements of the text from the previous chapter. I then place those ideologies within a broader ideological ecosystem of the 1970s and 1980s, drawing from political theorists, Christian conservatives, and sociologists. Ultimately, *Ravaged by the New Age* reflects core ideologies related to pressing Christian theological questions of the 20th century. Conservative Christian theological inquiry emerges from a broader ideological ecosystem of biblical family roles, dominion theology, apocalypticism. Through this ideological analysis, I will demonstrate the theological and ideological source of conservative Christian antipathy towards *D&D*, enhancing the symbolic interactionist approach implemented in Chapter 2.

¹ While not always the case, I take for granted that Marrs attempts to faithfully communicate his ideology in this book. In the previous chapter, I followed Terry Eagleton's approach to ideology as a process of signification, which itself occurs in an ecosystem of other processes that unconsciously and consciously relates to whole persons.

Authoritarian, Biblical, and Familial Values

Marrs is deeply concerned with the role that parents play and protecting their children and abiding by biblical mandates. Most of the material that he addresses in his book is related to children: books, television shows, games, toys, the GSA, the BSA, public education, and comic books. The image on the front cover of the book depicts an innocent child. His critique of cultural trends and practices stems from a particular ideology, characterized by authoritarian, biblical, and familial values. In other words, familial control is an extension of a man's personal spiritual morality and is a primary spiritual and social good.

The quotations Marrs chose as the headers for each chapter in *Ravaged by the New Age* illustrate this ideological emphasis. Each chapter begins by juxtaposing a biblical text(s) with a quote(s) from a New Age text (or a cultural feature corrupted by the New Age). For example, chapter 2 quotes Psalm 127:3: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward."² He juxtaposes this quote with a quote from Joshua Halpern, author of *Children of Dawn*: "The first thing to do after discovering you are pregnant is to give things to the Goddess...Rainbow mother."³ Similarly, Marrs pairs critiques of the "inner light" with quotations of how Jesus loves the little children in Chapter 4.⁴ Rearing one's children has a clear spiritual component for Marrs. It is a

² Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 34.

³ Ibid, 34.

⁴ Ibid, 77.

mandate from God spoken through scripture. To permit one's child a degree of autonomy is to subject that child to the powers of Satan. Marrs states, "Love is not permissiveness. Moreover, if Satanism is not to gain access to the lives of their children, parents must be parents."⁵ This authoritarian rule over children grows from a posture of love and from a biblical mandate. To challenge the New Age is to live life as a "concerned Christian," someone who is close enough with God to challenge the world with God's help.⁶ The political undertones of many sections of the book also indicate a social good that results from biblical and authoritarian parenting. This socially benevolent will manifests itself in classrooms as resilience against the New Age and participates in and upholds certain "Democratic free rights."⁷ By reflecting on the explicit and implicit materials within the text, I have deduced an ideology of authoritarian, biblical parenting.

Sociologists expressed similar views regarding the presuppositions and ideologies of conservative Christians in the 1970s and 1980s. Critics of Christian conservatism at the time indicated an ideological bias within Christian conservatism towards reasserting authority over church and family in the face of modernization.⁸ Changes due to modernization, especially within the realm of familial relationships and power dynamics, are construed as Satanic attacks against the principles of Christian morality.⁹ Christian

⁵ Ibid, 248.

⁶ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 251.

⁷ Ibid, 251-252.

⁸ William V D'Antonio and Joan Aldous, eds., *Families and Religions: Conflict and Change in Modern Society* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985).

⁹ Ibid, 136.

Conservatives understand freedom related issues, such as freedom to listen to punk rock music or sexual freedom as trials of obedience.¹⁰ To choose liberal freedom in many instances is to choose disobedience before God. Such characterizations not only arise from “outsiders.” Patrick McNamara, a sociologist who defends conservative Christianity, also affirms this point. McNamara elaborates upon the spiritual and moral aspects of conservative Christian family values. Conservative Christians operate under the assumption that “by exercising personal agency and so choosing, one can change his/her life by seeking spiritual input.”¹¹ Authoritarian response, especially when rooted in a biblical command, is an exercise in pious, personal agency. Doing so not only benefits the children and parents. For Marrs, obedience before God fulfills an integral part of Christian discipleship. The hierarchical relationships between the parent and the child provide order and stability “and are maximally conducive to a nurturing caring atmosphere” within this conservative Christian ideology.¹² Order, stability, spiritual fulfillment, and healthy child-rearing constitute the many facets and goals of this ideology.

The broader ideological context of conservative Christianity attests to authoritarian familial values. The Christian Reconstructionist movement, while an extreme form of

¹⁰ Ibid, 39.

¹¹ Patrick McNamara, “The New Christian Right’s View of the Family and Its Social Science Critics: A Study in Differing Presuppositions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47, no. 2 (1985): 449–458.

¹² Ibid, 456.

Christian conservatism, interacts with within Marrs's ideological presuppositions within a broader ecosystem. The Christian Reconstructionist movement possesses several theological characteristics which prescribe authoritarian family values rooted in biblical law.¹³ Two of these characteristics shape Christian Reconstructionist discourse regarding family and politics: theonomy and dominion theology.

When it comes to matters of authority and legitimacy, Christian reconstructionism argues that all authority comes from God.¹⁴ The Bible manifests God's intent for humanity in writing and exerts ultimate authority over all things.¹⁵ By contrast, assertions and values rooted in human freedom or human discernment lack authority; these claims are sinful.¹⁶ Theonomy asserts that the Bible is the only good authority and reshapes political, ethical, and cultural stances.¹⁷ Christians must apply biblical law to contemporary issues rather than rely on human judgment or autonomous will.¹⁸

¹³ Notably, I have distinguished between ideology and theology. This distinction presupposes that theology ought not be an exercise in ideological power. While I recognize that theology is undeniably influenced by ideology, I support a more idealistic conceptualization of theology. Theology, as a field of research and inquiry, attempts to address questions about God with a degree of critical distance. The valiant effort of many theologians contributes to this attempt at unbiased theologizing. For the purposes of this thesis, I indicate several instances in which theology and ideology are almost indistinguishable. Christian Reconstructionist theology supports certain ideologies, just as certain ideologies support Christian Reconstructionist theology. Ideology and theology overlap and frequently interlock. I will demonstrate this reality when discussing the influence of Christian Reconstructionist theology on Marrs's ideology and the ideology of Christian conservatives in the Satanic Panic.

¹⁴ Julie Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*, 2015. 9.

¹⁵ Greg L Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

¹⁶ Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom*, 23.

¹⁷ Ibid, 23-24.

¹⁸ Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, 3-4.

Dominion theology is a practical outworking of theonomistic theology through an interpretation of the Bible.¹⁹ God confers authority onto humanity in the creation account of Genesis 1-2. Stewardship over creation involves caring for creation. Gary North indicates, “the will to dominion is...not the quest for power apart from ethical law, but the quest for authority by means of ethical action.”²⁰ Drawing on biblical law enables Christian Reconstructionists to practice dominion. As long as an individual is practicing dominion rather than power, their authority is legitimized by the word of God contained in the Christian scriptures.²¹ The household constitutes one appropriate area of dominion for a Christian Reconstructionist. While Marris Does not indicate Christian reconstructionism as the source for his claims regarding the authority of parents within the household, he does indicate the importance have a Christian life which rules over the household. He remarks, “It is high time that Christian adults strive to exemplify the high standards that God has set for his elect.”²² Raising a godly generation in the face of satanic powers and the New Age belongs to this calling for the elect.

One example of the ideological clash between dominion theology and the dynamic American culture of the 1980s emerges in political and theological discussion regarding the role of women. Marris rarely differentiates the roles of father and mother,

¹⁹ Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom*, 16.

²⁰ North, *None Dare Call It Witchcraft*. 126.

²¹ Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom*, 16-17.

²² Marris, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 127.

typically exhorting both parents simultaneously.²³ At one point, he does note that Christian men must make a special example for teenagers and children and does not address a particular role for women.²⁴ Despite his silence regarding the issue of parental gender roles, he does reference former Catholic Priest Matthew Fox on several occasions, citing Fox's "mother goddess" language as evidence of New Age Corruption.²⁵ Although Fox is a controversial figure common even amongst liberal Christian theologians, his teachings about the Mother Goddess are explicitly linked to contemporary shifts in gender studies.²⁶ Theonomy relies on established, biblical hierarchies. One of these hierarchies is the relationship between male and female, man and woman. Sociologists contemporary to the time of the satanic panic were discussing new models for the American family. One model praises equal-partner relationships, requiring negotiation in husband-wife and parent-child relationships.²⁷ Fox theologically explores this broader trend which upsets the necessary hierarchies within dominion theology. Christian conservatives, such as Tim LaHaye, countered this model by reaffirming the model of

²³ Ibid, 96-99.

²⁴ Ibid, 127.

²⁵ Ibid, 98.

²⁶ Watanabe, Teresa, and Los Angeles Times. "Seeking the Feminine in God / Goddess Worship Accentuates Female Origins of the Almighty." SFGate. San Francisco Chronicle, February 3, 2012. <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Seeking-the-Feminine-in-God-Goddess-worship-2981028.php>.

²⁷ Scanlon, John. *Shaping Tomorrow's Family: Theory and Policy for the 21st Century*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983. 93.

gender roles and marital roles outlined in the Bible.²⁸ Women must still submit to men, just as the passions must submit to the mind or the world must submit to the Kingdom. Dominion theology is gendered, establishing a core of authority for Christian men from which Christianity will reconstruct a new Kingdom.

Marrs's ideology of education stems from dominionistic components of his theology, aligning his stance with that of Christian conservatives and Christian Reconstructionists aiming to control their children's education. Many Christian schools were founded during the two decades of the satanic panic. Conservative Christians viewed public education as "irretrievably unbiblical" and understood education as one component within authoritarian dominion theology. Families maintain legitimate authority to educate their children, and public education violates parental sovereignty by usurping authority and outsourcing it to institutions beyond the family unit.²⁹ For example, Robert Thoburn, founder of Fairfax Christian School in Virginia, states, "The education of children...is the duty of parents in the Christian School is an extension of the home...Statist education is secular and humanistic."³⁰ The household is a core social unit under God's law. Thus schools ought to be accountable directly to parents rather than

²⁸ LaHaye, Tim. *Battle for the Family*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1982. 83.

²⁹ Ingersoll, Julie. "Raising a Godly Generation: Christian Schooling" in *Building God's Kingdom : Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 4.

³⁰ Robert L. Thoburn, *How to Establish and Operate a Successful Christian School* (Fairfax, VA: Self-published, 1971), 6.

the government.³¹ The Christian Reconstructionist and conservative Christian familial ethic reaches sociological extremes. Everett Sileven posits, from a Christian dominionist position, that a biblical family model entails “ownership” of children.³² He believes that Christian parents hold the specific responsibility to raise their kids within a theocratic framework that upholds God as Lord. According to Sileven, this task “is a matter of control” which “is not possible” in public schools.³³ Sileven demonstrated the importance of Christian freedom to practice dominion over church, faith, and children. Sileven, a pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Nebraska, spoke in a landmark hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary after he was arrested and forcibly removed from Faith Baptist along with many other protesters.³⁴ In his statement, he expounded on the ramifications of government interference with the Christian projected, pleading protection under 1st Amendment rights. He states, “Therefore, if I believe that education is a part of my religious faith, no government, including the Dept. of Education, the IRS, or anyone else has the right to define away that part of my faith.”³⁵ The expression of

³¹ Ingersoll, Julie. “Raising a Godly Generation: Christian Schooling” in *Building God’s Kingdom : Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 6.

³² Everett Sileven, *Dear Legislator: A Plea for Liberty in Christian Education* (Orlando, FL: Daniels, 1983). 23.

³³ Ibid, 32.

³⁴ Ingersoll, Julie. “Raising a Godly Generation: Christian Schooling” in *Building God’s Kingdom : Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 12.

³⁵ Hatch Orrin D. and Leahy Patrick J. *Oversight of the State of Religious Liberty in America Today*, Committee on the Judiciary. 98th Congress, 2d sess., 1984. 28.

dominion theology was a constitutional right. To lose that constitutional right, Sileven explains, is to lose the only nation which could allow for a Christian Reconstructionist way of life.³⁶ Christian participation in God's plan for humanity pivots on this cardinal doctrine. Authority and rulership over children, especially in the face of humanistic, liberal autonomy, is a vital component of the Christian Reconstructionist social life, biblical responsibility, and spiritual practice. Marrs's concern for children and exhortation to parents to guide and guard their children aligns with this ideological context, expressing concern with a newfound level of articulation against culture.

Apocalypticism

An intersection between ideologies exists already in the theological component of the authoritarian, conservative family values illustrated above. The very existence of Satan and dark powers which fills *Ravaged by the New Age*, depends upon a preexisting ideology: apocalypticism or a belief in the existence of a very real and ongoing spiritual battle that affects the lives of human beings.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid, 29.

³⁷ While Christian conservatives (especially evangelicals) are often associated with the Christian charismatic movement, to deny the relevance of or outright ignore these elements of Marrs's ideology would be an injustice to the text and to broader ideology of Christian evangelicalism. Another important caveat relates to the nature of this conservative Christian belief. Namely, is a belief in a spiritual reality ideology or theology? More specifically, in what ways does a charismatic expression of Christian theology transform into an ideology and dynamically guide the signification process? This question, its presence within *Ravaged by the New Age*, and its ideological context are all the subjects of analysis and investigation in this section.

Written for a Christian audience, *Ravaged by the New Age* presupposes the existence of God, Jesus, and the Christian scriptures as well as a metaphysical reality attached to those theological presuppositions. The “secret schemes” of Satan conspire in the shadows, seeking to overthrow God’s kingdom.³⁸ Satan spiritually and physically dominates and corrupts children, to steal them from parents and from God.³⁹ Dark forces present themselves seductively, luring children and humanity into their trap.⁴⁰ Evil spirits dwell within the ideological milieu of conservative Christianity. Moreover, spiritual powers and persons can possess positive connotations. The redemption of the life of Alice Braemer represents the faithfulness of God to deliver a woman from a New Age cult.⁴¹ Apocalyptic imagery found in Bible similarly suggests the eventual failure and destruction of Satan and his powers.⁴² For Marrs, divine intervention, at least in the life of the individual if not the entire nation, will eventually purge humanity of the New Age corruption.⁴³ This apocalyptic vision of a spiritual reality, consisting of a battle between the forces of good and evil, constitutes an important structural pillar of Marrs’s conservative Christian ideology.

³⁸ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 31

³⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 125-126.

⁴¹ Ibid, 132.

⁴² Ibid, 136.

⁴³ Ibid, 260-261.

The broader ideological context of differing views on metaphysics, spirits, and theology, provides a backdrop for the silhouette of Marr's ideology, revealing how *Ravaged by the New Age* functions as a ritual activity, reifying his perception of an apocalyptic reality. Recall that Eagleton argues for the existence of an ideological ecosystem in which many ecosystems conflict, overlap, and sublate one another.⁴⁴ Ideology is a consequence of lived relations, experiences, and intersections between an individual and the world around them.⁴⁵ An ideology which incorporates a spiritual reality manifests itself within the ritual activities of those who belong to or choose that ideology.⁴⁶ For example, if the driver of an automobile pats the top of a "Jesus Take the Wheel" bobblehead each time he steps behind the wheel, his action reflexively interprets his ideology. Because a spiritual reality exists, he pats the head of Jesus for divine protection while on the road. Because he taps the bobblehead each time he drives his car, he reifies the existence of a spiritual reality.⁴⁷ The activity upholds the ideology, and the ideology supports the lived experience.⁴⁸

Marrs's apocalyptic ideology leads him to find Satan lurking behind seemingly every comic book, cartoon, and tabletop fantasy game. In other words, it functions within

⁴⁴ Eagleton, *Ideology*. 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁶ Grimes, Ronald L. 2018. *The craft of ritual studies*. 194.

⁴⁷ Rappaport, R. (1999). Enactments of meaning. In *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, pp. 107-138). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511814686.006

⁴⁸ Eagleton, Terry. 1991. *Ideology: an introduction*. London: Verso. 31.

Ravaged by the New Age in the same manner as tapping Jesus's bobbling head. Marrs resymbolizes images from popular culture and New Age texts, equivalent in our metaphor to pouring brimstone onto a Satan bobblehead. Lived relations, this time narrated within a text, receive a new meaning and interpretation. A theological viewpoint reshapes a culturally produced image. For example, Marrs addresses the issue of unicorns in *Ravaged by the New Age* on several occasions. *My Little Pony* features unicorn characters which are a "potent symbol of the power of the Third Eye and of Antichrist, the little horn."⁴⁹ He references the apocalyptic imagery in Daniel 7, which describes a little horn which made war against God's people. Marrs explicitly indicates the symbolic nature of his subject matter, providing an interpretive platform upon which he can declare that unicorns are symbols of the antichrist.⁵⁰ Marrs does not create a new ideology. Rather, his interpretation of the image of unicorns in *My Little Pony* emerges naturally from his particular form of Christian apocalyptic ideology. Lived experiences with cultural features such as children's television shows or toys are always filtered through an individual's ideological framework(s). As a result, Marrs's apocalyptic ideology makes the world appear in constant cosmic peril, such that even Gusty from *My Little Pony* becomes one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

⁴⁹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 208.

⁵⁰ Apocalyptic imagery is especially prone to widely varying interpretations. For example, some writers and ministers assume that the little horn in Daniel 7 actually refers to the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican. See <http://www.the-bible-antichrist.com/>.

Marrs's project can be framed in terms of a struggle to gain and maintain power in an apocalyptic battle for the soul of America. As previously mentioned, Eagleton understands ideologies as powers within an ideological ecosystem. Some are stronger than others and legitimate the power of a dominant group (the bourgeoisie), while others enhance the lives of a minority group. As such, ideologies often conflict with one another. Marrs asserts the importance of his ideology, one which interprets and separates from cultural features stringently due to their particular spiritual essence, above alternate viewpoints. Marrs contrasts his argument with the claims of "pop psychologists" who urge parents to give their children autonomy and freedom.⁵¹ His apocalyptic ideology does not allow this level of "permissiveness." His ideology also includes and champions God as the ultimate Good in the battle between good and evil. To acknowledge God as sovereign and God's will as good, parents ought to adhere to God's prescription in scripture. The existence of spiritual beings not only informs how Marrs addresses and re-symbolizes cultural features, but it also addresses and resymbolizes the act of parenting, reifying this activity through a particular biblical lens. Marrs also portrays liberal forms of Christianity as a rival ideology. Marrs often ridicules Matthew Fox for participating in New Age activities and philosophies by implicitly linking Fox's vision of a cosmic Christ with satanic influence, New Age cult theology, and dissolving Christian ethical standards.⁵²

⁵¹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 248.

⁵² *Ibid*, 98.

Similarly, Marrs contrasts Christians who are willing to take a stand against cultural features with lukewarm Christians who are willing to hold a “dialogue” with what Marrs considers to be a corrupted culture.⁵³ For Marrs, only true Christians will be able to discern good from evil and thus be victorious in the cosmic battle. He writes, “others in society—lukewarm ‘Christians’ and the unsaved—will not understand nor be able to discern between good and evil” (scare quotes original).⁵⁴ Several ideologies clash in this statement. Marrs demonstrates that his ideology holds privileged knowledge due to its perception of God and other spiritual forces. The privilege inherent in this worldview spurs individuals into action, to minister to others that they might be free of Satanic influence and come to know Jesus as he really is.⁵⁵ Marrs portrays his own ideology as one which correctly interprets hidden satanic forces in contemporary culture and correctly comprehends the spiritual world, indicating a greater ideological conflict within the broader American ideological ecosystem.

Regarding the conservative Christian ideological context, I argue that *Ravaged by the New Age* is, at the very least, influenced by Christian reconstructionism if not directly informed by writers like Gary North and Rousas Rushdoony. Christian reconstructionism helps to sketch the outlines and structure of where Marrs belongs within the Christian conservative ideological context. While Marrs does not refer to Christian

⁵³ Ibid, 55.

⁵⁴ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 55.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 254.

reconstructionism as the basis for his argumentation, he does overlap theologically with Christian reconstructionism.

The most pivotal theological presupposition, one which affects many assumptions for Christian Reconstructionists, is millennialism. In brief, the millennial theological debate pertains to the end times events for Christianity. A premillennialist view assumes that Daniel and revelation contain prophecies about a future event.⁵⁶ Namely, premillennial dispensationalism assumes that Christianity exists in a world in perpetual decline until the return of Jesus. Jesus will usher in the coming of the Kingdom of God upon his return. Postmillennialism believes that the period of tribulation passed and that the Kingdom of God arrived as it was previously foretold.⁵⁷ Death and Satan fell to the power of Jesus at the moment of crucifixion; the crucifixion marks the beginning of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is not a future place or specific kind of rulership, but the fulfillment of the Kingdom project that is already underway. The previously mentioned dominion theology and theonomy blossom from this a theological standpoint. There are some overlaps between these two theological viewpoints. Within premillennialist theology, some theologians posit the existence of a “faithful remnant” which must guard Christianity during the period of tribulation; this theological viewpoint is incorporated into Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstructionist theological framework.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ingersoll, Julie. “Christian Reconstructionist Theology” in *Building God’s Kingdom : Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 13

Strangely enough, Christian Reconstructionists are explicitly postmillennialists, but this emphasis on the faithful remnant still influences the Christian Reconstructionist understanding of identity.⁵⁹ The concept of a faithful remnant remains significant for understanding the worldview of conservative Christians. Regardless of the pre/post form of millennialism, Christian Reconstructionists and Marris adopt an apocalyptic theology that views the future or the present Kingdom of God as an integral piece of the cosmos.

Marris does not expressly indicate whether he adheres to a postmillennialist or premillennialist theology. His references to Revelation and Daniel typically imply a future purification of the earth from the accusations of Satan upon the arrival of Jesus, filled with eschatological hope. Satan, and his powers, will eventually succumb to the power of God, just as the blessings of salvation will eventually come in full.⁶⁰ It is difficult to discern whether Marris is a premillennialist or postmillennialist. As his only reference to end-times events centers around the coming of Jesus. This arrival of Jesus could be to initiate the Kingdom of God following a period of tribulation, as it would be in a premillennialist theology. However, his reference to the coming of Jesus might also be the culmination of the Kingdom of God from a postmillennialism theology.

While classifying Marris's eschatological and unnecessary, understanding both of these theologies and where they overlap equips us to analyze his ideologies. Children,

⁵⁹ Michael McVicar, *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 59–64.

⁶⁰ Marris, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 136.

families, and cultural conflicts hang in the balance. While premillennialist theology expects a disaster from which God will save Christians, postmillennialist theology looks forward to a disaster which will present Christian Reconstructionists with the opportunity to establish God's dominion in the wake of catastrophe.⁶¹ In light of their shared emphasis on disaster, "Millennialist systems make the present moment the culmination of all of history and the lives of those living in this time of cosmic importance."⁶² This cosmic significance attributed to human lives and the present moments clarifies the emphasis and stress of Marrs's arguments against many pop-culture features. He imagines a future in which New Age racial selection methods will treat Christian children as offspring of an inferior species.⁶³ The New Age presents a kind of cataclysm that demands a special and theologically significant amount of faith and resistance. Furthermore, the "culmination of all of history" Implies a particular understanding of history. Rousas Rushdoony indicates the Christian Reconstructionist understanding of human history (and its relationship to millennialist theology) through his intellectual debates with history teachers in public education. Rushdoony asserts that public education, lacking references to God as the ultimate source of truth, is fundamentally humanistic.⁶⁴ A Christian Reconstructionist view would teach that history is the study of

⁶¹ Ingersoll, Julie. "Christian Reconstructionist Theology" in *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 20.

⁶² Ingersoll, Julie. "Christian Reconstructionist Theology" in *Building God's Kingdom : Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 21.

⁶³ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 148.

⁶⁴ Rushdoony, *Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, 37.

God's sovereign interactions with human events and circumstances.⁶⁵ The worldview which believes in the activity of God throughout all of human history assumes a degree of spiritual interaction and intimacy that is literally universal. As such, the Christian Reconstructionist movement in its concerns over public education bears marks of the apocalyptic ideology found in *Ravaged by the New Age*.

Christian Paranoia: The last ideology that I will discuss represents a culmination of the entire Satanic Panic discussion thus far, making sense of historical, sociological, and ideological trends. I propose that conservative Christians, including Marrs, embody a "paranoid style" when interacting with and condemning cultural change. Richard Hofstadter first theorized the paranoid style in a famous and controversial political essay by Richard Hofstadter. Released in 1964 to *Harper's Magazine*, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" argues that America conservatives operate with a paranoid state of mind within the political realm.⁶⁶ He characterizes the paranoid style as a mindset which "evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy."⁶⁷ American history demonstrates several instances of paranoia amongst conservatives regarding social, political, or cultural change.⁶⁸ His argument effectively leads certain

⁶⁵ Ingersoll, Julie. "Raising a Godly Generation: Christian Schooling" in *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 4.

⁶⁶ Hofstadter, Richard, Thomas Frank, Rafil Kroll-Zaidi, and Richard E. Maltby Jr. 2019. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." *Harper's Magazine*. Harper's Magazine. August 15, 2019.

⁶⁷ Ibid. I lacked a paper copy of the book due to limited library access during the COVID-19 pandemic and resorted to a web posting by *Harper's Magazine* which lacks pages numbers.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

inquiry.⁶⁹ However, this paranoid style framework lacks a scholarly consensus. Several critics have indicated issues with Hofstadter's historical narrative, especially regarding the Populist movement.⁷⁰ Others question the paranoid style on the grounds that it implicitly affirms the effectiveness of an aggressive, uncompromising paranoid stance.⁷¹ While these critics might, and rightfully so, challenge the usage and endorsement of the paranoid stance, they fail to exhaustively disprove the existence of the paranoid stance. As such, Hofstadter's essay still functions in an explanatory function without necessarily being prescriptive.

Controversy aside, Hofstadter's paranoid style contains several features that quite accurately depict the interactions between Christian conservatives and *D&D* in the Satanic Panic. These features include a historical interpretive framework, a multi-layered conspiracy, and the avant-garde prophetic voice. Of course, none of these features provide any basis for analysis if Marrs (or any of the anti-*D&D* conservative Christian voices) lack paranoia. Marrs indicates a degree of suspiciousness and conspiratorial fantasy at several locations in his book. He identifies a conspiracy against children in

⁶⁹ Serazio, Michael. "Encoding the Paranoid Style in American Politics: 'Anti-Establishment' Discourse and Power in Contemporary Spin." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33, no. 2 (March 14, 2016): 181–194. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15295036.2016.1174338>.

⁷⁰ Metcalf, Josephine, and Spaulding, Carina. *African American Culture and Society after Rodney King: Provocations and Protests, Progression And 'Post-Racialism'*. Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015. Accessed April 13, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central. 226-228.

⁷¹ "Donald Trump and the 'Paranoid Style' in American (Intellectual) Politics." In *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2018.

popular media. He cites the possible risk associated with popular movies and television, indicating a conspiracy among New Age media producers against children and Christianity.⁷² The same conspiracy which claimed the mind of LaVey, author of the *Satanic Bible*, also pulls the strings of comic book authors and fantasy authors and game designers.⁷³ In addition to the conspirators behind popular media, Marrs also lists the names of dozens of religious groups in North America.⁷⁴ His suspicious attitude towards these organizations is summarized in the assertion: Satan consistently spawns and creates new groups.”⁷⁵ His suspicion leads him to exaggerate the relationship between these organizations. For example, he includes the Koinonia Farm ministry as an example of a New Age cult, placing it alongside the Church of Latter-Day Saints and Tibetan Buddhism.⁷⁶ His lumping together of different religious categories under the umbrella term of New Age is precisely the kind of paranoid style Hofstadter animates in his essay. Marrs shows several tell-tale signs of the paranoid style.

⁷² Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 148.

⁷³ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, See 128. La Vey, Anton Szandor. 2017. *The Satanic Bible*. Bronx, NY: Ishi Press International.

⁷⁴ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 106-108.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 106.

⁷⁶ Koinonia Farm is a Christian social project started in the 1940s in Sumter, Georgia. The farm adhered to four principles that its founders, Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mabel England, derive from the New Testament. These included a radical view towards human equality, non-violence, communally shared possessions, and natural stewardship. Social service organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Koinonia Partnership Housing grew out of this Christian community.

We will now consider the listed features of the paranoid style in detail, comparing them to *Ravaged by the New Age* and the conservative Christian response to *D&D*. First, the paranoid style results in a kind of interpretive frame, a worldview with specific instructions for interpreting history and change. “The paranoid’s interpretation of history is distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequence of someone’s will.”⁷⁷ Marrs frequently confers social change and corruption upon the person of Satan, LaVey, or greedy corporate manufacturers.⁷⁸ Conservative Christianity concurs, addressing evolution as the product of Darwin’s will, epistemology as the consequence of Kant’s will against truth, local Satanic influence as the consequence of an individual named “Spring-Heeled Jack,” and the crimes of *D&D* players as the consequences of a dark spirit (often Satan).⁷⁹ Christian Conservatives exhibit this feature of the paranoid style, by personifying historical change. The approach conservative Christians take against this personified enemy ranges, although frequently Christian conservatives engage with this personified threat in an “apocalyptic and absolutistic” manner.⁸⁰ Mainly, conservative Christians do not simply dislike the personified threat but view it as potentially being cataclysmic. Marrs notes, “It is

⁷⁷ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” in *Harper’s Magazine*.

⁷⁸ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 119.

⁷⁹ North, Gary, *Unholy Spirits*. Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1988. 132, 147. Ellis, Bill, *Raising the Devil*. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2000. 205. Pulling, Pat, *The Devil’s Web*. Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1989. 40.

⁸⁰ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” in *Harper’s Magazine*.

undeniable that Satan has a master plan to seize absolute control of planet earth and its people.”⁸¹ Pat Pulling shares this view, noting that the corruption of children due to *D&D* or other occult trends ultimately means the dissolution of future generations and the risk of all families at all socioeconomic levels.⁸² Gary North states, “when men are willing to believe in supernatural forces but not in God, then mankind is very close to the end—either the final battle, or at the very least, the end of the anti-Christian world of humanism.”⁸³ Conservative writers concerned about *D&D* share this feature of the paranoid style: they personify change in history and understand this change within an apocalyptic and absolutistic framework.

Another feature of the paranoid style is the conservative team of a multi-layered conspiracy. For Hofstadter, The first layer of conspiracy pertained to a conservative fear of a centralized federal government.⁸⁴ While his argument related to a conservative fear of a communist state (his essay was released during the height of the Cold War, including an analysis of McCarthyism), it nonetheless identifies the conservative fear of shifting authority. Second, conservative Christians fear the infiltration of the American government by communist spies and agents.⁸⁵ Finally, conservative Christians harbored

⁸¹ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 250.

⁸² Pulling, Pat, *The Devil's Web*. Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1989. 136, 142.

⁸³ North, Gary, *Unholy Spirits*. Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1988. 4.

⁸⁴ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” in *Harper's Magazine*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

fears of an entire cultural infiltration. They feared that the “whole apparatus of education, religion, the press, and the mass media” joined arms with communist insurgents to overthrow the libertarian, capitalist way of life.⁸⁶ *Ravaged by the New Age* contains many parallels to this expression of the paranoid style. At the first layer, Marrs portrays a nation at risk of the master conspiracy of the New Age.⁸⁷ At the second layer, Marrs reveals the corrupting power of the New Age in government agencies, congressional offices, and education.⁸⁸ At the third, Marrs reveals the influence of the New Age on broadcasting networks, movies, television, science, and athletics.⁸⁹ How does this compare to other Christian conservatives? Gary North views an occult conspiracy from the perspective of philosophical change. As humanism dies and gives fertile soil to occultism, occultism integrates with each of the three layers identified by a Christian conservative paranoid style.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, North recognizes the capacity of Satan to confuse and misdirect through conspiracies that work against the Christian Reconstructionist project. In a chapter titled, “The Satanic Network,” Pat Pulling links together several stories of teenage suicide, human sacrifices, or criminal activity with a broader Satanic network.⁹¹ Pulling alludes to network or conspiracy but does not venture

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, ix.

⁸⁸ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 27, 138.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 29-30.

⁹⁰ North, Gary, *Unholy Spirits*. Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1988. 378-379.

⁹¹ Pulling, Pat, *The Devil's Web*. Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1989. 52-64.

to assert that all levels of society are equally affected. Her book specifies the power of evil over teenagers, such as her late son, Bink Pulling. She varies from Hofstadter's argument but still confirms an overall conspiratorial thrust in conservative Christian arguments against a particular, liberal cultural shift and the cultural features therein, including *D&D*.

The paranoid style of American conservatives in the 1960s remains true for our analysis of Christian conservatives in the 1980s. While a "political style" might not immediately equate to an ideology, a political style does operate similarly to an ideology. At worst, the paranoid is a terrific analogy for underlying conservative Christian ideologies. At best, the paranoid is an ideology in its own right. Compare this paranoid style with Eagleton's definition of ideology. The paranoid style bookends the signification process. With Marrs as an example, *Ravaged by the New Age* begins and ends with conspiracy, albeit the ending reference to conspiracy is a conspiracy in flight. The "startling hidden agenda" of Satan urges Marrs to discuss the New Age, guides the symbolization process within the text, and concludes the text, creating a textual "frame" in which his particular symbolic explanations and expressions find meaning. Like the borders and canvas of a portrait, Marrs's paranoid style colors and shapes his argumentation about the New Age and about *D&D*. His paranoid style aligns with a similar style adopted by his contemporaries regarding the subject of humanism, the New Age, and cultural trends, placing his style within an ecosystem. Much like an ideology, the paranoid style operates consciously and unconsciously. Marrs freely admits his suspicions regarding New Age and Satanic activity while unconsciously exaggerating

certain claims, such as the list of New Age religions.⁹² The paranoid style expressed in *Ravaged by the New Age*, is an ideology according to Eagleton's definition of the term.

The final significant feature is the avant-garde, prophetic voice of the conservative who adopts the paranoid style. The avant-garde is one who foresaw the conspiracy and recognized its handiwork and agents.⁹³ Rather than seeking mediation or compromise, the avant-garde chooses direct conflict, "since what is at stake is always a conflict between absolute good and absolute evil."⁹⁴ The avant-garde is a prophet, one who divines the reality of the conspiracy and pronounces over the people a possible route away from the destruction yielded by the conspiracy. Marrs declares *Ravaged by the New Age* to be just such a prophet. He writes, "This is the first book to completely expose the New Age destruction of our children."⁹⁵ He announces the obscurity of his topic, establishing his ethos through his hidden knowledge. Moreover, he establishes a dualistic argument. The innocence of children is opposed by the destruction wreaked by Satan's plots. Marr's disdain for liberal Christianity imitates the "no-negotiations" attitude of the avant-garde.⁹⁶ Pat Pulling assumes the role of the avant-garde for *D&D*. She exposes the dark magic elements of TRS's tabletop role-playing game and disseminates the expert

⁹² Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, 106-106, 111.

⁹³ Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" in *Harper's Magazine*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Marrs, *Ravaged by the New Age*, ix.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 55.

advice of psychologists and criminologists who see trends between teenage crime and tabletop role-playing games.⁹⁷ North associates his prophetic voice with that of apocalyptic texts like Daniel and Revelation. He remarks, “Occultism surfaces as a cultural phenomenon at the end of civilizations...recent social changes are evidence of a looming crisis in the West.”⁹⁸ He explores occultism but also divines a vision of the future through cultural phenomena as an omen of what is to come. Conservative Christians, in their approach to cultural change, adopt the persona of the avant-garde, challenging the conspiracy and serving as the whistleblower for their society.

Conclusion

The war against the occult does not rely on swords or nuclear weapons. Rather, Christian conservatives fought battles against cultural features deemed New Age or Satanic ideologically. *Ravaged by the New Age*, by Texe Marrs, addresses the occult from an ideological perspective rooted in conservative Christian theology, especially Christian Reconstructionism. His disdain for cultural change and features like *D&D* stems from three ideological presuppositions. Authoritarian biblical values, Christian apocalypticism, and conservative paranoia shape his understanding of symbols and culture. Theological discourse, as a dialogue that formulates symbolic worlds, radically shapes Marrs’s conversation with American culture. Biblical fundamentalism, dominion theology, and apocalypticism own ideological property within Marr’s symbolic landscape. They alter

⁹⁷ Pulling, Pat, *The Devil’s Web*. Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1989. 82-86.

⁹⁸ North, Gary, *Unholy Spirits*. Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1988. 13-15.

his perspective. As noted in Chapter 2's symbolic interactionist approach, symbolic worlds influence individual behaviors. In the case of the Satanic Panic, communities projected pre-existing anxieties onto ambiguous danger. Their symbolic world construed *D&D* as evil and subversive. *Ravaged by the New Age* characterizes *D&D* in the same manner, adding theological layers to existing symbolic worlds and demonstrating the consequences of certain ideological presuppositions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Concluding Remarks on the Satanic Panic

Almost 40 years have passed since the Satanic Panic, and its effects, ideology, and peculiarities are still relevant to this day. I became interested in researching the Satanic Panic and *Dungeons & Dragons* due to my long history of playing the game. I attended a conservative Christian private school for junior high and high school. The school favors a university model for class schedules, providing students with ample downtime and off-periods for studying or recreation. My friend group consisted of geeks, so we elected to spend our off-periods playing *Pathfinder Role-playing Game*, a rules-set variant of the 3.5 edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*. We would play publicly, seated at a picnic table near one of the school buildings (the school was located on a church campus) with our pencils, character sheets, and polyhedral dice. We created stories and worlds together. We fought monsters and enchanted a buffalo named Owen so that it could fly as our trusty party steed. Teachers and fellow students walked by our gaming table regularly, and we received no notice from friends or strangers that our game was disruptive or concerning. One Wednesday afternoon, the principal of the school approached our table and informed our group that we were no longer allowed to play tabletop role-playing games at school. We were very frustrated and indignant. He

informed us that, while he personally was comfortable with the game on-campus, some parents within the community were suspicious of our game and concerned about its presence on our private school campus. He chose to ban the game out of respect for their wishes. While this put a damper on our playgroup for about a week, we quickly rotated to playing at a friend's house after school. I found that several parents within our small community at this private school were apprehensive when it came to tabletop role-playing games. They were fearful of something which I did not understand, since the game was just an ordinary part of play and imaginative socializing. Their distrust of *D&D* and my time studying in the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core inspired me to research this topic.

D&D has always lived on the fringes of the gaming community. While the average American has heard of games like *Monopoly* or perhaps *Settlers of Catan*, many are unfamiliar with tabletop role-playing games due to an apparent barrier to entry, a buy-in factor which might ward off potential adventurers before they attempt the game. *D&D* entered a recent golden age due to several factors. Under the ownership of Wizards of the Coast, *D&D* has flourished in sales and popularity. Designer and co-creator of the most recent edition of *D&D*, Mike Mearls tweeted that the 5th edition sales of *D&D* books surpassed the total lifetime sales of 3rd, 3.5, and 4th edition *D&D* combined.¹ The player base has grown tremendously, with new players and dungeon masters popping up in

¹ “(20) Mike Mearls on Twitter: ‘@JWP611 @newbiedm 5e Lifetime PHB Sales > 3, 3.5, 4 Lifetime #WOTCstaff’ / Twitter,” Twitter, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://twitter.com/mikemearls/status/764241988128419840>.

gaming groups, social groups, dormitories, and local libraries. The game has grown so much, that content creators who specialize in creating televised, spectator versions of tabletop role-playing games (known as live-RPGs) are launching original television series based on their own *D&D* campaigns. The internet-famous series, “Critical Role,” recently fundraised over \$11,000,000 to produce an animated TV show based on their live stream adventures in *D&D*.² The Netflix series, *Stranger Things*, begins with its ensemble of protagonists crowded around a small table in a basement, rolling dice and playing *D&D*.³ Now, *D&D* is more popular than it ever has been.

This history of my conservative Christian experience and the rising popularity of *D&D* marks the trailhead of this quest to understand the Satanic Panic and its relationship to *D&D*. In Chapter 1, we discussed the history of the Satanic Panic and the biggest players in the lobby actions against *D&D*. Within a context of moral panic, critics of the game looked to particular stories about role-playing gamers. Fearful critics of *D&D* portrayed a causal relationship between the deaths of teenage boys like James Dallas Egbert III and Bink Pulling and the nature of the tabletop role-playing game. Mysterious disappearances, violent crimes, and occult elements within the game all contributed to a panicked narrative that associated the tabletop role-playing game with broader fears of

² “Critical Role: The Legend of Vox Machina Animated Special,” Kickstarter, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/criticalrole/critical-role-the-legend-of-vox-machina-animated-s>.

³ Duffer, Matt, Ross Duffer, Winona Ryder, David Harbour, Finn Wolfhard, Millie Bobby Brown, Gaten Matarazzo, et al. 2017. *Stranger things. Season 1 Season 1*.

cultic ritual abuse and satanic powers. Fear surrounding the nature of TSR's fantasy game resulted in political lobbying, popular media publishing, and Christian theologizing. All of these situated themselves against the role-playing game. In Chapter 2, We discussed some possible sociological explanations for the moral panic of the 1970s and 1980s. Relying on a sociological definition of rumor, I argued that reports of Satanic Ritual Abuse contributed to an overarching threat rumor. While there is not medical evidence to support many instances of Satanic Ritual Abuse, these accounts play a role in assuaging the anxieties of the broader public by naming and narrating a specific fear. Using a symbolic interactionist model, I demonstrated that the threat rumor related to *D&D* and the occult emerged in the context of pre-existing anxieties. Many Americans struggled due to the economic recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, the dissolution of the nuclear family created new rifts and anxieties, especially among conservative Christians. The discomfort produced by these pre-existing anxieties led to the dissemination of rumors through popular media. These rumors depicted an ambiguous danger, but their presence operated as a kind of social catharsis, decreasing other anxieties by highlighting a different anxiety.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyzed one particular anti-occult text, *Ravaged by the New Age* by Texe Marrs. I provided an interdisciplinary, holistic approach to understanding the Satanic Panic. I argued that, using Althusser and Eagleton as definitional references, Marrs possesses a particular kind of conservative Christian ideology. His method for identifying and symbolically condemning cultural features, such as *D&D*, emerges within an ideological context. The preceding moral panic and social changes in America clashed

with many elements of conservative Christian ideology, clashing especially with a Christian Reconstructionist ideology. Marrs presents an apocalyptic worldview, one which demands political action and careful Christian cultural engagement in order to resist the powers of evil. His apocalypticism, and the evil powers and spirits present therein, demand a paranoid style. In agreement with other anti-*D&D* authors, Marrs suspects that cultural features that incorporate occult elements belong to a dark plot against Christianity, against children, and against God's Kingdom.

My objective was to discover why conservative parents in 2015 might suspiciously deny a group of geeks the privilege of playing a tabletop role-playing game on a private school campus. In hindsight, my friends and I could have spent our off-periods studying and preparing for our next classes. However, my question lingered. Conservative Christians fear games like *D&D* for several reasons. While moral panics are a product of social behaviors, interpersonal relationships, pre-existing anxieties, and the media, the *D&D* panic relates to many of the core issues of Christianity from the 20th century. Biblical fundamentalism, gender roles, and the role of the family in American society form the cardinal issues which determined conservative Christian response to *D&D* and many other cultural features. Furthermore, perennial theological issues such as eschatology and apocalypticism contributed to conservative Christian imaginings of the Satanic and the powers of evil. The sociological factors enhanced and enlarged this response such that conservative parents in the 2010s might pause at the phrase, "dungeon master."

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