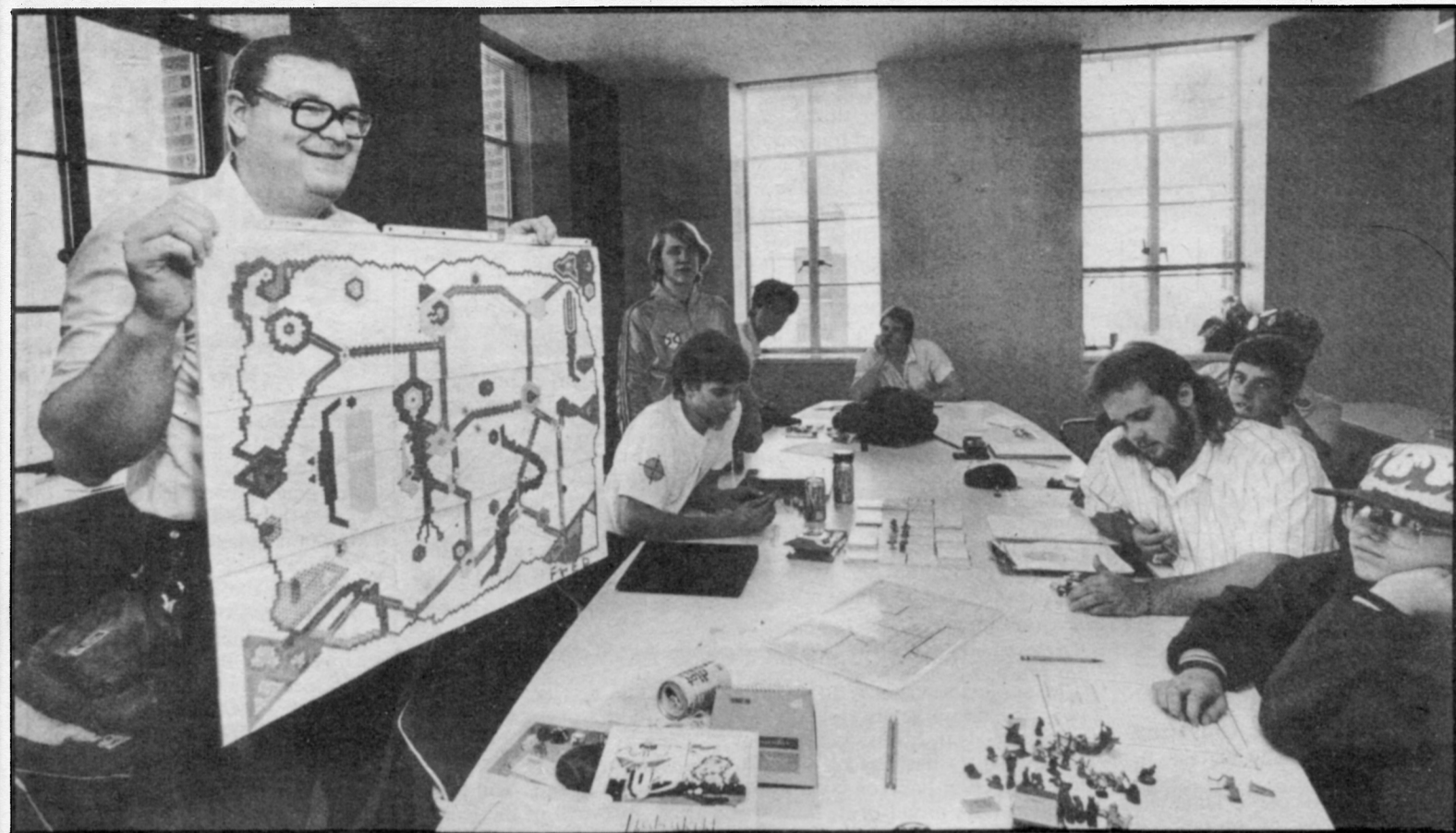


Gamers recreate wars, escape to Fred's World



Photo/John Haselmann

Fred Funk displayed the game setting he invented, "Fred's World," to enthusiastic participants of the U-Con 5 Game Convention held this weekend in Coffman Union. Said Fred of "Fred's World," "If you can conceive it, you can have it."

By **Meg Spilleth**
Staff Writer

There were medieval battles and naval battles, fighting dragons and menacing werewolves. Grown men hunched over tables filled with toys, plotting out the moves of armies or debating the merits of respective dungeons.

It was fantasy, all right, a convention of fantasy for people in various stages of escapism.

U-Con 5, as the gaming convention is known to Twin Cities gamers, took over Coffman Memorial Union during the weekend. Men, primarily, gathered in conference rooms to work their way through mythical landscapes. Most of the warriors, gladiators, dwarves and wizards seemed to be living on Mello Yello and cigarettes.

Coffman's Great Hall was surprisingly quiet for a battleground. Freshman Bart Kersteter hovered over a green felt landscape, maneuvering hordes of miniature soldiers. The French, the Scots-Irish, and the Poles were out "looking for nobles to smash."

It's free-form chess, really, but every move is plotted according to specific charts and rules — clean warfare and historically accurate.

"It's more fun to win with historically accurate tactics," he said. Not that the creative element is altogether smothered by historical re-creation; it is possi-

ble, for example, for a miniature tin Napoleon to conquer a paper-mache Waterloo.

But miniature war-gaming differs from more elaborate role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons. Players remain detached, surveying the battle from the air like generals, safe in their camps far from enemy lines.

"We re-create history rather than slaughtering monsters," said Kersteter.

The organization of such warfare is sheer fantasy. Troops charge by the quarter-inch. Casualties are determined according to a rulebook chart. Even the morale of the troops is determined by a roll of the dice.

Dorene Thornley, the "chair-fool" of the event, became involved in gaming through her husband's interest. There are very few women playing war-games,

and she isn't sure why.

"War's a male thing," she said, and left it at that. For the most part, she said, gamers are mathematicians or computer programmers — analytical types. There are also many historians.

Upstairs, Todd Clasen is leading a mystery role-playing game. His scenario involves a series of murders committed by, apparently, a werewolf. Six other characters are guided by Clasen through a city night in pursuit of the killer.

Clasen is a sophomore, majoring in computer science. His friend Paul Comeau characterizes gamers as a "subgroup of science fiction and fantasy" fans.

"We don't drink, smoke, go out with girls," he said. "Gaming is like becoming a character in a book. You get to be somebody. You can become a superhero."

They spend hours each week gaming, or plotting scenarios for games. Most of them have been at it since the age of 12 or 13.

Everyone was talking about "Fred's World." Talking so enthusiastically that it seemed to be quite real, as though the next train were leaving in a minute or two.

Fred is a real person, a very large and charismatic person, and he carries a world of 10 continents and 400 large cities in his head. It is a most accommodating world, borrowed freely from

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books and movies and whatever Fred thinks up next. "In my world, if you can conceive of it, you can have it," he says.

Fred is Fred Funk, and his experience with role-playing games goes back to its origins. Dungeons and Dragons, the first and most famous fantasy role-playing game, was invented by Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax in 1968 at St. Thomas Academy (now the College of St. Thomas) in St. Paul. Fred was one of the original seven "playtesters" for the prototype of the game.

There isn't much of a living to be made in fantasy gaming, however, so Fred earned a masters degree in criminology at the University in 1972 and has worked in law enforcement while creating "Fred's World."

Although he has printed manuals and maps for "Fred's World," and has a copyright on much of the material, he has no intention of ever publishing it. Too big, and too plagiarized. There are elements of "Star Wars," "The Wizard of Oz," and "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," to name a few.

"My world exists to create fun and make people happy," he said. "Gamers are not crazed idiots with Vegemetics — though some of them are. I let people have fun when they play. If they want to do Monty Python, or wit and

wisdom, or hack and slash, I let them." His philosophy towards proposals and ideas from gamers is TIAFO: try it and find out!

To play in Fred's World, the assembled gamers agree, you have to have imagination, creativity, and a sense of humor. And you have to love big dogs.

Big dogs?
"I had a dog named Gulliver when I was growing up," Fred explained, "half-collie and half-german shepherd. He got run over by a milk truck, so I put him in my world."

The "Boss" of Fred's World is named Ethelbert, and Gulliver is his "big brown furry roo-dog." Gamers in Fred's World want to stay on good terms with Ethelbert, as there is a 267-level dungeon awaiting those who don't like dogs. In addition, gamers are seeking two hidden spaceships that will take them into an intergalactic dimension of Fred's World. There, they will meet "Gullivernians."

"Humanoid german shepherds that are taking up the canine burden of bringing peace to the world," Fred explained.

Even Peter Pan had to grow up, though, and Fred claims to keep one foot securely in the world of taxes, homework and carburetor trouble.

"Reality must always supplant fantasy," he said. "One has to live in the real world." Wherever that may be.