



## **The Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III**

*William C. Dear*

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When William Dear began his search for Dallas Egbert, he had four possibilities in mind: suicide, runaway, kidnapping, and murder. But in the course of his astonishing, grueling investigation of life at MSU--and of a young man's tragic alienation from society--he came to understand that there could be no single explanation for the disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III.

## **The Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III for online ebook**

### **Deborah L. Cutter says**

#### **Love this author!**

Bill Dear has interesting cases that he shares. Well written and keeps you on the edge of your seat to the very end!

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### **Kevin Furr says**

This was quite a gripping page-turner. An old memory popped into my head recently of reading about this case way back, either at the time or shortly afterwards in the early 80s. In my recollection a boy genius named Egbert, who was obsessed with D&D and liked to play in the sewers of Dallas, had disappeared. But I didn't recall any resolution to the mystery. So getting this book, turns out my memory was about 75% right -- the boy's name was James Dallas Egbert, and the private eye on the case was from Dallas; but the kid had disappeared from Michigan State Univ, which he was attending as a 16-year old prodigy; and he liked to play live-action role-playing D&D in the steam and water pipe tunnels under the MSU campus.

This is the story, written by the private investigator called into the case. I won't give any spoilers, but it's a real-life thriller, hard to put down. Incidentally the on-campus steam-tunnel D&D games highlighted by the Egbert case were the basis for a novel and then an early Tom Hanks movie called "Mazes and Monsters", which somehow I never knew existed.

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### **Lisa says**

William Dear relates the story of his search for James Dallas Egbert III, a young genius and avid Dungeons and Dragons player who mysteriously disappeared from the University of Michigan in 1979 in this gripping memoir. Like in any good detective novel, Dear only reveals the clues to his mystery as he came upon them, leaving the reader to form their own hypotheses as they go along. Along the way he also paints the portrait of a very troubled and misunderstood youth for whom one can only feel sympathy. This book was fascinating and it kept me on the edge of my seat as I read about Dear's various adventures, working on the clues in the hopes that I might solve the mystery before he gave me all the answers. My only complaint is that at times the book read too much like a typical detective novel with Dear painting himself as the unlikely hero with all of his "gut hunches" and gadgets. All in all it was a good read, though.

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### **Sallee says**

This book is old, published in 1984, four years after the story came to a sad conclusion. I decided to read the book when I saw it as I come from the same town as that of the young man who disappeared while at Michigan State in East Lansing. James Dallas Egbert, III was a young man of sixteen when he went missing.

His parents from Dayton, Ohio owned a successful business. James was a very gifted child, starting college at age 13. He was a computer whiz, wrote poetry and excelled at his school work. Sadly, his mother constantly pushed him and insisted that things be done her way and his father was unable to stand up for his son. With no supervision at college, he was soon adrift, partaking of drugs some of which he manufactured himself, was involved in the gay community, and very much into actual role playing of the fantasy game, Dungeons and Dragons. It was too much, too fast and initiated a downward spiral. William Dear, a prominent detective from Texas was hired by the Egberts to find him. Mr. Dear and his investigative team did eventually find the Egbert boy and this is his accounting of the search and rescue. Interesting and profoundly heart breaking, this book is one that leaves you with a sense of sadness for a brilliant mind wasted.

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### **Sherry Lynn Wood says**

#### **Disappearance of Dallas.**

What I wish would disappear is all the typos in this book. There are way too many and distracting. I also felt that some of the supposed conversation statements were untrue in their wording. They seemed inauthentic for the person or occasion. Overall a decent read about the tragic story of Dallas Egbert.

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### **Fishface says**

Funny little book -- reads like true crime but nobody got hurt or killed. The investigators come out of the search baffled about what really goes on in the minds of role-playing gamers. Intended as a cautionary tale for parents to prevent their poor widdle children from being destroyed by Dungeons and Dragons, this sold like hotcakes for a short time and then dropped out of sight, leaving a lot of unanswered questions that probably don't even matter.

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### **Andrew says**

Loved this crazy book, an account of a somewhat flamboyant detective who searches for a missing teenage boy genius in the tunnels beneath a university, where the kid was apparently involved in a somewhat seriously advanced version of the then-popular game called Dungeons & Dragons.

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### **Nancy Radcliffe says**

#### **The Dungeon Master**

I CHOSE THIS RATING BECAUSE OF THE INTEREST I HAVE IN  
MENTAL ILLNESS.

THIS IS AN EXCELLENT BOOK.

THIS IS THE SECOND BOOK FROM MR. DEAR THAT I HAVE  
READ.

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## **Matthew says**

Is this a good book? I can't really say that. Is it worth reading? Maybe?! Go on a vanity-project journey into a private detective's ego as he investigates the disappearance of a young college student. Read about the adventures he has following false leads, learning about Dungeons & Dragons, exploring underground steam tunnels, and laying down on the train tracks, and vaguely learn about the darker, sad true story of the disappearance that seems to go mostly untold, and deserves better treatment than this.

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## **Kevin Fitzsimmons says**

I finished this book a few months ago, and have been putting off this review. This book makes me angry. It pains me mentally and emotionally. It is a despicable book, with a cast of despicable people and a child who is being exploited and used by all of them. This is what would happen if Satan wrote David Copperfield.

Anyone who played Dungeons and Dragons as a kid in the 80's would have been, at least parenthetically, familiar with the case of James Dallas Egbert. Notorious hack, Rona Jaffe, glommed onto his story in her own novel Mazes and Monsters, which became a TV movie featuring an unknown actor by the name of Tom Hanks.

Long story short: the popular depiction in the media is that Egbert killed himself because he went berserk playing a live action version of D&D. He became the poster boy for the damaged youth of America who couldn't differentiate reality from fantasy and suffered a dire end because of it.

Dear, is a self aggrandizing dirt bag who decided to write this book to cash in on the tragic situation of a teenage child prodigy who was dealing with a lot of issues: parental pressure, being a child prodigy, drug use, and coming to terms with being gay in the 1970's.

What is most tragic about the way the events in this book are depicted is that this poor kid had absolutely no one to turn to who wasn't either putting pressure on him, getting him stoned, ignoring him, or sexually exploiting him.

Dear adds to the cast of useless characters by wanting to make a buck off of the kid.

What makes this so painful is that there is a story to be told here. Dallas' life is worthy of discussion and being remembered. he lived at the intersections of a society that hated and feared gay people; a society that is distrustful and exploitative towards child prodigies; and, the need for self destruction that has taken so many young people from us.

I hope one day someone writes that book.

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### **Bill reilly says**

James Dallas Egbert disappeared from the campus of Michigan State University in August of 1979. William Dear, a private investigator was hired to find him and he is the author. The first clue was Dallas's membership in a gay council. A 16 year-old child prodigy, the boy was a computer genius and had an obsession with the game Dungeons and Dragons. He played a real life version of the game in tunnels under the campus. Dear and his fellow investigators discovered the fact that Egbert would lie down on railroad tracks and "trestle;" that is remain on the tracks while a train passed over him. They found nothing at the tracks. In an attempt to get into Egbert's mind, Dear played a game of D & D with a couple of students. It is a Tolkein like world of wizards, orcs, and dragons of which I know nothing about, and after a few pages, my head was spinning. Dear returned to the real world and discovered through several interviews the fact that many students played D & D in the tunnels. MSU played dumb, and so Dear headed underground and into the abyss. He quickly realized that he could only cover a small portion of the tunnels 8.5 miles. After finally receiving permission from MSU, Dear and eleven other men went into the maze of pipes and 130 degree heat. Rats thrived in the squalid atmosphere. Three days and nothing is found. More rumors of Dallas's homosexuality and drug use. Dear was stumped and turned to an expert on D & D for advice on Egbert's mind set. He also filtered through hundreds of calls from people claiming to have valuable information. The most bizarre was from a man telling Dear to leave town and wait for a call which would solve the case. After a few more twists and turns, the PI receives a shocking phone call. The final thirty pages will not restore your faith in humanity. Dear is a decent writer, but he has an over sized ego which is extremely annoying. He is Sherlock Holmes, Columbo, and James Bond. The man is a composite of all the great crime solvers. Get a life, gumshoe. Get me the real scoop on the JFK assassination. That would impress me. The Dungeon Master is only a passable read.

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### **Jordan says**

A great window into the beginnings of the Satanic Panic. William Dear, while definitely quite a bit self-aggrandizing, is surprisingly non-judgmental. By now we all know how the story ends, though the book does a good job of investing the tale with tension nonetheless.

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### **Marsmannix says**

did not hold my interest

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### **Joe Noir says**

More than a true crime book, this is a true whodunit. A real life mystery, investigated by a real private detective. William Dear wrote this book (no co-author is listed) about his experiences in 1979 trying to find a troubled 16 year old genius missing from his dormitory at Michigan State University. William Dear is a hugely successful private investigator based in Dallas, whose success allows him to hire several operatives. He is an airplane owner who still can charter Lear jets as necessary. The man who wears three-piece Pierre Cardin suits and eel skin boots. He is also one of the very best private investigators in the nation.

James Dallas Egbert III, a gay 16 year old Dungeons and Dragons fanatic, was enough of a genius to get into Michigan State at his age, who found himself outside of every group he wanted to join. He was, to paraphrase an Outlaws song, “lonesome, and lonely, and far from his home”. Things weren’t great at home, either. His mother allegedly pressured him in many ways. On August 15, 1979, he left the cafeteria of his dorm and vanished. Odd clues had been left behind by Dallas...or someone else. His parents hired William Dear.

As part of the investigation, Mr. Dear recorded every conversation it was possible to record. These recordings are transcribed in detail in the text. This provides verisimilitude, but reads like just what they are: long transcripts. Since Dallas was a Dungeons and Dragons player, and clues suggested the game figured in his disappearance, Mr. Dear contacts a dungeon master and plays a complete game of D & D. The game is recorded in detail, and replayed step by step and move by move. This reads like just what it is: a long transcript of a D & D game. Remember, however, that in 1979 D & D was nowhere as huge as it would eventually become, and most readers were probably unfamiliar with the role playing game.

In fact, the first half of the book could use a nice tight edit. Then something really cool happens: at page 195 in the first Ballantine Books edition (November 1985) the suspense begins to build. The investigators search eight miles of eerie steam tunnels under the university campus. More clues are found. Earlier, a woman in a red Chevy Vega is seen “stalking” Mr. Dear. Now, threatening calls are received from an anonymous voice who demands Dear and his investigators leave the state of Michigan and then they will be told where to find Dallas. Suspense mounts and more people become involved: a gay P.I. from New York arrives to assist, as does a nineteen year old D & D expert from California. Everything rushes headlong toward an almost bizarre climax in an unexpected locale. And the book’s still not done, for there’s a nasty sting in its tail.

This case received nationwide press back in the day, and I was vaguely aware of it. Only now I picked up this book and read it for the first time. Nothing was spoiled by my fuzzy memory. I can’t say I loved this book, can’t give it four stars, but I can tell you the final 138 pages are sometimes excruciatingly suspenseful and ran me through a gamut of emotions. I say that’s pretty cool.

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## Mike says

Fascinating. The back cover has what I believe is the only photo of someone who (1) describes a session of Dungeons & Dragons in painful detail and (2) is posing with a tommy gun. That pretty much sums up this oddball book.

(If you haven’t heard about the incident, Dallas Egbert was a 16 year old college student whose disappearance inspired the book and movie “Mazes and monsters” wherein a D&D player loses himself so entirely in the game he believes it is real). In reality Dallas also had serious problems with depression, drugs, social isolation, and so on. He did commit suicide shortly after being found.

On the one hand the author is actually very sincere and not sensationalistic about the role of games in Dallas’s disappearance, and rather quickly dismissed the idea that he was playing D&D when he disappeared, but the media loved the theory and kept it alive for years.

Anyway his account of finding a DM to run a game for him so he could understand the game, and the D&D session in a hotel room that followed, is simultaneously creepy, hilarious, and objective. The author actually

admits finding the game quite gripping.

Dallas' story on the other hand is very tragic, and you can't help but feel terrible for the boy who clearly was very imaginative and intelligent but unable to find even one friend.

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