

BioE 24: Playing Well with Others

developing teamwork skills through Role Playing Games

Course Format: 1 hour of discussion per week (1 unit, P/NP, synchronous remote, not recorded)

Instructor: Terry Johnson, 418 HMMB

Office hours: by appointment

You may access the syllabus as a document using [this link](#).



Image by [Raul Figtree](#)

“If we were always to judge from reality, games would be nonsense; but if games were nonsense, what else would there be left to do?” - Leo Tolstoy

Role-Playing Games (RPGs) are collaborative storytelling tools wherein a Game Master (GM, sometimes DM for ‘Dungeon Master’) designs and performs the world, while Players take on the role of a character interacting with that world. The story is told through a combination of GM agency, Player agency, and random numbers (typically generated using RPG dice) that determine the outcome of an intended

action according to an established set of rules. There are RPGs that operate on different models, too, but the above is most typical.

RPGs are a great way to learn how to lead and participate in a team, to flex your creative muscles, or simply to set aside the week's homework for an afternoon in favor of something exciting and different. This class is designed for folks who are interested in RPGs, but *does not assume that you have experience with either GMing or playing.*

To get a passing grade in this class:

- Be absent no more than **twice**
- Be prepared to participate regularly in class with kindness and respect for your fellow classmates
- Participate in a one-shot RPG (as a GM or as a player)
- Regarding that one-shot, be prepared to discuss (individually, or as a group) on:
 - A decision that you made that you're proud of, or that you'd reconsider
 - Something someone else at the table did that you appreciated or found awesome
 - A lesson about working with others that you took away from the table

When Last We Left Our Heroes

01/20 - Introductions and ground rules



Image by [Elaine Tipping](#)

The answer to the question is always **no**, unless your fun is predicated on withholding fun from others, or otherwise being unkind.

Watch before class:

- [Stephen Colbert's D&D Adventure with Matthew Mercer](#)

Read before class:

- [Owlbears, Rust Monsters and Bulettes, Oh My!](#)
- [The Definition of Play Gives Insights](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- Why did you sign up for this seminar?
- What games do you find engaging and satisfying? Why?

Role for Initiative

1/27 - Why do we play?



Image by [Guillaume Bonnet](#)

Watch before class:

- [Different Kinds of Players, Running the Game #11](#)
 - The Power Player
 - The Butt-Kicker
 - The Tactician
 - The Specialist
 - The Method Actor
 - The Wangrod
 - The Storyteller
 - The Casual Player
 - The Mad Scientist
- [The Wangrod Defense](#)

Extras:

- [Reckless Endungeonment](#)
- [Bartle Taxonomy of Player Types](#)
- [Player Typologies, from Wargames to Role-Playing Games](#)
- [Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition basic rules, Part 1: Making a Character](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- Why do *you* play?
- What kind(s) of player are you? Characterize yourself according to the types presented in Running the Game #11. (For reference, I'm about 1/3rd tactician and 2/3rds storyteller.)

2/3 - Why rules, and what rules? / In-class demos



Watch before class:

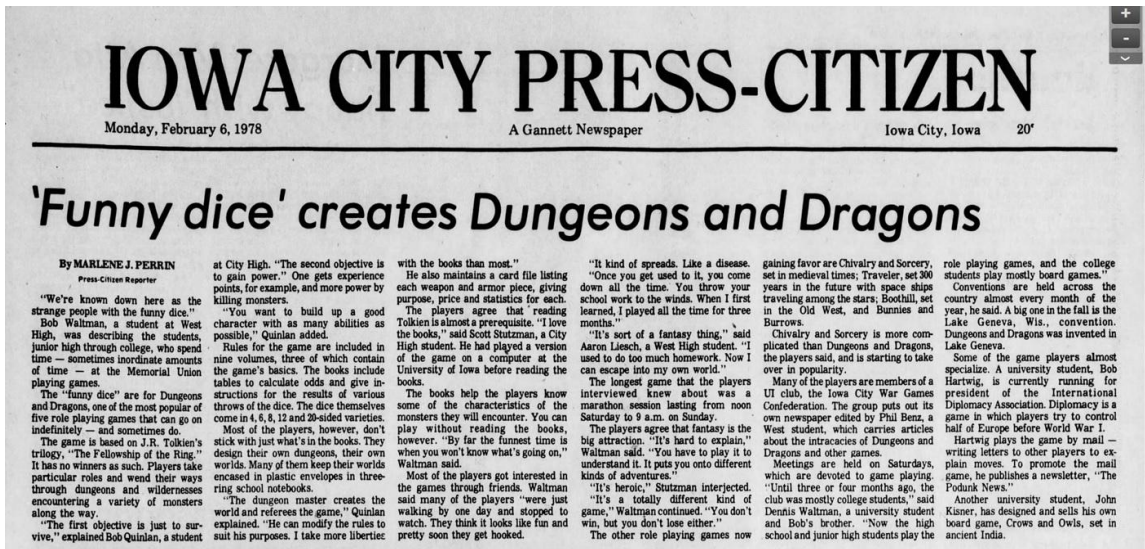
- [Handbooker Helper: Combat Actions](#)

Read before class:

- [Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition basic rules, Part 2: Playing the Game](#)

Extras:

- [How Gaming got its Dice](#)
- [Diceless Role-playing Games](#)
- [The Origin of Rule Zero](#)



Come prepared to discuss:

- What (if anything) confuses you about D&D 5E's rules?
- Why use rules? What problems do they solve? What problems do they cause?
- Why use dice? What problems do they solve? What problems do they cause?

Top of the Round

2/10 - Setting the table / In-class character creation

SADNESS REPRIEVE FIG. E.



MIGHTY WARRIOR DISCOVERS ADVENTURES THAT DON'T REQUIRE HIS BLADE

tragedyseries.tumblr.com • benjamin dewey 2013

Read before class:

- [Onboarding/Session Zero document](#) (this is the one I use, as an example)

Watch before class:

- [Forget the pecking order at work](#)

Do before class:

- Create your own D&D 5E character
 - Make an account on <https://www.dndbeyond.com>
 - I'll send out a link that you can use to join this course's campaign, which will give you access to all of the classes and options (**courtesy of D&D Beyond!**)
 - Use *Standard Array* for stats
 - Choose a single class at 3rd level
 - For equipment, choose "Equipment" or "Gold" (your choice). If the latter, go fantasy shopping for any [basic items](#) with that gold.
 - Don't add any magical items! Those are for your GM to grant.

Extras:

- [Adventuring Academy: Playing in a Safe Space](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- Would you like to GM a one-shot, or play in one?
- What would you include in your session zero (or session zero document)?

- What would your ideal game (as GM or as a player) look or feel like? Comparisons to other games, fiction, movies, etc. are fine.

2/17 - Backstory / In-class demos



Images by [Sam Key](#), Dong Cheng, and Joseph Meehan

Read before class:

- [Xanathar's Guide - This is your life](#)

Extras:

- [100 questions to ask about your roleplaying character](#)
- [Western Gunfight \(1970\): the First RPG?](#)
- [Immersion and Role Playing in the 1970s](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- Your backstory for the character you've built in D&D Beyond
 - Use the character background that you've chosen as a starting point
 - Choose one thing that they are good at, and one thing that they are bad at
 - Be ready to name three of their most important relationships (with other PCs, NPCs, deities, concepts, nations, etc.) and what they are based upon (love, hate, fear, rivalry, beauty, etc.)

2/24 - Failing / In-class demos



Image by zetrystan

Read before class:

- [Making Failure Awesome](#) in the Fate system (which rewards experience points for meeting narrative goals and for *failing* rolls)
- [GUMSHOE 101: for players](#) (designed for investigative games, to *guarantee* that the players uncover clues necessary to move the story forward)
- [Honey Heist](#) (which requires a balance of success and failure to keep a character in the game)

Extras:

- [Catastrophic Failure, Running the Game #32](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- What are a few of your favorite examples of making failure awesome from fiction? (Movies, books, etc.)

- Terry's favorite example: [Han Solo rolls a Natural 1 on a Deception check](#), and it's *so much fun*

Bonus Actions

3/3 - In-class demos / Group formation / Session zeros

Come prepared to discuss:

- Are you interested in GMing a game?
 - If so, be prepared to give a 90-second pitch for the game that gives potential players an idea of what they're in for
 - Also come prepared to run a session zero for your game
- What kind of game do you want to be a player in?

3/10 - The Haunting of Benthem Manor

Read before class:

- [Relics and Rarities: The Haunting of Benthem Manor](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- One choice that the GM or a player made that you particularly liked
- One question you have about a choice that the GM made
- One question you have about a choice that a player made

PCs:

- Annabella (human bard)
- Beryl (half-orc barbarian)
- Rikki (gnome druid)
- Veros (human fighter)
- Alistair (dragonborn sorcerer)

NPCs:

- Professor Roundland
- Mr. and Mrs. Powell (caretakers of the Manor)
- Sarah Benthem (current owner of the Manor, possessed)
- Dr. Mary Kennewick (Sarah's spouse)

The Manor was originally built by Morgwen Benthem for his wife, Eleanor. Their daughter Katherine died in a fire. Morgwen's nephew Simon Benthem inherited the manor, living there with his second wife Lucy and their twin children, Gwenneth and Luke. Gwenneth died mysteriously in her sleep, then Luke passed on in the morning.

Simon then sold the Manor to his cousin Sarah.

3/17 - The Beginning Begins

Read before class:

- [Fantasy High: The Beginning Begins](#)

Come prepared to discuss:

- One choice that the GM or a player made that you particularly liked
- One question you have about a choice that the GM made
- One question you have about a choice that a player made

PCs:

- Figuroth "Fig" Faeth (tiefling bard)
- Gorgug Thistlespring (half-orc barbarian)
- Adaine Abernant (elven wizard)
- Fabian Aramaris Seacaster (half-elf fighter)
- Kristen Applebees (human cleric)
- Riz Gukgak (goblin rogue)

3/24 - no class session (Spring Break)

Trigger a Reaction

3/31 - Village of Havock part 1

4/7 - Village of Havock part 2

4/14 - Village of Havock part 3

4/21 - Last class meeting / evaluations / lessons learned

Glossary

DM (Dungeon Master). The person who runs the world in which the game happens, and adjudicates decisions regarding the rules. Also known as the *GM*, or *Game Master*.

GM (Game Master). The person who runs the world in which the game happens, and adjudicates decisions regarding the rules. Also known as the *DM*, or *Dungeon Master*.

NPC (Non-Player Character). Friends, enemies, and “extras” that are controlled by the Dungeon (or Game) Master.

PC (Player Character). The character that the player controls.

RPG (Role Playing Game). A game in which, to some extent, the players inhabit a role distinct from themselves within the context of the game.

(X)d(Y). An indication that the player should roll X dice of type Y. For example, “5d6” is shorthand for “roll a total of 5 six-sided dice, and sum them”.