

CHID496E:

# Paper and Dice 101

## Tabletop Gaming as Storytelling, Storyplaying

FAMOUS AND INFAMOUS, *Dungeons & Dragons* was first published by TSR Hobbies, Inc. in 1974. By 1979 *Fortune* magazine named *Dungeons & Dragons* the hottest game in the US, and since then, hundreds of different role-playing games (RPGs) have followed spanning genres, systems and mechanics, histories, cultures, and technologies. However, common to most, if not all, tabletop or pen-and-paper (and some computer) RPGs is a desire for storytelling, for playing out a story, what Gary Alan Fine calls “shared fantasy.” In other words, it can be argued that RPGs are what Walter Ong calls “secondary orality,” a kind of oral tradition where characters and their adventures are rarely written down yet are collectively produced, remembered, recalled, and often retold. It is this orality, this storytelling and storyplaying that makes gaming more than a misanthropes escape. Right about the same time that D&D was coming to the fore, Ursula K. Le Guin wrote “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?” and argued, “For fantasy is true, of course. It isn’t factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom.” What then is the critical significance of RPGs? How do we analyze and understand gaming? Why is “shared fantasy” important or vital or useful?

“If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities.”  
—Maya Angelou

CHID 496  
Section E  
Tuesday  
2:00-3:50 PM  
PAR 305  
Autumn 2008  
Ed Chang  
University of  
Washington



“First sentences are doors to worlds.”  
—Ursula K. Le Guin

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”  
—Albert Einstein

“I was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in and there was no human condition that you were stopped from examining.”  
—Octavia Butler

OUR FOCUS GROUP, as part of a continuing series generated by the Critical Gaming Project at UW, will attempt to broadly historicize and contextualize tabletop gaming in the US and will focus on the critical question of why gaming and fantasy is of cultural value. Central to the focus group will be actual game play, from basic mechanics to character creation to role-playing to adventuring. The course will meet once a week for 2 hours to engage in play, guided discussion and observation, reflective writing, and a handful of critical readings.

### Requirements & Grading

Although CHID 496 is for credit/no credit and no numeric grade will be reported, for the purposes for the class, you will still need to earn a minimum of a 2.0 to receive credit for the course. With that in mind, passing with credit will be a reflection of engagement, effort, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

### Critical Blog/Vlog Entries (50%)

The majority of the writing you will do for this class is in the form of weekly short, critical, analytical response entries to the class blog: <[http://depts.washington.edu/critgame/forum\\_index.html](http://depts.washington.edu/critgame/forum_index.html)>. These single-spaced, 500-760 word writings serve as reactions to, close readings of, and analyses of the texts, games, play, and the connections you see, read, and



### Required Course Texts & Materials

- CHID 496E Course Reader & *Tellings* Abridged Edition (available at Ave Copy, 4141 Univ. Way NE @ 42nd)
- Edmond Y. Chang, *Tellings* role-playing game rulebook (excerpt)
- Some readings are also available via e-reserve.
- Web access and an active UW email account



## Course Requirements

- Critical Blog/  
Vlog Entries  
(50%)
- RPG Annotated  
Bibliography  
(20%)
- Class Participation  
(30%)

“When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than any talent for abstract, positive thinking.”  
—Albert Einstein

“When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls. What is to happen next will take place within the four walls of the story. And this is possible because the story’s voice makes everything its own.”  
—John Berger

talk about in class. These “journal entries” are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be graded on clarity, coherence, critique, and how well you concisely formulate arguments. Response entries are due weekly; some may take the form of video blog or “vlog” entries. You will do a minimum of 6 entries. See the critical blog/vlog prompt for more details.

### RPG Annotated Bibliography (20%)

By the end of the quarter, you will be responsible for putting together an academic, annotated bibliography on a research question of your choosing—such as role-playing game studies, gaming history, critical approaches to RPGs and game theory, gaming and technology, RPGs and culture, gamers and fandom, and so on. You will develop a critical research topic and develop a bibliography of at least ten useful, relevant, and timely sources, which you will annotate and share with the class. See the annotated bibliography prompt for more details.

### Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Again, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class, 4) your **engagement** in group work and play, 5) your use of the class blog, 6) and your interactions with me and other students. Finally, failure to turn in homework, incomplete assignments, or late papers will negatively impact your participation grade.

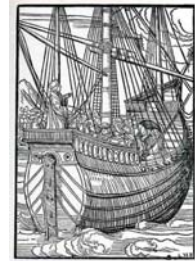
### Attendance

**Attendance is strongly recommended.** If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to play and participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. It is in your best interests to come to class. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. Therefore, it is particularly important for you to arrive on time, especially for a fifty-minute class. If you come in after I start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and I will mark you as such.

Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your class participation grade. If you know you are going to miss class, please let me know ahead of time (via email), provide any pertinent documentation, and we will make any necessary arrangements. And when you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes and see me in order to make up missed work in a timely manner. If you miss a great deal of the quarter, you are recommended strongly to take the course during a quarter in which you can more easily attend class.

### Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. Word processing is preferable because it makes the mechanics of revision—rearranging, adding, and deleting—easy. If you do not have your own computer with word processing capability, computer labs are available on campus with a variety of software that is easy to learn. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format.



“Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without ever noticing it, live your way into the answer.”  
—Rainer Maria Rilke

“I don’t pretend we have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about.”  
—Arthur C. Clarke

“Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable.”  
—Carl Jung

## MLA Paper Formatting

- 1) 1" margins top, bottom, left, and right on each page.
- 2) Double-spaced block header with your name, date, course, my name.
- 3) Appropriate title.
- 4) Standard Times Roman Font, 12 point only.
- 5) Correct MLA citation and bibliographic format.
- 6) Bibliography if necessary.

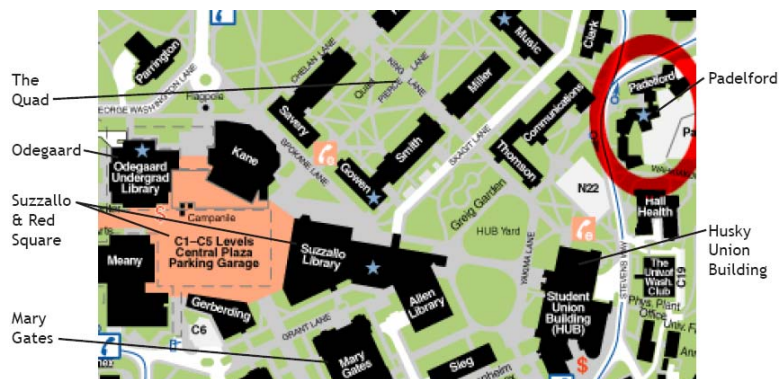
## Late Assignments

All assignments must be done completely and turned in on time. Lateness will subtract from your assignment's final grade and work must be turned in by the next class meeting after the original due date. Note that I will not comment on late work. However, you still need to complete late work or you will receive a zero. If you miss class on the due date of a paper, you must notify me and make arrangements to get the paper to me as soon as possible. **Unless previously arranged, I do not accept assignments via email.** Furthermore, all work must be seen and checked by me to be eligible for your final project! Remember that a paper has not been officially handed in until it is in my hands. Never turning anything in late is always the best policy.

Microsoft Word format, preferably in Word 97-2003 format; if you do not have access to Word, then save your documents in RTF or Rich Text Format. **Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in** (e.g. on disk, flash drive, by email). All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. **All papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions.** All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format.

## Finding Help

I am available during office hours and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see early in the quarter even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located in the ground floor of Padelford Hall (northeast of the HUB), Room B-33:



I am also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting me. I will do my best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually **within twenty-four hours**. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the Undergraduate English office in A-2H&G Padelford. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via AOL Instant Messenger (**AIM nickname: EDagogy**); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation for the first time, please identify yourself to me; also, be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

## Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing – as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions about these matters at any time. Plagiarism includes:

- a student failing to cite sources of ideas
- a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
- a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
- a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. It is always better to be safe than sorry. As a matter of



## Contact Ed

Office:  
B33 Padelford  
Office Hours:  
TuTh 10:30-11:20 AM  
E-mail:  
[changed@u.washington.edu](mailto:changed@u.washington.edu)  
AIM:  
EDagogy



“We live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion. The great task in life is to find reality.”  
—Iris Murdoch

please talk to me. It is always better to be safe than sorry. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review. For further information, please refer to UW’s Student Conduct Code at <<http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>>. **Play it smart, don’t plagiarize!**

## Accommodations

If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please see me immediately. I will gladly do my best to provide appropriate accommodation you require. If you have a disability and have not yet registered it with Disability Resources for Students in 448 Schmitz Hall, you should do so immediately. Please contact DRS at 206-543-8924 (Voice) or 206-543-8925 (V/TTY) or 206-616-8379 (FAX) or via their website at <<http://www.washington.edu/admin/ada/dss.htm>>.

“I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it’s a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope and that enables you to laugh at life’s realities.”

—Dr. Seuss

## syl-la-bus: *n* 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements 2: subject to change

Chang / CHID 496 E / Autumn Quarter 2008-09 / University of Washington

**Week 1: September 24-26**  
No Class

**Week 2: September 29-October 3**  
Introductions, Course Terminology, *Talisman*

**Week 3: October 6-10**  
Readings, Introduction to *Tellings*, Character Creation

**Week 4: October 13-17**  
Group One Play

**Week 5: October 20-24**  
Group Two Play

**Week 6: October 27-31**  
Group One Play

**Week 7: November 3-7**  
Group Two Play

**Week 8: November 10-14**  
Group One Play

**Week 9: November 17-21**  
Group Two Play

**Week 10: November 24-28**  
Group One Play

**Week 11: December 1-5**  
Group Two Play

**Week 12:**  
12/8 - Finals Begin, Wrap-Up

**Week 13:**  
12/15 - Grades Due

Wed 9/24  
First Day of Classes

September 2008						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

November 2008						
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

October 2008						
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19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Tue 11/11  
Veteran’s Day  
Holiday

Thur & Fri  
11/27-11/28  
Thanksgiving Holiday

December 2008						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
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