



CHID 496
Section D
Thursday
2:30-4:20 PM
MGH 254
Spring 2011
Ed Chang
University of
Washington



"Games give you a chance to excel, and if you're playing in good company you don't even mind if you lose because you had the enjoyment of the company during the course of the game."
—Gary Gygax

"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

IN AUGUST 1979, James Dallas Egbert III disappeared from Michigan State University. His disappearance, his characterization as a science fiction and fantasy fan and player of Dungeons & Dragons, and the subsequent investigation by Texas private investigator William C. Dear spawned newspaper speculations, made-for-TV movies, and urban legends of university students playing live-action role-playing games in the steam tunnels of their school—they became cautionary tales often ending in tragedy, loss, or death. It is this sensationalist and paranoid attitude toward fantasy and science fiction, toward role-playing games like *D&D*, especially toward live-action RPGs that this focus group will take up and analyze as problematic. Though the Egbert case eventually revealed no causal connection between his disappearance, attempted suicide, and *D&D*, prejudice and the demonization of fantasy and RPGs became firmly fixed as a cultural logic about the real, the normal, the acceptable, and the responsible.

IN RESPONSE, Ursula K. Le Guin's 1979 essay "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" 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 are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom." How might we understand live-action RPGs or LARPs as more than just a misanthrope's escape? What are the possibilities of LARPs?

OUR FOCUS GROUP, as part of a continuing series on RPGs generated by the Critical Gaming Project at UW, will attempt to broadly historicize and contextualize live-action role-playing games in the US and will focus on the critical question of why this particular kind of gaming and fantasy is of cultural value. We will look at the cultural treatment of gaming, including news and apocryphal tales, documentary films like *Darkon* (2006) and *Monster Camp* (2007), and scholarship. Most importantly, the focus group will engage in actual live-action 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 guided discussion and observation, reflective writing, and play.

THE GAME SYSTEM we will play is *Archaea*, an independent, high-fantasy live-action role-playing and wargaming system by Edmond Y. Chang.

Requirements & Grading

What is a focus group? Focus groups provide a unique opportunity for undergraduate students to design and lead a class. Focus groups allow students with common interests to create a space to discuss topics which may not be covered elsewhere in the UW undergraduate curricula. As with all CHID courses, all students participating in focus groups are expected to engage topics critically, respectfully, and from varying perspectives. What

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



Required Course Texts & Materials

- CHID 496 D course readings are available via e-reserve
- Chang, Edmond. *Archaea Live-Action Role-Playing and Wargaming* rulebook.
- Web access and an active UW email account



Course Requirements

Play Log (50%)
Class Participation (50%)

“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

are they not? Focus groups are not spaces for students to promote one particular point of view. While students can take on one idea or concept, this topic should be explored from multiple vantage points. Focus groups should not depart from CHID’s guiding philosophy that “the questions are the content.” Focus groups are about critical scrutiny, not about ideological imposition. This class is graded on a credit/no credit basis. All assignments must be satisfactorily completed, and you may not have more than two unexcused absences in order to get credit for this class.

Play Log, or, Plogs (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: <<https://catalyst.uw.edu/gopost/board/changed/20934/>>. These single-spaced, 250-500 word writings serve as reactions to, close readings of, and analyses of the readings, films, game, play, and the connections you see, read, and talk about in class. These “journal entries” are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be evaluated on clarity, coherence, critique, and how well you concisely formulate analyses and arguments. Response entries are due weekly; see the “plog” prompt for more details.

Participation and Preparedness (50%)

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 contribution to the course blog: <https://catalyst.uw.edu/gopost/board/changed/20934/>
6. and your interactions with us 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. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class we may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and we will mark you as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your credit for the class. If you know you are going to miss class, please let us know ahead of time (via email), if you can, 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.



“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



Finding Help

Contact Ed

Office:
B33 Padelford
Office Hours:
Th 10:30 AM to
12 PM or by appt.
E-mail:
changed@uw.edu
AIM or Google Talk:
EDagogy

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. See map below.

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 or Google Talk (**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 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!**



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

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

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."
—Albert Einstein

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>>.

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

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Week 1: March 28-April 1

Welcome & Introduction to the Course
Monster Camp (2007 film, 81 mins.)
Le Guin, "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?"
Vanek, "Cooler Than You Think"
Various news reports about James Dallas Egbert III

Week 2: April 4-8

Darkon (2006 film, 93 mins.)
LARP @ Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LARP>
Archaea Rulebook, Ch. 1-2
Fannon, *Fantasy Role-Playing Gamer's Bible* (ch. 10-11)

Week 3: April 11-15

Introduction to *Archaea*, Character Creation
Archaea Rulebook, Ch. 2-4, 7
Gygax, *Role-Playing Mastery* (ch. 1-4)

Week 4: April 18-22

Play *Archaea*
Archaea Rulebook, Ch. 5-6
Peruse "Gender & Live-Action Role-Play" website:
<http://cerise.theirisnetwork.org/archives/category/articles/gender-live-action-role-play>

Week 5: April 25-29

Play *Archaea*

Week 6: May 2-6

Play *Archaea*

Week 7: May 9-13

Play *Archaea*

Week 8: May 16-20

Play *Archaea*

Week 9: May 23-27

Play *Archaea*

Week 10: May 30-June 3

Play *Archaea*

Week 11:

3/6 - Finals Begin, Final Plog Due

Mon 3/28
First Day of Classes

March						
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	31		

Play Logs, or, Plogs
are due weekly,
preferably by the
start of the next
week.

April						
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

May						
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	31				

Mon 5/31
Memorial Day
Holiday

June						
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	

