

## Introduction:

Back in 1974 the very first edition of the fantasy tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) *Dungeons and Dragons* was published by Gary Gygax. It was derived from the typical wargames of the time, where instead of being a commander of an army you played as a single character. You play with generally 2 to 6 people, I think 4 is a good number, a sheet for the information of you character, maybe a book for rules of the game, and dice to add some luck to the story. One person is the Dungeon Master, or Game Master who builds the world and plays as the non-playable characters and the monsters, and the rest are players that create characters to live and survive in the world built for them. Since its first publication *Dungeons and Dragons* has been recreated many different times, the current version and the one I play is the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. It is currently Owned by Wizards of the Coast which is a company that is also known for making other games like *Magic the Gathering* and *Pokémon Cards*. Because of its success it has influenced many video games specifically ones in the role-playing game genre (RPG).

Back before I left home for college I was in a *Dungeons and Dragons* Group called *The Embers of Valor*. This was a special type of campaign, which is what a game of *Dungeons and Dragons* is called because of the war games it was based on, called a west marches after the most famous game in this style named *West Marches*. Instead of being like most games where it is one group of players going on an epic adventure and working as a team, this is a bunch of solo players who can band together to go on quests, but just as much go alone. I was the first person my Dungeon Master brought this up to, and eventually I was the first player to set foot into Zadius's domain.

This group, the Embers of Valor, is a great representation of a discourse community which as described in Dan Melzer's article *Understanding Discourse Community* is a term to describe a group of "people who share the same goals" (Melzer, p. 102). However, there is more to a

discourse community than just that. The group of students in your freshman humanities class, while all want to pass the class, would probably not qualify for a discourse community. As Melzers explains in his article on page 102, there are 6 features that makes a community become a discourse community. Those being:

- Common goals shared by the group.
- Mechanisms of communication.
- Use of these mechanisms to relay information.
- Genres that help work towards the goal.
- Specialized language(lexis).
- A specific number of expert members.

The Embers of Valor checks each of the following features making it a very solid example of a Discourse community.

**Common Goals shared by the group:**

My Dungeon Master is currently a senior at a high school close to where I lived before I left for college. He, and a lot of my other friends, is a very talented member of the theatre, resulting in a lot of people he talks to being similarly theater kids. As a result most of the people in the Embers of Valor are theater kids. We all of course want to have a fun time and play Dungeons and Dragons, however another layer to this is that we all want to tell a good story, being this common goal that we share. Interestingly some of the best sessions of the game that I have played don't involve combat, it is playing as these characters interacting with other characters played by my talented friends.

One of the references I have attached is 2 sections of a recording of me playing a session with my Dungeon Master. I play as Rygan the son of a noble house called Tanrid and the knight of a crumbling town known as Techtumbra, where players sign to join a group called the Embers of Valor, hence the name of the campaign. I am protecting a group of loggers trying to cut a road to the trade tower about 4 leagues north of Techtumbra. The larger goal for Rygan in this recording is to give field experience to two non playable characters Tangen and Brawnnet. If you haven't watched it yet there is a slight spoiler where while fighting a monster, Brawnnet is killed when he was standing too close to the construct when it casts Spiritual Guardians. This was a very sad moment and while this was a character that both me and the Dungeon Master loved, the most logical thing for the monster to do was to cast this spell and as a result Brawnnet had to die.

When playing this game to create a beautiful story there must be sacrifices. My Dungeon Master is very clear that when playing this game that if it is the correct thing for the story, even your character you are playing can be killed. That however isn't the only thing we sacrifice for the love of the story and the game. Some characters have storylines that are secret from the other players, Rygan being one of them. As a result to drive the story I have been kicked out of the room where we were playing in for 30-45 minutes while another player is doing secret game play that Rygan wouldn't know about, and those players do the same for me to keep the integrity of the world. Making it so much sweeter when a player finally reveals what they have been hiding.

### **Mechanisms of communication and Use of these mechanisms to relay information:**

The two of these discourse Community qualities I feel work hand in hand and so for this essay I felt I should tie them together. Both of course are important on their own but again this essay flows nicer if I explain the Mechanism and after explain what information we exchange using it.

We have a discord for players who are in the Embers of Valor. It has many different Channels for communication from an out of character general chat to a session scheduling chat, to a voice channel for online play. The video I have in the archive was of us playing in this discord channel. Of course, there are other forms of communication like just texting the players you want to play with or the Dungeon Master if you want to plan a session or make a new character, but for the most part if you need to communicate with the community you should go to the discord.

One of the really cool and unique ways we give out information instead of just telling our friends the cool things we do, we will either bring it up in character or we can write articles for the chronicle. The chronicle in game is this huge old book that was used by the previous Embers of Valor members to write stories of their adventures. While those old stories were lost, players can, in character, write essays about their own adventures, give tips for questing and surviving, and whatever other things your character might want to put into there to help and inform other characters of what is going on in the world.

The other file in the archive is a word document of Rygans first entry into the chronicles. This article is of Rygan stepping into this old, abandoned town with the group of merchants on their way to Techtumbra, protected by Rygan before he is knight of it. You can of course read it if you would like, but an important detail was that he had failed to protect the merchants on a previous night, and their numbers dropped from 7 to now 4. Articles like this are sent into the discord for other players to read. My DM even wanted to set up a competition where chronicle entries could be voted on and the person to get the most votes at the end of the week would get extra experience points or something along that line.

**Genres that help work towards the goal:**

A genre in music would be like rock or pop; in movies you have action or horror. These are all categories for these respected forms of entertainment. You can have genres in literature too, as Jacobson, Pawlowski, and Tardy detail in their article *Make Your “Move”: Writing in Genres* “genres can be thought of as categories of writing” (Jacobson, Pawlowski, and Tardy, p. 217).

Genres used in the Embers of Valor come in many different forms. You can of course find Dungeons and Dragons information in books or on DnDBeyond or other online resources. But if you want information on specific elements of the world we play in there are two main places to look. As stated earlier the chronicle entries are important to get the story elements of the other players and first hand records of events that happen around you. Another form of this is the map that one of the other players whose character’s name is Mangiel Giionu. Mangiel is a survivalist who is also an assassin, he has been mapping out the world around Techtumbra from the trade tower to the north, to the swamp in the west. Even though these wouldn’t be considered any form of professional essay they are as Jacobson explains types of literature and there for genres.

However, an arguably more important genre you can find also in the discord is the homebrew documents. The game we play isn’t exactly as Wizards of the Coast or Gary Gygax intended, sense of course this is not a video game you can easily change mechanics or add features to the game as you please which is called homebrew. My Dungeon Master loves to make new mechanics, in fact he spent around 4 hours building a logging mechanic just for my character to be able to teach, protect and produce lumber so that we could start rebuilding the town. We only used this once ever, but it was a fun 2-3 hours of play. If you need to figure out how strain casting works or at what level you get your ichor abilities at, the homebrew documents is the place you will find it

**Specialized language(lexis):**

Being a Dungeons and Dragons group there is a specific lexis you adopt from words like AC, DC, Initiative, spell slots, but because of the homebrew explained in the previous section there are other newly adopted words like MCDM, Ichor, or Coins. And on top of all of that there is just our own slang mixed in there from the internet or just funny things that the DM says.

Part of the interesting thing when it comes to discourse communities is the use of these specialized words and how it can sound “like we were communicating in a foreign language” as Melzer explains on page 105. Even though this is the case I thought I might as well explain a few from each of the categories I brought up:

- AC: Short for armor class, this is how difficult it is to hit a character or enemy based on how much armor someone is wearing and how good they are at avoiding attacks.  
Someone wearing chain armor has 16 AC, Brawnnet as seen in the video when he gets his Shield gets 2 more AC on top of what he had from the chain.
- Initiative: How quickly do you react in combat, this is a roll to see who attacks and in what order. If you are more dexterous you react quicker.
- Ichor: a normal human has 4 health meaning another normal human could kill the first with a dagger (which deals between 1 and 4 damage) about 25% of the time. However, a player character like Rygan for example has 68 health so even though he is human he can get stabbed multiple times. Ichor is my Dungeon Masters explanation for this and all the other superhuman things our characters do. There is a lot more to it, but that is the basics.
- Coins: You can sometimes just be unlucky when rolling dice. If this happens my Dungeon Master gives you a coin which if you ever want, you can turn it in to reroll a future bad roll.

Explaining everything can take a long time and even a relatively short combat like the one shown in the video can take an hour of our time. Being able to quickly communicate can greatly speed up this process. Asking “What is your AC?” is much easier to say than “What is the number I need to roll to hit and deal damage to this creature?”.

### **A specific number of expert members:**

Of course in every Dungeons and Dragons group you have at least one Dungeon Master who is generally considered the leader of the group, in some sense they are the ones who have full control over this world. However, this is something that differs from most dungeons and dragon’s groups and the Embers of Valor. In most campaigns each player plays for every session resulting in every character having around the same power level and player have the same experience in the world. But in the Embers of Valor each character has their own story arc and has different experiences compared to other members and there for be more experienced. This results in players who play the most being generally being the strongest.

There are 4 players who are considered to be experts, those characters are Rygan, Mangiel, Stav, and Valzerin. These 4 characters were owned by players who had played in games together before and most have made secondary characters resulting in them playing more Dungeons and Dragons and being very experienced players. On the other side there are new players, while they are being considered part of the campaign, the haven’t gotten to Techtumbra and as such aren’t a part of the embers of valor in game, resulting in them having limited access to features like using the Chronical.

### **Conclusion:**

While now I have started my own campaign with some of my friends I met in college, it is nice to look back at that group in the new light of discourse communities. While I am still a part of the Embers of Valor, as you can imagine I don't play as much as I would like to anymore. It is always super fun to play with my friends back at home and thanks to discourse communities I can use it as a framework for my future games now that I am a dungeon master myself.

Discourse communities are a very important thing to have as a person as it surrounds you with people who have very similar interests to you and are made to help you grow in some form.

Melzer in his essay joins a guitar group because he enjoyed guitar and wanted to get better at it. More importantly discourse communities are as Melzer says directly are "important to college writing" (Melzer, p. 106). Not only in classes dealing with rhetoric but every class you write something in, from history courses or science or even a tiny bit in mathematic classes. Studies show that students struggle to write when they first enter a new discourse community, but in my case I now from using the given genres, playing dungeons and dragons for many years at this point and now understanding that we all have this common goal, I am able to more easily help the group reach that collective goal.



## Archive:

- A wish for death (Chronical Entry):



A Wish For  
Death.pdf

- 2 Parts to a D&D Champain(Video):

Note: So sorry it is very long, You don't have to watch the entire thing I just didn't have too much time to edit it down.

Link: <https://youtu.be/fSJ-XCrnqfk>

## Citations:

Title: *Understanding Discourse Communities*

Author: Dan Melzer

Pages: 100 - 115

Title: *Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres*

Author: Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, and Christine M. Tardy

Pages: 217 – 238