Turmoil in Tuhadid Public Facing Report S1

Members: Evan Dine, Quinn Foster, Dakota Hinchman, Zoe Caggiano

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Progress Statement

Completed

Over the winter break, we have spent time familiarizing ourselves with Wordpress and began creating three mock-ups for the website component. These mock-ups will be complete by Monday January 17 and one of them will be chosen during the team meeting Wednesday January 19.

In Progress

Outlining the RPG elements of *Turmoil in Tuhadid* has begun. We have begun brainstorming aspects of the game's setting, including potential political factions and conflicts/relationships between them, as well as political issues that can serve as focuses for one-shot adventures. Currently we have five factions, each of them representing different political systems and values, and seven issues.

To-Do

We will further brainstorm RPG elements and start writing the first one-shot by Monday January 17. We will also shortly choose a mock-up for the website and begin building the basic website framework.

Turmoil in Tuhadid

Student Members: Evan Dine (Project Lead), Quinn Foster (Narrative Designer), Dakota Hinchman (Lead Researcher), Zoe Caggiano (Contributor)

Problem Statement

Discussing politics can be difficult. Many people are reluctant to talk about politics in the first place, and when they do, those conversations often devolve into heated and ineffective arguments between people of opposing opinions. One way to creatively address this problem is through the medium of fantasy tabletop role-playing games.

Role-playing games offer a unique form of embodied learning by having players inhabit the backgrounds, cultures, and personalities of their characters. The educational potential of role-playing characters in fictional scenarios has already been observed in other role-playing media such as video games and even professional simulations like Model UN and mock trials. Participants have often developed their empathy, tolerance, and other skills through these exercises.

Fictional role-playing also provides a means to explore complex topics with little real-world consequence. For example, *The Islands of Sina Una* by Lucia Verspille et al. is an original campaign setting for the 5th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* tabletop role-playing game inspired by pre-colonial Filipino mythology and culture, giving light to a historically underrepresented identity. Additionally, the tabletop role-playing game, *Hillfolk*, by Robin D. Laws et al. encourages interpersonal conflicts and drama amid worlds of intrigue.

Our project, *Turmoil in Tuhadid*, aims to combine tabletop role-playing's ability to delve into complex topics with embodied learning to facilitate political conversations through fantastical role-play.

Background and Justification

Political conversations can make people uncomfortable and upset, and can lead to meaningless, vitriolic disputes where nobody involved learns anything and perspectives are lost in the heat of the moment. Thus, a way of creating an orderly environment where those conversations can stay meaningful without devolving would be highly beneficial.

Why a tabletop role-playing game like *Dungeons & Dragons*? Role-playing games are a form of situational cognition by having players take on the roles of fictional characters and overcome obstacles from those characters' perspectives. These characters can differ greatly from their players in beliefs and personality, allowing players to interact with a fictional world as people who hold different points of view. This can expose players to new ideas and build their conversation skills and political knowledge, teaching them how to navigate political conversations outside the game-world.

Project Description

Turmoil in Tuhadid is an online module for people to use to play politically-focused tabletop role-playing games. The intention is to encourage civil political discourse in a controlled, neutral space, using 5th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* to design game rules and mechanics. The entirety of the module will be hosted on a website designed with Wordpress. A collection of example scenarios, or "adventures," will also be displayed on the website for people to play or base their own scenarios off of.

In traditional *Dungeons & Dragons*, adventures have a group of player characters explore dangerous settings, overcome external obstacles, and acquire awards over extended playtimes, or "campaigns." Our scenarios will be very different. Each scenario will follow the format of a "one-shot," shortened storylines designed to be finished in one sitting, with each one focusing on a different political issue that parallels a topic in the real world. An example of such a scenario is having the players take on the roles of ambassadors from different nations negotiating the shape of borders.

What really makes *Turmoil in Tuhadid* unique is its procedural generators. These will encourage players to step out of their comfort zones and create tensions when playing the scenarios. Each scenario will have its own set of generators that will randomize fields of the player characters' backgrounds and some story elements according to the scenario. For example, the generator for characters will assign each character political/factional affiliations, economic class, education, personal conflicts, etc. to allow players to inhabit characters that may differ from their perspective, while a generator for a scenario about strained resources will choose the resource being debated over. The goal of these generators is to provide dynamic gameplay that motivates the players to think about and discuss a variety of complex topics.

Goals

1. **Create a controlled environment tailored for low-stakes political discussion:** Fictional tabletop role-playing allows complex topics to be discussed while being disconnected from real world issues. This creates the opportunity for players to think and talk about these subjects without the stigma typically associated with them.

2. **Encourage players to bring their experiences out of game:** *Turmoil in Tuhadid* will feature fictional characters, factions, and situations that involve various political perspectives and ideologies and challenge those of the players. By the time gameplay finishes, players will hopefully use what they have learned to inform their own experiences in reality.

3. **Ensure the players have a good time:** While the project deals with heavy subject matter, it is important that the players still have fun when playing through the scenarios. *Turmoil in Tuhadid* is still a game, but more importantly, providing players with an enjoyable experience and making them feel good about the things they accomplish increases their chances of retaining their experience beyond when the game ends.

Milestones

1. **Minimum Viable Product, The Website:** The Wordpress website will host all the components of *Turmoil in Tuhadid*. This will include web pages describing the project's setting, the example scenarios, and the procedural generators. The generators are the most critical component of this project, so ensuring their full functionality is of vital importance.

2. **Minimum Viable Product, The Scenarios:** At minimum, we intend to have a collection of three "one-shot" scenarios, each exploring a different political issue. This should provide players with enough material to understand the purpose of the project, how to utilize the project, and potentially use the project to further their own explorations.

3. **Building Upon the Foundation:** Once we accomplish the first two milestones, then we would focus on expanding what is already in the module, as well as adding more content. This includes creating original art for maps and characters, as well as balancing game mechanics to provide a cohesive experience. Additional one-shots would also be written to provide players with opportunities to explore more political issues.

Faculty

We are currently looking for faculty to assist us in this project as advisors in our early brainstorming phase: assistance in game mechanics and digital aspects; assistance in creating believable and sensible political systems; assistance in creating sensible and respective cultures; and assistance in representing ethical dilemmas.

References

Eveland, William P. and Myiah Hutchens Hivley, "Political Discussion Frequency, Network Size, and 'Heterogeneity' of Discussion as Predictors of Political Knowledge and Participation." *Journal of Communication* 59 no. 2 (June 2009): 205-224.

Laws, Robin D. et al. *Hillfolk*. London: Pelgrane Press, 2013.

Simkins, David and Constance Steinkuehler, "Critical Ethical Reasoning and Role-Play." *Games and Culture* 3, no. 3-4 (July 2008): 333-355. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rit.edu/10.1177%2F1555412008317313.

Stolz, Steven. "Embodied Learning." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47 no. 5 (2015): 474-487. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.879694

Versprille, Lucia et al. *The Islands of Sina Una*. Ottawa: Hit Point Press, 2020.

Annotated Bibliography

Versprille, Lucia et al. *The Islands of Sina Una*. Ottawa: Hit Point Press, 2020.

The Islands of Sina Una is a campaign setting for 5th edition Dungeons & Dragons heavily inspired by pre-colonial Filipino culture and mythology. While its intention to raise awareness of a historically oppressed cultural identity differs from *Turmoil in Tuhadid*'s political intentions, the projects are similar in that they both try to accomplish their goals through fantastical representation and tabletop role-playing. *Sina Una* is an example of how to use fantastical elements and gameplay to facilitate the discussion of important real world topics.

Eveland, William P. and Myiah Hutchens Hivley, "Political Discussion Frequency, Network Size, and 'Heterogeneity' of Discussion as Predictors of Political Knowledge and Participation." *Journal of Communication* 59 no. 2 (June 2009): 205-224.

Search Term: political discussion

This research article analyzes how the frequency of discussions, network size, and the diversity of opinions impacts political knowledge and participation. It finds that the frequency of discussions has a positive impact on political knowledge, while the other factors don't matter as much.

Simkins, David and Constance Steinkuehler, "Critical Ethical Reasoning and Role-Play." *Games and Culture* 3, no. 3-4 (July 2008): 333-355. https://doi-org.ezproxy.rit.edu/10.1177%2F1555412008317313.

This research article investigates how role-playing can facilitate critical ethical reasoning in an individual and help them develop empathy, tolerance, and understanding of others. Its focus is on role-playing video games, but it does emphasize the educational impact of other role-playing media, including professional role-playing scenarios that aren't considered games such as Model UN and mock trials. The argument it makes can easily be applied to tabletop RPGs.

Laws, Robin D. et al. *Hillfolk*. London: Pelgrane Press, 2013.

A different RPG to gain inspiration from, *Hillfolk* is a great example of how tabletop roleplaying can be used to handle complex topics, including interpersonal relationships and conflicts as well as political disputes like cultural conflicts and wealth distribution.

This is done with its DramaSystem, the set of rules and mechanics that drives the game. Although *Hillfolk*'s main setting is inspired by the Iron Age Levant, the DramaSystem can be used to tell intricate stories across any setting and genre, showing the range of subjects TTRPGs can cover.

Stolz, Steven. "Embodied Learning." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47 no. 5 (2015): 474-487. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.879694

As the title says, this article examines the role of embodied learning in education and the advantages it has over cognitive and empirical learning. Role-playing games can utilize this kind of embodied learning. Although the "bodies" the players of the game are inhabiting are fictional, they are still projecting themselves onto other people's experiences and controlling their actions, incorporating those experiences into their own out of game.

Research Questions

1. How do we create an environment for civil political discourse?

2. How can role-playing games satisfy educational learning in ways that other means cannot?

3. How can procedural generation garner new ways of thought?

4. How can procedural generation affect tabletop role-playing?

5. How else have people used tabletop role-playing to explore complex topics?

Project Timeline

JANUARY 10TH
- Have general setting laid out
- Planned out layout of the website (rough sketch)
    - Everyone should learn basics/capabilities of WordPress
- Generating ideas/outlines for one-shots

JANUARY 12TH
- Final proposal & timeline revisions
- Further brainstorming of setting, factions, one-shot ideas

JANUARY 14TH
- Public Facing Report S1
- Begin outlining & storyboarding first one-shot

JANUARY 17TH
- Three completed website mock-ups
- Begin writing first first one-shot

JANUARY 19TH
- Choose one of the mock-ups and begin designing website
- Further brainstorming of setting aspects and one-shot ideas
    - Writing of the first one-shot continues

JANUARY 21ST
- First meetings with faculty advisors should have occurred by now
- Statistics for non-player characters, monsters, etc. for one-shot
- Basic website structure completed (functional page navigation & layout)

JANUARY 24TH
- Begin research in developing procedural generator model

JANUARY 28TH
- Public Facing Report S2
- Complete first draft of the first one-shot
- More content is uploaded to the website

JANUARY 31ST
- Begin organizing playtesting of first one-shot
- Start outlining second one-shot

FEBRUARY 4TH
- Begin writing second one-shot

FEBRUARY 11TH
- Continue working on second one-shot
- Revise the first one-shot based on playtesting feedback
- Website should be mostly complete
    - Generator should be *at least* basically functional

FEBRUARY 25TH
- Finish first draft of second one-shot, organize playtesting
- Start outlining third one-shot
- If ahead of schedule, possibly start making subclasses and items

MARCH 11TH
- Have another one-shot in a roughly playable state
- Finish polishing first one-shot
- Start making website aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly
- If ahead of schedule, possibly start making subclasses and items
    - If that's done, start polishing

MARCH 25TH
- Revising of the second one-shot
    - Begin reworking where necessary
- Website should be in position for people to test functionality and overall experience
- If ahead of schedule, possibly start making subclasses and items
    - If that's done, start polishing

APRIL 11TH
- Finish polishing second one-shot
- Finish polishing website and working out bugs and errors
- If already ahead, begin finishing polish on subclasses and items

APRIL 18TH
- Spend week polishing and reevaluating the one-shots we're presenting at IMAGINE
- Basically, by this day, have pretty much everything done and we're just doing minor tweaks

APRIL 23RD - IMAGINE RIT
- At least two one-shots are able to be presented and website is fully functional and accessible

Faculty Advisor: *David Simkins*
Academic Year: *2021-2022*
Project Title: *Turmoil in Tuhadid*

Memorandum of Understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) states the agreement between the Faculty Advisor, *David Simkins*, and the student team of *Turmoil in Tuhadid,* Evan Dine, Quinn Foster, Dakota Hinchman, Zoe Caggiano.

Advisory Area:
- *Game Design*
- *Game ethics, narrative cohesion*

Advising and Meetings:
One 30-minute meeting every two weeks after submitting the public-facing report.

Feedback:
- Faculty Advisor will provide the Capstone Instructor, *Jessica Lieberman,* with written feedback on student progress and the project.
- Faculty Advisor is not required to grade this project, but his feedback will be crucial in the determination of project progress and grading by the Capstone Instructor.

Evan Dine, Project Lead

Signature: _____ Date: 11/39/21

Quinn Foster, Outreach Coordinator

Signature: _____ Date: 11/29/21

Jessica Lieberman, Capstone Professor

Signature: _____ Date: 11/29/21

David Simkins, **Faculty Advisor**

Signature: _____ **Date: 11/23/2021**

Faculty Advisor: *Michael Brown*
Academic Year: *2021-2022*
Project Title: *Turmoil in Tuhadid*

Memorandum of Understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) states the agreement between the Faculty Advisor, *Michael Brown*, and the student team of *Turmoil in Tuhadid*, Evan Dine, Quinn Foster, Dakota Hinchman, Zoe Caggiano.

Advisory Area:
- *Historical/political analysis*
- *Ecological validity of political issues, ethical considerations*

Advising and Meetings:
One 30-minute meeting every two weeks after submitting the public-facing report.

Feedback:
- Faculty Advisor will provide the Capstone Instructor, *Jessica Lieberman*, with written feedback on student progress and the project.
- Faculty Advisor is not required to grade this project, but his feedback will be crucial in the determination of project progress and grading by the Capstone Instructor.

Evan Dine, Project Lead

Signature: _____ Date: 12/8/21

Quinn Foster, Outreach Coordinator

Signature: _____ Date: 12/7/21

Jessica Lieberman, Capstone Professor

Signature: _____ Date: 12/7/21

Michael Brown, **Faculty Advisor**

Signature: _____ Date: 12/7/21