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## First Tabletop Role-Playing Gaming Class Called a Success

Winthrop University

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## First Tabletop Role-Playing Gaming Class Called a Success

### Quick Facts

- As a group, the class wrote a 64-page supplement to the popular Pathfinder game and created an imaginary town called Ravensberg. Over the spring semester, they populated it with residents, provided four locations – a manor, a prison farm, a cathedral and the first level of a castle – and came up with adventures.
- Instructor Christina Stiles plans to teach a second such writing course in spring 2017 and possibly sell the class' supplement to benefit the Department of English.



Students participate in the second gaming session for the class.

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – The first Winthrop University writing course on tabletop role-playing games ended this month, and its instructor calls it a success.

As a group, the class wrote a 64-page supplement to the popular **Pathfinder game** and created an imaginary town called **Ravensberg**. Over the spring semester, they populated it with residents, provided four locations – a manor, a prison farm, a cathedral and the first level of a castle – and came up with adventures.

“Ravensberg is a mixture of the class' creativity,” said instructor **Christina Stiles '97, '04** who has written for tabletop gaming since the early 1990's and who is an award-winning tabletop game designer, editor, publisher, and guest host at sci-fi conventions, such as this past weekend's **RavenCon** in Williamsburg, Virginia. She proposed the course to the **Department of English** so she could share her gaming passion with the students.

Stiles recalled in a **Kobold Press** blog that she introduced the class in January to gaming with “**Tales of Zobeck**” and used a favorite convention adventure written by Wolfgang Baur, “**Madman at the Bridge**,” which she ran with the Castles & Crusades rules. For the first class sessions, she brought the map, dice, and figurines, and gathered four volunteers for a tabletop experience.

“Do you want to play the wizard, rogue, fighter or cleric?” she asked the first four volunteers. After a quick scan, a student exclaimed, “Kobold! I'm a kobold?”

“Yes! Absolutely! You are the movers and shakers of Zobeck. Nothing gets done in Zobeck unless you guys make it so.” A few smile at this realization of power.

She then directed the players to the personality pieces provided on the sheets for the game's two female and two male characters. One of the male students in the first



Faith Hunter, from left, and Christina Stiles



Krysten Hudson

session asked if he could change the female to a male for the scenario.

“Nope. You play what you get,” she said, and stressed that “play” is the operative word in this instance. “Role-playing” is a part of the gaming process, so that players aren’t just looking at rules and building settings around them.

In later classes, the class played “**Dungeons and Dragons 5e,**” and “**Mage: The Awakening,**” “**Dragon Age,**” and **Savage Worlds** at the table.

With **Kobold Press’ permission,** Stiles used pieces of the company’s **Midgard campaign supplemental material** as examples for what was being built in class: a town setting, denizens, locations, ruins and short adventures. The class explored various games to create their own characters and then used the best ones for the group supplement.

Stiles also invited **New York Times bestselling author Faith Hunter** of Rock Hill, South Carolina, to talk about character development. Hunter’s popular “**Rogue Mage**” **novels** have been the subject of a game of the same name written by Stiles, Hunter and Raven Blackwood.

One of Stiles’ course goals was to expose female students to the hobby. “Gaming has been stigmatized as a geek hobby,” said Stiles, who is one of the few women in the tabletop industry. “It isn’t typically thought of as female-oriented.”

Stiles found a kindred soul in **Krysten Hudson,** a senior psychology major in the honors program from Rock Hill who emerged as one of the project managers. Hudson had experience with gaming before the class, and now plays it weekly as a game master. “I love fantasy novels,” she said, adding that table-top gaming proves to be a good way to bring alive fantasy characters.

Hudson turned to gaming for her honors thesis and wrote about whether table-top gaming helps children who have social issues.

So what did the class accomplish?

“In short, they successfully worked toward a semester-long goal as a team. Along the way, some gained leadership experience, they have game-designer experience, and they shared the gaming medium as it was meant to be shared: at the table. And Ravensberg is a living place in our minds,” Stiles said.

Stiles plans to teach a second such writing course in spring 2017 and possibly sell the class’ supplement to benefit the **Department of English.**

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw,** news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at [longshawj@winthrop.edu](mailto:longshawj@winthrop.edu).

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