

#RPGaDay2025

Well, I wanted to participate again in this year's #RPGaDay2025 but I can't deal with the [whimsy](#) so I'm going to do my own thing and recount a life in gaming. My life, because it's the one I know best¹. So over the course of August I will be posting accounts of my life in gaming. Woo and hoo. So with no further ado let's get this mix of lies and misremembering going...

Day 1

I was born in a log cabin in Illinois, no wait that was Lincoln². I was born in Winnipeg in the fall of 1963 the son of two German immigrants. Like many people I was born in a hospital. I grew up in the suburbs and had absolutely no exposure to gaming of any sort whatsoever³ until a friend of mine⁴ got the Basic D&D set. We poured over that sucker but never managed to actually do any gaming. Later I bought a copy of [The Keep on the Borderland](#)⁵. Very cool we

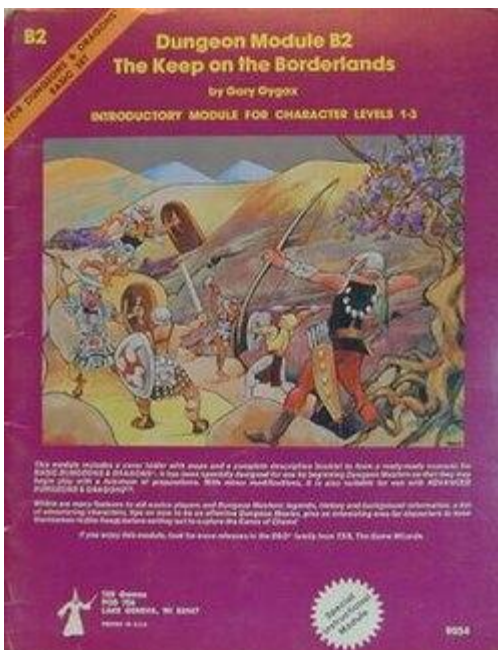
thought and more pouring ensued but again no actual gaming occurred.

Any actual gaming had to wait until I joined the war games club at Vincent Massey Collegiate⁶ in 1980, or as I knew it grade 12. According to my high school year book...

"(t)he war games club was very successful this year, as the number of members shot up by 175%."⁷

"Some of the games we played included the strange but attractive⁸ "Ace of Aces", as well as "Dune", "Starfire" and the old stand-by, "Diplomacy". The ever popular role-playing games and modules were also frequently employed."⁹

The club was pretty diverse. We had three members who



¹ Well, best to put words to paper as it were since those memories aren't getting any clearer. I'd better write something down before I claim to be Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's love child.

² Not really he was born in Kentucky.

³ Well I have fond memories of playing Masterpiece, Careers and [Mensch ärgere dich nicht](#).

⁴ I think they had a Pong game too.

⁵ It's around here somewhere. I might have a problem with hoarding.

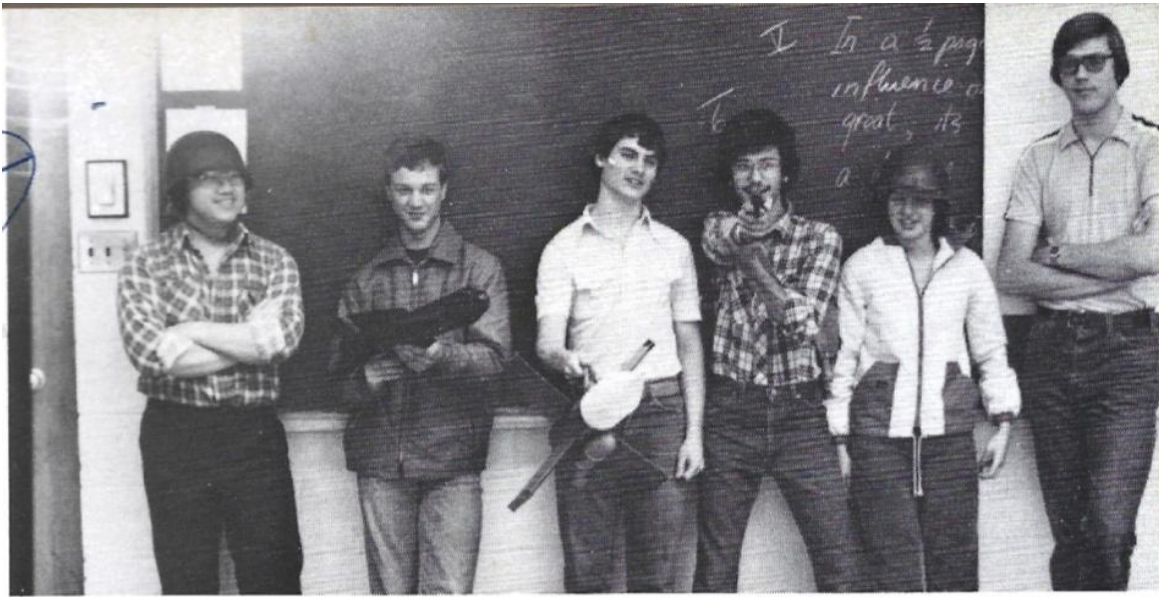
⁶ The one in Winnipeg, not the inferior one in Brandon. I'm morally obligated to make this claim as a proud, I'm going to say Spartan? Or were we Trojans. Hmmm.

⁷ Not a height reference and a strange number.

⁸ Low hanging fruit but that might describe the members of the club. Bah da dum.

⁹ Glad they could find work.

weren't of white European descent AND one young woman.



See six members, half not white European males. I suspect we averaged out to “normal” height. (I’m on the right wearing my photochromic glasses. Man I hated those things).

Here’s a picture of even more club members outside in the atrium. Note the flags. If memory serves me someone had brought a Nazi flag but the teacher advisor wouldn’t let us pose with it. The East German one which I got on a visit to my relatives was apparently okay.



(Why am I wearing the sweat jacket and hat? Wimp).

This is where I first got a taste for gaming. This was a safe environment where you couldn't waste ridiculous amounts of time playing games. You could have fun but your marks didn't suffer. That had to wait for university.

The only role playing game I remember playing in high school was Tunnels and Trolls. I played a gargoyle. (Somewhere in the piles of my momentos I still have the 3x5 index card with my character on it. I did try and find it for this but failed my Notice roll¹⁰). The playing of a gargoyle is foreshadowing for a penchant for weird characters in the future BTW.

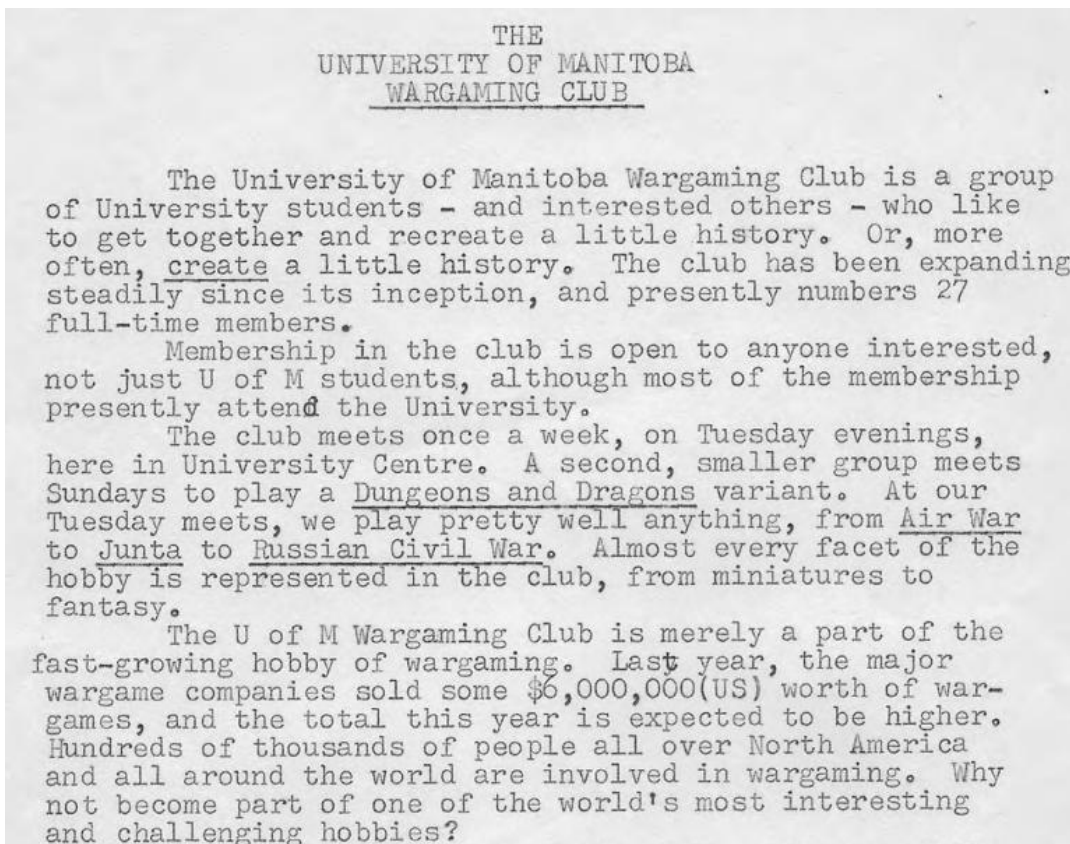
Now the stage is set for even more gaming! More on day 2.

Day 2

So in the fall of 1981 at the tender age of 17 I went off to University for some more book learnin'. I enrolled to obtain a BA Advanced¹¹ with a major in Anthropology and a minor in History but what I got instead was a whole lot of gaming. I had gotten that dirty itch at the Vincent Massey War Games club and I wanted, nay I needed to scratch it. So despite my somewhat shy and retiring nature I made my way to room 102-O University Centre. This was

the home of the University of Manitoba Wargaming club.

This august institution had been in existence since 1980. When I entered its hallowed door the club was sharing space with another club. Oddly they abandoned the space shortly after I joined. Apparently you need to be a nerd to enjoy the company



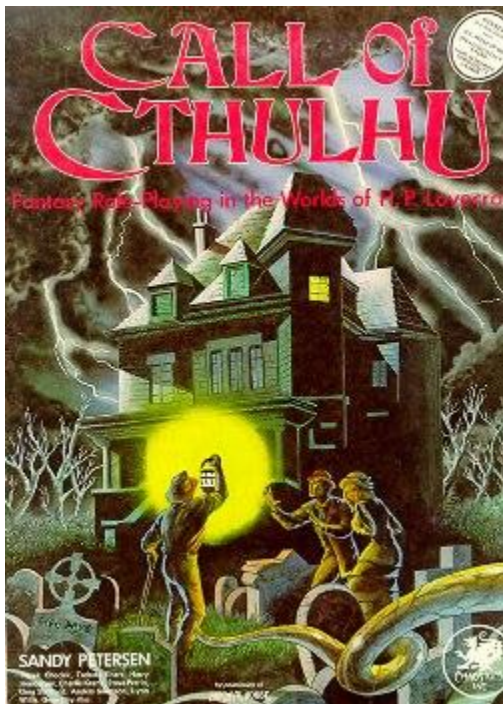
¹⁰ Insert your own game reference here. I'm currently heavily into Savage Worlds.

¹¹ A four year degree basically back when they weren't mostly four year degrees.

of nerds¹². Who knew? I was in luck as I was both a university student AND interested in gaming so they had to let me join! Besides they already had two Doug's and two Jeff's they needed some name diversity!¹³

What a paradise! There were always people in the office ready and willing to play games like Ace of Aces or Bridge. This may have had an impact on my GPA BTW. Negative of course. Besides the regular Tuesday night games dedicated mostly to board games there were roleplaying games on the weekend as well. Friday nights, Saturday nights and twice on Sundays - afternoons and evenings! I somehow wrangled my way into these games and found acceptance. Many of these people are still my friends over 40 years later! We're still gaming together on Friday nights albeit virtually.

What did we play? AD&D, Champions, Universe and Dragonquest. Universe was the first game I joined but soon I was in them all! Was I content to remain a player? No, I was not. Soon after



it was released I bought and ran a scenario for the first edition of Call of Cthulhu. I don't remember much about the scenario I came up with other than it was set in Manitoba in the community of Bissett. I choose Bissett because one of my gamer friends¹⁴ was from there.

Like most Winnipeggers I suffered from Perimeteritis, a malady which causes you to forget there's anything in the province outside the Perimeter Highway. The malady causes an almost total ignorance of anything not related to Winnipeg. (Like Toronto and the rest of Canada). Anyway I included tentacled sheep in the scenario which caused Grant much amusement as Bissett is a mining community in rough, rocky heavily wooded terrain on the

Canadian Shield. Not exactly sheep country.

Interestingly this was foreshadowing for my preference for setting games in historical settings. It's one of my favourite themes, mixing RPGs and history. These days anyway.

More on Day 3.

¹² And there were always nerds hanging out.

¹³ Plus two Gordon's and later on two Darryl's. They had a Larry too!

¹⁴ I didn't have any other kind.

Day 3

The U of M Wargaming Club, a potted history.

I've written a bit on this topic, both yesterday and [previously](#) but I'm going to rehash it here.

I had erroneously mentioned yesterday that the club was founded in 1979 but it was actually started in 1980 by a stalwart group of gamers. According to the ringleader Jon Penner:

"Well, there was a group of guys who got together regularly before 1979 to play games, booking a room in the University Centre for the purpose. I joined that group not long after starting my studies at U of M in 1979. It would have been a year or so later that I convinced some of the others that we should apply to UMSU for recognition as a bona fide group. That got us an office space and even, IIRC, some funding."

This was the group I joined in September 1981. According to the club's constitution:

I. NAME AND OBJECTIVES

1. Name

- a) The name of this organisation shall be the University of Manitoba Wargamers Club.

2. Objectives

- a) The objectives of this organisation shall be:
 - i) To provide the opportunity for University of Manitoba students interested in wrgaming to meet each other.
 - ii) To provide an opportunity for University of Manitoba students to congregate and play wargames.
 - iii) To promote the hobby of wargaming within the University of Manitoba.
 - iv) To provide a vehicle through which University of Manitoba students interested in wargaming can meet and compete with wargamers at other universities and in other clubs.
 - v) To provide unusual and/or inaccessible wargames and wargaming literature to University of Manitoba students.

Somebody typed that out...on a typewriter. One draft. That's a lost skill¹⁵.

¹⁵ Good riddance.

The name seemed to morph readily between Wargamers and Wargaming club judging by various ads in The Manitoban, the student newspaper. By 1983 the problematic word “War” had been dropped from the name. Interestingly it always seemed to be the Gaming club though, never the Gamers club.



I only have the one picture of the inside of the club and all it really shows is one of the members¹⁶.

The membership was made up of full-time and associate members. The full-time members were U of M students while the associate members were other interested parties.

They were equal in status other than that associate members couldn't vote for the executive.

II. ORGANISATION

1. Membership

- a) The club shall consist of:
 - i) All University of Manitoba students requesting admission. Such membership is granted automatically, unless the applicant was previously expelled from the club.
 - ii) Any other persons requesting admission whose request is approved by a majority of the membership.
- b) A membership may be revoked by a two-thirds vote of the club membership.
- c) There shall be two types of membership. All current University of Manitoba students and all club officers shall be full members. All other members shall be associate members.
 - i) Associate members shall have all the rights and privileges of full members, with the exception of the right to vote.
- d) Membership fees shall be determined by the Executive.

¹⁶ Looking good though.

The club was designed to have a four member executive made up of full members. Interestingly it looks like associate members, i.e. non-students could be on the executive in which case they would be full members. Ooh, upgrade!

2. The Executive

- a) The Executive shall consist of:
 - i) President
 - ii) Vice-President
 - iii) Treasurer
 - iv) Secretary
- b) All Executive members shall be elected by the membership of the club.

3. The Council

- a) The Council shall consist of:
 - i) Public Relations Director
 - ii) Tournament Co-ordinator
 - iii) Editor-in-Chief
 - iv) Club Liaison Officer
 - v) Publications Director
 - vi) Gamesmaster
 - vii) UMSU Liaison Officer
 - viii) Recruitment Director
- b) All Council members shall be appointed by the Executive.

Alongside the executive there was also a council that helped the executive with the running of the club. Each member of the executive and the council, collectively officers of the club, had specific duties.

III. POWERS AND DUTIES

- 1. The duties of the club's officers shall be:
 - a) The President
 - i) To provide leadership for the club.
 - ii) To co-ordinate the activities of the various Executive and Council members.
 - iii) To represent the group to other organisations.
 - iv) To do or delegate responsibility for all tasks not specifically assigned to club officers.

- b) The Vice-President
 - i) To assist the President in his duties.
 - ii) To perform the President's duties when he is unable to do so.
- c) The Treasurer
 - i) To handle and account for the club's finances.
 - ii) To purchase such items as are deemed desirable by the Executive.
- d) The Secretary
 - i) To keep minutes of all Executive meetings.
 - ii) To conduct club correspondence.
- e) The Public Relations Director
 - i) To publicise the existence and activities of the club.
- f) The Tournament Coordinator
 - i) To organise wargame tournaments and exhibits.
- g) The Editor-in-Chief
 - i) To run and keep a file of any club publications.
- h) The Club Liaison Officer
 - i) To communicate with and coordinate club activities with other clubs.
- i) The Publications Director
 - i) To maintain and expand the club's collection of wargaming literature.
- j) The Gamesmaster
 - i) To maintain and expand the club's collection of wargames.
- k) The UMSU Liaison Officer
 - i) To maintain club contacts with UMSU.
- l) The Recruitment Director
 - i) To actively recruit new members for the club.

This was all very fancy and well laid out.¹⁷ However by 1986-87 they were so desperate for people to fill jobs that I got elected president. I do not remember any council or much organization. We managed to put on our annual gaming convention, Win-games though. According to the club journal for that year, which I kept, the con was the "Worst yet." But it "Made money". The club folded the following year.¹⁸

This wasn't due to any mismanagement on my part but rather the U of M Student Council, UMSU deciding to kick us and two other clubs¹⁹ out of our offices. There were always way

¹⁷ A law student wrote it after all.

¹⁸ I accept no blame.

¹⁹ The Womyn's Centre and the Campus New Democrats.

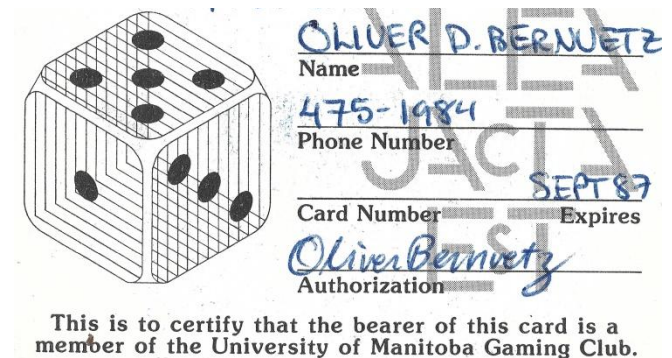
more student groups than there were offices. When these three clubs were slow to provide the correct paperwork UMSU decided to use this as an excuse to pull the plug on the three clubs. I understand that there's an eSports club at the U of M now but I don't know if there's a traditional gaming club or not.

Day 4

A couple of things I left out of the history of the UMGC²⁰ was that we had a lending library of games. They even had library cards and pockets. Here's a terribly fuzzy picture showing one of the pockets.²¹



We also had official membership cards that included our official logo, Alea Jacta Est. It's my recollection that I came up with this slogan and no one hated it enough to fight me on it.²²



My late friend Ron Gregory who was an art student designed the card.

So I was talking with my brother-in-law Andy at breakfast the other day and he said, "You were into gaming right at the

²⁰ University of Manitoba Gaming Club,

²¹ I have a few of their old games but what I have do not have cards and pockets in them.

²² The die is cast. It's what Julius Caesar is said to have uttered when he crossed the Rubicon. Clever huh? I was taking Latin at that time.

beginning weren't you?" I demurred and said, "No, not really." But thinking about it I wasn't that far off the beginning after all. So here's a short history of gaming²³ with a special focus on mostly Winnipeg.

You can divide the games that compose "gaming" into three main categories, board games, miniatures and role-playing. Yes, there's overlap between all of these and board games is an incredibly broad category from Candyland to backgammon. All of them date back centuries if not millennia but their modern, commercial versions can be traced to specific dates.

War games/Board games

Ancient of course, chess is basically a war game of a very abstract nature. Early commercial war games that are still being played are Diplomacy (1954), Risk (1959) and Gettysburg (1958) all helped set the stage. Still a huge industry with broad popularity

Miniatures

Playing with toy soldiers predates any rules of course but once you have the figures you want to do something with them. While H. G. Wells published two sets of rules before the First World War a man named Jack Scruby is considered the "Father of Modern Miniatures" organizing the first miniatures convention in 1956, manufacturing miniatures and publishing miniatures magazines. Still a popular pastime, especially with advances in manufacturing such as plastic miniatures.

Roleplaying Games

The first commercially produced roleplaying game was Dungeons and Dragons in 1974. It's been over 50 years and roleplaying is still going strong.

Gaming Conventions

As noted above one of the earliest gaming related convention occurred in 1956 though focused on miniatures. The first Gen Con was held in 1968 and is still going strong.

All of these made their way to Manitoba quite early. A November 20, 1979 Winnipeg Free Press article entitled "It's war! Not just a game." discusses the gaming scene in Winnipeg. A store called Keystone Book & Hobbies founded in 1974 is mentioned as the unofficial

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_games

headquarters of local gamers. The article also states that the city is said to have “not much more than half a dozen Winnipeg dungeon masters.” Not bad for something that’d been around for only five years or so.

The following year would see the first gaming convention in the province. Not the one associated with the gaming club itself but Prairiecon held in 1980 in Brandon and inspired by a trip to Gen Con. The first Winnipeg convention, Win-games wasn't held until February 1981.