

DUNGEONS + Drama Nerds

Dungeons + Drama Nerds is a podcast produced by Percival Hornak and Nicholas Orvis, two dramaturgs interested in the intersection of theatre and tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs). It was founded alongside Todd Brian Backus in 2019. *Dungeons + Drama Nerds* is mixed and edited by Percival Hornak, and produced in collaboration with a creative ensemble including Todd Brian Backus, Anthony Sertel Dean, Christopher Diercksen, Ben Ferber, Kory Flores, Tess Huth, Romana Isabella, Leo Mock, Dex Phan, Jon Jon Johnson, Tristan B. Willis, C. "Meaks" Meaker, CJ Linton, Jovane Camaaño, and Mieko Gavia.

Each season features different TTRPGs and systems; the podcast has featured *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition*, *Apocalypse World*, *Paranoia: Red Clearance*, *Blades in the Dark*, *Bluebeard's Bride*, *Kids on Bikes*, *Oh Dang! Bigfoot Stole My Car With My Friend's Birthday Present Inside*, *Lancer*, *Thirsty Sword Lesbians*, *Brindlewood Bay*, and *ARC*. Episodes release biweekly on Wednesdays, alternating between Actual Play episodes featuring a group of theatre artists playing a game and Commentary episodes that offer analysis of the game system and its parallels in the theatre world. The podcast explores what kinds of storytelling different game systems foster best.

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Website: <https://dungeonsanddramanerds.com>

Cast + Crew:

Producers/Hosts:

Percival Hornak, Nicholas Orvis

Creative Ensemble:

Todd Brian Backus, Anthony Sertel Dean, Christopher Diercksen, Ben Ferber, Kory Flores, Tess Huth, Romana Isabella, Leo Mock, Dex Phan, Jon Jon Johnson, Tristan B. Willis, C. "Meaks" Meaker, CJ Linton, Jovane Camaaño, and Mieko Gavia

Casts rotate from game to game; for a full list of artists who have been featured in our Actual Play campaigns, head to our website (<https://www.dungeonsanddramanerds.com/>)

Analytics:

- average ~500 downloads per month
- 20,600 all-time downloads (as of 3/29/2024)

Press:

"Theatre of the Mind" on [Howlround](https://www.howlround.com/)

Linked to in “Amid a pandemic and a racial reckoning, ‘D&D’ finds itself at an inflection point” in [The Washington Post](#)

Who Are We?

Percival Hornak (Co-producer, he/him) is a dramaturg, playwright, and dungeon master who loves theatricality, ghost stories, and plays about lesbians. He proudly serves as literary manager of Stroller Scene, a play development and advocacy organization based in NYC. Past companies Percy has worked with include Arena Stage, where he served as Literary Fellow for two years, as well as Luna Stage and Andy’s Summer Playhouse. He is a proud alum of Albright College, where he studied English and Theatre, and holds an MFA and Certificate in Feminist Scholarship from UMass Amherst. Percy’s research studies trans play, history as a site of queer relationality, experiential performance, and alternate reality games. In addition to his work in dramaturgy, he has been a dungeon master for several years in various editions of Dungeons & Dragons as well as several Powered by the Apocalypse games, although his favorite game systems are Carved from Brindlewood and Belonging Outside Belonging. Find him on Twitter @techxni, on Instagram @percy.hornak, or at percivalhornak.com.

Nicholas Orvis (Co-Producer, he/him) is a dramaturg, director, literary manager, and tabletop roleplaying game enthusiast who’s dedicated to fostering new stories in media of all kinds. As the Literary Associate for Premiere Stages at Kean University, Nick served as the dramaturg on over a dozen workshops, readings, and productions, and grew the company’s annual submission pool by hundreds of playwrights. He’s also worked at Portland Stage Company, the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, Luna Stage, and the Tank, and his short (fan) fiction has appeared in Wayfinder magazine. He has over a decade of experience in tabletop roleplaying games (mostly as a GM). He’s on Twitter @nsorvis, on Instagram @norvis13, and online at nicholasorvis.com.

How The Show Began:

In the summer of 2019, three dramaturgs (Todd Brian Backus, Percy, and Nick) joked on a Twitter thread that they should start a podcast doing analysis of tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) the way they analyze a play or theatrical text. Several years later, they’re doing just that.

They’ve explored *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition*, *Apocalypse World*, and *Paranoia: Red Clearance*, three games with vastly different genres and storytelling mechanics, and along the way have explored links to playwrights like María Irene Fornés, methods of virtual theatre production, devising theatre, and intimacy choreography. Season two featured *Blades in the Dark*, *Bluebeard’s Bride*, *Kids on Bikes*, *Oh Dang! Bigfoot Stole My Car With My Friend’s Birthday Present Inside*, and *Lancer*. It also discussed topics like mechs and trans embodiment, fictional positioning and “crunch” in TTRPGs, One Page RPGs and 10-Minute plays, and much

much more. Season three featured *Thirsty Sword Lesbians*, *Brindlewood Bay*, and *ARC*, as well as interviews with game designer April Kit Walsh, Jason Cordova and Joel B. New, and the New York Neo-Futurists, with commentary episodes covering topics including queer theater, the magic circle, and setting-agnostic games and stories.

As of spring 2024, the podcast has switched from a season-based structure featuring multiple games to singular Actual Play arcs interspersed with commentary episodes. When a campaign is airing, episodes will release biweekly; between campaigns, the podcast will release monthly “Dark Time” episodes covering broader topics related to the intersection of theatre and TTRPGs.

Reviews + Testimonials:

My best friend did science on me...



And told me to listen to this podcast, and wow am I glad I did! Todd, Percy, and Nick give such excellent thought nuggets for any theatre maker/ttrpg gamer to consider and bring to their respective spaces. I thoroughly enjoy the format of actual play and commentary. It allows the listener to contextualize the game play and want more as the stories develop. Still in the early episodes, but I am loving it!

“Put ghosts in your stories, coward!”



These nerds put on some good games. Their expertise of theatre, and how to play together while weaving interesting (and fun!) stories shines through each episode. If you’re looking for a good campaign that engages you while not being dire, definitely try D

For anyone who loves collaborative storytelling



A full-hearted, immensely thoughtful, and incredibly entertaining look at all the opportunities, pitfalls and ideas put on the table by both role-playing games and theatre. The creators talk shop about both fields throughout, but never in a way that’s prohibitive for folks who don’t know, and they pull together casts and storytellers that bring out the best of the various game systems they try. As a theatre maker and a gamer, I’ve found this a really invaluable way to dip a toe into all sorts of techniques and systems I haven’t gotten the chance to try, and the intentionality with which the show approaches everything they do is really refreshing in a landscape where too many actual-play shows tend to coast off their charm and scrappiness. Well worth a look from anybody who wants to learn and play more within both theatre and gaming spaces, and see the ways they can draw on one another.

@NightSkyGames (Meguey Baker, one of the designers of *Apocalypse World*): Heck yeah inter-sectional everything! Games, theater, story, venue design, everything. Use all the spaces, play with all the tools, turn everything upside down and inside out to see what /else/ it could be. Yes.

Link: [tweet](#)

@GameCalledQuest (a Quest AP podcast): Here are some APs that we love that make an effective effort support and feature folks from marginalized communities: [@TBHalfings](#) [@DNDramaNerds](#) [@ProteanCity](#) [@magpies_pod](#) [@moonharborcast](#) [@NoInitiativeTV](#) [@MeowsterDungeon](#) [@aznsrepresent](#)

Link: [tweet](#)

@Dramaturd (Ty Monroe): Y'all, if you're not listening to the @DNDramaNerds podcast, then I don't know what to tell you. It's everything I love wrapped into one podcast.

Link: [tweet](#)

How To Listen

Dungeons + Drama Nerds is available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Stitcher](#), or your podcast app of choice (Podcast Addict, Overcast, etc.)

Episodes are also available on our website:

<https://www.dungeonsanddramanerds.com/episodes>

You could start in Season 1 with the intro episode to our D&D, AW, or Paranoia arcs (Eps 1, 14, and 34, respectively), in Season 2 the intros for our BitD, Bluebeard's Bride, Kids on Bikes, Oh Dang! Bigfoot..., or Lancer Arcs (S2E1, S2E15, S2E21, S2E34, and S2E39, respectively), or in Season 3 with the intro episode to our Thirsty Sword Lesbians, Brindlewood Bay, or ARC campaigns (Eps 1, 12, and 31, respectively).

You could also dive straight into these Commentary episodes; we feel they reflect some of our best work:

Episode 9: Player as Performer and Audience

- In this episode Todd, Nick, and Percy discuss the role of the player as both performer and as the audience in tabletop role-playing games.
- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerds.com/episodes/episode/3ea11d9f/episode-9-player-as-performer-and-audience>

Episode 27: Lineage of Craft - Maria Irene Fornes and PbtA

- In this episode, Todd, Nick, and Percy chat about the way we pass down creative knowledge from one generation of artists to another. They examine the impact of the incredible Maria Irene Fornés on the theatre field alongside the way D. Vincent and Meguey Baker have influenced game design in the world of TTRPGs.

- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerd.com/episodes/episode/3fe686bc/episode-27-lineage-of-craft-maria-irene-fornes-and-pbta>

Episode 23: Intimacy Choreography in TTRPGs Feat. Leo Mock

- Leo Mock, an artist and consent educator, joins Percy, Todd, and Nick to talk about intimacy choreography techniques and how we can use them in TTRPGs.
- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerd.com/episodes/episode/3d5c6a2e/episode-23-intimacy-choreography-in-ttrpgs-ft-ella-mock>

S2E9: Narrative is the Jelly: The False Binary of Fiction and Crunch

- This week, Todd, Nick, and Percy dive into a recurring theme in discourse about tabletop role-playing games: fiction-forward games and "crunchy" games. They dissect what these terms mean, discuss their own takes on the value of each approach to game design, and try to locate Blades in the Dark within that spectrum.
- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerd.com/episodes/episode/3c7c6e83/s2e9-narrative-is-the-jelly-the-false-binary-of-fiction-and-crunch>

S2E29: Queering Monsters

- Todd and Percy chat about two plays in the kids on bikes genre, including the way each play interacts with the conventions of that genre and each play's relation to queerness and monstrosity. Plays Discussed: *Wolfcrush* (a queer werewolf play) by Haygen-Brice Walker and *The Interrobangers* by M Sloth Levine.
- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerd.com/episodes/episode/3bbc6986/s2e29-queering-monsters>

S2E43: Big Trans Mechs

- Percy is joined by Tristan B. Willis and CJ Linton to talk about mecha stories and their connection to trans embodiment, as well as the kinds of stories they personally resonate with in terms of queerness and gender.
- <https://dungeonsanddramanerd.podbean.com/e/btm-big-trans-mechs/>

S3E27: Everything is Data: Magic Circles in Play and Performance

- Percy, Nick, and ensemble member Jon Jon talk about the concept of the magic circle and how we can use it as a tool in TTRPGs and in performance, touching on the exploratory power of play, consent and intimacy choreography, and the question of who defines the magic circle in the first place.
- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerd.com/episodes/episode/3c1faf52/everything-is-data-magic-circles-in-play-and-performance>

S3E34: Finesse in the Chaos: an Interview with the New York Neo-Futurists

- Todd and Chris sit down with our beloved contributor Anthony Sertel Dean as well as Rob Neill, Co-Artistic Director of the New York Neo-Futurists, to talk about their show *The Infinite Wrench*, a theatrical race against the clock akin to the mechanics of ARC.

- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerds.com/episodes/episode/3e0342ae/finesse-in-the-c-haos-an-interview-with-the-new-york-neo-futurists>

Dark Time Episode 1: Collaborative Worldbuilding in Theatre and TTRPGs

- Nick, Percy, and ensemble member Leo Mock talk collaborative worldbuilding in TTRPGs and devising, focusing on a definition of worldbuilding as the tangible ways we shape the spaces in which we're making theatre or playing games together. They discuss what works about effective systems of collaborative worldbuilding, what actually makes them collaborative, and how power can inhere in collaborative processes in a way that undermines their original intentions.
- <https://www.dungeonsanddramanerds.com/episodes/episode/3efd841d/dark-time-collaborative-worldbuilding-in-theatre-and-ttrpgs>

For assistance with embedding a specific episode in an article or webpage, please reach out to us at dungeonsanddramanerds@gmail.com.