

VALOR: VILLAINS, CREATURES AND FOES – A TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAME
EXPANSION AND A METHODOLOGY FOR PLANNING AND MANAGING TABLETOP
ROLEPLAYING GAME PROJECTS

By

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Signatures

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Abstract

Valorous Games, an independent developer and producer of Tabletop Roleplaying Games (or TTRPGs), has successfully executed three book development projects over the past seven years (the third project being a reprint and update of their first book), in addition to smaller ancillary projects. In 2023, it was determined that rescoping and restarting their third book, *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes*, would better align with future goals for the company and its proprietor.

Initial research showed that little to no academic material exists for study of Project Management (or PM) in the context of the Tabletop Role-Playing Game hobby; thus, it was determined that the project scope would be extended to include building of genericized Project Management resources to aid organization of similar projects, as a start point for academic material around management of TTRPG development projects.

The project phases covered by this thesis focused on development of the book's manuscript alongside PM materials for the project, then genericization of the PM materials for use as a reference for similar projects as a start point for PM skill development for TTRPG writers – or TTRPG development for PM practitioners.

Keywords

Project Management, Tabletop Role-Playing, Tabletop Roleplaying, TTRPG, Tabletop Role-Playing Game Development, Tabletop Role-Playing Project Management, Valor, Dungeons & Dragons

Dedications

This thesis dedicated to the author's Academic Advisory Committee – I would not have been able to progress nearly so well on this project without industry professionals Liana MacKenzie and Vanessa Hoskins, nor academic advisors LuAnn Piccard and Dr. Nasim Bahari. Thank you for all you have done for me.

To Dr. Kenrick Mock of University of Alaska's College of Engineering: Hopefully this project is better than my previous capstone.

To my family and friends, including those who had to put up with me disappearing for hours on end during vacations to progress on this thesis: Thank you for your patience, love, and kindness.

RPG Developer Thanks

The following firms in the Tabletop RPG industry are represented in the subject matter expertise gathered for this paper:

- Valorous Games, developers of *Valor, The Heroic Roleplay System*: <https://valorousgames.com/>
- Reify, Inc., developers of *The Stuff of Legends*: <https://stuffoflegends.games/>
- Rule of Cool games (defunct), developers of the *Legend* roleplaying game.

(While Vanessa Hoskins is an employee of Wizards of the Coast, her subject matter expertise was provided in a personal capacity.)

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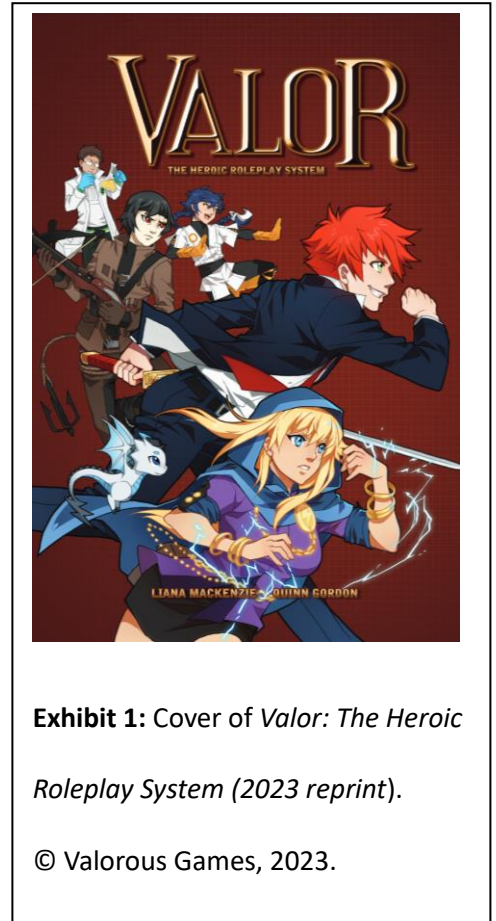
Background

The modern Tabletop Role-Playing Game (or TTRPG) hobby is generally understood to have originated in its modern form with Dave Arneson's *Blackmoor* in 1971, deriving from tabletop wargaming and an array of non-systemized role-playing concepts before; the medium's first dedicated project was *Dungeons & Dragons*, published by Tactical Studies Rules in 1974 (Tresca, 2014), with an entire industry forming around the medium since. While *Dungeons & Dragons* was developed for high fantasy role-playing, influenced by such works as *The Lord of the Rings* and the works of Jack Vance, the concept quickly spread to science fiction with such works as 1977's *Traveler*, and then to being genre-nonspecific (also known as 'generic' or 'universal') with 1980's *Basic Role-Playing* (Both Applecline, 2014).

The largest player in the industry by a fair order of magnitude has nigh-consistently been the owner of *Dungeons & Dragons*, originally Tactical Studies Rules and later Wizards of the Coast (part of Hasbro); however, since at least 1975 with Rick Loomis' play-by-mail game studio, Flying Buffalo, publishing *Tunnels & Trolls* (St. Andre, 1982), there have been competitors of varying sizes and levels of popularity.

One such company, Valorous Games, was established in 2014 by Liana MacKenzie and Quinn Gordon, producing one system, *Valor: The Heroic Roleplay Game*, and later a supplement for that system, the adventure path *Valor: Best in Class*. (It is at this point that the author pauses to point the reader toward Appendix A.A, a glossary of basic TTRPG and PM terms, in lieu of interrupting himself regularly to provide definitions.) An effort toward a supplement, *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes*, began in 2016, but did not receive sufficient funding to justify continued development at the time; other work continued, including on *Best in Class*, and on ancillary products, including two video-based "Actual Play" series released on YouTube.

In 2023, it was determined that it was a good time to return to *Villains, Creatures and Foes*, starting with development a text-only version intended as a stretch goal to accompany a funding campaign on Kickstarter to rerelease an updated version of the *Valor: The Heroic Roleplay System* core book, which included a series of balance patches and errata fixes, and also updated the authors' names to account for one coming out as transfeminine and the other non-binary in the interceding years. However, in the interceding years, the existing text for the book had become out of date, due to focusing on the company's first setting, the fictional world of Valress. A newer fictional world, Lenaia, was more successful in ancillary projects, drawing greater audience interest and support.



This was determined to call for a rescope and redrafting of the existing work done on *Villains, Creatures and Foes* (hereafter *VCF*), including recruiting new staff (making this Valorous Games' first project involving more primary authors than the original book's two).

At a similar time, the author of this report observed the limited amount of academic content specifically covering the intersection of Project Management (PM) for Tabletop Role-Playing Game development. It was determined that active PM of *VCF* might pose an opportunity to improve this, by developing PM materials for the redevelopment of *VCF*, then genericizing those materials to be usable by the broader PM and TTRPG communities.

This report covers development progress for the revised text of *VCF*, the development of the genericized PM materials, and potential uses of the latter by the broader industry. It has been researched, tried, and tested in the creation of the text of the book text.

Introduction

Problem Statement

Valorous Games seeks to increase its profile by making its Tabletop Role-Playing Game significantly easier to use. Pre-built ‘creatures’ (also known as ‘monsters’, ‘non-player characters’, and many game-specific alternative terms) that can be inserted into a campaign are generally one of the more valuable tools in games within this medium for game masters, and the original *Valor: The Heroic Roleplay System* and the adventure path *Valor: Best in Class* only provide prebuilt creatures relevant to the scenarios presented within them.

Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes, originally intended to be supported by a fundraising campaign in 2016, failed to reach its fundraising goal; with no money collected, it was put on the backburner until 2023, when an effort to reboot it was added to a fundraising campaign to release a fixed update of the original book – and this time, was successfully funded. Existing material from 2016 would need redevelopment, not only to account for updates to the system since, but to rework the book to account for it now being developed for Valorous Games’ more recent setting development.

Scope

The scope for the project has been split into a series of phases, connected to milestones with flexibly-defined dates; this was an intentional call in the context of an independent development project, based on the determined triple constraints deprioritizing schedule in favor of constraining on cost and ensuring the highest-quality resulting work.

The scope presented here covers the objectives for the phase of the project concluding in early December 2024, which is the basis for this report.

In-Scope Deliverables

Four deliverables have been completed for this project as of November 22, 2024. The first of these was a complete, genericizable project plan for all in-scope deliverables with analysis for future phases. The second was progress on the draft manuscript for *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes*, including text-adjacent materials such as tables. Third was a genericized version of the project plan, updated to account for lessons learned from the implementation of the project so far. Fourth is this final report, analyzing progress, methodologies, and their results so far.

Scope of Future Phases

Future deliverables for this project's full scope have been determined and given preliminary analysis, beginning with completion of the text and layout for the preliminary release of the book, followed by, in order, a series of further objectives, beginning with organization and running of a crowdfunding campaign to cover a portion of costs of remaining objectives. The funding campaign will then cover costs needed for the artwork needed for the primary release of the book, finalizing of the book's layout, and a digital release of the book to crowdfunding supports. After this will come the ordering of a print run of the book and shipping of said print run to Valorous Games' storage, then getting the completed book out to customers and distributors. Finally, lessons learned from these phases will be compiled to enhance the genericized version of the project plan, to enhance future work by Valorous Games and by other independent tabletop roleplaying game developers.

Assumptions

This project had several key assumptions during execution – the first being that a majority of writing for the project would be completed by a primary author, Liana MacKenzie (the owner of Valorous Games and project sponsor). This is common in the independent space for tabletop roleplaying games.

The project also assumes that, as Valorous Games is an independent operation run with no corporate parent and with a flexible team, organizational norms will be limited in scope, and centered around content design and writing-style norms (sometimes called a “house style” in the parlance of multiple industries).

Project costs before the funding campaign are assumed to be primarily out of the pocket of the project sponsor – thus necessitating a hard constraint on project costs during the project so far, as building up the money to pay those costs takes time.

Finally, this project assumed the Project Manager was *not* a core writer for the manuscript of *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes*; their role focuses on project management, and the writing of project management materials, genericized versions thereof, and this report. (During execution, this assumption mostly held; the Project Manager did work within the manuscript to adjust content formatting, and reworked portions of manuscript text for one creature entry.)

Out of Scope

The project scope strictly excluded intentional work on the manuscripts for materials not directly intended as part of *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes* or the project management materials, including preparation for those projects; while materials developed during manuscript development would be set aside for potential future reuse, they were developed with intent to use in *VCF* or in project management materials.

Further, the project scope for the project materials was to be focused *solely* on the Tabletop Roleplaying Game book medium. While some lessons-learned would naturally be usable in related mediums (video games, book publishing in general, smaller-scale tabletop roleplaying supplements, etc.), examination centered around books for Tabletop Roleplaying Games.

Triple-Constraint Matrix

	CONSTRAIN	ENHANCE	ACCEPT
TIME			Take the time needed to get it right – but keep stakeholders updated regularly!
COST	Minimize expenses before crowdfunding campaign; constrain to budget after		
QUALITY		Favor quality wherever possible	

Exhibit 2: Project Triple-Constraint Matrix

One of the most valuable PM materials for this project was its triple-constraint matrix, shown above. The nature of this project, being worked on by an independent studio centered on a primary author, necessitated the choice to accept on time constraints – that is, allow them to slide as necessary in order to avoid ‘rushing’ project deliverables development, even if this meant rescoping the project in the context of this thesis (which did, ultimately, occur). This was chosen in service to the firm’s traditional focus on quality – favoring a consistent and rigorous editorial voice and house style for books, high-quality artwork, and strongly tested game design and balancing.

This naturally left cost as a hard constraint for the project for several reasons – not the least of which is that money essentially costs time for the firm, in the form of the proprietor needing to save up money from sales of Valorous Games materials or their day job to pay costs. Minimizing expenses, especially before the project’s crowdfunding campaign (intended to run in a future phase), would be critical to continued progress on the project while adhering to the focus on maximizing quality.

Research Approach

This project was intentionally designed to center around execution and development – initial research centered on literature and internal understanding.

Subject Matter Expert Freeform Interviews

Later in the project, it was determined that consulting with some available Subject Matter Experts could contribute useful lessons for the genericized project plans; in total, four SMEs were reached out to via a text-based chat community the Project Manager was part of, representing a small, independent producer-focused cut of the larger Tabletop Roleplaying Game development community. (Two further SMEs considered participation but had to back out for personal reasons.)

SME questioning was handled via the asynchronous text messaging service Discord, allowing questions to go back and forth over time and allow for more information. This led to a large amount of qualitative data, including additional information acquired through iterative questions over a three-week period in October and early November 2024, collecting thoughts from producers over multiple standard realms of Project Management.

Initial questions in each interview were identical, to serve as a baseline for findings; all questions were open-ended to draw perspective. Exhibit 3 includes an example of one such question and answer by way of example; all questions asked and answers provided are attached as Appendix B.

Erik: What kinds of challenges have you encountered or witness with resource allocation and balancing, and how would you have handled those, in the context of TTRPG related projects and efforts?

Liana: TTRPGs as an industry have very little available in the way of financial resources, it's not a high profit industry so budgeting is always a huge challenge. Each product has enormous up-front cost and recouping those costs is extremely difficult and time-consuming.

Exhibit 3: Excerpt from one subject matter expert interview

Internet Research

Internet searches via multiple engines were performed through Fall 2024, producing a number of independent sources on project management in the context of tabletop roleplaying game development; as the independent tabletop roleplaying game development community has grown in the past years, podcasts (Stover, 2023) and interviews by developers (Segedy, 2021) have contributed to an ad-hoc body of knowledge in the field forming.

It was also interesting to discover one academic and one commercial effort to use tabletop roleplaying games as an aid for learning project management, a kind of converse to this project (Dombrowski, 2021; PMZone, 2020).

Academic Literature Research

Tabletop roleplaying games have had some academia over the years – particularly within the past decade, as the medium (in its modern form) has become old enough to have generations influenced by it. Reviews of academic literature were performed through a series of searches of journals available to UAA's consortium library.

While this led to few academic sources about management of tabletop roleplaying game development projects, it did reveal writings on a variety of topics showing research in the field. Examples include, but are not limited to, study of the social dynamics of the transition from in-person play to remote play during the 2020 surge of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it related to the challenges of adapting to remote work in the same timeframe (Parks, 2021); how the structure of tabletop RPGs can connect to ecophobia (Herrera, 2022); writings on the medium's history (Appelcline, 2021 among others); controlled vocabularies and their inefficacies in describing tabletop roleplaying games in academic collections (Smith, 2024); and even the development of tabletop roleplaying games as tools for

modeling and simulating real-world or theoretical scenarios as a tool of teaching (Hawkins, 2020; Torres-Rodriguez and Martinez-Granada, 2022).

Key Research Findings

Subject Matter Expert reviews and research into existing materials discovered some recurring threads.

One of the largest challenges in TTRPG projects is that the nature of the product produced often limits profitability and capacity for expedient recouping of costs – especially in the independent sphere, there is often very limited space for cost buffers. This strongly influences a project’s options for managing uncertainty and risk in such projects, tending to put emphasis on time buffers, time-based slack built into the project schedule, and keeping track of ebb and flow of how much work needs to be done by which roles at what points in project execution. Project schedules should be built to be actively ready for disruptions for late or insufficient freelance submissions, as well as team turnover.

In general, it was agreed that developing a project plan, writing that plan out (rather than leaving it in the project manager’s head, even where that PM is the primary or sole developer), and applying Project Management methodologies would actively have been helpful for projects where such was not done. (Looser development efforts may benefit from Agile or Agile-esque patterns.) Further, it is important that the plan, changes to the plan, and changes to the product being developed, be communicated across the team through active engagement, to prevent waste effort (where someone develops something that is incompatible with the current project direction).

Strong Risk and Uncertainty management – particularly as relates to opportunities – was called out as being particularly valuable in hobbyist projects, and positively mandatory in corporate-scale projects.

One risk to watch out for, given these projects are often highly creative by nature and deal with competing internal goals and constraints, is personal issues or disagreements between key developers; these sorts of issues can become a primary source of project delays and even collapse.

Strong Quality Assurance (and, more broadly, Delivery Performance management) is critical for TTRPG projects, to minimize rework (especially of critical pieces of the product). In larger firms, this tends to be a studio-wide method. A strong Delivery Performance Plan can be key to project success and to prevention of hurt feelings between developers; layout norms were specifically called out as important in this context.

Finally, it's worth noting that generative AI, so far, has not been a valuable tool in the tabletop RPG development among higher-tier developers, who have generally found hand-crafted content and the labor that goes into it more valuable.

Future Research Considerations

The data gathered from the research performed for this project provided for some findings; however, due to time and resource constraints on this project, questions were focused on higher-level aspects of Project Management. There are many potential topics to pursue in future research.

A broader survey targeting a wide swathe of the industry at all scales – including pursuing data from multiple independent and hobbyist TTRPG developer communities – could be an entire project unto itself, helping to turn trends unearthed in the sample-based research performed for this project into formally-backed knowledge. This could, in turn, unearth more detail-oriented questions to pursue.

Examination of optimal conditions for TTRPG writing and other creative work – including how to produce such conditions when dealing in purely remote circumstances – would represent a particular research space unto itself.

A strong comparison of measures of project success and how they correlate – or do not correlate – to end-product success could be a valuable data point, though possibly a harder one to research at the corporate level (where such data is often actively protected by nondisclosure policies).

Project Methodology

Scope Description and Definition

The project methodology for development of the project deliverables was initially developed around three key facts: First, that the project would produce two key deliverables – the *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes* book, and a genericized version of the project project plan suitable for reuse in future projects by Valorous Games and able to be provided to other independent firms. Second, that the project structure around both deliverables would need to build ‘upward’, starting with base components that would then be used to build the full works. Third, that the project was of a new scale for the developing studio – being the largest book yet by Valorous Games, as well as the first by them to heavily involve writers external to the firm and the first to involve a separate Project Manager. This led to the definition of a detailed project scope (introduced at a high level in “Introduction”, above, and detailed in Appendix A), including a list of discrete objectives, and a detailed analysis of that scope being performed prior to execution, including initial risk analysis, interdependency analysis, and definition of milestones, as well as building of a four-level project Work Breakdown Structure as the basis for the schedule, partially shown in Exhibit 4, below.

Task Mode	WBS	Task Name	Work	Duration	Start	Finish	Cost	% Complete	WBS Predecessors	Predecessors	Resource Names	Notes
0		0	Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes	702.5 hrs 626 days?	Fri 9/8/23	Fri 1/30/26	\$0.00	44%				
1		1	Project Planning / Thesis Planning	148.5 hrs 67 days?	Fri 9/8/23	Mon 12/11/23	\$0.00	100%				All dates listed here are based on class due dates for thesis work for PM 686A, Fall 2023.
49		2	Text Rework Scoping	143 hrs 305 days	Mon 10/2/23	Fri 11/29/24	\$0.00	100%				Yes, being worked on alongside the Project Plan - Reviews are for 'does this fit the rescope to the Lenala setting'. A Creature or Rule can STAY AS-IS, be UPDATED to suit the setting, or be DROPPED for use in future material.
63		3	Text Completion	63 hrs 305 days?	Wed 11/1/23	Tue 12/31/24	\$0.00	39%	1,2	1,49		
90		4	Art Preparation	4 hrs 66 days?	Wed 1/1/25	Wed 4/2/25	\$0.00	0%	3	63		Some existing art will be used; this is for required new art.
94		5	Layout Preparation	12 hrs 66 days?	Sat 2/1/25	Fri 5/2/25	\$0.00	50%	3,4[55+20%]	63,9055+20%		
99		6	Best in Class Backer Release	128 hrs 55 days	Mon 2/3/25	Fri 4/18/25	\$0.00	0%	5,2	96		[A text-only, PDF-only version of the book, fulfilling a milestone of a previous project]
116		7	Funding Campaign Prep	112 hrs 22 days	Mon 3/31/25	Tue 4/29/25	\$0.00	0%	4[55+10%],5[5055+10%],9455+10%			[Dates from here, except for WBS 17, to be revised based on timing of fulfillment of WBS 6.]
124		8	Funding Campaign Execution	76 hrs 22 days	Thu 5/1/25	Fri 5/30/25	\$0.00	0%				
127		9	Finalize Project Scope	0 hrs 1 day?	Sun 6/1/25	Sun 6/1/25	\$0.00	0%	8	124		Account for Stretch Goals, add new task groups based on them or any other determined requirements; this will define WBS 10-12
128		10	New Writing	0 hrs 66 days	Sun 6/1/25	Fri 8/29/25	\$0.00	0%	9	127		(Subtasks to be added based on WBS 9)
129		11	Artwork	0 hrs 67 days	Mon 6/2/25	Tue 9/2/25	\$0.00	0%				(Subtasks to be developed based on WBS 9)
130		12	Layout	0 hrs 67 days	Mon 6/2/25	Tue 9/2/25	\$0.00	0%				(Subtasks to be developed based on WBS 9)
131		13	Printing	0 hrs 1 day	Mon 9/1/25	Mon 9/1/25	\$0.00	0%	4,5,9,6	90,94,127,99		Printing begins after layout finalization; from this point forward, schedule is entirely controlled by outside firms, and focus of remaining team effort will be dedicated to the thesis (WBS 17).
132		14	Receiving of Printed Books	0 hrs 1 day	Sat 11/1/25	Sat 11/1/25	\$0.00	0%	13	131		
133		15	Shipping to Customers, Distributors	0 hrs 23 days	Mon 12/1/25	Wed 12/31/25	\$0.00	0%	14	132		
134		16	Project Closure	0 hrs 22 days	Thu 1/1/26	Fri 1/30/26	\$0.00	0%	13	131		(Most project closure tasks can be completed during receiving and shipping phases, as efforts are out of project team's control from here in.)
135		17	Thesis Completion	16 hrs 69 days	Sun 9/8/24	Wed 12/11/24	\$0.00	78%	1,2,3[55+20%]	1,49,6355+20%		Dates listed here are based on class due dates for thesis work for PM 686B, Fall 2024.

Exhibit 4: The Work Breakdown Structure to Level 2. Note that WBS 17, “Thesis Completion”, does not have the project deliverables for *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes* (WBS 3-15) as a prerequisite.

Change Management Plan

The project’s Change Management Plan was determined to be of particular importance early in project planning. Besides the inevitability of changes needed due to schedule shifts or similar, smaller changes in project direction during development would be unavoidable. This was partially handled by not defining all aspects of the book in the Project Plan, allowing adjustments to be made to the book without changing the project plan. However, it was critical to implement a Change Management Plan to account for changes to the project external to the book’s scope, such as the project schedule and adjusting the scope of deliverables for the milestones resolved for this paper within the allotted timeframe. This was one of the first pieces of the project plan completed after the initial scope, and one of the most heavily reviewed between the Project Manager and Project Sponsor before the beginning of project execution.

Risk Management Planning

Risk and Uncertainty management was also chosen as a priority focus early in project planning, with later research bearing out the value of this decision, for the simple reason that previous projects by

Valorous Games had run into a variety of risks over the years, and strong anticipatory planning would assist with appropriate mitigation of risks this time around. A risk register was formatted based on existing project management templates developed by the Project Manager, then populated and expanded throughout the project – including genericizing the risks discovered to populate the genericized project plan.

Project Lifecycle

Initiation

The reinitiation of *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes* was determined to be a desirable goal in 2023; discussions between Liana MacKenzie and Erik Ottosen led to the idea of using the project as Erik's thesis for Project Management as the Fall 2023 semester began. Initial discussions led to the preliminary scope – purely focused on the *VCF* book – to expand to include developing a genericized version of the project plan, suitable for future reuse by Valorous Games and by other firms in the tabletop roleplaying game development community and industry.

Key focus domains were selected based on project needs and concerns: Team Performance since this project would involve a larger team than previous efforts, Planning Performance since this project would be a larger project than anything previous to the company since its establishment, and Uncertainty Performance due to a record of unexpected risks associated with past projects.

The project charter was approved based on these decisions on September 21, 2023, alongside drafts of the project scope and Work Breakdown Structure.

Planning

Project Planning began before the charter's final approval, with drafting of what would become the project's full scope and Work Breakdown Structure. Alongside refinement of these documents would

be development of the Stakeholder Register, Risk Register (including response planning and a Risk Breakdown Structure), Lessons Learned Register, and Requirements Traceability Matrix (Appendices A.C through A.F in this report), establishment of the format for the Change Management Log, and full drafting of the main Project Plan for this effort. Preliminary research was executed, and the plan approved by project stakeholders (including University faculty advisors) by December 2023.

It was during this phase that the largest-impact risk to the project became realized, as the Project Sponsor and primary developer was diagnosed with an early-stage cancer that would require treatment over a significant period of time. This became known to the project team in September 2023, with treatment continuing through May 2024, shifting project execution and the scope of deliverables for this report accordingly, with heavy focus restarting in August 2024.

Execution

Execution on the project began in December 2023, focused on team members besides the project sponsor due to her prioritizing treatment; this included working with freelance writers on developing knowledge of the original *Valor: The Heroic Roleplay System* core book and system as part of quality assurance, and some creature development. However, progress would remain slow until the completion of the project sponsor's treatment.

While project development by Liana began to ramp up following the completion of treatment in May 2024, including building a full progressing tool, the next major team meeting to reignite efforts would be in August 2024, just before the beginning of Fall 2024 classes at UAA. During this phase, focus would pivot to developing the genericized project plans, and a change would be secured, focusing the project purely on the text of *VCF* and the genericized plan, based on what would be attainable by the end of 2024 at a present rate of progress.

The primary project measurement was refined to be based on ‘parcels remaining’ in April 2024, with a Google Sheets worksheet (chosen for ease of all staff accessing) with checkboxes for each of the 155 ‘creatures’ (representing 95% of remaining text as of that point), notes for who will handle which side of that creature (split into two parcels per creature – their in-setting descriptions, and their game-mechanical statistics or “statblock”), as well as book-side information such as each creature’s defining mechanical elements and categorization within the setting. An example of the parcels checklist (minus a notes column that contained proprietary data) is provided as Exhibit 5, and the burndown chart based on confirmed parcels completed (those checked off, usually by Liana) is provided as Exhibit 6, and an example of one of the parcels as Exhibit 7.

	A	B	C	D	E	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Foe	Level	Type	Keywords	Classification	Status	Writer(s)	Statblockers	Region	Writing Drafted: 82 of 155	Stats Drafted: 124 of 155
2	Autumn Hare	4	Soldier	Military Jack of All Trades	Baron	New addition	Soup	Liana	Taehan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	Autumn Hare Swarm	6	Swarm		Baron	New addition	Soup	Liana	Taehan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Werewolf	9	Elite	Commander Brute	Baron	Stat block complete	Soup	Liana	Any	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Werewolf Packmaster	11	Master	Commander Jack of All Trades	Baron	Stat block complete	Soup	Liana	Any	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Merfolk	5	Soldier	Mercenary Skirmisher	Baron	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Machen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Archon Commander	12	Soldier	Military Guardian	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Archon Soldier	9	Soldier	Military Guardian	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	Cherubim	16	Elite	Commander Jack of All Trades	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	Divine Legion	18	Swarm	Military Guardian	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Heavenly Host	13	Swarm	Military Guardian	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Horsemen of the Apocalypse	19	Swarm	Evil Spirit Dominant	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13	Mechanae Armor	10	Master	Commander Jack of All Trades	Construct	New addition	Liana	Liana	Machine Consortium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14	Mechanae Pulverizer	5	Master	Military Artillery	Construct	New addition	Liana	Liana	Machine Consortium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15	Mechanae Skyrender	18	Soldier		Construct	New addition	Liana	Liana	Machine Consortium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Mechanae Trooper	1	Soldier		Construct	New addition	Liana	Liana	Machine Consortium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17	Ophanim	14	Elite	Defender Guardian	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18	Seraphim	18	Elite	Support Guardian	Construct	Stat block complete	Liana	Liana	Purging Flame Imperium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
19	Ghoul	4	Flunky	Evil Spirit Harrier	Djinn	Stat block complete	MadnessDiamon Liana	Liana	Mufrait	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
20	Ghoul Horde	5	Swarm	Bound Harrier	Djinn	Stat block complete	MadnessDiamon Liana	Liana	Mufrait	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
21	Ifrit	13	Elite	Evil Spirit Jack of all Trades	Djinn	Stat block complete	MadnessDiamon Liana	Liana	Mufrait	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
22	Jann	10	Elite	Principled Artillery	Djinn	Stat block complete	MadnessDiamon Liana	Liana	Mufrait	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
23	Marid	15	Elite	Commander Jack of All Trades	Djinn	Stat block complete	MadnessDiamon Liana	Liana	Mufrait	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Exhibit 5: Example of the parcels checklist. (Level, Type, and Keywords are all key to the statblock; Classification and Region are all key to the writing; Status, Writer(s) and Statblock designers, along with the checkboxes, reflect work assignment and progress.)

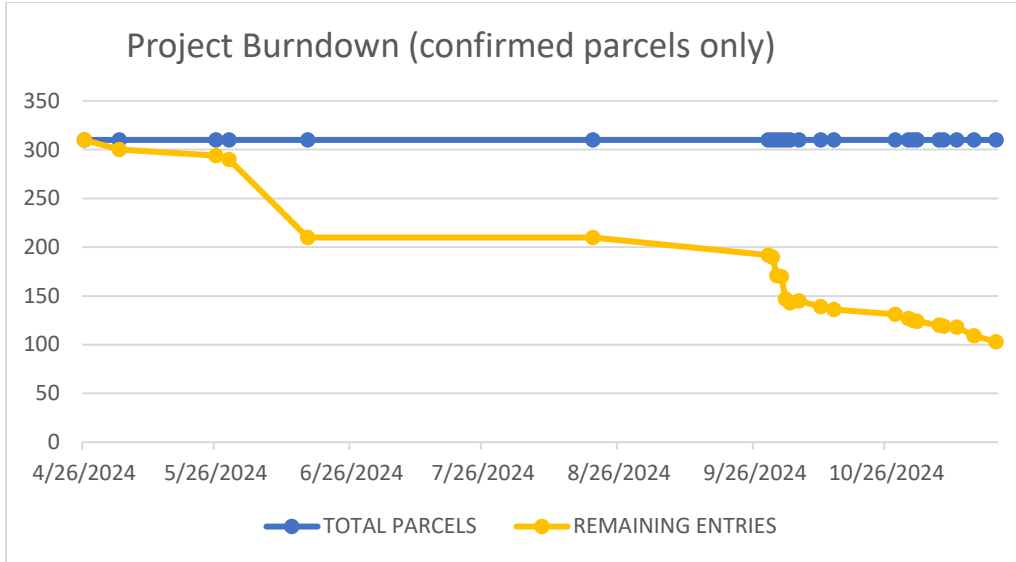


Exhibit 6: Project Burndown (based on confirmed parcels). Dots reflect days where the number of items checked off changed (except for August 20, 2024, which was marked as the date of a key meeting).

Dokkaebi (formerly Goblin)
Lv. 6 Flunky, Trickster Assassin

Updating to Dokkaebi

Primary	Attack	Active	Statistics	Increments
Strength: 13	Strength: 19	Muscle: 9	Health: 1	Health: -
Agility: 4	Agility: 10	Dexterity: 4	Stamina: 76	Stamina: 16
Spirit: 5	Spirit: 11	Aura: 5	Defense: -	Critical Health: -
Mind: 13	Mind: 19	Intuition: 9	Resistance: -	Damage: 6
Guts: 5		Resolve: 5	Move: 5	Initiative: 4

Passive Skills: *Sprinter lv. 2, Tireless lv. 1*

Skills: *Diminutive, Invisibility*

Bonk! **Technique Level:** 9 **ST:** 11 **Core Power:** 8

The Dokkaebi breaks its club on any nearby skulls

Attack action; roll Muscle (+8) to hit, deals 74 damage, targets all enemies in your Zone of Control

Exhibit 7: A single parcel of work, the statblock for the Dokkaebi (a creature originating from Korean mythology). (This is the smallest parcel in the draft document... And the only one directly worked on by the Project Manager, though only to update it based off notes by the writer. Gold highlights represent comments on the draft manuscript, not shown due to containing proprietary information.)

Note that this checklist was separate from and more specifically focused than the full project Work Breakdown Structure, focused solely on the largest portion of writing efforts split into individual

work parcels; calculations of progress in the WBS were updated based on this checklist. This was done for cost reasons (only the Project Manager has a license for Microsoft Project; at \$1129 per seat for Project Professional, providing it for the full team would be prohibitively costly), and also for simplicity (a binary 'done or not done' is more useful as a progressing tool than percentage measures per-parcel when dealing with hundreds of parcels). Using Google Sheets specifically also provided a version history, enabling retroactive measurement collection for select data.

It is good to note that the number of remaining entries went *up* on the entry recorded on October 6, 2024; this was because two entries were determined to be in need of rework to better fit other portions of the book that had been completed. (This had also occurred a few other times; however, those are not reflected in this chart, as more entries were checked off as completed than unchecked in those measurement timeframes.)

Separate from this effort, the genericized project plan and tools were drafted based off of the project plan, alongside updates to the project plan based on lessons learned over the first months of development, in October 2024, with the first draft fully completed November 1st. This version of the plan removed data proprietary to, or specific to Valorous Games, such as the firm's work payout rates for writing and artwork, and included guidance in each section and tool for how a novice PM might rework that section to reflect their specific project.

On November 16, 2024, based on progress made to date and risks realized during project execution, it was determined that the project scope would be revised to reduce the deliverables to measurable progress on the manuscript of *VCF*, and the complete genericized project plan and tools.

Monitoring and Controlling

Project Monitoring was intentionally implemented in a 'light touch' format, better suited to an independent development, combining updates to the Microsoft Project file based on informal

discussion, implementation of a simple progressing mechanism (Exhibit 5, above), and regular questions to detail progress. All monitoring and control was performed by the Project Manager, with responsibilities tracked on a per-parcel basis by the Project Sponsor, who also served as the primary (though not sole) adjudicator of when a parcel should be checked off as completed (or unchecked for rework).

This methodology was optimal for this project, as the active work parcels for this phase of project execution generally did not require execution in a specific order (creature descriptions and statblocks could be worked on independently of each other, as shown in Exhibit 7), and because the timeframe of *VCF*, being based on a triple-constraint matrix where time was allowed to slide, did not call for heavy metricization of progress beyond a straightforward Earned Value (EV) metric – doing so could actively cause undue pressure to the project team.

What *was* actively tracked heavily throughout project execution, was realization of risks – planned-for and otherwise – throughout execution, and management of project changes as a result of those risks. While the plan was crafted such that changes internal to *VCF*'s book text were not controlled in this way, changes to the project's scope were actively controlled, including review with the Project Sponsor, analysis by the Project Manager, then implementation accordingly, throughout. This balance turned out to be correct for this project, as it maximized the Project Sponsor's flexibility to update high-level components of the book during implementation of the creature entries without process that would have been useful only as a formality.

One surprise boon to measurement and control was picking non-core portions of the work for the book, and specifically assigning them to the Project Manager. This included tasks like reformatting creature entries to be formatted in a format suitable for copying into the final book (Exhibit 7, above, depicts such a reformatted entry), adjusting section order in the manuscript, and quickly updating one

creature stat block (Exhibit 7) just to get it out of the way. This work necessitated the Project Manager taking a direct hand in the manuscript, allowing them to get a better feel for work performed and enabling more accurate measurements. This also was useful because it freed the Project Sponsor or other members of the Project Team from having to deal with these tasks, thus focusing on the completion of the actual descriptions and statblocks.

Closeout (Phase)

As described above, the project scope includes more phases that will be going out beyond the execution performed and detailed within this project report, including funding and implementation of the book's artwork, print run, and delivery to customers. However, the project plan was built with the assumption of 'phase' closeouts at selected milestones, including Milestone 2, the completion of the book text.

During this closeout, review of project successes, lessons learned, and realized risks was performed, and results documented; these formed the basis for this report, and for confidence in future progress on this project. The details of this are documented in project plan documents, as well as in Project Findings and Results, below.

Project Findings and Results

The development of *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes*, the genericized Project Management Plan, and the attendant context-specific tools reveals an array of valuable takeaways for future similar projects for Valorous Games and for other TTRPG developers, particularly independent and hobbyist creators – the first such lesson being simply to keep track of lessons learned. Continuously document risks realized (planned for or otherwise), changes to the project scope, updates for stakeholders, and other elements, and figure out what you and your team can learn from them. Even lessons that may seem utterly obvious can be highly valuable to document, as what is obvious for you right now may cease to be mere months later, let alone to future project team members.

Implementing a project plan was generally observed to be of value for the project, in that it helped keep the project’s intended scope tightly controlled, and provided a clear, mutually-understood source of knowledge. While some specific elements were used more than others, writing out and documenting the baseline for everything – then updating it based on project realities and lessons learned – helped keep track of project work to a level of detail greater than previous projects. Setting a plan implicitly sets facts about the project’s execution methodology, which is greatly valuable in most circumstances.

One component of the project plan that was highly useful for this project and would be valuable for any TTRPG project intended for print release was the implementation of a pagination plan – simply put, a layout of how many pages the book is expected to be, and how many of those pages should go to each section of the book. While these plans tend to require some flexibility, they can help ensure a top-quality book that doesn’t have several blank pages in the back due to printer limitations or other effects. A sample pagination plan with documentation has been included with the genericized project plan.

Change management proved critical to success of this project so far – particularly in the realm of developing and verifying understanding of scope changes. That said, the plan was crafted to be capable of handling changes in a reasonable timeframe for the project – the final change was recommended, considered, analyzed, and decided upon within twenty minutes, with details of the impact on the project plan implemented within an hour after that. While larger projects necessarily call for greater rigor, smaller efforts should still have a documented set of rules for how to modify the project plan – and document those modifications – to be optimally ready for things that can cause changes during execution. Related, however, should be that the plan includes changes that are explicitly not subject to the change management procedure. In this project, a rule was implemented allowing the Project Sponsor to order a change, and if she either specifically stated to skip the change management plan or was asked if this change should skip the plan and she said yes, then the plan would be implemented immediately. A similar rule may be imprudent for larger projects, but for small team efforts, it can enable contextual flexibility. (Notably, this skipped process still involved recording the change and its impacts in the log, to enable post-hoc analysis.)

Uncertainty and Risk Management should not be undervalued – this bore out repeatedly with subject matter experts from the hobbyist scale to the corporate scale, and bore out in project execution as it ensured that events that occurred with the project were able to be compared against old events, and their functional impacts usefully documented. Even risk events that “turned out okay” (or turned out to be secretly more of an opportunity than a threat in one case) should be documented in detail, lest they recur with greater severity next time due to being underestimated.

In projects where the Project Manager is not additionally filling other roles in the project, it is worthwhile to find some work they can contribute to, so that they have some direct engagement in aspects of project work. This can help develop a perspective on the work, or handle ‘administrative’ type tasks like reorganizing a manuscript, freeing the project writing team to focus on new writing.

Summary, Implications, and Conclusions

The extremely short summation of this project is simply that “Building a project plan and looking at many segments is valuable in Tabletop Roleplaying Game development at the hobbyist and independent development scale, as much as if not more than at the corporate scale.” Implementing best practices and PM tools and techniques helps allow for optimal risk mitigation and control, without needing to be ‘overburdening’ on the project team – in fact, good project planning can eliminate future burdens on project efforts for the team.

Good Project Management does not mandate specific methodologies for specific aspects of a project – more important is the active, considered choosing of methodologies throughout. Special consideration to Change Management is particularly useful, alongside uncertainty management (including investigation of opportunities), and good accounting for the health, physical and mental, of the project team – including the Project Manager.

A good project plan for a tabletop project – especially one in the independent or hobby sphere – can and does increase a project’s resilience against even severe risks becoming realized.

The attached project plan is intended as a start point, based off these conclusions and lessons learned from the development of *Valor: Villains, Creatures and Foes*. New Project Managers – or experienced ones who have only more recently realized that Project Management is what they’re doing – are provided the materials to enhance their own work. PM can be valuable even for purely hobbyist projects, let alone at commercial scale.

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