

Making Believe, Together: A Pilot Study of the Feasibility and Potential Therapeutic Utility of a
Family Tabletop Role-playing Game

by

Lorna Breen

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Interventions for children and their families have traditionally stemmed from two interrelated frameworks: play-based child therapies, and family therapies (Gil, 2015). Integrated family play therapy frameworks aim to capitalize on the strengths of both approaches by combining meaningful engagement of children through play, and systems-level insights into patterns of family functioning and interaction (Gil, 2015). A virtually unexplored avenue for play-based therapeutic applications of role-play that may lend themselves to an integrated family play therapy framework are tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs); cooperative and narrative-based games wherein players adopt the role of fictional characters as they navigate a fantasy setting arbitrated by a game master. Case studies on the use of TRPGs with children and young adults have yielded initial evidence of their potential therapeutic utility (e.g., Blackmon, 1994; Enfield, 2007; Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013), however, research on their application is limited, particularly with families. The current study pilot tested an original TRPG module (“*The Family Tabletop Adventure*”) for use with families to establish the module’s potential therapeutic utility and identify targets for further refinement. A sample of three family groups ($N = 11$) were recruited to participate in six weekly online sessions (a 1-hour introductory session, four 1.5- to 2-hour game sessions, and a 1-hour exit interview). A variety of mixed-method measures were used to assess family functioning at baseline and post-game, including observational coding, self-report, and qualitative group interviews. Exploratory analyses of the findings indicated the module’s feasibility of implementation and ease of use, low iatrogenic risk, perceptions by families as fun and engaging, and potential utility across a range of family processes relevant to therapeutic contexts, including communication and problem solving, positive interactions and relationship building, and the generation of novel insights about family members. Family feedback was used

to identify several targets for additional refinement of the game module to improve families' comprehension and engagement with the game. The implications of these findings and their relevance to the use of TRPGs in family intervention contexts are discussed.

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Dedication

To my grandma, Cynthia, one of the most wise and remarkable women I have ever known, who offers every one of my creations her pride, enthusiasm, admiration, and love, whether they be lilacs in mason jars or publications.

To my mama, Gale, my cheerleader, whose dedication to and support of my studies throughout my academic career could surely have earned her a degree of her own, and whose intelligence, bravery, and unshakeable spirit have provided me with tools to build the resilience that enabled my perseverance through the darkest and most difficult points of my life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

There is a significant amount of evidence that the quality and stability of an individual's family context poses wide-reaching implications for wellbeing throughout the lifespan (Turner et al., 2012). Adverse family environments, including those characterized by abuse, maltreatment, neglect, and household dysfunction have been implicated in numerous harmful, long-term effects on mental, physical, and emotional health and development (Turner et al., 2012). For instance, greater cumulative exposure to adverse childhood experiences during development is associated with a progressively greater risk for the emergence of a variety of psychiatric conditions throughout development and into adulthood (Waite & Ryan, 2020) including mood disorders, substance use, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and behavioural disorders (Felitti et al., 1998; Kessler et al., 2010), as well as detriments to physical health, including increased risk for the development of chronic health conditions like heart, liver, and pulmonary disease, sexually transmitted infections, and early death (Felitti et al., 1998). Perpetration of family violence often occurs in the context of, or is further exacerbated by, general characteristics of the family system that are associated with increased risk, including parental dysfunction, family conflict, problematic caregiver interactions, harsh or inconsistent parenting practices, and family adversity and stress (Turner et al., 2012). Conversely, positive family contexts and interactions contribute to multiple dimensions of wellbeing throughout development, including self-esteem, social competence, emotional regulation and coping skills, secure attachment bonds, and fostering resilience in response to stress and adversity (Turner et al., 2012). Subsequently, a growing understanding of the interactions between numerous factors within the family environment, and their resulting implications for development and functioning across the

lifespan, have produced a demand for evidence-based interventions to address the complex needs of children and their families.

Integrative Approaches to Child and Family Therapy

Traditionally, therapeutic interventions for children and families have largely stemmed from two therapeutic frameworks that, while frequently interrelated in practice, originated as discrete approaches to intervention: child therapy approaches, most often play therapy-based, and family therapy approaches (Gil, 2015). Historically, the largest departure between these frameworks has been in their focus; play-based child therapies emphasize the needs of a child as an individual, often with a diminished emphasis on their larger family context, while in contrast, family therapy approaches emphasize the family as a system as opposed to individuals within it (Gil, 2015). While early family therapy theorists recognized the importance of the inclusion and engagement of children in treatment of the family as a whole, evidenced by multiple examples of early approaches to family therapy that emphasize and advocate for the inclusion of children and the importance of play within their frameworks (e.g., structural family therapy; Minuchin, 1974; symbolic-experiential family therapy, Keith & Whitaker 1981; the Satir model of family therapy Satir, 1991), later research documenting the exclusion of children from family therapy suggests that a notable lack of this emphasis had become increasingly commonplace (Miller & MacLeod, 2001). Proposed reasons for this exclusion include a lack of therapist comfort, confidence, and/or interest in treating children (Breunlin & Jacobsen, 2014; Lund et al., 2002), possibly exacerbated by a paucity of developmental, child-focused training and education received by practitioners of family therapy (Gil, 2015). Critics of family intervention frameworks that do not incorporate play as a medium for children's communication and instead focus exclusively on "adult" modes of communication argue that this omission may limit the capacity for children to

express their feelings and contribute their own perspectives, or ultimately, to be included as active participants in treatment (Gil, 2015). Unlike adults who possess the ability to verbally convey their feelings and describe their experiences, children's expression and communication often occurs through the natural, developmental language of childhood—namely, play and fantasy (Russ, 2004). Conversely, play therapists who work individually with children may lack the expertise to analyze a child's context with a family systems-based lens in their approach to intervention, or the capacity to effectively incorporate caregivers or other family members in the therapeutic process. As a result, valuable insights into the role of family functioning in the development and maintenance of childhood emotional problems may be overlooked (Gil, 2015). Subsequently, these oversights may pose important implications for treatment outcomes; multiple metanalytic reviews examining the efficacy of play therapy have found significantly larger effect sizes for interventions where caregivers were involved in treatment (Bratton et al., 2005; LeBlanc & Ritchie, 2001; Ray et al., 2001).

An ever-growing understanding of the many interconnected influences on children's development have produced developmental systems approaches to child psychopathology that increasingly underscore the significant contributions of the family system to children's developmental trajectories across a variety of areas of psychosocial functioning (Hayden & Mash, 2014). In light of these considerations, the fields of both child and family therapy have witnessed a shift in emphasis towards the development of integrated frameworks of family play therapy that combine the respective strengths of both approaches to holistically address individual and collective needs within the family system (Gil, 2015; Lund et al., 2002). The theorized benefits of an integrated family play therapy approach that capitalizes on complimentary goals of both family therapy and play therapy include enhancements to

communication between family members, increased avenues for assessing and altering patterns of family interaction and generating novel solutions to problems, improvement to attachment bonds and enhanced relationships between family members, and tools for clarifying roles and boundaries, providing family members with new insights about one another and fostering cooperation, joy, and collective pleasure through play (Gil, 2015).

Therapeutic Applications of Tabletop Role-Playing Games

A therapeutic technique that is commonly utilized across multiple therapeutic modalities, including within family play therapy paradigms, is the use of stories and role-play. A largely unexplored format for their application in a therapeutic context, particularly with families, are tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), a subgenre of games popularized by *Dungeons & Dragons*. A unique aspect of TRPGs is their cooperative nature: the content and progression of the game is co-constructed by the imaginations and creativity of its players as they take on the role of fictional characters to describe their actions within a fantasy setting arbitrated by a game master, or GM, who provides story quests and objectives and narrates the outcomes of players' decisions through interpretation of randomized dice rolls.

There are various theorized benefits of the application of TRPGs as therapeutic tools that may be drawn from existing knowledge of the role of cooperative pretend play in fostering social, emotional, and cognitive competencies throughout childhood and adolescent development (Cattanach, 2008; Russ, 2004) in combination with the use of role-play in family play therapy contexts as tools to assess and target family competencies in problem solving, patterns of communication and interaction, as well as to foster relationship building through shared play (Gil, 2015). However, though a small number of case studies on the therapeutic use of TRPGs have provided initial evidence of their clinical utility in individual (e.g., Blackmon, 1994; Enfield, 2007) and group settings (e.g., Enfield, 2007; Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013) with children and young adults,

research on their therapeutic applications is limited, and further, no research has been conducted on the therapeutic use of TRPG with families to date, raising questions about potential risk and possible adverse effects, feasibility of implementation, and the effectiveness of family engagement posed by the use of a TRPG module within a therapeutic context. As such, the purpose of the current study involves pilot testing an original TRPG module with families to establish preliminary insights into these areas of inquiry, and further, to refine the module for use in future research aimed at the formal evaluations of its therapeutic utility.

Chapter Two: Background and Literature Review

Play Across the Lifespan

Play has long been regarded as an essential element of the human experience, regardless of one's chronological age. In his essay *The Aims of Psychotherapy*, Carl Jung (1931) wrote that "The creative activity of imagination frees man from his bondage to the 'nothing but' and raises him to the status of one who plays. As Schiller says, man is completely human only when he is at play." (CW 16, para. 96). In research and theory on both human and animal models of emotion, play is included among a number of essential emotional systems in the mammalian brain that generate the basic, primary-process affective states which form the foundations of the higher-order human emotional experience (Panksepp, 2009). The neural networks that comprise the Play System have not yet been mapped as extensively relative to other basic emotional systems, however specific brain regions that have been implicated in its functioning include the medial thalamus and ascending dopamine systems (Panksepp, 2009), the latter of which has been linked to the generation of joy from laughter (Burgdorf et al., 2007). Further, the Play System serves a crucial role in the social instincts of mammals, and in particular, our urge for joyous engagement with others through social play (Panksepp, 2009).

For children, play behaviours have been implicated in brain maturation and the achievement of a variety of essential developmental tasks across physical, motor, cognitive, social, and emotional domains, including the development of problem-solving and reasoning skills, creativity, self-differentiation, emotional regulation and self-monitoring, language acquisition, literacy, and social competencies, including empathetic thinking (Frost et al., 2012; Panksepp, 2007; Russ, 2004). It has been theorized that play facilitates positive social interchanges between young mammals that promote the acquisition of learned social rules and

effective navigation of the external social world (Panksepp, 2009) including the development of inhibitory skills initiated by the frontal lobe that aid in the regulation of emotional urges and impulsive behaviour in order to enable effective, goal-directed behaviour (Panksepp, 2007). The rapid changes to neural circuitry that occur during maturation and the subsequent emergence of increasingly sophisticated developmental abilities are actively shaped by the conditions of children's environments, including the degree of available opportunities for play and interaction, which in turn function to increase the range and complexity of children's play behaviours (Frost et al., 2012). In line with these findings on the dynamic role of play in shaping children's development, it has been theorized that mental representations generated by symbolic play extend beyond merely simulating the exact conditions of children's external environments, and function instead to actively transform their internal cognitive-affective representations of their external social worlds (Bretherton, 1984).

In addition to a range of developmental competencies, play also contributes to the strength and quality of children's attachment relationships. Attachment is an essential bond between children and their caregivers that establishes internal templates for children's concepts of themselves, their relationships with others, and their external environments, and fosters the acquisition of competencies in emotional and physiological self-regulation, self-organization, and social skills (Bowlby, 1982; Waite & Ryan, 2020). The adverse effects of disruption to attachment-related processes on the developing brain have been well-documented; extreme neglect is associated with severe deficits in cognitive, emotional, and social development (Frost et al., 2012). Conversely, children require secure, mentally stimulating environments and nurturing interactions with caregivers to promote optimal development, and play behaviours are some of the earliest mechanisms by which children navigate their external environments and

engage in interactions with their caregivers that contribute to the degree and quality of their attachment bond, thereby influencing later development (Brown; 2010, Frost et al., 2012).

While play is commonly characterized as an artifact of childhood, evidence exists that documents its ongoing importance and enduring benefits across the lifespan (Brown, 2010). In human and non-human animals alike, play is associated with empathy, adaptability, creativity, and social cohesion; it enhances learning, and buffers against feelings of isolation and mental decline, regardless of age (Brown, 2010). However, despite the benefits associated with play and play behaviours in adulthood, existing research on play behaviours in adults is limited, a paucity which may exist for several reasons. First, though the significance and enduring role of play as a cultural and historical phenomenon that underscores numerous aspects of social life has been previously articulated in the works of various theorists (e.g., Huizinga, 1955; Jung, 1931) the cultural value (or lack thereof) ascribed to play in Western society generally characterizes play in adults as frivolous, irresponsible, and unproductive (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015a), often by virtue of its association with children (Cattanach, 2008), as well as social constructions of play and work that position them as diametric opposites (Brown, 2010). Next, difficulties inherent to the operationalization of play and playfulness in adulthood pose additional challenges for conducting research on play in adult populations due to the nuances of and variation in the forms and settings in which activities that evoke the cognitive-affective conditions that underpin “play” may occur (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015; Brown, 2010).

Despite an overall paucity of research on play in adults, several studies have examined the associations between adult playfulness and physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing. For instance, playfulness in adulthood is associated with multiple indicators of health, activity, and physical fitness, including improved cardiovascular health (Proyer et al., 2018). Similar

associations have been documented between adult play and psychological health as well; a study of playfulness in a sample of 898 young adults conducted by Magnuson and Barnett in 2013 found that playfulness was associated with lower levels of perceived stress and the utilization of active rather than avoidant coping strategies among their sample, while a 2012 study by Proyer found a robust positive association between playfulness in adults and ratings of overall life satisfaction and engagement in physical activity. Finally, a separate study conducted by Proyer and Ruch in 2011 that surveyed a sample of 268 adults revealed links between adult playfulness and teamwork, with connections between specific facets of play (operationalized as “fun,” “silly,” “expressive,” “creative,” and “spontaneous,”) to particular character traits indicative of psychological functioning. Specifically, robust positive relationships were found between the “fun” facet of playfulness and emotional strengths (zest; humour), as well as between all five facets of playfulness and intellectual strengths (creativity; curiosity).

Play may also confer benefits to interpersonal functioning. For instance, play behaviours are associated with positive affect in relationships; shared experiences of novel, exciting activities are associated with enhanced relationship quality and reduced boredom between intimate partners (Aron et al., 2000), and previous research with a sample of couples with high relationship satisfaction indicated that participants ranked play as a more essential feature of their relationships than sex or shared humour (Lauer & Lauer, 2002). Further, other research has shown that couples’ satisfaction with their participation in shared leisure corresponds to their overall levels of marital satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2006). By extension, play functions to reduce relationship conflict by strengthening emotional bonds and improving communication and conflict resolution skills (Vanderbleek et al., 2011; Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015b). In addition, established patterns of play in relationships may bolster their resilience during times of stress; a

2008 study by Claxton and Perry-Jenkins found that detriments to relationship quality associated with decreases in leisure activity following major life transitions (e.g., parenthood) were buffered by existing patterns of participation in shared leisure activities in a sample of 147 heterosexual couples.

The Therapeutic Utility of Play

In addition to its general benefits, it has been posited that play demonstrates particular utility as a medium for the delivery of therapeutic interventions by virtue of several of its essential qualities that allow it to be inherently self-reinforcing, including being seemingly purposeless, inherently engaging, and psychologically arousing, and providing freedom from a sense of time and self-consciousness that perpetuate a desire to continue (Brown, 2010). In turn, these self-reinforcing qualities stimulate improvisational potential that exposes individuals to new insights and discoveries, and aids problem solving (Brown, 2010). Beyond its utility as a medium for delivery for a variety of interventions, play functions as a useful therapeutic tool in and of itself by virtue of its capacity to generate therapeutic change. Some of the therapeutic mechanisms of change that are theorized to underlie this utility include self-expression and emotional catharsis, identification and labelling of feelings, generation of positive emotion and other corrective emotional experiences, counterconditioning fears, stress inoculation and management, the enhancement of social relationships through attachment and changes to object relations, social competence, empathy, problem solving and the generation of insight, resiliency, moral development, self-regulation, and self-esteem (Russ, 2004; Schaefer & Drewes, 2014). Further, while traditionally developed for use with children, play therapy interventions have been implemented with individuals across the lifespan, from early childhood to late adulthood (Kaduson, 2016).

Theoretical Foundations of Play Therapy

The therapeutic applications of play in Western psychological tradition may be traced back to the works of early theorists and practitioners in the growing field of psychotherapy, particularly Anna Freud and Melanie Kline, who adapted and extended existing psychoanalytic theory and practice for work with children through the use of play-based techniques (Seymour, 2016). Since these early beginnings, play has been utilized across a variety of therapeutic disciplines to adapt interventions and treatment to suit the developmental needs of children, providing a broad interdisciplinary foundation for the eventual emergence of play therapy as its own distinct field of inquiry and practice throughout the 1960's to the 1980's (Seymour, 2016).

While the breadth of this foundation conferred the field of play therapy with the roots of a rich and expansive therapeutic tradition, it also posed several challenges, including a notable lack publications specific to the field throughout its development relative to other more established therapeutic paradigms (Seymour, 2016). As a result, despite the therapeutic utility of play, play therapy interventions have historically been criticized as lacking sufficient empirical support to demonstrate their efficacy (Reddy et al., 2016). To address this deficit, recent years have witnessed increased attention devoted to empirical investigation of the clinical utility of play therapy (Reddy et al., 2016). Multiple meta-analyses examining the efficacy of play therapy interventions have been conducted that demonstrate its effectiveness, producing moderate to large effect sizes across a range of presenting problems, ages (from 3 to 16 years), genders, formats (group versus individual), and notably, finding that the inclusion of parents within an intervention generated the largest treatment effect sizes (Bratton et al., 2005; LeBlanc & Ritchie, 2001; LeBlanc & Ritchie, 1999; Ray et al., 2001), further supporting the rationale for the integration of play in family therapy interventions. However, many still regard play therapy

research to be in its initial stages, and recommendations have been made calling for research examining the efficacy of play therapy interventions that clearly articulate the specific components that underpin the therapeutic change produced by play therapy techniques in order to create manualized and replicable treatments and integrative therapy approaches that can be tailored to the needs of particular populations of clients (O'Connor et al., 2016; Phillips, 2010). Additionally, despite the existence of a number of empirically-supported play therapy approaches that incorporate caregivers, including filial therapy and Theraplay (O'Connor et al., 2016), these approaches are still primarily oriented toward the resolution of children's difficulties and family factors with a child or dyadic child-parent focus, rather than on the family system as a whole.

Drama and Narrative Play Therapies

Owing to an expansive theoretical base and integration of a wide range of existing therapeutic modalities within play therapy paradigms, the field of play therapy has expanded and differentiated amongst itself to encompass a wealth of techniques and approaches to intervention. Among these variegated approaches are a subset of drama and narrative play therapies that centre on the use of stories of events (real or imagined) enacted through dramatic and narrative play that enable children to convey experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings with and to others (Cattanach, 2008; Harvey, 2016). Narrative play therapy traces its roots to the work of Ann Cattanach, a dramatherapist whose model of play therapy outlines several core assumptions that serve as the theoretical foundation for narrative-based play therapies (Taylor de Faoite, 2011). The first assumption of Cattanach's model is that play is considered as essential and central to a child's understanding of their internal and external worlds; it is the medium through which a child navigates and produces internal representations of the physical and social world and

developmental processes that generate internal conceptions of the self. By extension, play is assumed to be a developmental process that allows children to articulate themselves as discrete, individual entities through their use of creative expression—children move along a developmental continuum of play that fosters their capacities to discover, embody, project, and enact symbols and metaphors through play to articulate, understand, and ascribe meaning to their inner and outer worlds and further develop their capacity for creativity. This process of imagining and experimentation underpins the next assumption of the model: that symbolic and imaginative play allow children to experiment with the possibilities of imaginary choices and situations and their outcomes without having to directly experience their consequences, a process underpinning the development of cognitive capacities for learning and problem solving (Russ, 2004). Finally, Cattanach specifies that the play generated through play therapy occurs within a therapeutic space co-constructed between a child and a therapist, establishing both physical and psychic containers in which these processes may occur and unfold.

Stories, Metaphors, and Role-play in Family Play Therapy

A cornerstone of narrative play therapy is the use of stories and metaphors, including dramatic pretend play and role-play, which serve a variety of essential therapeutic functions. First, the telling and dramatic enacting of stories through imaginative play offers children a medium through which they can negotiate and make sense of both their experiences and the experiences of others (Cattanach, 2008; Harvey, 2016), assisting them in navigating their own inner worlds, communicating their feelings and needs, and engaging in problem solving (Pernicano, 2016). It confers the opportunity for children to exert themselves as active agents by determining the roles of the characters, the events they will encounter, and the approach and outcome of obstacles (Taylor de Faoite, 2011). The stories that we (and others) tell about

ourselves shape the navigation and development of our personal and social identities, and narrative play therapy provides a space in which a child and therapist utilize the stories that emerge through play to collaboratively explore ways of shifting and expanding aspects of children's understandings of their identities to challenge harmful dominant narratives that they may have internalized (Cattanach, 2008). Children may choose a variety of mediums to tell these stories, including with the use of toys, props, drawing, or building as they enact the story (Taylor de Faoite, 2011).

The use of stories and role-play may confer particular benefits to an integrated family play therapy approach. Role-play is regularly utilized outside of play therapy paradigms with clients across a range of ages, including acceptance and commitment therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (Pernicano, 2016). In a family context, the use of imaginative role-play could offer multiple avenues for assessment and treatment planning and delivery. For instance, stories and imaginative role-play could be used to engage families in exploring family dynamics and conflicts, fostering communication, expressing needs, and generating solutions (Gil, 2015). Role-play can help family members express their internal experiences, produce and experiment with solutions for the resolution of conflict, and allow for the exploration of experiences normally outside of the realm of possibility within daily life (Harvey, 2016). Further, role-play offers the opportunity to observe and assess patterns of interaction between family members. For instance, family dynamics in attachment and communication are reflected by the dramatic expression of children and their family members and the roles they adopt during dramatic pretend play, which may also offer important insight into children's functioning; fantasy dramatic play is a pretend play behaviour that develops in concert with cognitive abilities, social competence, and emotional regulation skills, and may serve as an indicator of children's

wellbeing, as the expression of spontaneous dramatic play may be disturbed by poor functioning (Harvey, 2016). In addition, the use of fictional stories can help family members address issues that they find difficult to talk about or confront directly in traditional talk family therapy, and further, incorporating parents and other family members into imaginative storytelling can help to engage all family members in therapy, enhance relationships, and increase a family's overall understanding of one another's difficulties (Gil, 2015). Finally, the flexibility conferred by a story-based format would allow practitioners to develop their own stories or narrative elements tailored to a family's specific context or treatment targets; shedding light on issues that might not have been noticed by every family member, challenging denial or problematic thinking, or using stories to teach specific skills like coping, problem solving, and cooperation (Pernicano, 2016).

The Application of Tabletop Role-playing Games in Family Play Therapy

A potential mode of application for the use of story, metaphor, and role-play in a family play therapy setting lies in the realm of tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). TRPGs were first introduced in 1974 with the release of the first edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, a cultural staple from which a variety of other modern TRPGs have drawn their inspiration (Sargent, 2014). Though previously regarded as a niche interest enjoyed by a subset of gaming enthusiasts, the format's mainstream popularity has surged since its inception (Sargent 2014). While role-playing games also commonly take the form of single- and multi-player video games, a unique aspect of TRPGs is that their content is drawn from the imagination of players to co-construct the narrative of the game by taking on the role of fictional characters of their own making and verbally interacting with one another to describe the actions taken by their characters.

The general framework for the game and the scenarios that players encounter is provided by a game master, or GM, an individual who acts as a referee between the fantasy setting of the

game, its associated rules, and the players. Though not participating directly as a player, the game master is tasked with the management of multiple responsibilities; these include assuming the role of non-player characters that players encounter during the course of the game, providing players with choices of quests and objectives, and narrating the outcomes of their actions and decisions, as arbitrated by the interpretation of randomized dice rolls and the base rules of the game. In contrast, players interact with the world generated by the GM by adopting the roles of fictional characters and co-constructing their personal narratives within the setting through collaborative storytelling and the pursuit of both shared and individual goals.

Before the game may begin, each player is tasked with creating their character—the fictional persona that they will adopt during the game. This process involves generating their character’s personal history, as well as selecting their personality traits, skills, and abilities. These skills may be social in nature (e.g., a character’s abilities of persuasion), mental (e.g., a character’s general level of knowledge and wisdom) or physical (e.g., a character’s level of physical strength and athleticism). Skill levels and proficiencies determine numeric modifiers that may be added to dice rolls pertaining to the appropriate skill and that, in turn, affect the likelihood of their success. In addition, players may also select the “class” of their character that indicates their fantasy profession, for example, a wizard or a ranger. Beyond the assignment of these core elements, the level of detail involved in the character creation process is flexible to the preferences of each player, and details of their backgrounds, appearances, and mannerisms may be as simple or as elaborate as they choose.

In addition to the intrinsic value of TRPGs as engaging, collaborative, and socially driven leisure experiences (Sargent, 2014), they may also demonstrate utility as a mode of delivery for therapeutic intervention in several respects. Games in general have a long history of utilization as

teaching tools, promoting the development of logic and cooperation (Wright et al., 2017). Developmentally, cooperative games and pretend play allow children to explore and develop their competencies in social interaction, negotiation of rules, perspective-taking, and emotional expression and regulation (Wright et al., 2017). The fantastical and flexible nature of TRPGs allows players to engage in situations and social interactions unhindered by the constraints of reality and which may extend beyond the range of their normal experience. Progression through the narrative of the game through the completion of objectives allows players to engage in collaborative problem solving, navigate relationships between characters, and experiment with social roles, providing the opportunity to safely test moral and social decisions and work through their outcomes. Because characters are player-generated, it is assumed that individuals will express, at least to some degree, their own behavioural and social tendencies through the actions of their personas; despite occurring in a fictional fantasy setting, the structure of the game requires players to interact with the world by “imagining how they would handle the same circumstances if they were their fantasy persona and the situations were genuine,” (Waskul & Lust, 2004, p. 349). As such, the actions of a client’s character could be utilized as sources of feedback that may be responded to and reflected upon during the course of therapy to stimulate insight (Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013). Additionally, therapists can utilize the structure of the game-rules to implement limit-setting and ground rules (Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013). To this end, a number of additional potential therapeutic benefits of fantasy role-play have been outlined by Enfield (2007), including addressing real-world challenges that a client is facing through the use of story and metaphor, opportunities to explore one’s own strengths and issues through those of a character, and chances to develop a number of intra- and inter-personal competencies, including communication, self-esteem, and emotional regulation.

Theorized Advantages of a TRPG Intervention for Families

The cooperative, group-based structure of TRPGs may provide specific benefits when implemented in a family play therapy context. External observations of behaviour possess particular utility in both research and practice with families, providing valuable insights into the processes of the family system that shape familial relationships and interactions, and contributing to children's development and maturation (Kerig, 2001). Further, observations provide additional information to supplement that which is provided by an individual's own report of their self-perceptions, as discrepancies may exist between these perceptions and their behaviours (Kerig, 2001). In practice, the potential therapeutic advantages afforded by TRPGs may provide additional avenues to achieve the goals of intervention in a family play therapy context, providing additional tools for practitioners to generate fictional scenarios to observe and assess individual and family competencies, family dynamics, communication and conflict resolution styles, patterns of interaction and attachment, and potential targets for intervention. Practitioners could potentially subsequently utilize this information to pursue family-specific goals through the generation of tailored scenarios that offer opportunities for families to build relationships, resolve conflicts, and develop their communication skills as they engage in collaborative problem solving.

A potential advantage specifically offered by the format of a TRPG for use in research and practice with families is its emphasis on group problem solving as a fundamental mechanic. A core aspect of family life involves the capacity to cope with problems and conflict, whether minor, transient issues or major upheavals. Because families function as interconnected systems, even issues that occur on an individual level may have direct consequences for other family members and for the family unit as a whole; consequently, a family's inability to navigate

problems may increase their risk for conflict, poorer communication, and reduced relationship quality between family members (Forbes et al., 2001). As such, family problem-solving behaviours serve as key indicators of family functioning that provide the opportunity to observe family characteristics of cohesion and communication, and have become increasingly conceptualized as essential characteristics of family life (Forbes et al., 2001).

A further advantage of the use of TRPGs in a family play therapy context may lie in its potential to address possible barriers to therapeutic engagement among specific populations of clients. One such population is adolescents; despite the benefits of play for individuals of a variety of ages and the popularity of play-based interventions in child therapy, most play interventions have been designed for use with younger children, primarily ages 3 to 12 (Kaduson, 2016). Though attention towards the use of play-based interventions with adolescent clients has increased in the literature (Milgrom, 2005), there exists less available research on best practices for the adaptation and implementation of play-based interventions to the specific developmental needs of this age group (Kaduson, 2016). For example, therapy interventions that involve the use of toys may provoke discomfort for preadolescents and adolescents due to fears of being perceived as immature at a time where preparation for adulthood becomes increasingly salient (Enfield 2007; Milgrom, 2005). Youth in this age range also possess greater capacities for abstract, logical reasoning and the ability to generate and test hypotheses about future outcomes (Kaduson, 2016). Further, a fundamental task of adolescence involves the exploration and formation of identity through the adoption of different social roles (Rosset & Stauffer, 2013). As such, practitioners working with older youth often utilize play strategies that are more abstract, including expressive art, games, and storytelling that provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for self-expression and individuation (Kaduson, 2016; Milgrom, 2005).

TRPGs may be particularly advantageous in this regard by providing older youth with the opportunity for abstract, expressive play wherein they may experiment with questions of identity through the creation of fictional personas and develop their social and emotional competencies by testing the outcomes of their character's social and moral choices in a controlled, non-threatening setting (Enfield, 2007; Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013).

An additional population that experiences barriers to their engagement in treatment are fathers. Several reviews have found that compared to mothers, fathers are underrepresented in child- and family-based mental health and parenting programs, with low rates of participation impeded by inconsistent attendance and increased drop-out (Panter-Brick et al. 2014; Smith et al., 2012; Tiano & McNeil, 2005), and despite evidence that the involvement of fathers in such interventions may improve child outcomes (Lundahl et al., 2008). These disparities extend to the literature, where the vast majority of study participants are mothers, and fathers' rates of participation are often so low that they are not reported (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Trends in the available research suggest that this disparity may be attributable to multiple barriers to engagement, including practical and organizational factors (e.g., the scheduling of sessions around work commitments), program-related factors (e.g., the degree to which content is relevant to fathers), personal factors (e.g., awareness of parenting programming, help-seeking attitudes), family factors (e.g., the degree to which fathers' participation is facilitated or limited by other family members), and practitioner-related factors (e.g., a practitioner's confidence and expertise in incorporating fathers in treatment) (Tully et al., 2017).

Addressing barriers to the inclusion and engagement of fathers remains a key element in the implementation of treatment interventions and parenting programming in order to improve intervention outcomes by addressing father-specific parenting practices that may contribute to

child and family dysfunction, reduce inter-parental conflict, and foster the development of consistent, effective co-parenting strategies (Tully et al., 2017). To this end, increased attention has been directed towards fathers' preferences for and barriers to their participation in family-based interventions and programming. In a 2015 study conducted by Frank and colleagues, survey and focus group data were collected from a sample of 176 New Zealand fathers to gain insight into their rates of participation and preferences for parenting programs. In line with previous research, survey results indicated that the sample demonstrated low overall knowledge and experience with parenting programs. However, several notable insights into the sample's program preferences were gleaned from their responses; program topics rated as the most important by participants were "building a positive parent-child relationship, increasing children's confidence and social skills, and the importance of fathers to children's development" (pp. 942). In terms of program delivery, survey participants expressed a preference for less-intensive delivery methods (e.g., seminar, web-based) and individually tailored instruction. Further, a selection of focus group participants provided additional elaboration of their preference for interactive, practical activities. Similar findings were obtained by Tully and colleagues in 2017; according to survey responses from a sample of 1001 fathers, the highest-rated program topics of interest included "bully proofing your child, teaching social skills to your child, and encouraging child development through play" (pp. 14). In addition, their sample indicated the highest preferences for delivery formats that were less-intensive, internet- and/or community-based, and brief.

The format of a family-centered TRPG may lend itself to the accommodation and implementation of these findings in several ways. As previously noted, TRPGs may be particularly useful for the development of children's social skills through the mutual navigation

of social and moral choices. Their engaging, game-based format encourages progression through mutual play as family members respond to challenges and pursue shared goals through cooperating and problem solving, building a unique, co-constructed narrative. As each group member is provided equal opportunity to contribute, and the relative strengths of each character are complementary to one another and contribute to the group's overall likelihood of success, the involvement of every family member is equally essential to the progression of the narrative, ensuring that fathers are engaged as active participants in the intervention. Further, the flexible, story-driven nature of TRPGs requires relatively few materials and allows for the construction of narratives that may vary in length according to a particular family's needs, and which may be implemented in a variety of settings, including online, where web-based TRPG platforms are well-established (e.g., Roll20).

Online Delivery of Family Interventions and Programming

The relatively recent emergence of web-based therapeutic interventions and programming have coincided with increased attention in the literature aimed at establishing their efficacy compared to traditional, face-to-face delivery. A systematic review of studies comparing online versus in-person cognitive behavioural therapy for a range of psychiatric and somatic disorders found that both modes of treatment produced equivalent treatment effects (Andersson et al., 2014). However, online interventions may possess several additional advantages, particularly in terms of increased access to care by reducing barriers of cost, travel, time, and local availability of treatment providers and programming (Wade et al., 2006). In a family context, these advantages are reflected by findings that indicate a parental preference for the convenience and ease of use of online delivery (e.g., Frank et al., 2015; Kurowski et al., 2019; Tully et al., 2017; Wade et al., 2006).

Though most studies of online interventions have been conducted with individuals, research also exists examining their efficacy with families; a recent systematic review of internet-based interventions for families of individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness found evidence of their efficacy, including reduced hospitalizations and symptom improvement (Barbeito et al., 2020). Further, studies of the use of online family problem-solving therapy for families of youth who have experienced a traumatic brain injury have found evidence of their effectiveness in reducing parental distress and improving family problem-solving skills (Wade et al., 2006) as well as evidence of superior improvements to executive function and behavioural outcomes when compared to traditional face-to-face delivery (Kurowski et al., 2019). As such, online delivery of family-based interventions and programming remains a prominent area of investigation for improving individual and family outcomes across a variety of areas of functioning.

Previous Investigations of the Therapeutic Applications of TRPGs

Despite the theorized utility of TRPGs as therapeutic interventions that may be delivered in a variety of settings and formats, formal research on their practical application is limited, and further, no research has been conducted specifically with families. A case study conducted by Blackmon (1994) details one of the first attempts to utilize TRPGs as a therapeutic intervention with a 19-year-old client who had been referred to treatment following a suicide attempt, making little progress within and outside of therapy until he began playing *Dungeons & Dragons* in his spare time. Blackmon utilized his client's engagement with the game to apply it to a treatment context and explore his client's issues and needs, ultimately increasing his confidence in himself and improving his social competence. More recently, a case study conducted by Rosselet and Stauffer in 2013 utilized a group TRPG intervention to target the intra- and interpersonal skills of

groups of gifted children and adolescents, and found that participants experienced increases to their social competence and communication skills, enhancement and development of their personal identities, and the opportunity to express difficult emotions. Other investigations have examined the broader benefits of TRPGs, indicating associations between TRPGs and increased moral development (Wright et al., 2017) and levels of empathetic involvement with others (Rivers et al., 2016), while qualitative interviews of individuals regularly engaged in TRPGs indicate that participants credited their gaming experiences with increased feelings of belonging, improvements in social skills, and reduced anxiety (Sargent, 2014).

Though evidence for the efficacy and application of TRPGs in therapeutic settings is limited due to a lack of formal research, qualitative interview data outlined by Gutierrez in 2017 indicate that some mental health practitioners are already regularly incorporating them into their therapeutic practices with clients. Participants, a selection of five mental health practitioners working in the non-profit sector, described a number of perceived benefits of TRPG interventions to their respective therapeutic practices, including the ability to tailor narratives to client concerns, perceived increases to client engagement in the therapeutic process, potential uses across both group and individual settings, and potential applicability for work with clients who present with trauma as a tool for exposure to and exploration of themes pertaining to traumatic content.

Despite initial indications of the potential therapeutic utility of TRPGs, the paucity of empirical research in the area remains a particular concern, a sentiment that was echoed by multiple practitioners in Gutierrez's 2017 interviews. Questions of the clinical efficacy of TRPG-based techniques for intervention remain prominent, especially as their delivery requires an application of the structure of the therapeutic process and goals of treatment to a game-based

format that requires specific knowledge, proficiency, and comfort with its mode of delivery, in addition to baseline levels of clinical expertise and competencies required for effective clinical practice. Further, beyond the need for additional investigation to establish the clinical efficacy of TRPGs, the glaring lack of available research related to the therapeutic applications of TRPGs raises additional questions pertaining to potential adverse effects that may be associated with their use, also referred to as iatrogenic risk factors, particularly with populations that may be disproportionately vulnerable to and require particular ethical considerations for mitigating these risks (e.g., children, individuals with trauma histories; Gola et al., 2016) or populations that have yet to be studied (e.g., families). For instance, a previous account of male adolescents' unstructured play of *Dungeon & Dragons* in an inpatient psychiatric facility detailed several deleterious outcomes of the game, including disruption to the treatment process and the normalization of anti-social behaviour through gameplay centred on violent themes (Ascherman, 1993). Though these observations were based on a single account of non-therapeutic, unstructured, and unsupervised TRPG gameplay, they nevertheless lend additional support to the need for the development and evaluation of structured TRPG game modules for use in therapeutic contexts. Given that some mental health practitioners are already implementing TRPGs in their therapeutic practice (Gutierrez, 2017), these concerns are particularly salient, and underscore the need for additional formal empirical investigation of the application of TRPGs as therapeutic interventions with these populations.

The Current Study

Existing TRPG rulesets (e.g., *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Pathfinder*) are highly detailed and time-consuming to learn, both for players as well as those in charge of executing and moderating the game's delivery. For instance, the core rulebooks of the current edition of *Dungeons &*

Dragons encompass over 900 pages of content (Wizards of the Coast, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) with pre-existing narrative “campaigns” that are often designed to be played across the course of months. In order to initiate the process of formally evaluating the therapeutic utility of TRPGs for use with families, the objective of the current study was to first develop an online TRPG module (“*The Family Tabletop Adventure*”) consisting of an original narrative and ruleset, and next, to conduct a pilot test with a sample of families to assess the extent to which the module was practical to implement, accessible to learn and play, developmentally appropriate, and met the needs and preferences of its intended population.

As such, the primary objectives for the current pilot test of the module are twofold: gaining preliminary exploratory insights into the module’s potential therapeutic utility, and identifying targets for refinement for the module’s implementation and formal evaluation in future intervention research. To achieve the first objective, the methodological process of gathering and investigating family data pertaining to the therapeutic utility of the module were informed by four overarching target areas of focus: evaluation of the module’s ease of use and the feasibility of its implementation with families, its potential iatrogenic risk, its ability to engage families, and finally, its contributions to family processes, including observable processes associated with optimal functioning of the family system that are theorized to underlie the benefits of a TRPG module (e.g., problem solving, communication, relationship building and positive interactions between family members) and any additional emergent processes revealed through exploratory analysis of the data. Next, given the lack of existing empirical research examining the therapeutic applications of TRPGs, particularly with families, insights gained from the current research will serve to establish a foundation for the ongoing development and study of a formal, manualized TRPG intervention for use in family play therapy. Further,

preliminary results will contribute to the growing knowledge base of integrated models of family and child therapy and the use of evidence-based play interventions.

Hypotheses

The overall lack of existing empirical literature examining the therapeutic application of TRPGs with families in combination with the exploratory nature and limited sample size of the current study preclude the ability to make specific hypotheses about quantitatively derived, inferential outcomes of the current research. However, given the existing theorized benefits of TRPGs in enhancing relationships, positive interactions, communication, and problem solving, hypotheses may be made pertaining to general trends of these outcomes amongst the sample gathered from quantitative and qualitative sources; specifically, that exploratory analyses of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis generated from family feedback interviews and measures will reveal either maintenance or enhancements across these areas of functioning for participating family groups.

Chapter Three: Method

Materials

McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD-III)

The FAD-III (Epstein et al., 1983; Epstein et al., 2005) contains 60 items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 4 = “strongly agree”) that assess transactional patterns associated with healthy and unhealthy family dynamics in the areas of problem solving, communication, role functioning, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavioural control. The theoretical basis for the model of the FAD-III is derived from a family systems approach, wherein the family is viewed as a collection of interconnected systems (individuals, couples, parents, etc.), the dynamics of which cannot be adequately conceptualized according to individual characteristics and interactions (Ryan et al., 2005). Throughout the course of its development, the FAD has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties in both clinical and non-clinical populations, including internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .72 to .92; Epstein et al., 1983) test-retest reliability (correlation coefficients ranging from .66-.76; Miller et al., 1985) and concurrent validity, demonstrating moderate correlations with other self-report family assessment measures (Miller et al., 1985). In addition, the FAD has also demonstrated low correlations with social desirability, with correlations coefficients between scores on the subscales of the FAD and scores on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale ranging from -.06 to -.19 (Miller et al., 1985).

To establish characteristics and levels of functioning of participating families at baseline and post-game, self-report data on perceptions of family life were collected from each family member using a selection of items from the FAD-III (Appendix A) at two separate intervals prior to the start of and following the completion of the game. The final measure was comprised of

three FAD-III subscales: Problem Solving (6 items), Communication (9 items), and General Functioning (12 items), for a total of twenty-seven items. This choice was made to minimize the burden on attention that would be imposed by responding to the full 60-item measure, particularly for participating children, and to prioritize subscales of the FAD which coincide with the dimensions of family functioning that TRPGs are theorized to act upon, and further, that would be most readily observable over the limited timeframe of the current study (for instance, problem-solving skills versus the dynamics underlying affective responsiveness).

Family Problem Solving Code (FAMPROS)

Recordings of participating families' interactions with one another during two ten-minute Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks occurring before and after their participation in the game were viewed and rated by two independent raters according to a selection of coding dimensions adapted from the Family Problem Solving Code (FAMPOS; Forbes et al., 2001). Grounded in research that has increasingly demonstrated the significance of problem-solving behaviours and associated processes as key indicators of overall family functioning and potential targets for therapeutic intervention, the FAMPROS code was developed as an efficient, comprehensive observational coding system to assess both global family functioning and problem-solving skills through observer ratings of interactions between three or more family members, with children at least 8 years of age (Forbes et al., 2001). Ratings are made on 7-point Likert-type scales across multiple dimensions of verbal behaviour, including general characteristics that contribute to a family's problem-solving effectiveness (positive behaviour, negative behaviour, relationships, coalitions, participation) as well as aspects of problem solving (how clearly the problem was defined, the quality of proposed solutions, the extent of resolution, and quality of the overall problem-solving process). Ratings are global, with whole interactions

(typically 10- to 20-minutes in length) serving as single coding units versus single behaviours, streamlining the coding process and allowing for efficient coding of target behaviours that occur in complex interactions between multiple individuals. The coding system can be employed in a variety of contexts, but is most commonly used to rate interactions that occur within the family home or community settings (Forbes et al., 2001).

The FAMPROS code has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties, including internal consistency between problem-solving codes (correlation coefficients ranging from .66 to .82; Vuchinich et al., 1996) test-retest reliability (correlation coefficients ranging from .70 to .73; Vuchinich et al., 1993; Vuchinich et al., 1996), as well as predictive validity, with moderate correlations between problem solving, positive behaviour, and negative behaviour ratings and parent-reported scores on measures of family characteristics collected 1 year in advance (Vuchinich et al., 1996). In terms of inter-rater reliability, multiple studies have demonstrated mean correlation coefficients between independent raters ranging from .73-.77 for positive behaviour ratings, .72-.81 for negative behaviour ratings, .68-.78 for problem solving ratings, and .81-.82 for participation ratings (Vuchinich et al., 1993; Vuchinich et al., 1994; Vuchinich et al., 1996).

For the purposes of the current study, ratings were made using an abbreviated selection of dimensions included the FAMPROS coding system: “Positive Behaviour,” “Negative Behaviour,” “Participation,” and the “Overall Quality of the Problem-Solving Process,” selected from the Problem Solving dimension (see Appendix B). The Positive Behaviour and Negative Behaviour coding dimensions assess, respectively, the degree of positive and negative behaviour expressed bidirectionally between each family member dyad (e.g., separate ratings for each child to each parent, each parent to each child, each child to each sibling, and each parent to each

parent) on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, where larger values indicate increasing degrees of the expressed behaviours. Positive behaviours encompass displays of affection, warmth, agreement, support, and understanding, while negative behaviours encompass displays of anger, disagreement, rejection, complaining, and criticism. The Participation coding dimension provides a rating for each individual family member evaluating their degree of involvement in the interaction. Ratings are made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, where larger values correspond to greater degrees of participation and initiative in the problem-solving discussion. Finally, the Overall Quality of the Problem-Solving Process code provides a single rating of the family's overall effectiveness in solving the problem, taking into account various aspects of their problem solving process, including how well family members worked toward a solution, their ability to define the problem and how much time they spent discussing the problem, their possible solutions, the degree of involvement of each family member, and their receptiveness to each other's perspectives, feelings, and suggestions. Ratings are made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, where larger values correspond to greater degrees of effectiveness in problem solving.

This decision to limit the selection of codes included in the current study was made in order to streamline the coding process by limiting the inclusion of codes to those that would be readily observable in a TRPG setting; for instance, the adoption of fictional personas could preclude the ability to code more complex behaviours that reflect long-standing relationship dynamics when attempting to discriminate them from the context of in-character role-play. Further, the patterns of interaction captured by this selection of codes overlap with family characteristics assessed by the selected subscales of the FAD-III (Communication, Problem Solving, and General Family Functioning), fostering the alignment between observational and

self-report data in establishing baseline and post-game characteristics of participating families and facilitating exploratory comparisons.

Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks

FAMPROS codes were not applied to recordings of in-game interactions, as the flexible and imaginative nature of the game narrative allowed for families to make a variety of diverging choices despite consistency in its overarching structure that precluded the standardization and coding of narrative tasks, in addition to the confounding influence on family interactions posed by the participation of the researcher. To address these concerns, observational data of family interactions were collected and rated according to the aforementioned selection of FAMPROS codes through the use of two standardized Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks developed for the current study (Appendix C). These tasks were administered before and upon completion of the game, respectively, in order to establish and compare baseline and post-game characteristics of each family. The first task, administered during the introductory session of the study, tasked families with imagining that they were stranded on a deserted island with one another, and asked them to discuss and collaborate with one another for 10 minutes to come up with a list of items that they would want to be stranded with, and collaborate to choose the most important item, as well as the first thing that they should do when they arrived on the island. The second task, administered during the final session of the study, was designed to be similar in structure to the first task to enable comparison between observer ratings at each timepoint. The task required families to imagine that they had travelled through space to establish the first human civilization on Mars, and asked them to work together for 10 minutes to come up with a list of potential items that they would want to be guaranteed among their supplies during their mission and choose their guaranteed item, as well as their first objective once they reached the surface.

The decision to utilize the two Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks versus the example problem-solving activity outlined in the original FAMPROS system (asking families to select a problem and discuss it; see Forbes et al., 2001) was made for several reasons. First, asking families to engage in collaborative problem-solving tasks that require them to imagine themselves in situations outside of their normal experience aligns more directly with the skills involved in adapting fictional character personas and imagining themselves in the fictional world of the TRPG campaign throughout the course of the study, and thus allows for observation of family problem-solving skills and interactions in a format similar to that of the game. Second, previous research utilizing the FAMPROS system found that the original FAMPROS discussion task caused discomfort amongst participating families, increased their risk of socially desirable responding, and limited the meaningful inclusion and engagement of children in discussion, and as a result, demonstrated less utility for producing accurate representations of family interactions (Giusto et al., 2019). Conversely, the substitution of a standardized activity that encouraged families to solve a problem that was less personal in nature than the original FAMPROS tasks elicited increased engagement and interactions between all family members (Giusto et al., 2019).

Tabletop RPG Module and Ruleset

An original TRPG module titled *The Family Tabletop Adventure* was developed for use with families prior to data collection in order to address the limitations posed by existing TRPG systems that are highly detailed and time-consuming to learn and play, and may lack age-appropriate content. The game module is comprised of a narrative (herein referred to as a “campaign” and modified ruleset). The modified ruleset (see Appendix D) is loosely based on a selection of gameplay concepts outlined in *Dungeons & Dragons, 5th Edition* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014a; 2014b). Significant modifications have been made to both the character creation

process and gameplay to minimize teaching time for the rules, ensure ease of use, and prevent disengagement by reducing their complexity. Examples of these modifications include alterations to character classes (e.g., omitting classes that may be counterproductive to the promotion of prosocial interactions, such as “barbarian” where a character’s power stems from their level of aggression; removing classes such as “cleric” that emphasize religion), skill areas (e.g., condensing a wide range of individual skills and ability modifiers for each player character into three overarching areas: “strength,” “speed,” and “smarts,” with single predetermined numerical modifiers associated with each type of character class, thus eliminating the need to remember multiple numerical values), and the overall gameplay process (e.g., the use of single versus multiple dice rolls, and one type of die versus seven; elimination of the need to keep track of movement and distance). In addition, to reduce the potential for the character creation process to cause a sense of discomfort or intimidation, families were also provided with supplementary materials that provided guidance on the creation of their character, including optional lists of example character details (e.g., potential character names or background details) available to select from. This conferred family members with the flexibility to determine their preferred degree of depth and detail in the creation of their characters. Taken together, these modifications allowed the rules of the game to be taught to families in approximately 40 minutes.

In addition to the above modifications, the rules of the game were also designed to incorporate a mechanical benefit to collaboration. For example, upon encountering an obstacle (e.g., a locked grate over the entrance to a sewer), a player could choose to respond to the problem individually (e.g., performing a “skill check” dice roll to attempt to pull the grate off of its hinges) or players could instead choose collaborate to combine their skills to solve the problem together (e.g., performing a “skill check” dice roll after describing how they would

attempt to remove the grate together by combining the use of their respective spells or talents). Players that opted to work together to solve a challenge were awarded with a teamwork bonus to the dice roll used to determine the outcome of their efforts, thereby increasing their chances of success. Further, as character classes differed in their specialties (according to modifiers to their speed, strength, and wits), each player character possessed unique advantages to contribute to different aspects of various challenges, with the chances of their successful resolution maximized by a combination of these advantages.

The original narrative campaign developed for this study (see Appendix E) takes place in the original fictional setting of “Borealia,” and was divided across two story arcs designed to be delivered in four 1.5- to 2-hour sessions each, amounting to approximately 6 to 8 hours of total gameplay in full. In recognizing the potential burden imposed by the extended investment of time required of participating families in the current study, the decision to divide the campaign across two discrete but related arcs versus a single continuous narrative was made in order to provide a complete narrative experience to families who may not wish or be able to participate in all sessions at the halfway point of the study, while also providing a sense of continuity for families that opted to continue their participation, rewarding them with a “level-up” to reflect the ongoing growth of their characters in gameplay. Further, providing the option for families to continue their participation conferred an additional indirect measure of their level of engagement with and enjoyment of the game.

Both story arcs incorporated a series of challenges to be overcome by family groups acting as a “party” of adventurers that required them to engage in mutual collaboration and problem solving to resolve the main conflict of the overarching narrative (an impending dragon attack on the city of Dragonclasp), with the second story arc building upon the progress made by

families in the previous arc. These challenges varied in format, including puzzles, battles, and social challenges involving interactions with non-player character's (NPCs), played by the principal researcher acting in the capacity of the GM, with each format offering the opportunity for families to collaborate and combine their characters' respective talents and skills to resolve the various tasks they encountered. As one of the notable benefits of TRPGs is the ability to explore situations outside of the realm of normal experience and the opportunity to experiment with moral and social choices, families were not artificially restricted in their decisions or directed to a correct choice. Instead, families were told that just as in the real world, their actions would have consequences for the world and shape their interactions and reputations with its NPC inhabitants.

The overarching narrative structure of the story, including the narration of story challenges and descriptions of surroundings, was consistent between family groups and designed to incorporate themes of family relationships and navigating family conflict, emotional bonds, and teamwork. However, the flexible nature of the campaign's structure allowed families to decide amongst themselves what course of action they will take to approach various challenges, with the outcomes of those decisions functioning to alter the story, including the improvised narration of outcomes and interactions between characters. Further, the narrative was shaped to meaningfully incorporate families' ideas for their character's imagined backstories by making reference to these details throughout the campaign. As such, the overarching events of the narrative were refined according to each family's choices and character descriptions, providing an experience unique to each family group beyond the scope of the basic narrative campaign guide included within the appendices of this study. By extension, the included narrative guide does not encompass the entirety of the resulting dynamic, improvised interactions (e.g., dialogue;

narrative descriptions) that occur between players and the GM during gameplay. Instead, it serves as a basic framework for the delivery of the story, including the timing and sequence of major story events, verbal descriptions of environmental features and non-player characters, instructions for the delivery of in-game challenges, and guidelines for instances of standardized dialogue.

Exit Interview

Following the conclusion of gameplay, family groups participated in an exit interview comprised of a series of 14 questions pertaining to their experiences playing the game (Appendix F). In addition, the exit interview also served as an opportunity for families to provide their feedback on the game, including suggested changes or improvements. Interviews were approximately 50 minutes in length, and were conducted in an open format with all family members present.

Pilot Feedback Survey

In addition to the exit interview, additional feedback on the game was gathered from each family member through the individual completion of an online pilot feedback survey (Appendix G) comprised of 15 questions. Questions 1-11 asked family members to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements pertaining to the game, rated on a 5-point (1 = “strongly disagree,” 5 = “strongly agree”) Likert-type scale and comprised of four adjectives with a positive valence (e.g., “The Family Tabletop Adventure was enjoyable”) and five adjectives with negative valence (e.g., “The Family Tabletop Adventure was confusing”), in addition to two statements about the story and the game materials, respectively. Questions 12 and 13 asked participants to indicate the degree to which their interest in playing games with their family (1 = “greatly decreased,” 5 = “greatly increased”) and the likelihood that they will play

games with their family in the future (1 = “less likely,” 2 = “neither more or less likely,” 3 = “more likely”) had changed as a result of their participation in the game. Finally, in recognition that some family members may have experienced discomfort in providing their feedback on the game directly to the researcher during their exit interview or in front of other family members, questions 14 and 15 were presented in an open-response format to provide family members with a second opportunity to describe their experiences with the adventure in their own words (respectively, the least enjoyable part of the adventure, suggestions to improve the adventure, and any additional thoughts or comments about the adventure).

Participants

Three family groups were recruited to participate in the current study via digital advertisements across a range of social media platforms through the University of Victoria’s Healthy Relationships Laboratory. The advertisements invited adult members of prospective participating families to follow a weblink to complete a pre-screen questionnaire (Appendix H) to determine their eligibility to participate in research on how families play games together for the purposes of testing a new family game program, and informed them that eligible participating families would be provided with either a \$50 or \$100 Amazon gift card according to the number of sessions completed as a thank you for their participation. Inclusion criteria required that all participating family members be fluent in English, given the narrative-based nature of the game, and that they reside in Canada to abide by the online privacy laws of the country in which the data were collected and stored. Further, the study required that family groups consist of three to four individuals and include at least one child for the purposes of balancing and scaling gameplay, examining the feasibility of the module for use with both child and adult family members, and to investigate dyadic and whole-family interactions. Children from participating

families were required to be at least 12 years of age in order to complete self-report measures administered at the beginning and end of the study, and to ensure their understanding of the narrative content of the game. The online delivery of the study required families to have access to the internet and a computer equipped with a webcam and microphone to enable them to communicate with the researcher and view the game materials on their screen. Families that were actively involved in family therapy or similar services were ineligible to participate in order to avoid potential confounding effects on outcomes evaluated by the current research, as well as to limit the inclusion of families experiencing elevated distress. In addition, families that were comprised of more than four family members, or children under the age of 12 were not eligible to participate in the study to avoid potential harm resulting from the exclusion of individual family members from participating in gaming sessions.

The final sample of participating families consisted of 3 family groups ($N = 11$), with two family groups of four individuals in size (comprised of two parents and two children, and one parent and three children) and the remaining group of three individuals in size (comprised of two parents and one child). The age of participating adults ($n = 5$) in the sample ranged from 38 to 51 years ($M = 44.60$ years, $SD = 6.26$ years), while the age of participating children in the sample ($n = 6$) ranged from 12 to 15 years ($M = 13.00$ years, $SD = 1.09$ years). Additional demographic data pertaining to gender, ethnicity, adult education level, adult marital status, family roles, and household income were collected from adult family members during the first series of online surveys (Appendix I). Adult family members were also asked a series of questions pertaining to their family's game behaviours, including the types of games played and frequency of shared game time. Further, as the current research was conducted between February and June 2021 during the COVID-19 global pandemic, additional questions and specifiers pertaining to the

pandemic were added to distinguish between current and pre-pandemic gaming behaviours in recognition of the potential effects of public health orders on the duration of time spent by families interacting in close proximity. Finally, in recognition of the potential impacts of a family's baseline level of familiarity with TRPGs on their perceptions of the module, families were asked during the pre-screen process to indicate previous experience with TRPGs among their family members, either through direct gameplay or consumption of TRPG related content (e.g., podcasts, livestreams). Demographic information reported by family groups and individual adult participants are summarized below in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1
Family Group Demographics (N=3)

Item	<i>n</i>	%
Household Income (CAD)		
\$30,000 to \$49,000	1	33.3%
\$100,000 to \$150,000	1	33.3%
Prefer not to say	1	33.3%
Average weekly shared game time (some family members)		
1 to 2 hours	1	33.3%
2 to 4 hours	1	33.3%
5 hours or more	1	33.3%
Average weekly shared game time (entire family)		
Less than 1 hour	1	33.3%
1 to 2 hours	1	33.3%
2 to 3 hours	1	33.3%
Types of games played together		
Video and/or computer games	3	100.0%
Board games	3	100.0%
Card games	3	100.0%
Outdoor games and/or sports	2	66.7%

Table 2
Individual Demographics (N=11)

Item	<i>n</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age (in years)				
Adults	5	38-51	44.60	6.26
Youth	6	12-15	13.00	1.09
Item	<i>n</i>	%		
Gender (Adults)				
Women	3	60.0		
Men	2	40.0		
Gender (Youth)				
Girls	5	83.3		
Boys	1	16.7		
Ethnicity (Adults)				
White/European	5	100.0		
Ethnicity (Youth)				
White/European	5	83.3		
Asian	1	16.7		
Education Level (Adults)				
Some college or university, no degree	1	20.0		
Trade's certificate or diploma	2	40.0		
Bachelor's Degree	2	40.0		
Family Role (Adults)				
Parent	5	100.0%		
Marital Status (Adults)				
Married	4	80.0%		
Divorced	1	20.0%		
Shared game time resulting from COVID-19				
A little more than usual	4	80.0%		
A lot more than usual	1	20.0%		

Procedure

Before proceeding with study procedures, weblinks to the online consent form for the study were provided to adult guardians to indicate consent to participate for themselves, as well as their children. After consent was obtained from adult guardians, weblinks to either the online consent form (age 13 and older) or the online assent form (age 12) were provided to youth family members. Once every family member had provided their consent, and prior to the first game session, families were provided with a document containing individual weblinks assigned to each family member that directed them to the first of two sets of online surveys administered through the LimeSurvey platform, approximately 10 to 15 minutes in length, to be completed individually and in private. The composition of the first survey differed between adults and youth, consisting of demographic questions followed by the FAD-III for adult family members, and only the FAD-III for youth family members.

In the week after completing the first online survey, family members met with the researcher for their first online session for approximately 1 hour, conducted over a secure connection via the video communication platform Zoom. Prior to beginning the session, consent was verbally obtained from each family member a second time, including permission to record the audio and video feeds from online sessions. Following introductions to the researcher and an opportunity to ask questions, families proceeded to participate in their first 10-minute Imaginative Problem-Solving Task, during which the researcher left the room to allow families to complete the exercise in private. The remaining 40 to 45 minutes of the first session were dedicated to teaching families the rules of the game and answering questions. Upon conclusion of the first online session, families were provided with a digital copy of the game instructions, as well as materials to create their characters in the week prior to their first game session. Families

then participated in two online gaming sessions, occurring once per week for approximately 1.5- to 2-hours each. During these sessions, the principal researcher acted as the GM, narrating the story and outcomes of families' choices through the combined use of the story guide and improvisation, and displaying game materials (e.g., maps, character tokens, virtual dice rolls, music) on families' computer screens via a combination of Zoom's screenshare function and the Roll20 online TRPG platform. Upon the completion of their second game session, families were provided with the option to continue the game from where the first narrative arc left off with two additional 1.5- to 2-hour bonus game sessions, or to instead proceed to their exit session. All three family groups opted to continue their participation in the bonus sessions.

After completing the game, families participated in their final online exit session, beginning with the second 10-minute Imaginative Problem-Solving Task, and immediately followed by an approximately 50-minute exit interview, during which they were asked questions about their participation in the game and offered the opportunity to provide feedback on how the game might be improved for use with other families in future research. Questions were delivered in an open format, and with all family members present. Family members were then provided with a document containing assigned links to their second of two online surveys to be completed individually and in private within a week following their exit interview, as well as a weblink to redeem their \$100 Amazon gift card as a thank you for their participation. The second online survey, approximately 15 to 20 minutes in length, was identical for both adult and youth family members and consisted of the previous items from the FAD-III from the first online survey, followed by the pilot feedback survey items.

Following the conclusion of data collection, baseline FAMPROS codes ratings derived from the Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks completed at baseline and post-game were

generated for each family member by the researcher and an independent rater. Prior to coding, both the researcher and the independent rater were trained in the use of the FAMPROS system using training materials obtained from one of the system's original developers, Dr. Samuel Vuchinich at Oregon State University. These training materials included descriptions and associated verbal and non-verbal behaviours for of each coding dimension, in addition to a range of example ratings and rationales provided by trained coders.

Chapter Four: Results

Results from the analysis of quantitative (FAD-III scale scores, FAMPROS ratings, demographic questionnaires), qualitative (exit interviews, game sessions), and mixed (pilot feedback surveys) sources of data are summarized and synthesized below. Due to the limited sample size of the current research, analysis of quantitative data was limited to exploratory descriptions and summaries of sample characteristics. Descriptive statistics derived from baseline and post-game ratings on the FAD-III and FAMPROS codes were generated using the statistical software R, and are summarized in Tables 3 to 6 (FAD-III) and Table 7 (FAMPROS).

FAD-III

Scores for the Communication, Problem Solving, and General Functioning subscales derived from individual ratings on the FAD-III collected from each family member at baseline and upon the conclusion of the study were calculated for each family group. In line with standard procedures for scoring the FAD-III, reverse-coding was applied to negative items from the Communication (items 7, 11, 16, and 24) and General Functioning (items 1, 5, 10, 15, 19, 23) prior to the calculation of scale scores for each family. Scale scores range from a minimum of 1.00 to a maximum of 4.00, such that higher overall scale scores coincide with a greater degree of unhealthy functioning.

Table 3
Overall Sample Means and Standard Deviations for FAD-III Scale Scores¹

FAD Scale	Baseline			Post-game		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Communication	1.92	0.19	3	1.93	.17	3
Problem Solving	1.68	0.19	3	1.64	.17	3
General Functioning	1.49	0.16	3	1.56	.13	3

¹ Minimum possible score = 1.00, maximum possible score = 4.00

Table 4*Means and Standard Deviations for FAD-III Communication Scale Scores by Family Group¹*

Group	Baseline		Post-game		Community Samples ²		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family 1	1.92	.47	1.94	.50	Non-clinical	2.05	.38
Family 2	2.19	.13	2.15	.06			
Family 3	1.72	.35	1.75	.33	Clinical	2.38	.43

¹ Minimum possible score = 1.00, maximum possible score = 4.00² Mansfield et al., 2015**Table 5***Means and Standard Deviations for FAD-III Problem Solving Scale Scores by Family Group¹*

Group	Baseline		Post-game		Community Samples ²		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family 1	1.75	.35	1.58	.29	Non-clinical	2.00	.36
Family 2	1.89	.10	1.89	.10			
Family 3	1.46	.42	1.50	.41	Clinical	2.45	.49

¹ Minimum possible score = 1.00, maximum possible score = 4.00² Mansfield et al., 2015**Table 6***Means and Standard Deviations for FAD-III General Functioning Scale Scores by Family Group¹*

Group	Baseline		Post-game		Community Samples ²		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family 1	1.46	.40	1.54	.39	Non-clinical	1.79	.42
Family 2	1.75	.17	1.75	.14			
Family 3	1.33	.45	1.44	.38	Clinical	2.31	.49

¹ Minimum possible score = 1.00, maximum possible score = 4.00² Mansfield et al., 2015

FAMPROS

Recordings of family member interactions during both Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks were reviewed and coded to generate baseline and post-game ratings for each family for the Positive Behaviour, Negative Behaviour, Participation, and Overall Quality of the Problem-Solving Process. An estimation of the inter-rater reliability of the FAMPROS code ratings generated by the researcher was assessed by calculating an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) using a two-way random effects model that compared them against a set of ratings provided by a trained independent rater, which produced an overall ICC coefficient of .70, (95% CI [.68, .78]). Additional ICC coefficients were calculated for the Positive Behaviour (ICC = .58, 95% CI [.38 - .72]), Negative Behaviour (ICC = .41, 95% CI [.17, .60]), Participation (ICC = .75, 95% CI [.34 - .90]) and Overall Quality of the Problem-Solving Process codes (ICC = .20, 95% CI [-.70, 1.09]). Though there is no universally agreed upon standard for evaluating the acceptability of ICC coefficients, existing guidelines provided by Koo and Li (2016) suggest that ICC values between 0.50 and 0.75 indicate a moderate degree of reliability, while values less than 0.50 indicate poor reliability. It is possible that low estimates of reliability may be attributable to suboptimal training procedures for the FAMPROS codes, given that the training procedures for the original FAMPROS system utilized video coding exercises that were unavailable for use in the current study due to data privacy issues. As such, only the Positive Behaviour and Participation codes have been retained for exploratory analysis, though the range of their confidence intervals warrants additional caution in their interpretation. Ratings for each possible dyadic combination were averaged to produce a single score for each family group across both coding dimensions at baseline and post-game. The decision to calculate a single score for each family group versus reporting within-family scores for both coding dimensions

was made to preserve the anonymity of participants, given the distinct characteristics and composition of participating families in combination with the small size of the overall sample.

Table 7
Means and Standard Deviations for FAMPROS Codes by Family Group¹

FAMPROS Dimension	Baseline		Post-game	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Behaviour				
Family 1	3.25	1.4	3.08	0.8
Family 2	5.67	0.5	4.67	0.5
Family 3	2.50	1.8	3.25	1.3
Participation				
Family 1	5.50	1.0	5.75	0.5
Family 2	5.67	0.6	6.00	1.0
Family 3	3.75	2.6	4.25	2.4

¹ Minimum possible score = 1.00, maximum possible score = 7.00

Qualitative data derived from exit interview transcripts, recorded game sessions, and open-ended pilot feedback survey items were analyzed using a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis, an approach referred to as analytic induction (Patton, 2015) to extract a range of themes that encapsulate the experiences families had during the study, both in- and out-of-game. Broadly, analytic induction is an approach to content analysis that seeks to verify or extend existing theory or propositions by applying existing theoretical frameworks to the deductive analysis of qualitative data in conjunction with inductive analysis of emergent themes or new understandings (Patton, 2015). This combined approach was selected to bridge the gap between the lack of research on the therapeutic use of TRPGs with families and findings derived from previous case studies on the use of TRPGs in individual and group settings, as well as existing theory on the therapeutic utility of story, metaphor, and role-play more generally.

During this process, recordings of family exit interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy, in addition to relevant segments of recorded game sessions referenced by families during these interviews. Next, transcripts were deidentified, and participant names were replaced with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. These recordings and transcripts were reviewed several times to ensure familiarity with their content and initial impressions of their underlying structure prior to coding.

Due to the novel nature of the current pilot study procedure and materials, all codes for the current analysis were inductively derived without the use of a pre-existing codebook. However, the overarching structure for the categorization of these inductively derived codes and their associated themes used to organize and describe the data was determined prior to interpretation through an extension of the primary objectives of the study and existing research and theory on TRPGs (i.e., feedback and suggestions for improvement, engagement and enjoyment of the game, iatrogenic risk, and family processes in relationship building, positive interactions, communication, and problem solving), while unanticipated codes and their associated themes that emerged through inductive analysis of the data were categorized following their identification. The first cycle of the coding process involved the generation of descriptive codes pertaining to topic areas derived family responses to standardized exit interview questions (see Appendix F) interactions during gameplay, and open-ended pilot feedback survey items (see Appendix G). Next, these codes were reorganized, grouped, and mapped according to the categorization scheme described above, followed by their extrapolation into the resulting overarching themes that constitute the analysis.

The resulting synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative sources of data have been structured and presented according to the two primary objectives of the current pilot study:

establishing preliminary exploratory insights into the module's potential therapeutic utility, and second, identifying targets for additional development of the module for use in future research informed by these insights. The presentation of the first of these two objectives is discussed in the sections that follow, and has been further delineated according to four overarching areas of analysis: feasibility and ease of use, iatrogenic risk, engagement and enjoyment, and family processes. The second of these two objectives is expanded upon in the following chapter, building upon the insights gained from the analyses outlined below.

Therapeutic Utility: Feasibility and Ease of Use

Exit Interviews and Open-ended Feedback

A range of themes derived from family exit interview transcripts and open-ended feedback offer insights into the feasibility and ease of use of the game module; in particular, relative themes include Confidence in Rule Comprehension, Appreciation and Use of Prompts, Examples, and Reminders, and Confusion about Mechanics of Dice Values.

Confidence in Rule Comprehension. When asked if there were any parts of the game that were confusing or difficult to understand, responses from family members across all three family groups indicated that they found the explanation of the game to be straightforward and easy to comprehend, and the level of detail included in the rules to be balanced. However, one participant, "Wes," (parent, 51) added that, despite being easy to understand, learning the rules was the least interesting part of the adventure, consistent with his previous experiences playing TRPGs:

So, the part that I found the least interesting was the, um—uh—going through the rules and explaining the combat, so- and that's- that's consistent with what I remember from playing *Dungeons & Dragons* like 35 years ago, was that it's like, okay, I've heard about

this cool game, and my friend who's played it at a bunch says, 'yeah, come on over and we'll play. Okay first thing—we have to create your character, right? Roll this dice ten times and then, you know, go through all this stuff.'

We went on to describe how the delivery of the rules could be made more effective by using a hands-on, interactive tutorial, possibly in combination with the Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks used during the study, to teach players the rules by sequentially demonstrating how they work in practice:

I was thinking, um, you know, you've got that warmup exercise, you know, the [deserted island task]. I was wondering if you could think of a way to, um, sort of combine that warmup exercise with the—with more of a tutorial approach. A lot of video games will have like, a first level where it's easy... you just dive right in... so you go through the first part, and then you pause and say, 'okay, the next thing is this, and in order to do it, you're going to have to understand this,' and then we go forward. So do your intro level that starts quickly and then has little explanations as you go through it. It just means that you don't have that long explanation before anything happens.

Appreciation and Use of Prompts, Examples, and Reminders. Though every participant indicated the ease of which they were able to learn the rules, multiple participants expressed an appreciation for the character sheets they made during the character creation process; specifically, how it allowed them to keep track of their character's abilities and powers. One participant, "Sarah," (parent, 38) described how the game would have been more difficult without this resource:

We made our character cards and we just had them on the table each week when we played so that we had a visual, you know, so we had some sort of idea. I think, for

myself, my memory is terrible. So, for me to have to remember which things I chose and what they would be capable of would have been a struggle.

For some participants, the GM's narration provided additional cues to help them keep track of events that occurred during the story, for example, by providing verbal recaps at the beginning of game sessions, or in the case of "Amanda," (parent, 44) through the use of distinct character voices:

And I liked... I mean, I just liked hearing you, like, tell the story. You know, with your different voices and stuff... and if I kind of like, blinked or zoned out for just a second, it was like, 'oh, I know who's talking to me, that's Drake's voice,' or whatever. Yeah, so that was really good, and it was really quite entertaining.

Along with providing immersion and entertainment, other participants felt that the narration of the GM was helpful for preserving momentum when players were unsure of what to do next. As Sarah (parent, 38) describes, the GM's narration provided a sense of balance within the open-ended structure of the game:

It was open-ended enough that we could make our own decisions, but I liked that it was guided. Like, if we—if we were kind of stalling out, the narrator was gracious enough to kind of gently steer us in the right direction and get our wheels turning again.

In addition to the aid provided by various aspects of the GM's narration, participants who encountered difficulty in coming up with ideas for their characters expressed appreciation for the example character names and backgrounds provided in the game's supplementary materials.

Confusion About Mechanics of Dice Values. Though families expressed the overall ease with which they were able to learn and apply the rules and mechanics of the game, multiple

participants experienced a degree of difficulty in parsing the significance of the range of possible values for dice rolls, particularly at the start of the game, as Amanda (parent, 44) describes:

Maybe it was discussed and maybe I forget, but it took me a little—I mean, it's fairly obvious, but I had to wait a little while to realize that like, the rolling of the dice had—what exactly the impact of rolling the dice was... like, I kind of suspected what it was, but it wasn't until you had—until you had done it like, several times, that I was like 'oh, yes, my suspicions are correct.'

Amanda further elaborated that though her understanding of dice's mechanics improved over the course of gameplay, ambiguity remained when it came to mid-range rolls:

Like, a six is fairly—like, it's really strong. It's not necessarily going to have like, all the success, but it's probably going to get you on the—on the successful side of things, compared to a one... in the end, I really only cared about like, ones and sixes, because I didn't really know the range in between.

Pilot Feedback Survey

In addition to the themes generated from family interviews, individual responses to several items contained in the pilot feedback survey (summarized in Tables 8-10) may be applied as informal measures of the game module's feasibility and ease of use. When asked to indicate their level of agreement to the statement "The Family Tabletop Adventure was confusing," all individual participants ($N = 11$) indicated either strong disagreement (63.6%, $n = 7$) or disagreement (36.4%, $n = 4$). Similarly, in response to the statement "The Family Tabletop Adventure was frustrating," all individual participants indicated either strong disagreement (63.6%, $n = 7$) or disagreement (36.4%, $n = 4$). Responses further indicate that, overall, the sample enjoyed the module's narrative and supplementary materials, with participants either

strongly agreeing (36.4%, $n = 4$) or agreeing (63.6%, $n = 7$) that they enjoyed the story, and strongly agreeing (54.5%, $n = 6$) or agreeing (45.5%, $n = 5$) that they enjoyed the game's visuals. Finally, none of the responses to open-ended feedback questions contained any indications of concerns with accessibility or developmental appropriateness of the game.

Table 8
Pilot Feedback Survey Responses: Positive Items (N=11)

Item	<i>n</i>	%	Parents (<i>n</i> =5)	Youth (<i>n</i> =6)
The Family Tabletop Adventure was interesting.				
Strongly agree	3	27.3%	1	2
Agree	8	72.7%	4	4
The Family Tabletop Adventure was fun.				
Strongly agree	4	36.4%	2	2
Agree	7	63.6%	3	4
The Family Tabletop Adventure was useful.				
Strongly agree	4	36.4%	2	2
Agree	3	27.3%	1	2
Neither agree nor disagree	4	36.4%	2	2
The Family Tabletop Adventure helped me to feel closer to my family.				
Strongly agree	3	27.3%	2	1
Agree	4	36.4%	1	3
Neither agree nor disagree	4	36.4%	2	2
I enjoyed the story of the Family Tabletop Adventure.				
Strongly agree	4	36.4%	2	2
Agree	7	63.6%	3	4
I enjoyed the visuals (maps, pictures) of the Family Tabletop Adventure.				
Strongly Agree	6	54.5%	3	3
Agree	5	45.5%	2	3

Table 9
Pilot Feedback Survey Responses: Negative Items (N=11)

Item	<i>n</i>	%	Parents (<i>n</i> =5)	Youth (<i>n</i> =6)
The Family Tabletop Adventure was boring.				
Strongly disagree	5	27.3%	2	3
Disagree	6	72.7%	3	3
The Family Tabletop Adventure was stressful.				
Strongly disagree	4	36.4%	2	2
Disagree	7	63.6%	3	4
The Family Tabletop Adventure was confusing.				
Strongly disagree	7	63.6%	3	4
Disagree	4	36.4%	2	2
The Family Tabletop Adventure was frustrating.				
Strongly disagree	7	63.6%	3	4
Disagree	4	36.4%	2	2
The Family Tabletop Adventure caused fights between my family members.				
Strongly disagree	8	72.7%	4	4
Disagree	3	27.3%	1	2

Table 10
Pilot Feedback Survey Responses: Game Behaviour Items (N=11)

Item	<i>n</i>	%	Parents (<i>n</i> =5)	Youth (<i>n</i> =6)
How has your interest in playing games with your family members changed as a result of playing the Family Tabletop Adventure?				
Increased	4	36.4%	1	3
Stayed the same/no change	7	63.6%	4	3
How likely are you to play games with your family as a group as a result of playing the Family Tabletop Adventure?				
More likely	4	36.4%	0	4
Neither more nor less likely	7	63.6%	5	2

Therapeutic Utility: Iatrogenic Risk

FAD-III Scores

Comparisons between mean scores on the Communication, Problem Solving, and General Functioning subscales of the FAD-III collected at baseline and post-game (see Tables 3-6) indicate that, overall, family groups in the sample maintained their level of functioning across these areas upon conclusion of the game. In instances where slight increases in mean scale scores were observed between baseline and post-game, both overall and family group mean scale scores for all three subscales remained below those reported by both clinical ($n = 155$) and non-clinical ($n = 155$) community samples of families in previous research conducted by Mansfield and colleagues (2015), with the exception of the mean Communication scale scores reported by Family Group 2 (Table 4), which were higher than the mean scores reported by the non-clinical community sample ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .38$), but lower than those reported by the clinical community sample ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .38$) at both baseline and post-game. Further, none of the families in the sample surpassed the threshold scale score of 2.20 indicating dissatisfaction established by the original developers of the scale and re-validated by Mansfield and colleagues (2015) across any of the three subscale areas.

FAMPROS Ratings

Due to poor inter-rater reliability estimates (described above), the presentation of FAMPROS ratings for participating family groups ($N = 3$) have been limited to comparisons between mean Positive Behaviour and Participation scores at baseline and post-game intervals (see Table 7). Comparisons of these ratings demonstrate decreases for observed mean levels of positive behaviour between baseline and post-game for Family 1 ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.4$; $M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.8$) and Family 2 ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 0.5$; $M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.5$) and an increase for Family 3

($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.8$; $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.3$), and increases to mean levels of participation for Family 1 ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.0$; $M = 5.75$, $SD = 0.5$), Family 2 ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 0.6$; $M = 6.00$, $SD = 1.0$) and Family 3 ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 2.6$; $M = 4.25$, $SD = 2.4$).

Pilot Feedback Survey

Potential indications of the game's iatrogenic risk may be extrapolated from individual participant responses to a range of items contained in the pilot feedback survey. Responses provided to negative items on the survey (see Table 9) indicated that all participants indicated either strong disagreement or disagreement with statements that the game was boring (Strongly disagree: 27.3%, $n = 5$; Disagree: 72.7%, $n = 6$), stressful (Strongly disagree: 36.4%, $n = 4$; Disagree: 63.6%, $n = 7$), confusing (Strongly disagree: 63.6%, $n = 7$; Disagree: 36.4%, $n = 4$), or frustrating (Strongly disagree: 63.6%, $n = 7$; Disagree: 36.4%, $n = 4$). Further, all family members in the sample either strongly disagreed (72.7%, $n = 8$) or disagreed (27.3%, $n = 3$) with the statement "The Family Tabletop Adventure caused fights between my family members." Conversely, responses to item 9 ("The Family Tabletop Adventure helped me to feel closer to my family," see Table 8) indicated that 27.3% of participants ($n = 3$) strongly agreed and 36.4% ($n = 4$) agreed that the game brought them closer to their families, while the remaining 36.4% ($n = 4$) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Exit Interviews and Open-ended Feedback Questions

Several themes emerged during thematic analysis of participant interviews and feedback that are relevant to the iatrogenic risk posed by the game module. These include Increased Comfort Over Time and Over Time and Reduced Competitiveness and Conflict.

Increased Comfort Over Time. Though responses to interview questions and items in the pilot feedback survey indicate that families hold positive perceptions of their participation in

is in the game, some participants experienced a sense of nervousness prior to playing the adventure. For instance, one participant, “Rory,” (youth, 12) expressed discomfort with the role-playing aspect of the game, citing a lack of confidence in his acting ability, while also noting that this nervousness decreased over the course of gameplay. During their exit interview, his mother Sarah (parent, 38) reflected on the ongoing check-ins that had occurred between Rory and his parents about his nervousness, and further, described the positive outcomes that she anticipated as a result of her son’s time playing the game:

Sarah: I think it's good for people to be out of their element sometimes, because that's how you grow. And we've talked about it after each [session]. We've said like, 'if this isn't your thing, if—if this makes you very uncomfortable, then you don't have to continue.' And the fact that it was a positive experience that, you know, was maybe out of a usual comfort level and the fact that it went so well, I think there'll be something for [Rory] to draw on in the future. Like 'oh, remember that time that we did that and you weren't—weren't super comfortable at first, but it turned out okay,' right?

Rory: (nodding, smiling)

For another participant, “Heather” (parent, 51), previous experience playing more competitive, adversarial game formats with her family in contrast to the cooperative, collaborative format of the present game module produced an initial sense of suspicion as to the motives of the GM, which she shared with her husband, Wes (parent, 51):

Heather: I think for me, the most interesting part was getting my head around the idea that we were supposed to succeed, and you wanted us to succeed, that you weren't trying to double-cross us, or—because I was looking at all sorts of alternate angles and, and

backstories thinking that you were going to try and thwart us. And then [Wes] was like, ‘no, we actually—we’re—we’re just... we’re supposed to do well.’

Wes: You were expecting [researcher] to behave like I would? (laughs)

Heather: (gestures) Yes! (laughs)

As the interview progressed, Heather and Wes discussed how this suspicion was resolved as she begun to play the game:

Heather: I think after one of the first sessions that went well—was it after the first session? I was like, ‘wow.’ We talked about it after the fact, that I was assuming I was going to be tricked.

Wes: (laughs) ‘She probably wants us to be successful.’

Reduced Competitiveness and Conflict. In reflecting on the differences between the current game module and games that they normally played together, participants from multiple family groups cited the contrast between the cooperative nature of the game module and the games that they usually played, which were more competitive in nature. For one family, it was common for more competitive, adversarial games to result in some degree of conflict, as the following excerpt of an exchange between family members Sarah (parent, 38), Jessie (youth, 13), Rory (youth, 12), and Rick (parent, 39) indicates:

Sarah: Oh, I think it’s way different than other games. Like—

Jessie: We are—we’re very competitive.

Sarah: Yeah. Usually, we’re very competitive, so—

Rory: We try to go against each other.

Sarah: Well, some more than others.

All: (laughing)

Rick: (laughs) There's—there's screaming, and old-school trash talk, and—

Jessie (laughs) Bargaining.

Rick: —cheering, and bartering, and trying to knock each other out.

Sarah: (laughs) There's none of this like, 'oh, you let your kids win,' stuff. That—that's never been part of their childhood, that's not how it works around here. Every man or himself, and if he wants to win, he needs to get better. (laughs)

Jessie: We're not allowed to play *Monopoly* often because of it. (laughs)

Sarah further elaborates that while alliances may be formed during these games, their competitive structure often precludes the opportunity for collaboration between the whole family:

This was kind of nice, it was cooperative. It was working together. Usually if there's alliances, someone ends up rubbed the wrong way because two people had alliances. Yeah, it was much different than what we usually do.

Therapeutic Utility: Engagement and Enjoyment

Participation in Bonus Sessions

Upon the conclusion of the first narrative arc/two sessions of the game, all family members were provided with the option to either proceed to their exit interview, or continue playing the game for an additional two sessions before proceeding to their exit interview. All three participating family groups indicated their desire to continue the game and opted to participate in the additional bonus game sessions.

Pilot Feedback Survey

The pattern of participant responses to the positive items contained within the pilot feedback survey (see Table 8) provide an overall indication of enjoyment of the game amongst

the sample, with all participants indicating either strong agreement or agreement to positive statements about the game, including that the game was interesting (Strongly agree: 27.3%, $n = 3$; Agree: 72.7%, $n = 8$), and fun (Strongly agree: 36.4%, $n = 4$; Agree: 63.6%, $n = 7$), and either strong agreement, agreement, or neither agreement nor disagreement to statements that the game was useful (Strongly agree: 36.4%, $n = 4$; Agree: 27.3%, $n = 3$; Neither agree nor disagree: 36.4%, $n = 4$) and helped them to feel closer to their families (Strongly agree: 27.3%, $n = 3$; Agree: 36.4%, $n = 4$; Neither agree nor disagree: 36.4%, $n = 4$).

An additional measure of families' level of engagement and enjoyment of the adventure may be derived from items pertaining to the effects of the game module on family game behaviours (Table 10). In response to the item "How has your interest in playing games with your family members changed as a result of playing the Family Tabletop Adventure?" 36.4% of participants ($n = 4$) reported that their interest in playing games with their family increased, and 63.6% ($n = 7$) reported that their interest stayed the same. Similarly, when asked "How likely are you to play games with your family as a group as a result of playing The Family Tabletop adventure?" 36.4% of participants ($n = 4$) anticipated that they would be more likely to play games with their family, and 63.6% ($n = 7$) anticipated that they would be neither more nor less likely to play games with their family.

Exit Interviews and Open-ended Feedback Questions

Multiple themes pertaining to families' engagement and enjoyment of the game were revealed through analysis of the content of their exit interviews and responses to open-ended feedback questions provided at the end of the pilot feedback survey. These themes included Appreciation of Novelty, Appreciation of Pace and Structure of the Story, Immersion Provided

by Visuals and Music, Creative Freedom and Player Agency, Creation of Additional Character Material, and Desire to Keep Playing.

Appreciation of Novelty. As noted elsewhere, multiple families noted that the cooperative, collaborative format of the game served as an enjoyable departure from the competitive style of games that they normally engaged in. For one family group that possessed previous experience playing cooperative games, the current game module offered an additional element of novelty by virtue of the element of spontaneity conferred by the open-ended, story-based structure and interactions between the GM and players throughout the game, illustrated by the following discussion between Lisa (youth, 15), Wes (parent, 51), Heather (parent, 51):

Lisa: There were more possibilities.

Wes: Yeah. So I mean, we play cooperative games like *Hanabi*, but they're... but there it's very restrictive, you know, the moves that you make are very limited, so this kind of game is a lot more discussion.

Heather: That cooperative aspect, the facilitated cooperation—like, having a facilitator was quite lovely. Like, having the narrator. [Lisa] and I are just reading [book series], and every once in a while, they actually—the narrator is part of the story.

Lisa: Like, it sounds like the narrator has their own backstory.

Researcher: So, what did you enjoy about having a narrator, [Heather]?

Heather: It was just, it was—I think it was that the novelty was fun. It was different than—than what we've done in the past.

Lisa: (nodding)

Wes: I mean, we've played games like *Werewolves* where there's an emcee—which is similar, but again, that's a very structured game, so you don't have the—the narrator doesn't have as much of a broad possibility for interaction with the players.

Heather: It's fun, not knowing what's coming next—

Wes: Mhm.

Heather: —like, because you couldn't—you couldn't read the box and get hints... so it was all a surprising mystery. That was fun.

Appreciation of Story Structure and Pace. In addition to an appreciation of novel elements of the game, families also expressed enjoyment of the pace of the story, which engaged their attention throughout sessions. As Heather (parent, 51) notes: “I found the time passed much faster than I expected... like, there was always something going on... the pace was good. Like, things kept moving, and I was never hoping it would end. (laughs)” Other participants echoed this sentiment; Amanda (parent, 44) noted that the pacing of successive missions in the narrative's structure contributed to her family's enjoyment.

We all agreed that we liked that we had to finish missions, and then it had like —after we finished that mission, it would just kind of lead into another mission. You were never really—really wondering, um, if anything else was going to happen. So, it kind of stayed, like, exciting throughout the story.

Members from multiple families also expressed their appreciation for the underlying connections between narrative elements of the story that provided clues for them to uncover and piece together as they progressed, culminating in unexpected twists, as Wes (parent, 51) describes:

I liked the—that you had connections throughout the story, like the pictures that you described around the underground, that kind of explained, or gave us clues...

foreshadowing about what the dragons were going to do. I liked that by thinking back on what you described in the past, I was able to work out what [to do next] ... I thought it seemed like you had put a lot of work into the connections throughout the story.

Despite an overall enjoyment of the pace expressed by the sample, a number of family members, particularly youth, noted that they would have preferred more action throughout the adventure in the form of additional battles. By extension, as choices made by families often enabled them to avoid additional potential conflicts, family member Heather (parent, 51) discussed the importance of balancing the amount of drama and action associated with various outcomes to ensure all were equally impactful:

Heather: There's that idea that you—sometimes, the gain is more dramatic and interesting if you don't do well. (laughs) You know, when you like—like in the *Apocryphal Spelling* video game, if you spell a word wrong, you get blasted by a fire breathing dragon, which is way more interesting than getting it right.

Researcher: So, making sure that there's that balance there, between the successes and the failures, in terms of the drama?

Heather: Yeah.

Immersion Provided by Visuals and Music. While some participants noted minor technical difficulties that occurred on occasion with visuals and music during the course of gameplay (e.g., difficulties with volume, placement of images) overall, family members indicated that the visual and auditory aids used throughout the game increased their immersion in the story; as “Becca” (youth, 13) notes: “I liked [the visuals] because it helped explain the story... it was cool how you could like, move things around, like the characters.” In addition,

other participants specified that balance in the level of detail of the game visuals facilitated the use of their imaginations, without being constrictive. Heather (parent, 51) elaborates:

I think it was basic enough that we could use our imaginations and kind of mold it into what we... kind of maybe would have envisioned, like when you're reading a book, you read a book and you're like, 'oh, I thought it looked like this,' and you watch a movie and you're like, 'oh, well that was kind of a let down. I had imagined this whole like wonderful world.' and this is like, very 2-D, where the visual was enough to, you know, bring it home, but it wasn't all-encompassing.

Creative Freedom and Player Agency. One of the distinguishing features of the game's format discussed most frequently by all participating family members was the degree of freedom and player choice embedded into the core mechanics of the game. For instance, several family members, particularly youth, referenced their enjoyment of the character creation process, which allowed them to experiment with features and personality traits of interest in the creation of their "alter egos." For instance, siblings Becca (youth, 13) and "Rachel" (youth, 12) described their enjoyment in being able to experiment and direct the creation and choices of their characters

Researcher: So, what was that experience like for you—to make this character and then play as that character?

Becca: It was fun.

Researcher: What was fun about it?

Becca: You got to like, create people that wouldn't actually exist.

Rachel: I liked being able to go off my own ideas rather than somebody else's.

The opportunity to explore and experiment with aspects of personality and identity through role-play was a particular highlight of the gaming experience for Jessie (youth, 13):

Jessie: It's really good... and I just like creating characters and acting.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Like, what is it that you like about creating characters, [Jessie]?

Jessie: Like being able to just do different personalities, or just saying like, 'they're like this,' and it's—just the whole aspect of acting that out.

Rory (youth, 12), who expressed a general aversion to role-play and role-playing games, attributes the creative freedom of the game to his enjoyment.

Researcher: Was your experience playing the Family Tabletop Adventure different from how you expected it would be?

Rory: Yeah.

Researcher: How so?

Rory: Uh, it was actually pretty fun, 'cus I've always really, really hated role-playing games, but this one was pretty fun.

Researcher: So, how was this different from other role-playing games you've played, [Rory]?

Rory: Um... like, I can do whatever. I can do whatever I want.

By extension, family members who described difficulties with connecting to their characters frequently cited constraints imposed by the limited number of available character classes to select from. Heather (parent, 51) speculates that her enjoyment of her character would have been increased had she felt that she could choose a character class with greater alignment to her own personality:

Heather: That was hard for me, being the Defender role, because I knew we needed a Defender in the team, and I wanted to be [character name], but the element of, 'am I

supposed to be the aggressor? Am I supposed to be the one offering to bash stuff?’

That’s—that’s not my natural role. So that was hard.

Researcher: Was there a job that you would have been more comfortable with rather than a Defender?

Heather: Well, I would have liked to have been the Spy.

Finally, when asked what advice they would give to other families playing the adventure for the first time, families often referenced the importance of improvisation and creativity in role-play to their enjoyment of the game, as illustrated by Wes (parent, 51) in the following excerpt:

You can think of it like a—like, I think of it as a little bit like an improv exercise, where, you know... you've got this whole game mechanism underneath it, but if the players are comfortable with it and enjoy that kind of thing, I think you can have a lot more fun if you emphasize that—living in your character. I especially enjoyed when—I think when [Lisa] was climbing up on the dragon and getting something. Doing things like that, where you've got, you know, a couple of the characters thinking through how their characters would react, and then kind of playing with it, throwing—throwing things back and forth together within the games. That's what I enjoyed. So, if people find that fun, they should—they should take that and run with it, lean into the improv.

Creation of Additional Character Material. Youth from all three family groups provided indications that they had spent extra time outside of the sessions generating extra material for their characters. For instance, Rachel (youth, 12) was eager to develop her character’s backstory following the introductory session, as recalled in this interaction between Rachel and her mother Amanda (parent, 44):

Amanda: As soon as she found out that she could create a character, she was like, on the computer right away and done.

Rachel: (smiling, nodding)

Researcher: I noticed that you came up with a pretty detailed backstory for your character, [Rachel].

Rachel: (smiling) Yeah.

Another family member, Lisa (youth, 15) took the opportunity to apply her interest in art to spending extra time creating a drawing of her character's appearance. Rory (Youth, 12) also created drawings to supplement potential tactics and strategies his character might use his powers for in combat. Below, Rory describes his desire for more action in the story to apply his ideas to:

Rory: It was fun to do the character card thing.

Researcher: Which part of creating the character card did you enjoy, [Rory]?

Rory: Choosing the spell stuff and like, figuring out what to do with them. Like, I made a little sheet of what I could do with this stuff.

Sarah: Yeah, [Rory] actually did some extra writing. He made like, special little pieces to go with it, and illustrations.

Rory: Yeah, like, I mean—like, that's why I wanted to have a bit more action, I didn't really get to use them, except for the [inaudible].

Researcher: And that extra stuff—what kinds of things were in the extra stuff that you made?

Rory: Like, just battle stuff. Attack strategies and stuff.

Desire to Keep Playing. During their exit interviews, multiple families expressed a desire to keep playing the game. Below, Amanda (parent, 44) describes the mixed feelings she had about the end of the study:

We had so much fun, and it's kind of like, 'aw...' like, I mean, it would be—it's going to be nice not to like have to rush home and eat supper and that kind of stuff, but at the same time, kind of like 'aw... well, we gotta talk about... what are we going to talk about now on Wednesdays?'

Other families were curious about what the other outcomes of the story might have been, and expressed interest in playing again to revisit their choices, as demonstrated by this interaction between family members Heather (parent, 51), Wes (parent, 51), and Lisa (youth, 15):

Heather: Actually, we're gonna miss—I'm, like, I'm going to miss you—seeing you on Sundays.

Researcher: It's been so much fun working with your family. Yeah, it's been so much fun.

Heather: I'm curious, like, in those choose-your-own-adventure books, what the other—the other things that would have happened if we'd made different decisions. So yeah, it'd be fun to do it again—

Wes: You know, with different alignments, so that we're all, you know, like—

Lisa: We should touch that crystal ball, at—at Drake's place. (laughs)

Therapeutic Utility: Family Processes (Problem Solving, Communication)

FAD-III Scores, FAMPROS Ratings

As previously described, comparisons between mean baseline and post-game scores on the Communication, Problem Solving, and General Functioning subscales of the FAD-III

indicate an overall maintenance of family functioning in these areas over the course of the study (see Tables 3-6), while FAMPROS ratings for Participation codes indicated increases to mean ratings of family member participation in the Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks completed at baseline and post-game (see Table 7).

Exit Interviews and Open-ended Feedback

Discussion around the family processes of problem solving and communication featured heavily in families' descriptions of their experiences during their exit interviews, and demonstrated throughout the course of gameplay as evidenced by the derived themes of Testing New Ideas, and Group Planning and Strategizing.

Testing New Ideas. Throughout the course of gameplay, multiple families discovered that they were able to try out various combinations of their skills and powers, and increased the frequency with which they shared their ideas with the GM, illustrated by the following conversation between family members Becca (youth, 13), Rachel (youth, 12), "Emily" (youth, 13), and Amanda (parent, 44):

Researcher: What advice would you give to family members who are playing the Family Tabletop Adventure for the first time?

Becca: Be creative with your ideas.

Rachel: Like, you're able to do a lot of things. Like for example, I thought some of my ideas wouldn't work, but then they did.

Emily: (nodding)

Becca: (nodding)

Amanda: Yeah, I would agree with what they said too. It's just like, yeah, just like, don't be afraid—don't think that it's silly, the answer will rarely, if ever, be 'no, you can't do that.' So just don't be afraid to try things.

Upon discovering the freedom that they possessed to implement their ideas, Becca, Rachel, Amanda, and Emily found creative ways to combine their respective powers and build upon each other's choices, as demonstrated by the following excerpt from their second gameplay session, during a battle with a group of slimes in the sewers:

Researcher (as GM): And now we're back to the top of the round with Sia (Becca's character). Sia, what would you like to do?

Becca: Um, is there still, like, part of that pillar left?

Researcher (as GM): Uh, the pillar—it was a pretty substantial, epic pillar topple by your teammate Athena (Rachel's character) there, so it looks like there's some chunks near the base of the pillar, some loose pieces of rock, but the pillar itself has mostly fallen over.

Becca: Um... can I use my camouflage and sneak around to the back and grab a chunk or two of the wrecked pillar and try to like, hit the big slime in its weak spot?

Amanda: (raises eyebrows and nods) Nice one! (high-fives Becca)

Researcher (As GM): Okay, let's roll and see... that is *very* creative. (Rolls a 6) Oh, wow!

All: (exclaim excitedly)

Amanda: Woo!

Researcher (as GM): Before I described what was going to happen from this dice roll, I was just about to add that what you were trying to do involved multiple steps, so the roll would need to be higher for it to fully succeed, but you did just get a critical

success, and with your +1 bonus... oh, wow. Okay, so here's what— Oh, my goodness, this slime— (laughs)

All: (laughing)

Researcher (as GM): Here's what happens. So, uh, the rest of you see this sort of, uh— kind of purple-ish shimmer, and it's like one moment, Sia is there, and you see that her keen eyes are looking around the room, like they're making calculations of what she can do in this moment, and then she's just... gone. And all that's left is this shimmering, purple outline where she was. And she expertly, deftly moves behind this slime, over to where the fallen pillar is, and grabs a large chunk of rock. And with, with just uncanny precision, manages to lob it straight into the back of the large slime, right into its weak point. And let's see how much damage you do here... (rolls a 5) oh, my gosh!

All: (exclaiming, laughing)

Researcher (as GM): Wow! (laughs) Okay, so with the aid of this fallen pillar that Athena toppled over last round, you lob this sharp piece of rock into the large slime's weak spot, and it just explodes into a couple of smaller slimes that wobble around weakly. And if they had eyes, you'd think they were looking around, but they don't see you—you are a shadow.

Becca: (smiles)

Group Planning and Strategizing. All three family groups noted their enjoyment of the opportunity to collaborate and use their creativity to strategize and plan with each other about possible solutions or combinations of their powers to address in-game challenges. As family members Sarah (parent, 38), Jessie (youth, 13) Rory (youth, 12), and Rick (parent, 39) describe:

Sarah: I enjoyed the collaborative part.

Jessie: Yeah. I liked the collaborative stuff, working together.

Sarah: I liked being able to figure out like, ‘oh, okay, well what do you have on yours [character sheet] that I could help you with to make it work?’

Rory: (nodding) Yeah.

Researcher: So combining those abilities.

Sarah: Yeah.

Rick: (nodding)

Further, for all three family groups, these discussions occurred both during the game and in between game sessions in their conversations with each other, as Jessie (youth, 13) elaborates, “we talked about battle strategies, what happened, what we could do differently next time, and random–random things from the game.” For some families, the process of strategizing occurred before they had begun to play the game, during the process of the creation of their characters, illustrated by the following description provided by Heather (parent, 51):

That was a part I liked, sitting down with the three of us, and looking at– ‘okay, well, if you choose these spells, I should choose these spells, because we want to make sure we have a balanced combination of things.’

Therapeutic Utility: Family Processes (Positive Interaction, Relationship Building)

FAMPROS Ratings

As previously described, FAMPROS ratings for Positive Behaviour codes indicated decreases to mean ratings of observed positive behaviour between family members during Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks completed at baseline and post-game for two family groups (Family Group 1, Family Group 2) and an increase for one family group (Family Group 3, see Table 7).

Pilot Feedback Survey

Several items on the Pilot Feedback Survey described previously in this section may also be applied as indicators of positive interaction and relationship building between family members. For instance, 27.3% of participants ($n = 3$) strongly agreed and 36.4% ($n = 4$) agreed that the game brought them closer to their families, while the remaining 36.4% ($n = 4$) neither agreed nor disagreed (Table 8). Additionally, responses to the Game Behaviour items indicate that some family members perceived increases to their interest (36.4%, $n = 4$) and/or likelihood (36.4%, $n = 4$) of spending time playing games with their family (Table 10).

Exit Interviews and Open-ended Feedback

An additional category of themes that emerged from family exit interviews encompassed themes around the game's contributions to their positive interactions and relationships, including themes of Positive Interactions Out-of-Game and Dedicated Quality Time.

Positive Interactions Out-of-Game. In addition to planning and strategizing with each other between sessions, all three families noted that they had shared the positive interactions with one another outside of the game as they recalled funny, exciting, or otherwise memorable events that had occurred during gameplay, as illustrated by this exchange between family members Amanda (parent, 44), Rachel (youth, 12), and Emily (youth, 13):

Amanda: Yeah. Yeah. It was pretty neat... when we talked about it after, it was like, like, when somebody had like cool idea in particular, it was like, 'whoa, remember when you shape shifted the columns?' or... (to Emily) what did you do during that time?

Rachel: (gesturing) The spikes.

Amanda: (gesturing to Emily) The spikes! You made the spikes.

Emily: (smiling, nodding)

Amanda: The spikes. Yeah.

Sarah (parent, 38) described similar positive interactions and the excitement that occurred between their game sessions:

I just really liked having that time carved out that we hung out together, and there was lots of excitement after and people being like, ‘okay, well next time let’s try this,’ and ‘well remember, you need to add this,’ and I don’t know, it was—it was kind of a fun little adventure.

Dedicated Quality Time. All three families expressed their appreciation of the opportunity for quality time provided by the game. Further, multiple family members noted their specific appreciation for the structure and delivery of game sessions, which conferred their families with scheduled, dedicated quality time, as family member Sarah (parent, 38) expressed, this was particularly appreciated during the global pandemic:

I would say like, look forward to the time carved out for it. I don’t know. And given the way that the world is right now, we really, truly did look forward to it. Right now, we don’t have a whole lot going on, which was part of the reason why I signed up for it is I thought, ‘well, you know, it’s one day a week that we can be like, oh, I can play that game.’ I—you worked out really well for us.

Sarah elaborated that, while her family plays a lot of games together, they don’t normally have a set, dedicated time to do so: “we play a lot of games, we just don’t usually have carved out time. It’s more like, ‘oh, okay, we have nothing to do right now. Okay, let’s play a game.’”

For other families, their time playing the game had inspired them to consider looking for similar games to play together in the future, as Amanda (parent, 44) describes:

A common thread through all of us is that after the, after the first couple of games, we were talking about, 'oh, maybe we should seek out other games that might be like this.'... you could use that for marketing too, is that yeah, we're probably gonna use our Amazon gift card to buy some sort of role-playing game.

Therapeutic Utility: Family Processes (Generation of Novel Family Insights)

Exit Interviews and Open-ended Feedback

An additional category of themes that emerged during analysis of exit interview transcripts revolved around the novel insight family members gained about each other as a result of playing the game. As Rick (parent, 39) notes:

Well, it uh, it gave me- [Jessie] looks at the world differently than I was expecting... it was like, in the first session, we got the intro, and we're getting ready to the tower for the first time, and our Wizard [Jessie] was like, 'no, I've got 10 more questions I have to ask before I open the door... I have to get the background.' Like, I'd never seen that from [Jessie] in real life before, so I found that fun... it gave me insight into the gears inside their heads a little bit, as a parent.

For Sarah (parent, 38), the game offered new insights into how her child behaves in other settings by providing her with the opportunity to witness his behaviour in the novel context of the game while playing at home:

So, something that I learned is—for years, we've gone to parent teacher interviews and you know, all the time—well, [Rory] is a little bit excited and wild at home and out doing his thing. And teachers are always like, 'oh no, he's like, so quiet, and he just stays on task and in his desk,' and I'm like 'really?' For years, his whole school career, although these teachers praise you know, how—how he just stays on task, and he doesn't

interrupt and he's just down to business at school, and this would be the first time I've ever seen this within the walls of my house. (laughs) Like, this quiet timid creature is not usual. So, to see him during the first [session], where he was very quiet and very reserved... that's was... very different for me to see, that's not- not [Rory] usually.

In addition, multiple family members in the sample detailed newfound appreciation for their family member's creativity that emerged from watching them play the game, as Amanda (parent, 44) expresses in the following excerpt:

It was fun... it was- it sure was like, really interesting as a parent, to like, see the kids' personalities come through, like, you know? And see what they're capable of... it was really quite neat. Some of the stuff they came up with was, was neat to see. Like, when I—again, when I tell my friends about it, I'm like, 'and then they came up—my kids came up with this like, crazy idea!' Like, not even crazy, but just an idea that I never thought of, and it was, it was pretty neat to see how they're—how creative they are.

Family member Rachel (youth, 12) echoed this sentiment, adding that the opportunity to see her family contribute their ideas during the game made her more open to their ideas out of the game, as the following exchange illustrates:

Researcher: So, my next question is, have you noticed any differences in how you guys talk or interact with one another as a result of playing the Family Tabletop Adventure?

Rachel: Um... I'm more open to hear people's ideas since I like, heard about them when we were playing the game.

Researcher: Playing the game made you more open to hearing your family members ideas out of the game, too? Is that what you meant?

Rachel: (nodding) Yeah.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to pilot test an original family TRPG module for use in future evaluations of TRPGs as therapeutic tools for use in family play therapy. To achieve this end, the current study synthesized data from both quantitative and qualitative sources from a sample of three family groups into exploratory insights of the module's potential therapeutic utility across four overarching areas of focus: feasibility and ease of use, iatrogenic risk, engagement and family enjoyment, and family processes.

Therapeutic Utility: Feasibility and Ease of Use

Qualitative and quantitative findings regarding the module's ease of use indicated that, overall, the module was feasible for implementation with family groups. No family members in the current study indicated that they found the game to be confusing, frustrating, or stressful, and all indicated some degree of enjoyment of the visuals and story. While some family members expressed a degree of confusion with the significance of different numerical values of dice rolls, they further elaborated that this confusion eased through gameplay, and further, though only two members of the sample had previous experience playing TRPGs all family members across the sample indicated their overall confidence in comprehension of the game's rules and story, aided by the assistance of their character sheets and the presence of the GM.

Therapeutic Utility: Iatrogenic Risk

An evaluation of the potential iatrogenic risk conferred by the module indicated a low level of risk to participation in the game amongst the current sample. Families reported an overall maintenance of their general functioning, communication, and problem solving between baseline and post-game. Further, none of the family members in the sample perceived the game as boring, stressful, confusing, frustrating, or the cause of fights between family members.

Additionally, some participants felt that the game had brought them closer to their families, and family members who expressed degree of nervousness prior to playing the game perceived a reduction or elimination of this discomfort throughout gameplay. Several family members in the sample perceived the game to be significantly less competitive, and in the case of one family, less conflict-inducing than the games that they normally played together.

A potential exception to this overall pattern of low iatrogenic risk concerns the FAMPROS ratings of demonstrations of positive behaviour between family members during the two Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks conducted at baseline and post-game, which decreased for two family groups, and increased for one family group. This discrepancy could possibly be explained by the increases to ratings of the degree of family member participation between these two timepoints for all three families, which may have altered previous patterns of family interaction with the addition of a greater degree of involvement on the part of one or more family members. By extension, it may also be possible that this increased participation could have been conferred by improvements to initial levels of discomfort with the relative lack of familiarity with the study during the first task. As such, it is possible that post-game ratings may have been a more accurate reflection of existing family dynamics. Further, the overall trend of low inter-rater reliability amongst the initial set of included FAMPROS coding dimensions warrants caution in the interpretation of codes that were retained for analysis.

Therapeutic Utility: Engagement and Enjoyment

One of the clearest indications of families' engagement and enjoyment of the game was the continued participation of all three family groups for an additional two bonus gameplay sessions, further underscored by uniformly positive perceptions of the game as interesting and fun, and enjoyment of the story and visuals reported by participants on the pilot feedback survey.

Similarly, a range of themes pertaining to family enjoyment and engagement with the game were evident in the themes derived from family interviews; participating families, all of whom indicated that they regularly play boardgames or video games with each other, each described novel elements in the game module that captured their attention and produced enjoyment, particularly the elements of collaboration and teamwork, improvisation, creative freedom and experimentation, immersive visual and auditory aids, and the narration and presence of the GM. Further, all participating families indicated that they engaged with the game outside of scheduled sessions, including discussing events that occurred during gameplay and creating additional character materials. Finally, several family members expressed a desire to either keep playing the game or to play again to discover new possible outcomes. This pattern of engagement is consistent with existing research that indicates that individuals of all ages enjoy participating in play therapy interventions, and further, suggests that family-based TRPGs may capitalize on the most effective play therapy intervention strategies ascribed to the developmental competencies of both adolescence and adulthood; specifically, opportunities for experimentation with identity and abstract symbolic reasoning, and the generation of a sense of joy, pleasure, and connection with others through group-based play (Kaduson, 2016).

Therapeutic Utility: Family Processes

Several themes related to the family processes of communication, problem solving, and positive interactions and relationship building featured heavily in families responses to questions during their exit interviews. Family members across all three family groups engaged in in planning and strategizing both during and outside of gameplay in order to address anticipated challenges. Further, multiple family members described the structured quality time conferred by playing the game as a positive opportunity for bonding with their families, with one family group

indicating their intent to seek out additional games similar in nature to play together in the future. Finally, several family members also described various new insights that they had gained about their family members over the course of the game, including greater knowledge and appreciation of their family members' personalities and creativity, observations of behaviours not otherwise previously seen before in the family home, and for one family member, greater openness to family member ideas in her larger family context as a result of her interactions with her family during the game. Due to the overall lack of existing research on the use of TRPGs with families, the generation of novel insights about family members was not included among the hypothesized outcomes of the game module, though it is a benefit that has been previously listed among those ascribed to play-based family interventions more generally (Gil, 2015).

Targets for Development

In achieving the second primary objective of the current research, multiple targets for further development and refinement of the module may be derived from the exploratory insights generated by the above analyses.

Rule Alterations

Though all participants indicated their understanding of the rules, their delivery could potentially be enhanced by involving families more directly in their presentation through the implementation of a hands-on demonstrations of the various mechanical concepts of the game in practice, as was suggested by participant Wes. This alteration may further improve comprehension and retention of the rules by increasing families' engagement through direct involvement in the learning process, while in addition, reducing the time between when families learn the rules and when they have their first opportunity to implement them in practice. For family members without existing TRPG

experience, hands-on demonstrations of game mechanics like role-play could potentially reduce feelings of nervousness evoked by these or other mechanics prior to the start of the game. A further benefit to the addition of more hands-on demonstrations of the rules during the learning stage would be the opportunity to demonstrate examples of dice rolls in practice. This could improve family members' comprehension of the dynamic significance of various dice roll values (particularly mid-range rolls) depending on various contextual considerations outlined in the rules (e.g., situational or environmental factors, the difficulty of a player's desired action, the tools they are using to accomplish their desired action, whether they are working together with family members) through multiple demonstrations of how these dice rolls would change by altering the above factors.

In addition to the incorporation of practical demonstrations of game mechanics within the learning stage, another alteration that may be made to the module's ruleset involves an expansion of both the number and type of jobs available to players. By extension, the rules may be altered to offer players the opportunity to switch their selected job should they be unsatisfied with their initial choice or are interested in adopting and testing out a new role and range of skills. These changes may enhance player engagement and immersion in the narrative by increasing the likelihood that players are able to select character jobs that resonate with their personalities and preferences, while also reducing constraints on player agency and choice and offering additional opportunities for character exploration and experimentation.

Story Alterations

Multiple participants in the sample, particularly youth, indicated a desire for more battles in the story to increase the opportunities for them to use their character's powers and skills in combat. Though players also used their powers to solve puzzles, it is possible that some players may find the action-oriented nature of combat to be more engaging or accessible; for example, players who experience more discomfort with the role-play or other more imaginative aspects of the game may prefer the additional structure conferred by combat (e.g., changing from free-form contributions to a set turn order). Further, as players were able to avoid additional potential combat through their successful resolution of challenges during the story, the provision of increased opportunities for combat within the story, in addition to utilizing more action-based mechanics or descriptions in non-combat challenges (e.g., puzzles), could help to maintain a consistent sense of action throughout the narrative.

In addition to the above narrative modifications, the structure of the narrative guide itself may also be expanded upon to enhance its delivery and ease of administration, particularly for GMs without pre-existing TRPG experience. For instance, improvised descriptions, dialogue, and situational modifiers for dice rolls employed by the GM in response to the range of player choices that emerged during gameplay in the current study may be incorporated into the narrative guide to provide additional structure for future GMs administering the game. This may be accomplished by outlining a greater range of possible player choices and scenarios and providing additional guidance on arbitrating roll values and outcomes, as well as examples of descriptive phrases and dialogue.

Implications

Along with informing the ongoing development of the game module for use in future studies, insights gleaned from these results offer several novel contributions to existing literature pertaining to the therapeutic uses of TRPGs. In addition to serving as an investigation of the potential therapeutic applications of TRPGs in the novel, unexplored context of the family, the preliminary insights offered by the current research appear to lend support to a range of theorized benefits of the use of role-play and role-playing games in family play therapy contexts, including fostering communication between family members, encouraging the generation of and experimentation with solutions, and providing the opportunity to observe patterns of existing family dynamics and behaviours (Gil, 2015). Further, lending credence to the assertion that role-play can enhance family members' knowledge of each other (Gil, 2015), several family members in the sample indicated that the module facilitated the benefit of developing new insights about their family members. Finally, these findings also provide initial insights concerning the potential risks inherent to the use of TRPGs with families, with findings indicating that participation in the module did not produce stress or conflict for families in the sample.

Findings from the current study also provide initial indications into the module's ability to engage two populations who traditionally experience barriers to participation during treatment: fathers and adolescents. Responses offered by fathers in the sample appear to underscore themes emerging from research on father's preferences for family-based interventions and programming (Frank et al., 2015). Specifically, fathers in the sample ($n = 2$) indicated their enjoyment of the interactive, activity-based nature of the game module that allowed them to spend time with their families, with one father in the sample specifically highlighting the perceived benefit of increased insight into his children's personalities. Similarly, the unilateral enjoyment of the game expressed by all participating youth in the

sample ($n = 6$) in pilot feedback survey responses and during family exit interviews appear to indicate their engagement with the expressive, abstract, and analytical nature of the game's mechanics, consistent with existing theory that role-play games offer adolescents the opportunity to experiment with identity and testing the outcomes of imagined choices through the creation of fictional personas (Enfield, 2007; Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013); multiple youth in the sample described enjoyment in experimenting with different personality traits and characteristics during creation of their characters, and testing the limits of a range of creative choices during gameplay. Further, results for the current study underscore the utility of TRPGs for providing opportunities for youth to exert themselves as active agents in family discussions and decision-making through directing the creation of their characters and contributing their opinions to the resolution of challenges and obstacles, with the cooperative, non-hierarchical structure of the game enabling equity between the decisions and choices of adult and youth participants.

In addition to lending credence to the theorized therapeutic utility of TRPGs in family treatments, the high degree of enjoyment and engagement in the game expressed by the sample may bode well for considerations pertaining to treatment retention for TRPGs applied as therapeutic tools in family play therapy. For example, families' discussion of their specific enjoyment of the presence of and interaction with the GM throughout gameplay may indicate the potential for TRPGs to provide specific avenues or benefits to establishing and developing therapeutic alliances with families during treatment; previous research implicates the importance of the initial bond with clients as a key component of the therapeutic alliance (Anderson et al., 2018), and further, initial developments of this bond are associated with the form the alliance between clients and therapists will take throughout treatment (Zilcha-Mano & Errázuriz, 2017). Previous research also demonstrates that the therapeutic alliance mediates the relationship

between level of distress and high-conflict therapy formats on treatment dropout (Andersen et al., 2018), suggesting that establishing strong therapeutic alliances may help to retain families experiencing greater conflict or distress in therapy. Further, as family treatment specifically requires therapists to establish therapeutic alliances with multiple at different developmental stages, and previous research has noted that therapeutic alliances can be more difficult to establish with youth due to factors like a reluctance to participate in treatment or disagreement with parents about treatment goals (Campbell & Simmonds, 2011), tools like TRPGs could prove to be useful in establishing and navigating the therapeutic alliance throughout treatment by providing opportunities for positive communication and interaction between therapists, acting in the capacity of GM, and both youth and adult family members. Finally, the finding that all three families engaged in discussion about their choices during the game, including using reflection on past choices to inform future planning, may provide indications of the potential for TRPGs to be tailored as a mode of delivery for themes related to specific family treatment goals to facilitate engagement with treatment goals outside of therapy sessions.

Limitations

The first limitation of the current study was its small sample size, which precluded the ability to make inferences of statistical significance for family outcomes and limited the current findings to exploratory descriptions of sample characteristics. As such, it is possible that these findings may not generalize outside of the current sample. Additionally, as all family members indicated prior to the study that they play board games or video games together, with two family members indicating that they have previous experience playing TRPGs (see Table 1), it is possible that positive perceptions of the current game module among the sample were informed by pre-existing preference for and enjoyment of similar game formats. Next, though these

findings appear to provide initial indications of low risk inherent to the use of TRPGs, families in the current sample all demonstrated mean scores for family functioning across multiple domains that were lower than those of previous non-clinical and/or clinical community samples (see Tables 3-6). As a result, the risks posed by the current module to families displaying higher levels of conflict or distress is yet uninvestigated. Conversely, it may also be possible that the potential therapeutic effects of TRPGs would be enhanced with a sample of families experiencing greater disruption to domains of communication, problem solving, and general family functioning.

In addition to the above limitations conferred by characteristics of the current sample, these findings are also qualified by a lack of variability in the ethnicity of participating family members, with the vast majority of the sample identifying themselves as White/European. (90.1%, $n = 10$; see Table 1). As the narrative of the game module was structured around symbols and iconography associated with European medieval fantasy settings (e.g., descriptions of dragons and magic), it is possible that this influenced the overall enjoyment of and engagement with the story indicated by the predominantly White/European sample; though underlying processes of play share similarity across cultures, there exists a vast wealth of variation in cultural references and symbols and the nuances of their associated meanings between various cultural contexts that are, in turn, expressed through play (Cattanach, 2008). As such, it is possible that a diverging pattern of findings would emerge with a more culturally diverse sample.

The online nature of the study also presents several limitations to the current research. As participation was limited by the ability to fit all family members comfortably in front of a single computer screen, the findings of the current study may not generalize to larger family groups, which by virtue of their size, present with a larger range of dyadic- and system-level relationship

dynamics that may differ in responsiveness to a TRPG format. Further, the feasibility of the game's implementation may be compromised for larger families, for example by virtue of constraints on existing game mechanics (e.g., limitations in the number of character classes), or potential difficulties in ensuring opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution of all family members during the course of a single, time-limited session. Additionally, the existing online format limits the accessibility of the game to families that possess a stable internet connection and a computer equipped with a working webcam and microphone.

Another notable limitation was conferred by the familiarity on the part of the researcher with TRPGs, which may have increased the effectiveness of the delivery of improvised dialogue and descriptions of character interactions and story outcomes while acting in the capacity of GM. As a result, individuals without prior TRPG experience may encounter increased difficulty or reduced effectiveness in their administration of the game.

Future Directions

In addition to implementing the previously described alterations to the module extrapolated from feedback provided by families in the current sample, future research should aim to build upon the findings of the current study by expanding future study designs to encompass a larger and more ethnically diverse samples of families with greater variability in their level of familiarity with boardgames to enable the use of inferential methods of analysis and further increase the generalizability of findings. Further, future studies should aim to develop and implement different culturally relevant narratives and other alterations to the existing module to evaluate the potential enhancements to effectiveness conferred with their use in other cultural contexts. Next, to continue to establish both the therapeutic utility and iatrogenic risk of the use of TRPGs in therapeutic contexts, future designs should endeavour to evaluate the module with

samples of families that demonstrate greater functional impairment, utilizing proper risk management protocols with trained therapists acting in the capacity of GM. To further this aim, the existing narrative guide developed for the purposes of the current study should be expanded to provide more concrete instructions and examples (e.g., for describing outcomes, dialogue with players) for GMs who have less prior experience or comfort with TRPGs. Further, future studies should adapt and test the module with families in face-to-face settings that bypass technology requirements to enhance the accessibility of the current module, and in addition, enable the participation of larger family groups. By extension, future research may also evaluate the application of the game module with smaller dyadic relationship configurations (e.g., couples, parent-child dyads, siblings).

Next, low inter-rater reliability for several dimensions of FAMPROS ratings were also a concern in the current study. As the original training process for the FAMPROS protocol involved the use of training videos for which current access was limited. To address this, future research using the current game module could develop a training video using the Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks developed for the current study. Creation of this video would supplement existing FAMPROS training materials by enabling coders to compare and discuss codes and resolve discrepancies during shared training exercises, which may result in greater alignment between raters in their evaluation of families on these dimensions.

Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the previously unexplored effects of TRPGs on family processes by pilot testing an original TRPG module with a sample of three families over the course of six weeks, with the primary objectives of gaining exploratory insights into the module's potential therapeutic utility, and further, extrapolating these insights to targets for

additional development of the module for its use in future research. Findings synthesized across quantitative and qualitative sources of data indicated that the module demonstrated overall feasibility and ease of use with families in the sample, low level of iatrogenic risk to participating families, and produced enjoyment and engagement among family members. Further, though quantitative measures indicated an overall maintenance of family functioning across assessed domains, themes derived from qualitative interviews allude to the game's contributions across a range of processes, including communication and problem solving, positive interaction and relationship building, and the generation of new insights about family members. As such, the current research serves to establish preliminary evidence of the utility of TRPGs as therapeutic tools for intervention with families, and further, provides a foundation for the refinement and formal evaluation of the module with clinical samples in future research.

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Appendix A

McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD-III)

The following questions contain a number of statements about families. Please read each statement carefully, and decide how well it describes your own family. You should answer according to how you see your family. Each family member should complete the survey individually without the assistance of other family members.

For each statement, there are four (4) possible responses:

Strongly agree: select this response if you feel that the statement describes your family *very accurately*.

Agree: select this response if you feel that the statement describes your family *for the most part*

Disagree: select this response if you feel that the statement *does not describe your family for the most part*

Strongly disagree: select this response if you feel that the statement *does not describe your family at all*

Try not to spend too much time thinking about each statement, but respond as quickly and honestly as you can. If you have trouble with one, answer with your first reaction.

1. Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

2. We resolve most everyday problems around the house.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

3. When someone is upset, the others know why.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

4. In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

5. We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

6. We usually act on our decisions regarding problems.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

7. You can't tell how a person is feeling from what they are saying.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

8. Individuals are accepted for what they are.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

9. People come right out and say things instead of hinting at them.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

10. We avoid discussing our fears and concerns.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

11. It is difficult to talk to each other about tender feelings.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
12. After our family tries to solve a problem, we usually discuss whether it worked or not.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
13. We can express feelings to each other.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
14. We talk to people directly rather than through go-betweens.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
15. There are lots of bad feelings in the family.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
16. We often don't say what we mean.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
17. We feel accepted for what we are.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree

- Strongly disagree
18. We resolve most emotional upsets that come up.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
19. Making decisions is a problem for our family.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
20. We are frank with each other.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
21. We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
22. We confront problems involving feelings.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
23. We don't get along well together.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
24. We don't talk to each other when we are angry.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree

- Strongly disagree

25. We confide in each other.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

26. When we don't like what someone has done, we tell them.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

27. We try to think of different ways to solve problems.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Appendix B

Family Problem Solving Code (FAMPROS)

Codes 1-6. POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Overall, how positive was...

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. The [mother] to the [child]? | 1- Virtually none |
| 2. The [child] to the [mother]? | 2- Low |
| 3. The [father] to the [child]? | 3- Some |
| 4. The [child] to the [father]? | 4- Moderate |
| 5. The [mother] to the [father]? | 5- More often than not |
| 6. The [father] to the [mother]? | 6- High |
| | 7- Very high |

One type of positive behavior (A) includes, but is not limited to: showing positive affect, warmth, smiling, and displays of affection, giving compliments, displays of high enthusiasm, appearing interested in the other, and so forth.

Positive behaviors (B) also include supporting another, as well as defending or siding with another. Also included is demonstrating generally cooperative behavior, complying with requests/commands, participating, bringing up ideas, and so forth.

Note that the type of behaviors listed in B are, in general, less overtly positive and are scored lower than most type A behaviors.

For example, a child who is demonstrating generally acquiescent behaviors would be scored a 2 or 3 depending on factors such as frequency and sincerity. A child displaying more direct and active cooperativeness and similar behaviors could be scored a 4. To get to the 5-6 and 7 range, you need more initiative with sincerity.

For example, a parent's supportive behavior of another parent would be scored a 3 if it generally occurred throughout the interaction. If the parent showed consistent active support for his/her partner (e.g., agreeing with the other, picking up where the other left off), then you would score the parent's a 4. To get higher than a 4, there must be other direct behaviors.

Note that these behaviors should be directed to another person. For example, a child having a "good time" laughing and joking is not necessarily a positive behavior to the mother or the father.

Codes 7-12. NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR

Overall, how negative was...

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. The [mother] to the [child]? | 1- Virtually none |
| 2. The [child] to the [mother]? | 2- Low |
| 3. The [father] to the [child]? | 3- Some |
| 4. The [child] to the [father]? | 4- Moderate |
| 5. The [mother] to the [father]? | 5- More often than not |
| 6. The [father] to the [mother]? | 6- High |
| | 7- Very high |

Negative behaviors include, but are not limited to: showing negative affect, displaying anger, criticizing, accusing, swearing, reprimanding, disagreeing, arguing, complaining, insulting, negative teasing, leading questions, refusing to allow another the opportunity to talk, and negative directive commands. Pay attention to co-verbal behaviors such as tone (e.g., neutral vs harsh, clarifying vs accusatory).

Negative behaviors also include displaying noncompliant or refusal behaviors (verbal or nonverbal) and demonstrating in general uncooperative behaviors (such as inappropriate responses, inappropriate changes of topic, inappropriate resistance behavior), displaying agitation, aggravation, and so forth. Inappropriate aloofness is coded as negative.

Physical displays of aggression (e.g., hitting and kicking) and some physical or co-verbal behaviors (e.g., kicking in space, heavy sighing directed toward another, stomping feet) are also considered negative.

Codes 13-15. PARTICIPATION

Overall, how active was...

13. the [mother] in the interaction?

14. the [father] in the interaction?

15. the [child] in the interaction?

1- Not at all (e.g., withdrawn, uninterested)

2- Some, but not much

3- Not very active

4- Moderately active

generally involved in
interaction without much
initiation of own (follows
other's leads)

5- Very active with some initiation

6- Highly active

7- Extremely active

participates and initiates
throughout the interaction
(often the director of
conversation)

In general, the higher the participation throughout the interaction and the higher the initiation, the higher you would rate on this scale. The low end of the scale may represent solely responsive behavior or low frequency.

For example, you can give a 6 or 7 to participants who are actively engaged throughout the interaction (initiating and responding to the others).

Use a 7 for the participants who are obviously more active (such as in taking the lead, responding to everything that is said) and a 6 for participants who although active throughout do take turns with others, etc. (Exception is when you have 2, or in very rare cases 3, people totally active throughout—talking over one another, etc.

Code 25. PROBLEM SOLVING – OVERALL QUALITY

25. Quality of the overall problem-solving process:
1. Extremely poor
 2. Very poor
 3. Poor
 4. Moderate
 5. Good
 6. Very good
 7. Extremely good

Overall, how well did the participants work towards a solution? Did they take each other's viewpoints into account? Was everyone involved in the process? Were the participants receptive to feelings, and reactions of others? Did they discuss possible solutions to the problem?

Appendix C

Imaginative Problem-Solving Tasks

Task A: Trouble in Paradise

It's been a wonderful family vacation on an ocean cruise- you're out on the open ocean, with sunny skies above, and dolphins playing curiously around the ship. Unfortunately, that part is over. The ship has hit something jagged beneath the cerulean waves and is now sinking slowly into the depths of the sea. Luckily, lifeboats have begun to ferry passengers to the shores of a distant, unknown island on the horizon.

Your family is the last on the lifeboats. You don't know what anyone else is bringing with them, but you have time to grab a single item to help you survive while you await rescue on the deserted island. And once you make landfall, you will need to have a plan.

Working together as a group, use your imaginations to come up with a list of potential items you might gather from the ship, and then discuss with each other and decide which single item your group will choose to bring, and why. Next, decide as a group what you will do first when you arrive on the shore. Please discuss amongst yourselves as a group for the next 10 minutes.

Task B: New Horizons

Today's the day! After months of training and preparation, your family has been selected to occupy one of the first "Seeds" to be planted in the dry, crimson Martian soil: space-travel pods that contain families who have been chosen to travel from their homes on Earth to build the beginnings of the first human city on Mars. The trip will be long, but you will spend most of that time asleep. When you land, your pod will deploy a basic shelter. All around you, other families on the mission will do the same.

There are only two choices left: What will you prioritize taking along? Your family may request one item to be guaranteed in the supplies you will be provided. And finally, what will you do first now that you've finally arrived?

Working together as a group, use your imaginations to come up with a list of potential items you might request for your mission, and then discuss with each other and decide which single item your group will choose as your guaranteed item, and why. Next, decide as a group what your first goal will be when you arrive on the surface of the planet. Please discuss amongst yourselves as a group for the next 10 minutes.

Appendix D

Game Module Rules

THE FAMILY TABLETOP ADVENTURE RULES AND INSTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your first session of the Family Tabletop Adventure! Before we dive in, let's take some time to discuss the rules for the game, and answer any questions you may have.

What is the Family Tabletop Adventure?

The Family Tabletop Adventure is a role-playing game; a game about telling stories with one another—it's like a game of make believe that you all play together. "Role-playing" means putting yourself in someone else's shoes - in this case, a character of your own making - and imagining how you would react as if you really *were* that character. In a lot of ways, The Family Tabletop Adventure is similar to a choose-your-own adventure book, where you read a story about a world and the characters in it and imagine yourself as if you were really there, in that character's shoes, deciding what choices to make. The difference is that in the Family Tabletop Adventure, we all tell the story together as a team.

After we go over some of the basic rules for the game and answer any questions you may have, we will begin by having each of you create your character. Your character is one of the heroes of this story, an adventurer who works with the other adventurers in your family as a "party," a group of friends who combine their unique talents and abilities to solve the problems of the world of Borealia, where this story takes place.

The choices you make are up to you, and members of your party. Working together, you will decide what actions to take at various points of the story – these decisions could be something like whether to explore a deep, dark cavern, or figuring out how to sneak past a sleeping monster. Together, you'll solve puzzles, meet a variety of characters, and assist them as you work to complete a fantastical quest. The choices you make are up to you, and the possibilities of what you choose are limited only by your imagination, and teamwork. The better you work together, the more likely it is you will succeed in your actions.

GAMEPLAY

So how do we actually play this game? It's easier than you might think! The outcomes of the choices you make will be decided by a combination of a random virtual dice roll, which you will see displayed on your screen and the interpretation of those rolls by the Game Master (GM) (That's me). Along with the virtual rolls, your screen will also display virtual maps and information about your characters to aid in gameplay.

The Game Master (GM)

The GM is the lead storyteller of the game, like the narrator, and acts like a referee to determine what happens after a dice roll based on a combination of a number of factors:

1. The difficulty of what a player's character is trying to do
2. What ability scores your character has
3. What talents or spells your character is using
4. Whether you are working together with other members of your party/your level of teamwork
5. The number rolled on the virtual dice from 1 to 6, with higher numbers leading to an increased chance of success

Basic Steps of Gameplay

Throughout the course of the story, I will present challenges and objectives for your party to solve; for example, crossing a narrow, rickety bridge over a deep gorge to reach the other side. The players, acting and speaking in character, then deliberate amongst themselves what they want to do to respond to that challenge – will they decide to walk slowly across the bridge? Will they run as fast as they can? Will they use the tools and special abilities they possess, like a magic spell? Once you have decided, the virtual dice is rolled, and I will determine the outcome your party's actions based upon the above criteria and the value of the dice roll, with higher numbers corresponding to a higher chance of success. Then, I will narrate to the players what the outcome of their choices were. Because you are unlimited in what you may decide, the story is flexible to your choices, and possibilities for what may happen next are endless, and up to your imagination.

There's no typical way to "win" or "lose" in the Family Tabletop Adventure— regardless of the choices you make, we will be telling a story of your adventure together. If we work together, have fun, and create a memorable story, everyone wins regardless of how the story ends.

The basic steps to gameplay are as follows:

1. The GM describes the current surroundings and objective at hand, providing basic information to assist the players in their choices for how to proceed
 - For example, notable objects or people, features and scenery of the area
2. The players discuss with each other about what they would like to do
 - For example, *"I think I should cast my telekinesis spell to help lift us across the bridge!"*
 - This may also involve asking the GM additional questions about the task (e.g. *"How far across is the ravine?"* or *"if I look around, can I see any other path across?"*)
3. Players describe their actions in character, and the dice is rolled, with the addition of appropriate modifiers according to their abilities and level of teamwork. For example, if players are able to work with one another and assist each other in solving a task by

combining their abilities, they will get to add a bonus to the number rolled on the dice, further increasing their chances of success.

- During combat, gameplay works a bit differently, and each player will take a turn. Outside of combat, the game is more flexible - each player may offer their ideas, input, and make decisions in any order.
4. The GM considers additional information, like the difficulty of the task, how players have decided to respond to the task, and the outcome of the virtual dice roll, and then narrates the result of the characters' and party's choices. The end result may produce a new task for the party to solve, in which case, they would once again discuss the problem with each other, and return to the start of the process.

ABILITY SCORES AND BONUSES

Each player character, along with the characters and monsters played by the Game Master, possesses scores for three basic abilities: **Strength, Speed, and Smarts**.

Strength: How physically fit your character is, their capability to push, lift, and throw

Speed: How fast and nimble your character is, their ability to run, jump, and perform acrobatics

Smarts: Your character's level of intelligence and wisdom, knowledge about various topics, and ability to remember and recall information

It is important to know that *everyone* in this party is strong, speedy, and smart - this is why they are heroes! However, depending on the **Job** that you select for your character (for example, a Wizard), you will receive a +1 bonus to an area where you particularly shine, almost like your "superpower". Characters may be more successful when attempting to perform actions related to their bonuses. For example, the Wizard receives a +1 to their Smarts score, due to their rigorous study of the nature of magic, and when attempting an action related to Smarts (e.g., translate an unknown language written on a wall), they will be able to add this +1 bonus to the number rolled on the virtual dice, increasing their chances of success.

Remember, not possessing an ability bonus does not mean your character isn't smart, strong, or speedy. Instead, it means that you should all work together to make use of your various powers and unique advantages to tackle the challenges you will encounter. The better you work together, the more successful you will be!

JOBS

The first step to creating your character will be to select your character's **Job**. There are five jobs to choose from (Druid, Bard, Spy, Defender, and Wizard). Only one player will be able to select each job.

Each job possesses special **Talents** or **Spells** that are unique to that job, as well as specific bonuses to one of their three ability scores (Strength, Speed, or Smarts). When selecting a job,

you may choose **3 talents/spells** from that jobs talent/spell list. These talents/spells can be used for a variety of purposes, both in and out of combat. For example, a Wizard character may use their Control Fire spell to attack a monster with a ball of flame during combat, or to light a torch to illuminate a dark room out of combat. Your party will increase their chances of success by working together to come up with creative ways that they can use their respective talents/spells to overcome obstacles.

Below is a table of the ability bonuses associated with each job, as well as descriptions of their associated talents/spells.

Job Name	STRENGTH	SPEED	SMARTS
Druid			+1
Bard		+1	
Spy		+1	
Defender	+1		
Wizard			+1

DRUID

Ability bonus: +1 Smarts

Druids are magical beings of great wisdom who draw their power from nature and the world around them. Their affinity for the natural world grants them spells that are based in manipulation of the earth, and a connection to plants and animals. They wield and channel their magic through the use of staves carved from the wood of ancient, gnarled trees.

Basic Attack: In addition to 3 spells selected from the list below, Druids are granted the capability to use their staves to perform basic attacks.

Spell Name	Description
Befriend Animals	Your time spent in the wild around various creatures grants you the ability to cast a spell to befriend and telepathically communicate with animals and other creatures; they can understand you, and you can understand them.

Cleanse	<p>You draw upon the vitality of nature to cast a spell that grants 1 HP to yourself or another injured party member and heals injuries.</p> <p>During combat, party members that have 0 HP and have fallen unconscious are revived to 1 HP and may once again participate in combat.</p>
Green Thumb	Your connection nature gives you the ability to cast a spell to instantly grow and control plants and trees.
Shape Earth	Your druidic abilities allow you to shape and move earth and stone in the area immediately around yourself and nearby party members.
Night vision	You draw upon your natural talents to see as animals do, casting a spell that allows you to see in the dark as if it were daytime.

WIZARD

Ability bonus: +1 Smarts

Wizards are like scientists of magic, masters of the arcane who have honed their abilities through rigorous study and research, wielding spellbooks that grant them magical control over the elements and the manipulation of mental energy.

Basic Attack: In addition to 3 spells selected from the list below, Wizards are granted the capability to use their spellbooks to perform basic attacks.

Spell Name	Description
Elemental Control: Fire	<p>Your intense study and mastery of the element of fire grants you the ability to</p> <p>create and manipulate flames. Any flame you make may be held in your hand, or thrown in a direction of your choice.</p>
Elemental Control: Water	Your intense study and mastery of the element of water grants you the ability to sense and control nearby sources of water.

Elemental Control: Electricity	Your intense study and mastery of the element of electricity allows you to create and direct bolts of lightning that shoot from your fingers.
Create Illusion	Your intense research into the mind allows you to make small illusions that appear in the minds of others as sounds or images of objects. Roll the dice, and the illusion will last for the number of minutes or turns displayed.
Telekinesis	Your mastery of mental energy allows you to move nearby objects that you can see with your mind. The heavier the object, the less likely the spell will succeed.

BARD

Ability bonus: +1 Speed

Bards possess the ability to channel their magical influence through their voices and the instruments that they wield over the hearts and minds of others through music and song, hindering their foes and bolstering their allies

Basic Attack: In addition to 3 spells selected from the list below, Bards are granted the capability to use their instruments to perform basic attacks.

Spell Name	Description
Ballad of Inspiration	You perform a song of inspiration that motivates a single person of your choice, granting a +1 bonus to the next ability roll that they make. Repeated uses of this spell back-to-back require a success on increasingly more difficult dice rolls.
Piercing Melody	You alter your tune to direct a high-pitched melody at a target that confuses their senses. When used in battle against a single monster, a successful hit will cause the monster to become confused and miss their next attack.
Song of Friendship	You perform a lively song that warms the hearts of those around you, calming their emotions and increasing their friendliness towards you.

	When used in battle against a single monster, a successful hit will cause the monster to change their allegiance and fight for you for their next turn.
Soothing Lullaby	You sing a gentle melody that temporarily puts a single target into a deep sleep. Roll the dice, and the effect will last for the number of minutes or turns displayed
Crescendo of Confidence	Your song inspires magical confidence in a target of your choice, causing them to grow up to twice their height, granting them a +1 bonus to Strength. Roll the dice, and this effect will last for the number of minutes or turns displayed.

SPY

Ability bonus: +1 Speed

Spies are cunning masters of sneaking and evasion, whose shadowy abilities provide them with unique talents in stealth, acrobatics, and investigation. They wield a pair of small, easily concealed daggers.

Basic Attack: In addition to 3 talents selected from the list below, Spies are granted the capability to use their daggers to perform basic attacks.

Talent Name	Description
Shadow Sprint	Your natural talents allow you to gather a shadowy cloak around yourself that increases your Speed bonus by an additional +1 for your next roll related to the Speed ability In battle, you always start first in the turn order. In addition, you may take an extra action on your turn once per battle.
Keen Eye	Your keen sense of perception allows you to investigate surrounding areas for hidden traps, hazards, or other sources of information.
Uncanny Evasion	Your quick reflexes allow you the chance to dodge out of harm's way. In combat, you may automatically dodge an attack and avoid damage once per battle.

Camouflage	Your shadowy abilities allow you to temporarily blend in with your surroundings. Roll the dice, and your camouflage will last for the number of minutes or turns displayed.
Feather Feet	Your nimble movement allows you to jump with ease, perform acrobatic stunts, and land lightly on your feet to avoid fall damage.

DEFENDER

Ability bonus: +1 Strength

Defenders are stalwart sentinels whose physical prowess and natural athleticism increases their ability to push, pull, and lift. Their inborn strength and bravery also lends itself to their extensive martial training and proficiency in swordplay, which they use to defend themselves and others from harm.

Basic Attack: In addition to 3 talents selected from the list below, Defenders are granted the capability to use their longsword to perform basic attacks.

Talent Name	Description
Super Strength	You focus your mind and concentrate deeply to expand your physical capabilities beyond their normal limits, allowing you to lift, pull, and push even heavier objects.
Endurance	Your natural fortitude grants you a permanent +1 bonus to your HP, for a total of 4 maximum HP.
Triple Attack	Your expertise in martial training allows you to attack three times in one turn once per combat. If you miss, you may attempt to use triple attack again.
Shield	In addition to your sword, you now carry a shield that allows you to protect yourself from an attack, or to rush to the aid of a party member, shielding them from damage and enduring the attack yourself in their stead.
Grapple	Your immense strength allows you to wrestle creatures to the ground and hold them in place, limiting their ability to move.

EMBARKING ON YOUR ADVENTURE

The choices characters and the party may make and the ways they can interact with their surroundings are up to the imaginations of their players, though generally they fall into three broad areas: **interaction, exploration, and battle**.

Exploration and Interaction

As players explore their surroundings over the course of their journey, addressing the various challenges that come to their attention, they will be provided with the opportunity to interact with a range of places, objects, creatures, and people. The world is populated with a variety of non-player characters, played by the Game Master, and each of them possess unique personalities, backstories, and motivations. They may have access to important information,

These non-player characters may respond positively or negatively to the actions of the party, depending on the how player characters interact with them, as well as the choices that the party makes and how those choices affect the world around them. Along with their deeds, the party's interactions with these characters will shape their reputation among the various inhabitants of the world, and may provide them with valuable allies in their quest.

BATTLE

Heroes and adventurers are often called upon to defend the world from a variety of threats, including monsters. Over the course of the adventure, the party may encounter hostile creatures that engage them in combat.

Turn order

During combat, players will take turns taking actions (e.g., casting a spell or using a talent, making a basic attack) to work together to defeat these creatures. Turn order is determined by a virtual dice roll, with the highest number going first in the turn order.

Health points

Each character, by default, has **3** health points or **HP**, that represent their current physical condition. Players may lose health points during combat, or if they receive an injury (e.g., from a fall).

The most common way a character will lose HP is during combat with monsters. Monsters also possess a turn in the turn order, and the GM will make a roll on the virtual dice to determine if their attack against a player is successful. At the beginning of combat, players will start with full HP, unless they are injured. Any time a character takes damage during a fight with a monster, they will lose **1 HP**. If a player falls to **0 HP**, they will pass out, and will not be able to take a turn for the remainder of the combat, after which other members of their party will be able to revive them.*

*One exception to this is if a Druid in the party with the "Cleanse" spell uses this spell on the unconscious party member. In this case, the party member will return to their feet with 1 HP and will be able to resume combat.

Actions

On their turn, players will describe the action that they take in character. Players may make **1 action per turn**, which involves selecting a talent or spell from their list. In general, talents/spells may be used to make attacks against a monster, but players may also cast a spell or use a talent for other purposes, such as to produce a positive effect on their allies, or manipulate their physical surroundings.

When players make an attack, the virtual dice will be rolled. More difficult monsters will require a higher roll to hit, determined by the GM. A successful attack results in the monster losing 1 HP. Combat ends when all monsters possess 0 HP, at which point they are considered to have been defeated.

CHARACTER CREATION

At some point before the first session of gameplay next week, you will need to create your character. A character sheet will be provided for you to fill out the following details:

1. Select your job
 - Remember, each job may be selected by only one player to make sure the party possesses a wide range of spells and talents to use
2. Select 3 talents/spells from your job's talent/spell list
3. Create some background details for your character, including your character's name, age, and some basic details of your appearance
 - A list of names is provided on the following pages if you have difficulty coming up with one!
 - Feel free to include as much detail as you would like when describing your character.
4. Select a "claim to fame" for your character from the list below
 - Your "claim to fame" is a special accomplishment that your character achieved at some point in their past that they are famous for.
 - Examples are provided below, feel free to choose one, or come up with one of your own!

Example First Names			
Adon	Ailith	Aldred	Allerie
Annora	Barton	Bellator	Bree
Camus	Claret	Cressa	Delnyd
Dryn	Elik	Elodie	Emdren
Fallarel	Fangar	Farryn	Floris

Galor	Garyn	Hadwyn	Haldir
Idonia	Jarrick	Kade	Ketra
Kolvar	Kyrie	Larke	Lennox
Loic	Lyris	Mavrik	Merula
Mirren	Neldor	Nera	Prisma
Randar	Reina	Shard	Sona
Sythrill	Taggett	Tekren	Thade
Valarin	Verrona	Weston	Xenil

Example Last Names

Amberthorn	Ashcreek	Boldheart	Brightglade
Cafferen	Cedarclaw	Clearwater	Daxos
Dennon	Dyell	Eastglen	Elvert
Evigan	Farmane	Feller	Fennoc
Fernwood	Ferrens	Flamberd	Fleetsilver
Fletcher	Furrow	Galliard	Glennshire
Greenwater	Hallowbrook	Hallowrend	Harclay
Hillhorn	Hollard	Ilger	Jannin
Knettlewood	Korving	Landis	Loffler
Malver	Marbrand	Mayhall	Nightstride
Pinesprout	Pyreclaw	Ravenmark	Roughcrest
Smallgrove	Southglen	Thistlewood	Wylden

Job	Example Claim to Fame
Druid	Cured all of the plants on a local farm of disease after they had become sick with rot, ensuring that the nearby town would have plenty of food for the winter.
Wizard	Stopped a fire from spreading across an entire town by using your magic to control the flames

Bard	Stopped an argument between two angry kings by singing a song of friendship that calmed their tempers and convinced them to sign a treaty between their kingdoms.
Spy	Snuck past a horde of giant spiders to retrieve a long-lost artifact from their nest
Defender	Rescued a town from a flooding river by lifting heavy boulders to direct the flow of water away from the entrance

Appendix E

Game Module Narrative Guide

PART 1: THE DRAGON'S EYE

SESSION 1

NARRATION

Among the many wonders of the world of Borealia, the city of Dragonclasp is its brightest jewel. Built on top of the wreckage of the Sundered Mountain, the city spreads across the ground in the shape of an open hand. At night, it glitters from countless sources of light—among these, Dragonclasp's unique upside-down streetlamps. It is beneath the glow of these lamps—and the golden light shining from every window on the street—that your team hurries toward a lonely tower in the late afternoon, dimming toward evening.

INTRODUCE THE PARTY - who do we see/who is making their way towards the tower? Here, families will be asked to provide brief descriptions of their characters, and provide their names. Some family members may feel more comfortable describing their characters than others. The GM can add additional descriptors/narration to engage the families, as appropriate. For example, describing the billowing robes of a Wizard, or the stealthy cat-like movements of a Spy.

THE WIZARD'S TOWER

NARRATION

The tower twists as it rises, like the coiled tail of the ancient creatures that the city has been named after. Its stones are shaped to look like scales, and the snake-like coil is crowned on top with what appears to be... a shabby old hut? It looks like someone's treehouse may have been misplaced... or the owner of the tower was very impatient with the addition.

You have all been brought to this odd place by a letter delivered to your party. The writer was very familiar with your past heroic deeds, and asked to meet you in person to discuss a grave danger to the city. But it was the end of the note that was the most shocking: The message was supposedly penned by the Wizard Drake the Strange, a secretive old man who is rarely seen outside his tower—if at all.

The door at the bottom of the tower looks as heavy as it is ancient, but swings open strangely easily. Light bursts from the entrance, surrounding the shape of an old man standing in the doorway, who looks to each of you. There is a clear look of excitement in the wizard's eyes as he welcomes you into his home.

Here, the GM may have the Wizard Drake look over each of the party members, and remark on their names/make subtle references to their Claims to Fame that hint that the Wizard is familiar with their past deeds.

“As you may have guessed, I am the Wizard Drake,” he says, “many in this city call me ‘Drake the Strange,’ and perhaps I have earned that title, too. Nevertheless, no one calls me ‘Drake the Rude,’ and I would rather them not start! Please, come in.” The Wizard Drake rushes each of you inside.

Observant party members (for example, a spy with the Keen Eye talent, a charismatic Bard, or party members who have asked for extra details about the Wizard or made an effort to examine him/ask questions of him before entering the tower) may notice that the Wizard casts a nervous glance around the tower, and then to the sky, before closing the door,

“It is good that you are here,” Drake the Strange says as he closes the door behind you all, offering a thin-lipped smile under a glass monocle so large it covers nearly half his face. The uncovered side of his face is lined with wrinkles that spread from the corners of his mouth and eyes, complimenting the smile he wears. His shiny scalp head is covered in patches of wispy tufts of white hair. He’s dressed in long robes, soft cloth gloves, and fine fur slippers. Around his neck hangs a large amulet. Despite its size, its construction is very delicate—the image of a huge dragon in the palm of a giant’s hand, surrounded by tiny figures of people.

As Wizard Drake leads you into the bottom floor of the strange tower, you are surprised by its clutter. The room bubbles and hisses with the sounds of alchemy; potions, artifacts, and an array of complex devices for his many experiments.

*“We have much to speak of, but please feel free to indulge your curiosity should anything catch your eye. I only ask that you not touch the gauntlet,” he says, gesturing toward an upturned metal glove in the center of the room—the **miniature model of Dragonclasp** described below*

“Do look around—carefully—while I go and fetch some proper refreshments!” Drake says, before he disappears up the stairs toward the upper floor of the tower.

ACTIVITIES

Look around!

The party may want to look around the tower, at Drake’s invitation. This first opportunity introduces players to the concept of taking the initiative to exploring the environment and looking for additional clues. The GM can introduce any amount of additional improvised description, but some items of note may include:

- **A miniature model of Dragonclasp** , made from an old gauntlet. It is rich with painstaking detail, such that the magnifying glass suspended above it could provide hours of tiny sightseeing. Drake is eager to show it off, but won’t let anyone touch, for fear of breaking it.
- **An iridescent ball** that seems to be completely unaffected by gravity. It behaves like a basketball in space, drifting in whatever direction it is thrown, bouncing between

surfaces. Drake will offer the ball if someone wants it, so long as they don't throw it around in his home! [His name is **Bounce**, and he *always* comes back.] (Bounce may provide players without a source of light a means of lighting up the sewers during the sewer challenge)

- **An odd piece of chalk** floating in a jar of water. The chalk looks dry. If removed from the jar, it is in fact completely dry. Chalk that never gets wet and draws on anything! Drake is very proud of this invention—though he doesn't seem to have an idea of what it might be used for (it may come in handy for marking the way in the sewer challenge)
- **Items that reference each player character's backstory.** The items hint that the Wizard was researching the party before they arrived. Descriptions of the items will change, depending on their claim to fame and chosen job. You may have a family member find something relevant to a different party member, to encourage more conversation and discussion
- **Cabbage – lots of cabbage.** The Wizard has an odd fascination of cabbage – players who investigate his belongings will find it everywhere. It's clear that the Wizard is unfamiliar with what people generally eat or find valuable.
- **A strange basement door.** A door to the Wizard's basement that compels anyone who draws near to leave by convincing them that the door is unremarkable and causing them to suddenly and immediately lose interest when they approach. If questioned, Drake says that the bottom of the tower is his private room, and he made it himself. Players with magical backgrounds will sense that there are extremely powerful, ancient magical energies surrounding the door and the tower, a hint about the Wizard's true powers and identity.

NARRATION

When he returns, Drake offers a tray of drinks:

- Green milk from the giant aphids farmed in the fields below Dragonclasp
- Bubbling water that takes on the flavor of the fruit you picture when you first sip
- Liquid that looks very much like mud. (Anyone who tastes it will verify that it is, in fact mud—a favorite of the local trees that sometimes visit from the deep forests.)

After players have had a chance to explore the tower, Drake will describe the quest, giving opportunities for players to ask for additional information/clarification as the need arises.

“Many know the history of this city; constructed by an ancient architect on top of a mountain, shaped like an open hand upon which all our neighbourhoods are built. Its purpose was, of course, to provide a safety from the dragons who once terrorized Borealia.

Its upside-down streetlamps are a clever construction, they help to block any magic in the air above the city to blind the scaly creatures to our presence. Nevertheless, disturbing rumors have reached my ears. A dragon is prowling around the surrounding area. Animals are being eaten and crops burned, though dragons typically avoid small farms and towns. Many of them love nothing more than riches, and there are few to be had on farms.

What worries me most is that these reports have come closer and closer to Dragonclasp itself. I am afraid the city will be discovered, and even more worried that we will all be caught unaware.

To that end, it is time that I reveal an old secret that I have kept for a long time... The Dragon's Eye.

Deep beneath the city, beyond the sewers that our folk call the 'Do-Not-Enters,' there is the tale of a chamber that contains an orb of great magical power. When the orb is used, it grants the ability to see through the eyes of the nearest dragon, in order to provide warning should they ever return.

Long ago, many tried to gain control of the city to find the orb because of its great power. Because of this, one of the founders of the city hid the orb deep within its depths. Many desire it, but none have ever discovered its hiding place. You are the most capable adventurers Dragonclasp has ever had. I need you to be the first ones to find it."

At this point, players may ask Drake for additional information, or for helpful items on their quest. The GM may also provide the following prompts, if families are having trouble:

Prompts:

- "Is there anything I can provide you to help you on your way? I have few excess personal effects, but you are welcome to anything I can provide."
- "What will you do first?"

If the party asks for helpful supplies, Drake may offer one of the items in his tower, bandages, or items of the party's suggestion, that he summons at will from the sleeves of his robe.

If the party requires further coaxing, Drake might mention that the easiest way to enter the sewers is through one of the many grates on the edges of the city, where the wastewater spills down the mountain.

The Sewer Entrance

NARRATION

There are many entrances to the sewers—or as the city's denizens call them, the "Do-Not-Enters"—but several large grates on the edge of the city are the most accessible. Their magical locks are often poorly maintained, their barriers aged and often lacking repair, and there are few people to interfere with the messy work of jumping down into the darkness in a giant, dirty pipe

(Party members who look around will discover indications that the guard that's supposed to be on watch is elsewhere, including playing cards and a note from the guard.)

The entry point you discover looks to have been rigged with some kind of bug. (Druids in the party will be able to identify these as firebugs.) The bulbous orange beetles eat large amounts of wood, which they expel in puffs of flame from their abdomens, like the world's worst firefly. Someone has clearly dumped piles of sawdust over every dry surface in front of the entrance to the sewer. Behind the layer of sawdust and scurrying beetles, magical locks flash and spark, electrifying heavy iron bars that make up the grate that covers the opening to the sewer. Beyond

that, inky darkness with no sign of the bottom. A series of signs to remind any potential visitors that going inside is a terrible, terrible idea.

On the downside, firebugs and magical padlocks and a host of signs warning that entering the Do-Not-Enters may be a bad idea. On the upside, the bars look loose enough that if all of the obstacles are cleared, a group of people might be able to pull them off of the entrance.

CHALLENGE: ENTER THE SEWERS

The Do-Not-Enters are a system of sewage tunnels beneath the city. The entrances are few and far between, and all of them are blocked with a massive grate of lightning-enchanted iron. It will take everyone involved to get it open. In addition, the party must figure out how to distract, befriend, or defeat the bugs in order to move them away from the entrance. Some families may choose to address the bugs by defeating them through combat. There are 5 groups of them, each with 1 HP. They cast 1 point of fire damage and are particularly vulnerable to water.

Next, a magic-user might use his powers to deactivate the trap so someone else can touch the grate without being shocked. A strong character might lift the grate so the others can crawl inside but they will all need to work together to hold it open so that they can come too. A dextrous character might slip beneath the grate to pull a switch on the other side, which makes it much easier to open by activating a hidden latch.

Next, party members will need to find a way to jump inside the pipe. They may search the area and find some rope, control the water inside the sewers to lift them downwards, land lightly on their feet, shape the earth, etc. Inside the pipe, they will find a broken ladder that may be used to assist other party members down. Encourage creativity – if a family offers a solution, work with them to use it!

Inside the Sewers

NARRATION

You've done it. You have entered the Do-Not-Enters. Considering the effort required just to get inside, congratulations might be in order. That is, if you weren't standing in the darkest, wettest, smelliest place you've ever been... and also the darkest. You can barely see anything in front of you, and the light streaming in from the entrance above you is of little help.

Seeing anything, much less a long-lost artifact, will be difficult. The tunnels of these sewers are famously twisting and maze-like, built as the city grew with what seems to be very little regard for previous work. Navigation looks to be another challenge.

All of that, while trudging through shallow canals of an entire city's garbage—some of it distinctly magical. Glowing trails of magical sludge drip down through cracks in the walls. They are not bright enough to make finding your way any easier, but do a wonderful job of showing just how gross everything is.

The sewers are surprisingly spacious—but equally dark. The smell is overpowering, and the wet drip and slosh of the murky water is about as disgusting as you might expect. The channel of water between two narrow walkways glows in places, though that light does not carry far enough to illuminate your path. Much of Dragonclasp’s waste is magical, and there are rumors that the magic becomes troublesome when allowed to concentrate.

CHALLENGE – NAVIGATE THE SEWERS

The sewers are very dark, with many winding tunnels. After dealing with the darkness, the party will need to figure out a way they can use their abilities to mark their path as they move through the sewers, so that they’ll be able to find their way back, should they need to leave quickly

Party members may try to magically enhance the light of the glowing sludge, use fire or electricity, etc. to light their way. Party members with Nightvision may lead the way, those who can speak with animals may enlist the help of rats in the sewers that lead them to an abandoned torch and flint, etc. Again, support the creative solutions of families, and offer additional prompts/support as needed.

If the party inspects the slime or gets close to it, it is drawn to any magical objects or spells. On floors or walls, it will even defy gravity to drip in whatever direction is closest to significant magic.

Magic users will be able to detect that the sludge is drawn to magical energy, and magic can be used to make it glow brightly in their hands. Spies will have an easier time navigating the sewers, or noticing hidden caches (with maps, torches, etc.) Defenders may be able to break pieces off the walls, or scratch signs into the sludge with their swords – there’s no limit to the solution a family may come up with to mark their way through the sewers. As always, reward creativity and teamwork!

NARRATION

Around one of the many bends in the twisting tunnels, there is a place where the walkway seems to have dissolved. The sludge that pastes so much of the Do-Not-Enters seems to have gathered against a large pipe. Rather than dripping out of it, it appears the slime is trickling up—and in...

Observant party members may get an advance sense of the danger ahead. For example, a magic user may detect a significant source of magic through the pipe. A Spy may hear movement of the sludge through the pipe, etc.

Wiggling globs of slime have washed into a foul pool of sickly green. It bubbles, seemingly on its own, creating a gurgle that sounds a lot like a cat trying to cough up a ball of hair. Your approach causes it to shiver like the world’s worst gelatin, and suddenly smaller pieces are separating from the whole. The sludges wobble about for a moment, and then begin sliding toward you!

SESSION 2

Slime Chamber

CHALLENGE – FIGHT THE SLUDGES

As the party is navigating their way through the sewers (however they decide to solve the previous challenge) they will eventually be drawn towards a pipe that leads down into a center circular room with a green slimy pool of water that the slime trail on the walls appears to be drawn to. From here, glowing sludges will appear. The sludges are drawn to this room because of the magic of the Dragon's Eye.

There is a large “boss slime” that will continue to spawn a new round of slimes for each turn. It has 10 HP and will get smaller each time it is hit by a party member. Each small slime it spawns has just one health point. The large slime will continue to spawn slimes at a rate that is challenging, but not overly difficult/disheartening for families. The idea should be to exhaust them as much as possible, making it a hard-fought victory. As with any scenario, *reward creativity*. Let families make use of environmental features, combined spells, etc. Balance is less important than fun!

Once the encounter ends, family members will need to find the hidden entrance to the Dragon's Eye Chamber. For example, the party may notice that the slime trapped in the pool seemed to have been flowing and building up against one side—the side where the hidden door will be. Bashing it down will reveal a passage, but so will finding a hidden lever.

Dragon's Eye Chamber

NARRATION

The end of the twisting passage opens into a massive room. Far below the grimy thoroughfares of sludge and suspiciously glowing waste, someone has hidden a hall worthy of any fortress. In front of you is a large, empty stone bowl, filled with unlit coal. On the wall, intricate paintings.

All of the room's walls are covered in beautiful murals that tell a tale of *two* dragons. First, a pair of small dragons that look roughly the same age and size—red and blue—playing among the clouds. Their eyes shine with glee, and the sunlight bathes them in a warm glow so vivid you can almost feel it.

Beside it, the dragons again—this time seemingly older—flying in separate directions in a stormy sky. The red one's eyes seem to well with tears, while the blue one glares into the darkness.

In the next image, ruby-red scales coat the large form of a mature red dragon, curled into a semi-circle around a small group of villagers. But rather than opening his jaws to devour them, he appears to be shielding them from the dragon depicted in the image beside it - a massive blue dragon that rears back in fury, opening his mouth to unleash a brilliant bolt of lightning.

The final image shows the blue dragon climbing on top of a pile of gold, and every one of his claws seem to curl greedily. In the sky above him, the red dragon watches from the clouds.

Upon closer inspection what first appears to be rain is actually tears dripping from his eyes, unnoticed by the blue dragon below.

Between each of the images are torches. Some are lit by warm red and orange flame, while others appear to spark with blue electricity.

“Separate, our lights dim. Reunited, they light the way.”

CHALLENGE - DRAGON PUZZLE

The party must figure out the riddle, that they have to combine the blue lighting and red flame at the same time in the bowl of unlit coal, which will glow a brilliant bright purple (reuniting the flames that represent the dragon brothers.)

Party members who investigate the room will find the coal is still warm, even though it has clearly been many years since someone last entered this chamber. Party members who look closer at the bowl will find an inscription on a plaque underneath it that provides a hint for how to solve the puzzle: “Separate, our lights dim. Reunited, they light the way.”

Once the party solves the puzzle, the room will shake loudly, and a massive statue of a dragon to rise from beneath the floor into the center of the room. The party must then retrieve the Dragon’s eye from the statue.

NARRATION

At least three stories high and carved in dark stone, the statue towers over its visitors. It gazes down upon the party, making them feel almost as if they are being watched, though the statue gives no sign of life. One of its eyes is gold, the other blue. A simple inscription lines a plaque beneath him. “What do I desire?” it asks.

CHALLENGE – RETRIEVE THE EYE

The eyes are well out of reach, so part of the challenge will be retrieving them at all. Party members must again use their combined talents to scale the statue. Observant party members who investigate the statue will discover that it is not actually grey—it is covered in dust and grime. Beneath it, the scales are polished red stone, revealing that the statue is of the red brother, and thus desires to be reunited with his sibling (represented by the blue eye) rather than gold (represented by the gold eye)

In addition, should the party search the room, they will find a broad, cracked glass lens in a brass ring on the ground. While it appears to be a monocle, it is far too big for a human. In fact, it would probably cover half their face! It fits in a notch in front of the statue’s blue eye, completing the image of Drake in his draconic form, and adding another hint at the coming twist.

Should the party choose gold over the dragon will animate and pursue them from the chamber. Should they choose the correct eye, the chamber will light up, and the excess magical energy will

draw more of the glowing sludge, filling the chamber. In either case, the party will flee, retracing their steps using the strategy they came up with for the previous challenge.

GOLD (incorrect): *As you struggle to pull the golden orb from the statue's head, a deep rumble from its chest turns into a deafening roar. Red-orange light ignites behind its bared stone fangs, and flames begin licking outward. From the blue orb still in place, water begins to stream like tears down the dragon's cheek. The room begins to shake as the statue shifts in place. It's waking up.*

(Allow reaction so the party can retrieve the correct eye.)

Then: The dragon statue's movement sheds some of its dust, revealing its red scales. If the party has taken the other eye, it is blind and will pursue them more slowly as it thrashes about. If they haven't, it will chase them as far as it can, eventually wedging itself in a tunnel and running out of energy (so they can retrieve the blue eye).

BLUE (correct): *The deep blue orb is easily pulled from the statue's eye socket, and for a long moment nothing happens. Then there is a humming. Low, at first, but growing louder. Light flashes from the eyes of the dragons on the mural: Red in the blue dragon's gaze, and blue in his brother's. The room is suddenly awash in brilliant purple.*

Strangely, in this light, the gold upon which the blue dragon is perched seems to dull to almost nothing. The dragon's remaining eye is the same. In the enchanted purple light, you can finally see through the illusion. It is nothing but simple, dull stone.

Then: After the party retrieves the eye, they will notice that the room seems to be growing brighter, even though the purple light is fading. As they look around, they will notice the luminescent green sludge pouring in from cracks in the walls and ceiling. The sludge is, as the party will have seen earlier, attracted to the magical energy unleashed by the chamber. They must flee before they are overwhelmed.

It should be made clear to families that there will be no reasonable way to fight this potentially infinite amount of sludge. Should they attempt to anyway to make escape easier, use the same guidelines for the previous combat encounter, while reinforcing that the slime continues to pour in.

RETURN TO THE TOWER

NARRATION

Night has fallen on Dragonclasp. Every window glows with light from within, and the streets remain busy as people return to their homes, and merchants close the day's business. Traveling is uncomfortable, but easy: Uncomfortable, because you are still caked in sewer filth. Easy, because everyone gets out of your way. You... don't smell good.

The familiar sight of the tower is a welcome relief at the end of a grueling mission. But now that night has fallen, it looks even stranger than when you first saw it. Rather than the typical yellow-gold lamplight that makes every other building glow, the winding scaly tail that forms the bottom of the tower sparkles with sparks of enchanted red light. But on top, where the oddly

shabby little shack perches, there is no light at all. Surely Drake has not already gone to sleep?

Any doubts you may have disappear, as the great door to the wizard's tower swings open even before you can knock. Drake ushers you in, beaming and shaking each of your hands so enthusiastically that his wispy white hair bobs and drifts around his head.

"You've returned!" His eyes shine with excitement. "I knew you could do it." He holds out an open hand for the artifact.

Party members will have a chance to either offer Drake the artifact or question him further.

If the party hands over the artifact: Drake holds the strange orb, narrowing his eyes as he stares into it. His brow furrows. His jaw tightens as he concentrates. The orb pulses a purple light, unlike the red glow you saw when you retrieved it from the chamber. Sweat beads on the wizard's forehead. Moments later his shoulders sag, as he sighs.

"It's not working." Then he holds the orb towards all of you. "Perhaps one of you can do it. Just focus on the orb and think very hard about how it would feel to be a dragon. If it works, the orb will turn the color of the closest dragon, and you will be able to see through its eyes." He looks nervous, but determined.

As you stare into the orb, the room around you seems to darken. For a moment, the orb flickers blue, and you can smell the frosty air high above the clouds. You can feel, more than see, a rumble of thunder. But the moment passes, and that spark of blue turns purple—and then bright, blazing red. As your mind focuses, everything spins. Suddenly you are not standing among your team in front of Wizard Drake the Strange. Instead, you are looking at them - your team, and yourself!

You can feel your heart beating faster and faster. How could this happen? You are supposed to be looking through a dragon's eyes, but it seems like you're looking through Drake's. The vision passes, and your vision returns to normal. In front of you, Drake's eyes are glowing bright red.

"I know what you must be thinking," the wizard murmurs fearfully. "And the answer is yes. But there's no time for that. We must act quickly - right now, my brother is coming." He straightens. "And only we can stop him."

PART II: THE EYE OF THE STORM

SESSION 3

Between sessions, families who decide to participate in the bonus game sessions will "level up" as a bonus - they will now be able to select an additional spell or talent from their job's spell/talent list - see the ruleset for more details.

NARRATION

It's hard to believe that just a day ago, each of you were newcomers to Dragonclasp. Now, here

you stand, bathed in the red glow of a mysterious wizard's spire, being thanked by a dragon disguised as a little old man. The comically large monocle makes sense, now. It was not sized for a human's eye, but for a dragon's. Drake quickly leads you back into his home. He draws a deep breath as the door closes, and immediately gets down to business.

"My brother, Wyvern, is a storm dragon. While I am a red dragon of the land's fire, Wyvern rules the clouds," Drake explains, his smile fading to a more serious expression as he explains.

"When humans began to spread across Borealia, it was I who first met with them. I could see their capacity for creativity, for invention, and for good. Though they can be loud and at times difficult to understand, they live and build in ways that no other creature dares to even try." Drake looks wistful as he remembers this distant past.

"Wyvern was never close to the creatures that walk the ground. His opinion of humans was shaped by how far away he chose to stay. While I saw people share food around their fires, and others knitting clothes to keep the less fortunate warm and safe, Wyvern saw them cutting down the forests and carving away mountains to use as bricks for their castles. I saw hearts of gold, but Wyvern saw wars for gold."

Drake pauses for a moment with a sad look in his eyes but continues with his story. "While I tried to help humans make peace with the other creatures, Wyvern grew bitter and angry. He decided that the best way to stop humans from spreading was to take the gold they loved so much, and to burn the things they had made to protect themselves. To him, humans were unwelcome pests."

"I am sad to say that we fought with one another, more and more as the years passed, until eventually we grew apart completely. Wherever humans would gather, he would use his magical sight to find them. I would try and stop him. Sometimes, I succeeded. Most times, I failed." Drake shakes his head sadly.

"But I had spent those years learning from the people I tried to protect, learning from what they built together. Humans had a gift as magical as any in Borealia; they worked with one another. They made things better. Not perfect by any means, but better."

A smile returns to the wizard's face, and you can hear the excitement in his voice as he continues. "So I built, too. After years of experimentation, I made an orb that could sense a dragon's magical sight and capture it. By looking inside, humans would always know when a dragon was approaching and could figure out where it was by what it could see."

"Next, I designed a lamp that did just the opposite. The lights of Dragonclasp face upward, because their glow blinds magical sight that dragons possess. And finally, working with the smartest and most creative of the humans I could find, I designed a city. A city that could clasp a dragon."

Memories float across Drake's expression as his story is brought to a close. "I helped them to find this place and begin the city's construction. While they built, I spent years chasing and fleeing my brother, distracting him in any way I could. But by the time I returned, the builders I

knew were long gone, and their grandchildren had never spoken to a dragon. They were terrified by my arrival.”

“That,” Drake says, “is when I made this.” He reaches to his chest, where his amulet hangs. “It disguised me in human form, so that I could live and learn in this place. Live, learn, and keep watch. For centuries, Dragonclasp has grown, and I have seen and learned more than I ever would have imagined. But Wyvern is strong, and even these defenses could not hide us forever. The time is coming when we must confront him.”

“Fortunately, I did not merely create one artifact for this situation,” he says. “I made two.” Drake turns from the group, shuffling toward the center of the room where he reaches toward the armored glove you saw earlier on the pedestal. As he turns, he is already trying to put it on his hand. The gauntlet is so large it looks quite silly. The miniature model of the city sparkles with the lights of its tiny streetlamps as it slides down his hand and forearm.

The wizard smiles proudly, and excitement shines in his eyes. “This is the Gauntlet of Dragonclasp,” he says. “A model, yes, but also a tool.” He flexes his grip inside the glove, curling it into a fist so that the city folds in on itself. Suddenly, all the upside-down streetlamps across the city are all focused on one point: the city’s main square, right in the palm of its hand.

“A gauntlet... a city... to hold a dragon.” He pauses, and chuckles at his own cleverness. “Or clasp it if you will.”

There is a large jewel embedded into the forearm of the gauntlet, and Drake points to it without touching it. “This is a unity gem, created to keep the gauntlet from being used irresponsibly. Those of noble heart must each touch the gem, and it will shine with their courage. When it has been filled, the city and the gauntlet will be linked. Then, when the time is right...” Drake closes his fist again, making the anti-magic lights all beam in the same direction, now downward” the city may capture its enemy.”

“But first, we will need bait. Wyvern has always hated the riches that some people fight to keep for themselves and stealing it away is his favorite thing. There is only one way I know to secure enough gold to lure him close enough for capture; the Dragonclasp Treasury.”

“We’ll need to speak to the Mayor, I think,” he says. “I have already discussed the plan with her while you were on your adventure, but she is worried about putting all of the city’s wealth in the hands of strangers. You must go, introduce yourself and make a case for why she should trust you. I have done all I can to boast of your accomplishments. Now you will have to convince her of your goodness.”

He pauses before adding: “Do it as you like, but remember: Ettie is a good woman, and she values those who value others. I would recommend each of you brag of your fellow party members’ accomplishments, rather than you own.”

THE MAYOR’S MANOR

True to his word, Drake has already made arrangements for the party to speak with Mayor Ettie Cookson, one of the many children in a long line of Dragonclasp's most beloved bakers. She is known as much for her sweet rolls as she is her leadership. The walk is refreshing after slogging through sewage tunnels, and as you approach Mayor Cookson's manor the smell of honey and fresh bread adds a mouth-watering fragrance to a large courtyard. Two members of her personal guard stand outside of her house. One nudges the other when they see you, and both stand to attention.

Here, the party may make conversation with the guards, who have heard of their deeds. The guards may offer to put in a good word with the mayor if the party engages them in friendly conversation.

The guards escort you, not to an office like you might have expected, but a kitchen. The smells of food are richer here, dozens of scents blending into a smell that provokes rumbling in just about anyone's stomach.

The mayor herself is just pulling out a tray of her patented sweet rolls from the oven in a massive kitchen, decked with all manner of food. Ettie is known for hosting a weekly dinner at which any hungry citizen of Dragonclasp is welcome, and she looks to be in the middle of preparation for the next day's meal. As you enter, she turns and smiles, setting the sweet rolls on the counter to cool.

"Welcome! I would rather have welcomed you into my office, but I'm just a bit busy," she grins, "Please, have a seat. May I offer you something to eat?"

The mayor places a tray of various baked goods in front of the party. Add +1 to the roll to convince her if any party member takes a treat that is offered.

As the party is eating, the mayor's face turns serious.

"So, you are the ones Strange Drake brags about," she says, squinting as she looks over each of you. "I trust the man... he is an odd one, but his advice has always been good. But I can't just hand him the city's gold without knowing who he's put in charge of it, dragon or not!"

"So," she concludes, dusting flour from her hands and placing them on her hips. "Tell me about yourselves." A pause, and then she adds "Better yet, tell me about each other." For someone so non-threatening, her gaze is sharp as she waits for you to make your case.

CHALLENGE – CONVINCING THE MAYOR

Make a roll for how convinced she is based on how each party member contributes in the conversation. If they all participate and contribute, they will each get a plus 1 bonus to add to the roll. Emphasize that each of them should say something good about what another member of the party accomplished. Add an additional +1 if the guards put in a good word for the party.

If the party does not participate enough to make at least a 4, make a note about how the mayor does not seem convinced, offering the opportunity for additional elaboration.

SUCCESS: *By the time you have made your case, the mayor is visibly impressed.*

(Note: Add appropriate emotion! Is she misty-eyed, touched by their words? Is she laughing? Choose her feelings based on the tone of their participation.)

“All right, all right. Say no more. I’m convinced. You’re every bit what Drake said, and then a bit more besides,” she smiles. “I will tell the guards to begin preparations and move the gold from the treasury to the town square immediately.”

“But this is only one half an answer. We can’t pull a roll from the oven with bare hands! Let’s say we bait this great blue lizard to the square with all the city’s coin—what about the city itself? We’ll need defenses to make sure there is as little damage as possible, and the people are safe... any ideas?”

CHALLENGE – PLAN THE CITY’S DEFENSE

The party should come up with ideas for how to make sure the city is prepared for the attack. These could include lightning rods on the tallest buildings, since they know that Wyvern is a storm dragon. They could propose evacuating everyone near the center of the city, to make sure no one is in unnecessary danger. All ideas are good ideas—this is meant to be a similar challenge to the pre-game “island” question. Keep track of what the family’s solutions are and describe the preparations that have been made at the beginning of the next session. These preparations may help mitigate the difficulty of the challenges that follow - For example, additional guards may be stationed, citizens may be evacuated/removed from harm, extra help may be provided, etc.

SESSION 4

THE CITY SQUARE

By the morning of Wyverns expected arrival, your preparations have been underway.

Describe the preparations that have been made by the party.

“Yes... this will certainly draw his attention....” Drake muses as his eyes trail over the gold being piled by the guards into the centre of the square. “I can’t thank you enough, all of you, for what you have done for Dragonclasp. I don’t know what will happen here today, but I know in my heart I couldn’t have selected a more capable, brave, and true group of heroes. History will never forget what you have done here, and neither will I... and so! I wanted to repay each of you...”

At this point, Drake presents each family member with a unique gift, according to their job/talents. For example, for a Spy Drake may provide an unbreakable lockpick. For a Defender, he may provide a scabbard that keeps a sword perpetually sharp.

He takes a big, nervous gulp. "My brother is clever... when he is close enough to see the square, no doubt he will be suspicious that we are planning something. We must bring him low enough to the ground..." he touches his amulet, fidgeting nervously "You have all done your part, and so too must I do mine. I can no longer hide in my tower. My brother has always bested me before. He is stronger, yes, but his fatal flaw is that he has always underestimated humans." And then he pauses, and there is a sad look on his face.

"My brother... Wyvern. Perhaps I am but an old idealistic fool, but I would like to believe that he is not beyond all hope... I will bow to your judgement on this, heroes. But part of me hopes that if we are able to restrain my brother, perhaps a fight could be avoided... perhaps he could be made to understand."

At this point, Drake will look to the party to see if they intend to fight his brother. If they agree to try to converse with him first, he will be visibly relieved.

Then, his smile fades he ushers you all closer "He draws near, I can feel it. No doubt thanks to your preparations, we will be able to lure him here to the square. I daresay one could see the glimmer of this gold pile from two kingdoms away. Once he arrives, I will do my best to draw him close enough to the ground for you all to use the gauntlet. One of you must wear it, but all of you must channel your respective power into the gauntlet by touching it for it to be activated. You must wait until the time is right."

Drake will then hand the gauntlet to the party member that volunteers.

As Drake hands over the gauntlet, the Dragon's Eye suddenly begins to glow the bright blue of lightning at night. Sparks flicker and flash inside the orb, making it look like you are looking into a silent thunderstorm.

But the real storm is above you. Dark clouds have gathered, hovering over Dragonclasp, and the distance rumble of thunder vibrates the air. The birds have gone quiet, hidden away in their nests. Pets are pacing nervously around their homes, smelling the oncoming storm in the air. In the distance, lightning flashes. As the last wagonload of gold is dumped onto the stones in front of you, the rain begins.

"It is time." Drake's voice is behind you, solemn and serious as he gazes upward. He grasps the amulet hanging at his chest, then pulls the chain up over his neck. "Keep this safe," he says, offering it toward your group. "I'll need it when I return." (Anyone in the party may take it)

The rain is running down Drake's face, plastering his wispy white hair to his cheeks as he looks upward. As the clouds above begin to swirl and part, as lightning flashes in the darkened sky, as the wind begins to billow his robe, he... changes.

Ruby-red light swirls from within the wizard's robes, which seem to melt and transform into unfurling wings. Drake's form blurs and shifts and grows. A brilliant flash of light, and then Drake crouches before you. A majestic creature, shiny red scales dripping water from the rain above. The dragon Drake looks down at you, his monocle perched—now sized just right—upon his nose, and winks. Then his wings spread as he leaps into the air with a roar.

You see it, there above; red rises to meet a dark sapphire blue. A bolt of lightning flashes from the mouth of the diving dragon, but Drake ducks to the side, evading the strike. The bolt of lightning lands, cracking the cobblestone nearby. The battle has begun, and there is work to be done here, below.

CHALLENGE – DEFEND THE CITY FROM WYVERN

Drake will be fighting each turn to draw Wyvern closer to the ground. Party members may attempt to assist Drake from below, using their various talents. Additional challenges occur on a random basis:

Lightning: Periodically, Wyvern will unleash a lightning strike that has a chance to hit each party member if they roll lower than a 4. The lightning does 1 damage. Make it clear to family members that the lightning is made worse by the presence of water in the square and may be avoided by removing the water or avoiding touching the water. If party members are able to assist Drake in weakening Wyvern, the lightning strikes will also cease.

Rescue: Lightning strikes a nearby shop, damaging the roof. Though everyone is unharmed, the stairs are blocked, and people are calling for help from the windows above.

Rubble: The earth-shaking storm has almost knocked over a watch tower, which is about to topple over and cause destruction in the square below

Slime: The sewers begin to over be overflowing from the hurricane-like downpour, and magical slimes begin to emerge. If not dissipated, combat begins, using the earlier slime stats.

As Wyvern becomes weakened (either after 5 turns, or sooner depending on the extend of help provided to Drake by the party), the threats will cease, and narration will proceed.

NARRATION

When the storm can grow no darker, the rain can fall no harder, and the wind has torn every banner from the walls of the city, you all turn your eyes up to see a red and blue ball of energy falling from the sky.

As it grows closer, you can make out the forms of Drake and Wyvern tangled as they wrestle. Whump-WHUMP. Both dragons land in the square with an impact that shudders through the ground beneath your feet. It is time to use the gauntlet.

As the gauntlet is used: *As your party touches the jewel embedded in the gauntlet, you can feel its power. Your fingers curl, and everything around you trembles. Slowly, the fingers of Dragonclasp curl. The horizon bends, rises, as the ground that the outer neighbourhoods that*

the city is built upon lifts upward, then begins to curl inward in the shape of a massive, closed fist. The people on the streets do not fall... instead, they remain standing, upside-down, looking just as shocked down as all of those looking back up at them.

The streetlamps brighten as the city curls in on itself, and suddenly the square is at the center of a blinding purple light, shining from each of the magical streetlamps. Both dragons seem to wilt under this light, their eyes squinting shut and their shoulders slumping.

The red dragon glances back toward you with a meaningful look towards where you hold his amulet.

At this point, a family member may deduce that they need to wrap the amulet around Wyvern to trap him in human form. Speedier characters will have an easier time of this. Otherwise, Drake will extend his claw for the amulet himself. and weakly extends a clawed limb for the amulet he left in your care.

There is a flash of light that leaves spots in your eyes. When your vision clears, something has changed dramatically. The chain is wrapped around Drake's wrist—and that of another little old man, narrow and dark-haired with anger in his eyes. The chain is wrapped around his wrist, too. And where the amulet's light was once a flickering red, it now shines purple as it attempts to contain the true forms of two ancient dragons. Wyvern, now in human form, glowers angrily at each of you, straining under the magical lamplight.

If the party agreed to let Drake reason with his brother, he will do so right away. Otherwise, he will ask the party for another opportunity. Party members who choose to fight Wyvern will be able to do so – his anger at the party will cause a sudden surge of power, and when combined with a release of the gauntlet, will enable Wyvern to return to dragon form. He has a large amount of HP (50) and it will be a hard fought battle, with him doing 1 point of lightning damage to party members each round. Drake will step in to assist when the party has sustained too much damage, deflecting his brother's lightning strikes, and protecting the party by wrapping himself around them in dragon form, as he was depicted doing in the murals they saw in the sewer. Unwilling to defeat his brother, Wyvern will hesitate, offering Drake the window of opportunity to attempt to sway him with his words. If so, the speech below remains the same, except the brothers will be in dragon form.

“Look around you, brother... look what they have built. I only helped them, only showed them the way. Look what they have done! They live together. They laugh and cry, they grow up and grow old. They are beautiful, in their way.”

“Certainly, they have the capacity for destruction—all minds do. Even we have made mistakes, have we not? But look, Wyvern. They do not merely take. They grow, they harvest, they create. And when they are threatened, they join to become something strong.” He smiles, glancing back toward all of you. “Stronger than even a dragon.”

Wyvern looks towards the party. His eyes scan their faces, and he appears uncertain.

The party might choose to contribute something to say to convince Wyvern here - Provide them the opportunity if they would like to jump in.

The two brothers stand in silence for a moment, before Wyvern's shoulders sag with the release of tension. "I have much to think about," struggling to form words with a human tongue. "But I can see why you admire them." He glances around, as if seeing the city for the first time now that his eyes are on the same level as a human's.

"Let them show you, Wyvern," Drake smiles. "Show them patience. They learn, And everything they learn, they teach. In this way, all of them carry their wisdom. Just listen, and you will hear it. In the end, it is the best of them, not the worst, that matter most. They even have a name for those, the ones who carry this wisdom and kindness, who share and spread it." He glances back toward all of you. "Heroes."

Suddenly, there is a flash of light between the two. The amulet flashes red and blue. With a shattering sound, it explodes into glittering shards between the two brothers, and the illusion of their human forms are destroyed.

The two dragons stand there facing one another for a moment, before the red one turns in your direction. Drake bows his head toward your group, until his eyes—each one of them almost as big as your heads—are at your height. He nods to the gauntlet, signalling that the danger is past. As you open the gauntlet, the city uncurls into its original form

Wyvern turns his cold eyes across the city once more, before locking eyes with his brother. There is a look that passes between them, and then with a mighty beat of his wings, Wyvern lifts into the stormy sky, and flies away. The wind and rain seem to follow him. The clouds are torn to fading wisps, and the morning sun shines down on the city. Then the citizens of Dragonclasp fill the silence left behind by the storm with another sound: cheering.

EPILOGUE

Of the many wonders of the world of Borealia, the city of Dragonclasp is its brightest jewel. Built atop the wreckage of the Sundered Mountain, the city spreads across the shape of an open hand. But should you climb to the summit to see its wonders, you will be greeted first by the city's foremost pride a joy; a newly completed statue of [#] heroes.

Here, describe each of the party members in statue form, incorporating family's descriptions of their characters appearance and personality, and posed in scenes that reference to specific deeds they accomplished throughout the story.

Appendix F

Exit Interview Questions

1. What was the most interesting, fun, or valuable part of the *Family Tabletop Adventure*?
2. What was the least interesting, fun, or valuable part of the *Family Tabletop Adventure*?
3. Was your experience playing the *Family Tabletop Adventure* different from how you expected it would be? What did you expect?
4. Was there anything that your time playing the *Family Tabletop Adventure* helped you learn about yourselves? Each other?
5. How did it feel to create and play as your characters? What was that experience like for you?
6. How was this experience similar to or different from other games your family has played together?
7. Did you talk to one another about the game or things that happened during the game outside of our gaming sessions? What sort of things did you talk about?
8. Have you noticed any difference in how you talk or interact with each other as a result of playing the *Family Tabletop Adventure*?
9. Were there any parts of the *Family Tabletop Adventure* that were confusing, or difficult to understand?
10. What did you think about the story of the *Family Tabletop Adventure*?
11. What did you think of the visuals used (maps, pictures) during the *Family Tabletop Adventure*?
12. What suggestions do you have to improve the *Family Tabletop Adventure* for families that play it in the future?
13. What advice would you give to other families who are going to play the *Family Tabletop Adventure* for the first time?
14. Do you have any other final thoughts or comments about the *Family Tabletop Adventure*?

Appendix G

Pilot Feedback Survey

Thank you for helping us out with the development of our new Family Tabletop Adventure! Now that your adventure is complete, please respond to the questions below to tell us more about your experience. Your feedback is valuable, and will help us make improvements to the adventure for use with other families in the future.

The following questions contain statements about the Family Tabletop Adventure. Select the choice that indicates how much you agree with each statement.

1. The Family Tabletop Adventure was interesting.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

2. The Family Tabletop Adventure was fun.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

3. The Family Tabletop Adventure was boring.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

4. The Family Tabletop Adventure was stressful.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

5. The Family Tabletop Adventure was useful.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

6. The Family Tabletop Adventure was confusing.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

7. The Family Tabletop Adventure was frustrating
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

8. The Family Tabletop Adventure caused fights between my family members.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

9. The Family Tabletop Adventure helped me to feel closer to my family.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

10. I enjoyed the story of the Family Tabletop Adventure.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree

11. I enjoyed the visuals (pictures, maps) used during the Family Tabletop Adventure.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
12. How has your **interest in playing games with your family members** changed as a result of playing the Family Tabletop Adventure?
- Greatly increased
 - Increased
 - Stayed the same/no change
 - Decreased
 - Greatly decreased
13. **How likely are you to play games with your family as a group** as a result of playing the Family Tabletop Adventure?
- More likely
 - Neither more nor less likely
 - Less likely

For the following questions, please tell us more about your experience with the Family Tabletop Adventure in your own words.

14. What suggestions do you have to improve the Family Tabletop Adventure?

15. Do you have any other final thoughts or comments about the Family Tabletop Adventure?

Appendix H

Pre-Screen Questionnaire

1. Are you an adult aged 19 years or older?
 - No
 - Yes

2. Below, please list each member of your household and specify their ages, including yourself and any children:

3. Are you and your family members fluent in reading, writing, and speaking English?
 - No
 - Yes

4. Is your household located in Canada?
 - No
 - Yes

5. Do you have access to the internet **and** a computer (desktop, laptop) equipped with a working microphone and webcam?
 - No
 - Yes

6. Do you or other members of your family have previous experience with the video communication program Zoom?
 - No
 - Yes

7. Are you or any members of your family living in the same household currently receiving any psychological or family services? (e.g., individual counseling/therapy, family therapy, case management, behavioural therapists, etc.?)
 - No
 - Yes

8. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, please describe briefly what psychological or family services you or any members of your family living in the same household are currently receiving:

9. Have you or any members of your household ever played a tabletop role-playing game? (e.g., Dungeons & Dragons, Pathfinder?)
- No
 - Yes (please specify which member(s))

10. Have any members of your household ever viewed and/or listened to tabletop role-playing content? (e.g., podcasts, livestreams, videos, etc.?)
- No
 - Yes (please specify which member(s))

11. Families involved with the current study will be asked to participate in a series of weekly sessions, to be conducted over the internet with the researcher using the communication platform Zoom, and scheduled according to your family's availability:
- An introductory session (approximately 1 hour),
 - A minimum of two and up to four game sessions, according to the family's discretion game (approximately 1.5 to 2 hours each)
 - An exit interview session (approximately 1 hour)

In addition, each family member will be asked to complete two short online questionnaires (ranging from approximately 10-15 min each) related to your participation. These questionnaires will be completed by each family member at a time of their convenience before the first online session, and after the last online session. Participating families will be compensated for their time with either a \$50 (introductory session, 2 weekly game sessions, exit interview session, online questionnaires) or \$100 (introductory session, 4 weekly game sessions, exit session, online questionnaires) Amazon gift card.

Are you and your family members interested and available to participate in an initial introductory session (approx. 1. hour), a minimum of 2 weekly game sessions (approx. 1.5 to 2 hours each), and an exit session (approx. 1 hour) each to be conducted online using Zoom, as well as the completion of two online questionnaires?

- No
- Yes

12. Below, please provide your first name and an e-mail address where you may be contacted the researcher with further details about the study if your family is eligible to participate:

First name:

E-mail address:

Appendix I

Demographic Questionnaire

1. First Name:
2. Current age:
3. Gender:
4. What is your family role (e.g., Parent, Legal Guardian, Grandparent, Other, etc.)?
5. What is your marital status?
 - Single, never married
 - Living with partner
 - Legally married
 - Divorced
 - Separated
 - Widowed
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other (please specify)
6. Do you consider yourself to be a member of an Indigenous group?
 - No
 - Yes, First Nations
 - Yes, Métis
 - Yes, Inuit
 - Yes, other Indigenous group (please specify)
7. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority group? (e.g., Chinese Canadian, Indo-Canadian, Black Canadian, Latin American-Canadian, etc.)
 - No
 - Yes (please specify)

8. What is the highest level of school have you have completed?
- Did not attend high school
 - Some high school
 - High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
 - Some college or university, no degree
 - Registered Apprenticeship, Certificate of Qualification, or other trades certificate or diploma
 - College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma
 - Bachelor's Degree (e.g., BA, BSc, BEd, LLB)
 - Master's Degree (e.g., MA, MSc, MEd, MBA)
 - Professional Degree (e.g., MD, DDS/DMD, DVM, OD)
 - Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)

9. For each **child family member (under the age of 19)** living in your household, please provide the following information:

First Name:

Current age:

Gender:

Is this child a member of an Indigenous group?

- No
- Yes, First Nations
- Yes, Métis
- Yes, Inuit
- Yes, other Indigenous group (please specify)

10. Is this child a member of a visible minority group? (e.g., Chinese Canadian, Indo-Canadian, Black Canadian, Latin American-Canadian)

- No
- Yes (please specify)

11. What is your household's total annual income?
- Under \$15,000
 - Between \$15,000 and \$29,999
 - Between \$30,000 and \$49,999
 - Between \$50,000 and \$74,999
 - Between \$75,000 and \$99,999
 - Between \$100,000 and \$150,000
 - Over \$150,000
 - Prefer not to say
12. **Before the current COVID-19 pandemic**, on average, approximately how many hours **per week** did **some** members of your household play games together? (e.g., video/computer games, board games, card games, outdoor games/sports)
- Less than 1 hour
 - Between 1-2 hours
 - Between 2-3 hours
 - Between 3-4 hours
 - Between 4-5 hours
 - 5 hours or more
 - My family members do not play games together.
13. **Before the current COVID-19 pandemic**, on average, approximately how many hours **per week** did **all** members of your household play games together? (e.g., video/computer games, board games, card games, outdoor games/sports)
- Less than 1 hour
 - Between 1-2 hours
 - Between 2-3 hours
 - Between 3-4 hours
 - Between 4-5 hours
 - 5 hours or more
 - My family does not play games together as a group.
14. Has the COVID-19 pandemic **changed how often** you and members of your household play games together? (e.g., video/computer games, board games, card games, outdoor games/sports)
- No
 - Yes (please specify)
15. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, please choose the response **that best describes** how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how often you and members of

your household play games together (e.g., video/computer games, board games, card games, outdoor games/sports):

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, members of my household play games together:

- A lot less than usual
- A little less than usual
- A little more than usual
- A lot more than usual

16. Select the statement that best describes **which members** of your household play games together **the majority of the time**:

- Only *some* members of my household play games together (please specify which members of your household play games together as a group)
- All* members of my household play games together *as a group*
- Members of my household do not play games together, or as a group

17. What **type(s)** of games do members of your household play with each other and/or as a group? Please select all options that apply:

- Video and/or computer games
- Board Games
- Card Games
- Outdoor games and/or sports
- Other (please specify)