

# Editorial

## Special Issue: Living Games Conference 2018

The 9th issue of the *International Journal of Role-Playing* offers selected, peer-reviewed articles from the 3rd biennial Living Games Conference, a North American global live-action role-play (larp) summit held in Peabody, MA, USA on May 17-20, 2018. Presenters were asked to submit short papers that were then reviewed and revised over the latter half of the year. This issue allows us the chance to look back at recent role-playing scholarship and the role Living Games has played in recent years to foster more of this important work.

The point is obvious, but it bears mentioning: 2014 – the year of the first Living Games Conference – is not 2018. The 2014 conference was convened at the New York University Game Center in Brooklyn, NY. Shoshana Kessock led the organization team; Eric Zimmerman sat in the audience; presenter Claus Raasted had recently sold tickets for the initial run of a larp called *College of Wizardry* (later a worldwide sensation); escape rooms had just started to open in the US and Canada; and Barack Obama was still president of the United States. The conference stood not only at the beginning of a viral new wave of blockbuster larp design, successful transnational cooperation, and larp theorizing. It also took place prior to the coming crises of western liberal democracy, which would sharpen debates about nation, class, race, and identity, as well as the global #Me-Too movement, which questioned the morality of a great many high-status organizers and artists. Times have changed, and we would like to think that Living Games accompanied that change.

The 2018 Living Games Conference struck a fundamentally different tone than its 2014 and 2016 predecessors. The two earlier conferences contended that larp could transform the world and urged its practitioners to take new risks with the medium. This year's conference, however, responded with tales of those risks taken: the thorny issues raised in the professionalization and expansion of larp across broader spheres. Such issues take center stage in this year's conference proceedings.

Russell Murdock explores in his article "Legal Liability in Live Action Role-playing: The Law is Dark and Full of Terrors" the murky legal territory in which larp exists and the potential for liability concerns to

dwarf the content of even the most humble of North American larps. Murdock uses the legal precedent around provision of alcohol to highlight a clear dichotomy between larp organizers as social vs. commercial facilitators. In fact, the alibi of being intoxicated and the alibi of larping are roughly equated on legal grounds. Furthermore, Murdock notes that the provision of alcohol at any larp event has the most related legal risks, as well as employing event staff who have a history of sexual harassment and predation. Alcohol is a social lubricant, but, in the American case, should be tightly controlled. The same goes, Murdock implies, for an organizer's larp staff.

Two further articles pick up on the thread of psychological complications from larping. Diana Leonard and Tessa Thurman in "Bleed-out on the Brain: The Neuroscience of Character-to-Player Spillover in Larp" address the oft-discussed phenomenon of bleed, or the conscious fluidity in the boundary between player and character. Leonard and Thurman review neuroscience research with respect to character emotion bleeding out into the player, and determine that not only is the phenomenon noticeable and measurable, but that the larp community' current move toward managing consent and emotional counseling constitutes a proper response.

On that topic, Brodie Atwater and Alex Rowland's "Developing a Framework of Larp Counseling" lays out the basic theory and praxis of in- and out-of-game emotional care in terms intelligible to both the larp and psychological counseling communities. Rowland and Atwater set aside the notion that in-game counseling is intended for therapeutic purposes; rather, it is intended to manage player emotion and to minimize unpleasant fallout from the same for the players and organizers.

Finally, Jason Cox in "Documenting Larp as an Art of Experience" deals with the pile of ephemera that larp generates and its legitimacy within larger frameworks of what we call "art." Using a website to document physical ephemera generated by players from the *New World Magischola* wizard-school larp, Cox demonstrates how future audiences may consume and analyze the traces of play experience through meaningful documentation.

The *International Journal of Role-Playing* has certainly played a substantive part in establishing larp scholarship on an international level. As larp now interacts with our world's complex systems, IJRP remains there to chronicle those challenges and affordances that emerge.

— Evan Torner, Ph.D.  
Coordinating Editor  
December 26, 2018  
Insert text hereInsert text here

**Executive Editor, IJRP**

William J. White

**Coordinating Editors, IJRP**

Evan Torner

Sarah Lynne Bowman

**Production Editor, IJRP**

Sarah Lynne Bowman

**Special Issue Editorial Board**

Stephen Balzac

Jason Cox

Sarah Zaidan

**Special Issue Review Board**

Brodie Atwater

Maury Brown

Jason Cox

Mikael Hellström

Jonaya Kemper

Andrew Lacanienta

Diana Leonard

Magdalene Loh

Russell Murdock

Will Osmond

Celia Pearce

Rian Oliveira Rezende

Alex Rowland

Samara Hayley Steele

Tessa Thurman

Susan Weiner