Editorial
The Social Epistemology of
Analog Role-Playing Game Studies

Welcome to Issue 12 of the *International Journal of Role-Playing*. Social epistemology refers to knowledge production within groups of human beings, "each working on a more or less well-defined body of knowledge and each equipped with roughly the same imperfect cognitive capacities, albeit with varying degrees of access to each other's activities" (Fuller 1988, 3). This multidisciplinary field (Solomon 2008, 242; Collin 2020) seemed the best way for us to unite the disparate threads of this year's five peer-reviewed articles, each of which draws heavily on specific communities of knowledge and practice.

Our field is interdisciplinary and heterogeneous, and the editors of the *International Journal of Role-Playing* acknowledge that a unifying narrative for a given issue is difficult to find. Nevertheless, this difficulty allows us to introspect about the nature of knowledge produced about role-playing and those who would produce it. Neither can be separated from the other, it turns out. Anecdotally, in the Role-play Theory Study Group on Facebook, leadership scholar Joe Lasley has referred to the study of role-playing games as *antidisciplinary*, in that attempts to define or confine the practice through any particular disciplinary lens prove elusive.

Otherwise, how are we to make sense of the diverse set of articles and authors that comprise this issue of the *International Journal of Role-Playing*? The five articles cover a sprawling territory that includes using "character sheets" in the classroom, race and identity in *D&D*, the articulation of genre in *Call of Cthulhu,* sexual play in Nordic larp, and the state of the analog role-playing scene as well as its study in Brazil. The authors—besides being international in their academic traditions emerging from Brazil, French Canada, America, Norway, Finland, and Sweden—represent such scholarly traditions as academic librarianship; rhetoric and composition; comparative literature; sexology; and communication as well as game studies. They also speak from various points on the aca/fan spectrum, with some identifying themselves as larpwrights or Dungeon Masters, and others adopting a more studied academic voice in their writing.

The question of interdisciplinarity is of great interest within the academy generally (Aboelela et al. 2007) and within the field of game studies in particular—and notice that to implicitly position this journal as part of game studies as we have just done is in itself a claim about interdisciplinarity —where there has recently emerged a small corpus of literature interrogating the constitution of the field (Deterding 2017, Gekker 2021, Phillips 2020), generally concluding that there are some problems in its self-understanding that will shape it as it moves forward. Gekker (2021), for example, suggests that the focus on *digital* games that characterized the early history of game studies has become supererogatory, were it ever necessary, and anticipates an increased focus on the idea of *play* as an organizing principle for the field. The study of role-playing games would seem to fit more easily under that rubric than within a field narrowly focused on *digital* forms of play.

But, to a certain extent, every individual act of scholarship in a field like ours can be treated as a kind of attempt at *interdisciplinary interpenetration* (Fuller 1993, 33-65), connecting some configuration of claims by the scholar to the intellectual and disciplinary interests of the particular scholarly audience being addressed. So one way of looking at the articles we are presenting in this issue is to examine what sorts of positions they take.

To gloss Fuller (1993) as briefly as possible, he suggests that four ideal-type contingencies emerge from thinking about interdisciplinary positions as the product of, first, the scholar's "trade strategy" (*import*, or testing ideas from another field in the addressed field, and *export*, or applying ideas from the addressed field to another one), and, second, their "rhetorical aim" (difference-minimizing *persuasion* or difference-maximizing *dialectic*). The resulting categories of interpenetration are thus (1) *incorporation* (showing how certain ideas are consistent with or relevant to the addressed field), (2) *excavation* (showing how certain ideas correct inconsistencies in or solve problems for the addressed field), (3) *sublimation* (showing how ideas from the addressed field bear upon problems in which others are interested), and (4) *reflexion* (showing how constitutive ideas from the addressed field are themselves a problem).

Applying this scheme to the five articles in this issue, we think that most are pretty straightforward cases of incorporation. Grasmo and Stenros combine game scholarship with larpwriting, while incorporating ideas from sexuality studies to understand how sexual themes and content have been infused into Nordic larp design in a way that tries to balance intensely adult and even transgressive play experiences with safety and ludic boundaries; in doing so, they underscore the connection between the erotic and the playful. Baker, an academic writing instructor with experience as a D&D Dungeon Master and a background in rhetoric and composition, reads a multi-disciplinary literature (including scholarship from digital game studies, media studies, communication, and feminist studies as well as gaming news and commentary) on race, diversity, and representation in D&D, treating it as a discursive formation that has implications for gamers' conceptualizations of race and enactments of identity. Mehrstam, a scholar of comparative literature, takes a social cybernetic approach, a la Niklas Luhmann, to *Call of Cthulhu,* showing how it reconfigured elements from different media forms (including colonialist pulp fiction and fantasy role-playing) to articulate an instance of the "horror role-playing" genre in a way that spoke to Reagan-era geopolitical fears.

Martinolli, who is an academic librarian and instructor, seems on the other hand, to represent an instance of sublimation. He describes the use of a "scholarly character sheet" in a graduate student seminar on library skills, borrowing conventions and techniques from tabletop role-playing games to frame the course content, allowing students to engage in self-assessment, and create a playful space within the classroom.

Finally, Iuama and Falcão combine larpwriting with communication scholarship in their discussion of analog role-playing games and game studies in Brazil. Their approach seems to us to be engaging in *reflexion* in offering their national analog gaming scene as a challenge to the disciplinary self-concept of *analog role-playing game studies,* belying its pretensions to universality and the unilaterality of its global address.

The thing that links these articles, therefore, is how they represent individual scholarly efforts to solve the problem of interdisciplinarity, or of interdisciplinary interpenetration, one question at a time. We look forward to similarly thoughtful and engaging submissions as we help the broader field of game studies come to grips with the question of play.

—William J. White, Evan Torner, and Sarah Lynne Bowman
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