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Author(s)	JARPS Editors
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Editorial | 創刊号発刊の趣旨

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editors@jarps.net

1. Role-Playing in a Global Context

The study of role-playing games in their various forms and arrangements has matured in academic terms with numerous articles and books published in the past decade. With the publication of this inaugural issue of the *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* (JARPS), we are pleased to be a part of these developments and look forward to many new studies in this exciting field. Within game studies and ludology, much attention is paid to digital and online forms of gaming, so that other forms of play often fall by the wayside. Furthermore, many studies deal mostly with European or US American contexts of gaming. JARPS now seeks to fill these two gaps by publishing research about (primarily) non-digital (“analog”) forms of role-playing, with a focus on table-top/table-talk role-playing games (TRPG) and live-action role-play (larp) in and from Japan but in a global context.

Role-playing games (RPG) present us with a remarkably transcultural and global history that crosses many nationally or culturally imagined borders. They gained a first recognizable form through the so-called mother of fantasy RPGs *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974, building upon wargaming, which itself has its beginnings in 19th century Prussia and antecedents in ancient India. From then onwards, table-top, or if we use the Japanese phrase, table-talk role-playing games (TRPG) exploded into a myriad of forms, genres, and play-styles. The mainstream remains very much at home in the sword-and-sorcery genre. However, professional and independent designers explore many other settings and concepts, which are again rearranged through being played.

Non-digital RPGs such as *Dungeons & Dragons* or its Japanese cousin *Sword World RPG* spark not only the imagination at the game table but also form a crucial node in a nexus of various media types and genres. They have spawned in Japan a whole new form of literature, the *replay*, and subsequently inspired popular media mixes, such as *The Record of Lodoss War* novels, manga and animations, while being part of franchises like George Lucas’ *Star Wars* or George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* (“Game of Thrones”).

Truthful to their name, TRPGs are mostly played sitting at a table, where the shared story told by the players evolves out of verbal tellings. The

players steer characters, who have their own personalities and motivations, through intricate game worlds, aiming for fame and treasure, or exploring what it means to be human. The stories unfolding from RPGs are myriad and unforgettable for the participants.

Live-action role-play, or larp, where players often dress-up as their characters and embody them for hours if not days, recently gains attention worldwide. Larp is not only an increasingly popular hobby but has been recognized as a powerful educational tool. Especially in northern Europe do we encounter an exploding discourse about the possibilities of role-playing to allow participants to learn about other worlds and people, to make extraordinary, transforming experiences.

What all forms of role-playing games share is an extremely fluid and fleeting nature, which poses many hurdles to their study. How to analyze hours upon hours of play? To understand a particular role-playing game as a scholar, how many sessions should one observe? How many should one participate in? Can I fully understand an experience, if I stand safely apart while the players (or their characters) are shivering in the rain? If we take the metaphor seriously that a player group resembles the main cast of a movie, how can we approach a larp with dozens if not hundreds of participants, all experiencing other parts of the story?

2. About the Journal

JARPS encourages article submissions that deal with such questions, especially when the so far less researched role-playing practices of Japan are concerned. How were different arrangements of the practice appropriated, changed and transformed by Japanese players? This is not a search for the “Japaneseness” of TRPG and larp in Japan. Each and every actualization of a role-playing game is always particular. Role-players in Tokyo may play a narrative-oriented mainstream TRPG in the same competitive manner as their counterparts in Munich, while another group down the street in the same city plays it more story-oriented like the designers envisioned. Thus, JARPS is interested in particularities, in how the players create local stories with global building blocks. What role do designers play? What are their visions for a game? How do players translate this at the game table? Which place have role-playing games in their respective society



or media environment? JARPS is about studies of production and use, theory and practice, as well as everything in-between and beyond.

TRPGs and larps find application outside the spheres of hobby and pastime. Thus, JARPS also seeks contributions about the educational, political, or therapeutical application of these games. What do players learn from engaging with RPGs? How can larps be used to encourage teamwork? Can politicians understand environmental issues better if they fought zombies? Within JARPS, there is space for such questions and we invite case reports and best practice articles detailing projects in which role-playing games were used for something beyond fun – not denying the importance of fun, however.

We believe that knowledge should be shared freely. That is why JARPS is provided as an online-only Gold Open Access publication by the nonprofit *Japanese Association for Role-Playing Game Studies* and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. We do not ask for subscription fees but, of course, ask for our readers to give credence to the authors of our journal when they use or cite any of the material hosted on the journal website. JARPS seeks to publish articles that adhere to the highest scientific standards and includes a peer-review process for most contributions, such as original articles, case reports, and educational materials. We furthermore seek to create a space for transcultural exchange between the various discourses about role-playing games. Thus, JARPS is a bilingual journal accepting contributions in Japanese and English.¹ In this regard, we also encourage reviews of books, summaries of theories, or studies about local practices that are not yet available in the other language.

3. About this Issue

This first, inaugural issue of the journal begins with an invited foreword by game designer Kondō Kōshi (Adventure Planning Service), the father of the abbreviation TRPG (as *table-talk* RPG) in the Japanese discourse. He discusses how to define (role-playing) games in the first place, how players, games, and producers interact, and how new things arise through this interaction and ways of appropriation – of making games your own. In the subsequent papers, the editorial team of JARPS would like to showcase what kind of contributions we seek to publish in this journal.

Björn-Ole Kamm (Kyoto University) gives a brief introduction to “Nordic Larp” in Japanese, the

discourses, theories, and practices evolving out of the Scandinavian larp conference *Knutepunkt*. This theoretical article seeks to offer ideas to the Japanese-language discourse about role-playing games in the hope for more exchange. The next contribution is Denise Paschen’s (Münster University) case report about best practice examples of using larp and other forms of analog gaming in youth and child support. She details various projects by the German NPO Waldritter who are a leader in experience-oriented pedagogy. Her article is available in English and Japanese.² Last but not least, Katō Kōhei (Tokyo Gakugei University) showcases his research on the use of TRPGs in the communication support of children and youth diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). To date, his work has been almost exclusively available in Japanese, so that this is a first step into the English-language discourse on applied role-playing game research. This inaugural issue would not have been possible without the translation assistance of Katō Sayuri. We express our deepest gratitude.

We hope to see many more contributions in this bright future of role-playing games in and from Japan, but also elsewhere. If you are planning to apply TRPGs or larps in an educational setting, please consider writing about your project as a “Case Report.” If you encountered resourceful books on role-playing games, why don’t you review them and contribute to further the discussion on TRPGs and larp (“Book Review”)? Most welcome are theoretical papers exploring key ideas, such as *immersion* or *bleed*, as well as original studies, for example about specific ways players interact with gaming elements, or on how production has changed over the years. If you would like to be considered as a reviewer, please do let us know.³ We are looking forward to exploring the field of role-playing games together with our authors and readers. Without further ado, let us follow the rabbit into the wonderland of TRPGs and larp.

¹ Only if authors provide articles in both languages will they be published in Japanese and English. Please contact the editors if you are thinking about a contribution in both languages before making a submission.

² Articles published in both languages will have page numbers indicating the language used, for example, 6j-15j means that this is the Japanese version. 6e-15e stands for the English variant of the same article.

³ During the account creation process on this website, you can choose to be registered as a reviewer and also inform the editors about your areas of expertise.