

## Emotional and Psychological Safety in TRPGs and Larps | TRPG・LARP における感情的・心理的安全性

JARPS Editors | RPG 学研究編集委員会

editors@jarps.net

### 1. Questions of Safety

With great pleasure do we release the 2020 issue of the *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* (JARPS). After the inaugural issue last year, where we opened the floor to a hopefully continuing global exchange about the various forms of non-digital or analog role-playing games, this year we seek to focus directly on a matter of concern for role-playing game facilitators, players, and researchers: emotional and psychological safety.

Physical safety has played an important role for larp (live-action role-play) practices worldwide, especially concerning boffer-weapons (foam weapons). The introduction of a safety seal by the Japanese larp association CLOSS, directly after larp increased in popularity in Japan, attests to the concern about bodily harm. Recently, however, the attention is moving towards questions about different kinds of safety: How to create a safe environment or culture for play? How to deal with missing stairs in play communities? How do I encourage difficult topics in play without triggering players, who may have encountered and suffered through the situation-to-be-played outside the sphere of play? How to allow players to calibrate such situations? How to support players who went beyond their emotional comfort level? How to enable a space for dealing with extreme play situations? And many more questions continue to be asked.

Pre-game workshops, post-game debriefings, and various calibration tools have become a cornerstone of Nordic larp discourse and practice to address concerns about player safety. Similar movements and debates happen also in other regions and fields of role-playing, to which the X-card discussions attest, for example. The 2020 issue of the *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* (JARPS) seeks to link the English-language discourse to related concerns in the Japanese context and extend the discussion to table-top/talk role-playing games and other connected practices. The need for a safe environment to immerse oneself into a role-playing game requires continued interrogation, especially considering the increasing trend of

pedagogical and applied forms of role-playing game practices.

For this issue we sought submissions that address practical questions of creating safe environments, the use of calibration tools for larps and TRPGs, and concerns of in-game/out-of-game relationships between players and player communities. This issue particularly deals with best-practice examples as well as epistemological and ethical questions of what emotional and psychological safety entails in a transcultural context when players of different backgrounds and playstyles come together.

### 2. About this Issue

The latter concern forms the starting point for the first contribution to this issue, an invited paper by Johanna Koljonen (Participation | Design | Agency), leading experience designer and contributor to the Nordic larp discourse. She describes how what she calls the “advent of international larp” illuminated the various things and practices taken for granted in larp play cultures, which caused conflict when people from different backgrounds began to play together. This observation is her starting point for a detailed outline of three important calibration mechanics (the OK check-in, the tap-out, and the lockdown) now used worldwide in whose development she was very much involved in. She integrated these three tools into a wider discussion of what safety or safety design may mean by integrating these techniques into a systematic approach to play culture design that considers in-game but also out-of-game relationships. The English-language version of this paper represents an updated, systematic outline of her approach, while the Japanese version offers her tools to a Japanese audience for the very first time.<sup>1</sup>

Nicholas St.Jacques (independent) and Samuel Tobin (Fitchburg State University) follow with an exploration of player character (PC) death in TRPGs. Based on the rules and game mechanics for

---

<sup>1</sup> Articles published in both languages 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.



death in various systems, e.g. *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Ten Candles*, they analyze the different dimensions of gameplay related to death, including narrativity but also social dynamics and questions of the safe environment necessary to actually play with death. St.Jaques and Tobin link their discussion to player agency and control, building also on participant observations but focusing on theoretical considerations.

Jeremias Weber, Carissa Donker, and Carolin Heinrich (DrachenFest UG & Co. KG.) move directly into practice with their case report about a social safety team at the “Drachenfest.” The “Drachenfest” (dragon’s festival) represents Europe’s second largest, annual larp event with around 5,000 participants and set in a sword-and-sorcery fantasy world that has been played in since 2002. Most game rules consider questions of resolving combat or the use of magic. Contrastingly, social interactions were mostly left unregulated, which can be a source of interpersonal problems, for example, when one player goes beyond the comfort level of their fellows. Despite the fantastic background, different views of how a particular species should ideally be played can escalate into moments of in-game as well as out-of-game harassment. To deal with such issues, the “Drachenfest” organizers created not only a code of conduct but also implanted a social safety team for the first time in 2019. The authors detail the considerations behind these measures and evaluate the results.

William J. White (Penn State Altoona), who recently finished a book about the *Forge*, an online discussion website for tabletop RPG design and especially, indie-game innovation, continues with questions of player safety by providing historical context for the current discussions. With a focus on the tools *Forge*-creator Ron Edwards called Lines and Veils and Meguey Baker’s complementary principles of Nobody Gets Hurt and I Will Not Abandon You, White explores conversations around safety-related discourse within the “Forge Diaspora,” the many blogs and forums inspired by the *Forge* where further discussion took place. Following a rhetorical approach, he analyzes the different dimensions of and arguments within the discourse, where player creativity and safety, for example, are often pitched against each other, offering a larger understanding of the discursive dynamics surrounding safety.

White’s analysis also considers the X-card by John Stavropoulos, which found its way into a collection of many other calibration tools, such as the OK check-in or the lockdown discussed by Koljonen. Based on the work of Karen Twelves and many more contributors, Sayuri Katō translated

these “Safety & Calibration Cards” into Japanese, with which we close this issue of the journal.

Future issues of the journal will concern other areas of researching and practicing non-digital role-playing games but we still welcome more contributions dealing with questions of safety as this remains, in all its facets and issues, an important dimension of play. If you are planning to apply TRPGs or larps in an educational or therapeutic 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, how particular genres re-shaped the field, or how organizers deal with transparency and accessibility. If you would like to be considered as a reviewer, please let us know.<sup>2</sup> We are looking forward to further exploring the field of non-digital role-playing games together with our authors and readers. We hope you find some of your own questions about safety answered in this issue, lead you to new conceptualizations of safe play, and that some of the techniques or tools will enrich your practice.

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.