

Editorial | 第3号発刊の趣旨

The Master with a Thousand Faces — Game Mastering, Organizing, Plotting, and Running Analog Role-Playing Games | 千の顔を持つゲームマスター — アナログロールプレイングゲームのゲームマスタリング、主催、作成や運営について

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1. The Wide and Deep Spaces of Game Mastering

The role of “Game Master” (GM) in TRPGs and larps is a unique one not found in many other games: The GM can be a storyteller, rules arbiter, plot writer, director, facilitator, world builder; a character in the story (non-player character, NPC), an entertainer, improv expert, caretaker, group manager, event host... the list goes on and on.

In TRPGs, one single GM is usually responsible for all the aspects of this role. In larps, several people will share the various GM and NPC roles. Participants may literally encounter a “thousand faces” (of GMs) if we consider mass conventions. If a team takes care of the game mastering, managing that team also becomes a GM task. Plot-GMs and battle-GMs have direct player contact in mainstream larps, with plot writers and logistics managers working in the background but equally important.

Many game masters – or storytellers, dungeon masters, keepers, depending on the game played – and organizers prepare and host play as a hobby. Recently and in increasing numbers, we encounter professional GMs, for example, in TRPG cafés in Japan or as educational larpwrights working for an NPO. A thousand faces become ten thousand. Just as facilitating workshops for companies and other organizations has become a business, the way TRPG GMs and larp organizers work as a business may become a topic of further discussion in the future.

Contrastingly, some games follow a trend in which there is “no face” instead of a thousand. Such GM-less play may eschew this role altogether (this special issue includes a paper dealing specifically with this subject).

How individual GMs take on their role or how the game dislocates the game mastering onto rules or the other players in case of GM-less play can make or break a TRPG or larp, depending on how they are played. The message of the story and its impact on the players will vary greatly, as will the game’s

entertainment value. In this special issue, we focus on the GM, a significant figure in the planning and implementation of TRPGs and larps, and examine this role and position both academically and practically.

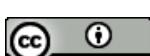
2. About this Issue

This issue of the *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* (JARPS) encompasses six articles dealing with the designated topic and one contributed article concerning other but still related aspects of analog RPGs.

Steven Dashiell (American University) contributed the theoretical paper “DM Habitus: The Social Dispositions of Game Mastering in *Dungeons & Dragons*.” This paper discusses the position of the Game Master, especially the Dungeon Master (DM) in *Dungeons & Dragons*, considering Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus theory. From this perspective of practice theory, the author attempts to substantiate the concept of DM habitus, “deeply ingrained habits, skills, and physical dispositions” that arise from game experiences and are established by individuals in the role of the Dungeon Master to strengthen their position.

Harada Yūsuke, Katō Kōhei, and Hiroshi Fujino (Tokyo Gakugei University) explore the role of the GM in promoting conversation in their case report “Facilitating Conversation and the Role of the Game Master in TRPG Activities for Children with High Functioning ASD.” In previous research, they had showcased how TRPGs function as communication support activities for autistic children. This paper now focuses on the GM and effective intervention methods employing conversation analysis of TRPG sessions.

Fujibayashi Kei’ichirō (independent scholar) provides a second case report entitled “Competence Map for Game Masters: Professional Requirements.” Following participant observations and an auto-ethnographic approach, this paper suggests a map of



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competencies for game mastering, building on the author's ideas and experiences.

William J. White (Penn State Altoona), Nicolas LaLone (University of Nebraska-Omaha), and Nicholas J. Mizer (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) consider the game master within TRPG fan discourse. Their original research paper, "At the Head of the Table: The TRPG GM as Dramatistic Agent," uses Kenneth Burke's dramatist approach to examine the portrayal of GMs in the discourse and develop a "rhetoric of the GM."

Ben Bisogno (Kyoto City University of Arts) contributed the essay "No Gods, No Masters: An Overview of Unfacilitated 'GMless' Design Frameworks." This paper identifies the traditional responsibilities associated with the role of the GM and argues that the various available "GMless" designs in both larps and TRPGs are reshaping and reincorporating these responsibilities to enable more equitable and engaging play for many.

In her essay "About the Demand for Online, Short-Time Voice Sessions of 'Golden Sky Stories: Heart-Warming Role-Playing Game,'" Miho Takeno'uchi (independent scholar) focuses on short voice sessions in the context of the increasing popularity of online play due to the outbreak of the new coronavirus infection,¹ and examines the demand and needs for such sessions in the form of a questionnaire.

Finally, Igarashi Ririka (independent scholar) and Aoyama Masahiko (Seijo University) contributed a research paper titled "What it Means to Create Player Characters for Tabletop Role-playing Games: Focusing on Setting a Character's Gender and History," going beyond the topic of this special issue. This paper exploratively examines the creation of TRPG characters from the perspective of gender through interviews and field observations.

Throughout the contributions to this special issue, researchers and practitioners in various fields discuss and explore the GM's thousands of roles (and "faces"). We, as editors, hope that this special issue will catalyze further exchanges of ideas and opinions across disciplines and that the articles and essays in this issue will contribute to making TRPGs and larps more enjoyable for everyone.

Future issues of the journal will concern other areas of researching and practicing non-digital role-playing games. However, we still welcome more contributions dealing with questions of organizing and facilitating play. If you plan to apply TRPGs or larps in an educational or therapeutic setting, please

¹ On the effect of the corona pandemic on analog RPG practices, see also JARPS issue 2 "RPG at a Distance."

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, and original studies, for example, about how players interact with gaming elements, how particular genres re-shaped the field, or how organizers deal with transparency and accessibility. Please let us know if you would like to be considered as a reviewer.² 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 questions about game mastering answered in this issue, that they give you new ideas about role-playing, and that some techniques or tools will enrich your practice.

Furthermore, the journal invites guest editors for the following special issue in 2024. The 2023 guest issue will focus on various forms and aspects of interactive media and fiction, beginning with gamebooks, such as *Choose Your Own Adventure*, and interactive comics.

Special and guest issues alike, each covers a specific aspect of current role-playing game related research and practice, such as educational applications, player-character relations, or the human body in play. Potential guest editors are asked to submit their ideas for a possible issue via the regular submission system.

From now on, JARPS is also open to rolling submissions. We welcome contributions even if they do not match a particular issue's topic or if they are submitted outside a call for paper's timeframe. After review, we will include such submissions in later issues.

We look forward to many new discussions and insights about analog role-playing games.

² During the account creation process on this website, you can choose to be registered as a reviewer and inform the editors about your areas of expertise.