Fantasy Spoils: After the Quest

Rob Wittig & Mark C. Marino

Interactive Storytelling Art

"The concept is intriguing, calling for the participant's attention to the painful after-math of every battle, be that mental or physical, taking place in the game or in one's everyday life."

ICIDS 2020 Jury

Fantasy Spoils: a netprov of injury and recovery

Abstract

Fantasy Spoils: After the Quest is a netprov, a collaborative writing game, inspired by the tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) *Dungeons and Dragons*, that uses storytelling to travel a quest of emotional recovery. *Fantasy Spoils* can be played online or in-person and was featured as an ICIDS experience during the 2020 conference. In this paper, we present *Fantasy Spoils* as a means of imaginative relief from the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic through shared improvisational play. In playthroughs that stress collective, creative problem solving, we offer players an opportunity to face and overcome internal, psychological monsters.

texts of discomfort

Keywords

role-playing games, trauma, netprov, storytelling, Dungeons and Dragons, collaborative writing

Having just completed the glorious epic saga, Ultimate Final Victory!, you have now returned home to deal with the aftermath: *Fantasy Spoils.* Gone are the orcs, hobgoblins, and dragons. In their place, you must contend with your wounds, property damages, and ensuing lawsuits. How will you deal with life here in Muddled Earth after the glorious quest? Are you hero enough to face your most daunting enemy: your own irritation? Because at the end of every epic quest, you will find fantasy spoils!

So began our 2020 netprov, which was featured in the ICIDS 2020 art exhibition.

Fantasy Spoils (2020)[1] is a new netprov that takes a playful tilt at the role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons. However, rather than focusing on glorious bloody battles, this netprov focuses on the not-so-glorious aftermath. First played in spring 2020, *Fantasy Spoils* arrived as a parodic play on epic, Tolkeinesque role-playing at the moment when much of the world, including our own students, were under lockdown orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As mankind stared blan-

[1] http://meanwhilenetprov.com/fantasyspoils/
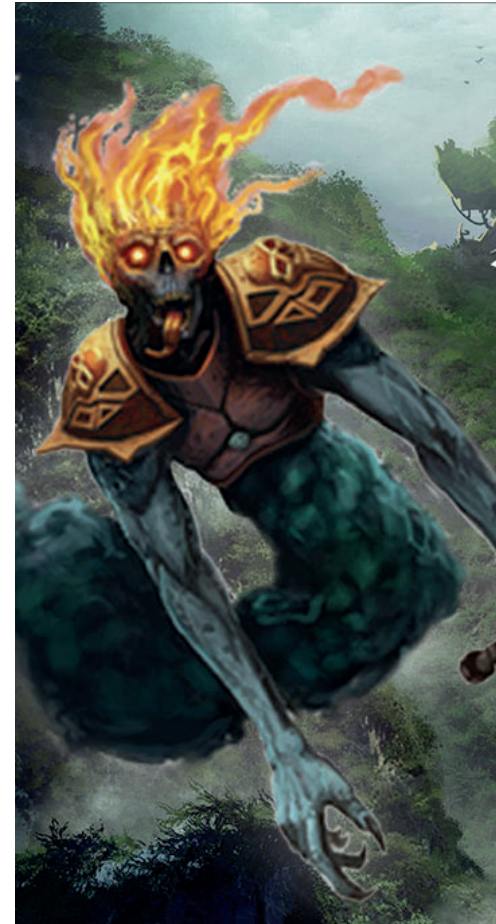
1

kly through the windows of teleconferencing software, we invited them to enter into an imaginary world for some collaborative narrative play focused on loss and recovery.

Netprov is the name we give online collaborative writing. The form was first labeled in 2011 by Rob Wittig. At the time, he had been developing such netprovs for years, but he also recognized that social media platforms were making collaborative writing a regular part of our digitally mediated lives. After staging in-person collaborative writing games as part of composing *Invisible Seattle*, the first novel created by a city, and developing writing games on a mainframe computer with *IN.SOM.NIA* (Wittig 1994), by 2011 he now had at his disposal the Internet's writing platforms, content management systems, ready for play.

Previous research

Scholars studying the psychological ef-

fects of role-playing games, particularly table top role playing games (TTRPGs), have found that given a purposeful management and direction, the games can be quite therapeutic for participants. Rosselet and Stauffer's study (2013), for example, suggests that role-playing games can help adolescents with their social emotional development. An earlier study by Rubin and Enfield (2007) found a superhero themed RPG was beneficial to adolescents 11-13 years-old who needed help controlling impulsivity and boundary issues. Similarly, Gutierrez (2017) and Koren (2018) have explored the efficacy of *Dungeons and Dragons* and live action role play (LARPs, which are the ludic cousins of role-playing games) as drama therapy. Another study by Causo and Quinlan (2021) showed how *Dungeons and Dragons* contributed to players' well-being, including giving players a safe space from and to engage with mental health symptoms. Marginalized communities can also find benefits in role-playing games. Also, Bayes' (2021) examina-

tion of the therapeutic potential for role-playing games for LGBTQ+ youth suggested their potential for helping players develop resilience and coping skills.

However, that is not to say that role-playing games are inherently therapeutic. While role-playing games offer a means of healing, they can also devolve into emotionally hostile environments. Sarah Lynne Bowman (2013) notes how misogynism, stereotypes, and other forms of social hostility can harm players and impact communal play. Similarly, one long-term inpatient study suggested that role playing games could reinforce negative pathologies (Ascherman 1993). Bowman, along with DeRenard and Kline (1990), suggests a need for careful management by game masters (GMs). One therapist Gutierrez interviewed cautioned that role-playing games are not inherently therapeutic but instead can be used as therapeutic tools. Heeding these warnings, we take great care in creating positive and nurturing spaces for play in all over our netprovs, including Fantasy Spoils.

Fantasy Spoils and the D&D renaissance

Fantasy Spoils: After the Quest takes up a middle earth role-playing motiv alongside the contemporaneous resurgence of the TTRPG Dungeons and Dragons. Podcasts and other live stream play, from *Critical Role* to the McElroy's *Adventure Zone*, have returned the game to popularity with a new eye toward expanded cultural inclusion. Performers and artists, such as the improvisers of College Humor's *Dimension 20* have adapted the fifth edition system (aka 5e) into new adventures where it is not uncommon to find a transexual drug dealer turned wild magic sorcerer or his counterpart Kingston Brown, the middle-aged nurse and cleric (Burns 2020). Moving beyond the world of Tolkein and its uptake by cisgender white male audiences (two of

whom are writing this paper), the game has become a place of inclusion where even the notion of races, like Elves and Orcs, has been challenged in recent years (Limbong 2020). The transition has also been marked by a more self-conscious expansion of the game from an emphasis on points and levels to the creation of collective powerful emotional experiences (Robinson 2019). Contemporary expansions have also diversified the source material for the gameworlds. For example, *Wagadu*, by Twin Drums, brings African mythology into what was previously a world of middle Earth drawn mostly from European folklore. *Dungeons and Dragons* is surely changing from what it was 30-40 years ago.

In the midst of that rebirth, *Fantasy Spoils* arrives as an alternative to glorious escapism and game-mechanics-driven leveling up by focusing not on the epic battles but instead on the aftermath, the recovery. Whether dealing with lawsuits over the decimated lands, the long road to physical recovery for injuries, or repairs to weapons and other property, players of *Fantasy Spoils* must find their way through the less pleasant parts of heroic life.

Fantasy Spoils lives on a Discord server, though it can equally be adapted for Zoom teleconferencing software or in-person play. Discord is a platform for digital interaction in the form of hubs for communities (called "servers") via discussion forums (called "channels"), including video and voice over Internet protocol (VOIP). Although Discord has a video channel,

ENDLESS ENNUI

Huge feline, unaligned   2

Armor Class 13 (general disinterest)
Hit Points 73 (7d12 + 28)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)

Skills Deception +5
Damage Vulnerabilities vulnerable to inbox notifications
Damage Resistances resistant to activities that used to fill its days with joy and light
Damage Immunities immune to overly enthusiastic creatures.
Senses smells how uninteresting you are, passive Perception 14
Languages Common, blah, blah, blah
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Relishing Reluctance. A spell that keeps players from taking any initiative because, well, what's the point?

Innate Spellcasting. The endless ennui's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 8, +0 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components: Relishing Reluctance

At will: *Relishing Reluctance*

ACTIONS

Boulders of Boredom. *Melee or Range Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 30/120ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage in melee or 5(1d6+2) bludgeoning damage at range

Arrows of Apathy. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. These arrows have a bonus damage of removing a player's desire to fight. (Constitution Saving Throw)

REACTIONS

Yawn. Whenever attacked, EE lets out a yawn that is so contagious it occupies the entire party.

DESCRIPTION

This monster is bored of you already, and you are consequently bored of all things. Your desire to conquer it is persistently dissipated by a general disinterest in all things that used to put a gleam on your chainmail armor.

ALACK OF MOTIVATION

Medium humanoid, lawful neutral

Armor Class 13 (hiding hoody and sweatpants of resignation)
Hit Points 60 (8d12 + 8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +1
Skills Deception +3
Damage Vulnerabilities slight vulnerability to motivational posters.
Damage Resistances resistance to high stakes testing. takes half damage
Damage Immunities immune to lofty goals., immune to tales of past glory.
Senses Can sense disinterest a mile away. Perception 18, passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Mumble
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Comforter Creep. Comforter Creep: Has the effect of pulling the bed linens over their head. Causes reticence to move and extreme coziness

ACTIONS

Snooze Bar Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6 + 0) Zzzzzz damage: Takes turn away as player sleeps for just 5 more minutes.

Verve Sucking. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 1 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) biting damage plus draining enthusiasm damage, next turn is done with disinterest
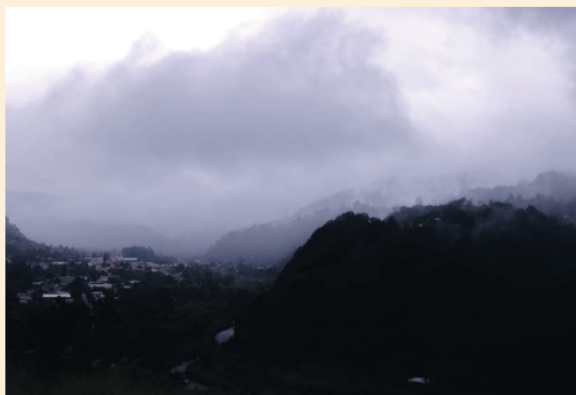
DESCRIPTION

A vampiric monster that drains its opponents of their will to adventure.

AMBIENT AMBIVALENCE

Large gaseous, unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 63 (6d12 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Persuasion +5
Damage Vulnerabilities fifty-fifty: vulnerable to coin tosses.
Damage Resistances ambidextrous resistance: advantage on two-handed attacks
Damage Immunities immune to general perkiness
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Race
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Unxious Uncertainty. Creates a cloud over the entire field of battle, reducing visibility to 0. Players are not even certain that the monstrosity released this cloud, or that the monstrosity is even there, or that there is even there. I am uncertain why I am writing this.

ACTIONS

Flying Flip Flop. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) flipping damage in melee, or 10 (1d12 + 4) flopping damage at range, or 8 (1d8 + 4) flapping damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

REACTIONS

Indecisivation. When attacked causes the player to ask whether or not that was a good idea, Wisdom saving throw, loss of a turn.

DESCRIPTION

More of gas than a solid monster, it can take over an entire party, taking away their forward movement by making every option seem equally good or bad.

our *Fantasy Spoil*s play sessions often started out on Zoom for video documentation of the adventure, which we later used just for voice.

On the Discord Server, we invited players to introduce their characters and to narrate their escapades in the just-completed campaign *Ultimate Final Victory!* After laying out the basis for a longer narrative arc, they were encouraged to narrate their daily recovery slog on the three channels: #recovery, #repairs, and #lawsuits (hashtags here indicate channel names). We encouraged participants on these asynchronous platforms to reference events, settings, characters, and objects from other participants' contributions, following the principle of "yes, and." Discord also affords notifications of other player's references to them via their handle (e.g., @user), an affordance that facilitates collaboration and dialogue during asynchronous play.

Against the backdrop of the asynchronous narratives, players also participated in synchronous narratives called camplaigns (a portmanteau of complaints and campaigns). Modeled on *D&D*, the camplaign, prepared by a Drudgeon Master, thrusts the players into a pitiable field of plight and then confronts them with one or more of our monstrosities. available in the *Manual of Monstrosities.*

These Monstrosities were likewise built out of psychological and emotional terrors, including Alack of Motivation, an enthusiasm vampire; Ambient Ambivalence, a fog of doubt; Babbling Bureaucracy, a slinger of red tape; Endless Ennui, a harbinger of extreme boredom; and Desolate Despair, a depressing blob. Although not intended to be limited to the COVID-19 experience, these psycho-emotional horrors became proxies for much of the malaise that attended lockdown. The *Fantasy Spoils* *Manual of Monstrosities* can currently be found on Critterdb. com for use on other games. One goal of our netprov was to ensure that even the more playful, parodic elements, such as these made-up monsters, are playable when following the 5e game mechanic. Such additions are often referred to as "homebrew" in *Dungeons & Dragons* circles.

A typical camplaign in *Fantasy Spoils* compels atypical role-play. Although partici-

pants could also roll-play, using virtual dice driven by the Avrae bot Discord plugin and even character sheets for the monsters and themselves (using *D&D* Beyond), Drudgeon Masters or DMs (in a separate manual) were encouraged to reward creative narrative solutions born of collaboration aimed at emotional matters. So, while players might roll for an attack or a dice challenge, they had to use more than their crossbow to free themselves from Verve Sucking or Unctuous Uncertainty. In other words, they would have to -- as Del Close co-founder of Chicago Improv put it -- play and go deep (qtd. in Wittig 2011). Bowman (2013) identifies the way conflicting playing styles, such as focusing on game mechanics as opposed to role-play can cause group play to deteriorate. In our adaptation, our Drudgeon Masters actively steer players to storytelling, a play-style Bowman calls "narrativism."

Camplaigns

A camplaign is a quest through the malaise of malady. Modeled on conventional *D&D* campaigns, camplaigns often began with a zero episode in the Proving Grounds Coffee Emporium, with a nod to the early video game *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*. There, misadventurers could meet, form parties, and get their daily dollop of caffeinated mud. Players were also encouraged to declare their readiness to join a misadventuring parties in the Bureau of Camplaigns, which we offered as a channel for recruiting teams. Once thoroughly acquainted with one another, participants were whisked off to some dismal setting, beset by some plague. In the university course settings, these camplaigns began often on the main college green, where the players would encounter their classmates in various states of infirmity. Ennervated, unmotivated their fellow students moaned from discarded couches and bean bag chairs that seemed to be sucking all the life out of them. Of course, during the early waves of the global pandemic and lockdown, this scene was not as fanciful as it might be otherwise.

Narrating in typical GM style, the Drudgeon Master would slowly unveil the scene, eventually offering clues as to what monstrosity had besieged this area.

texts of discomfort

COMBAT

Though the Avrae Discord bot enabled traditional dice-rolling combat scenarios, complete with weapons and spellcasting, our emphasis on netprov meant we emphasized imagination over might. After falling prey to an Alack of Motivation, one party revived their classmates by summoning the newly elected university president who was toting armfulls of corgis. Another group roused their classmates by playing some pop hits over a massive sound system. The unspoken agenda of the Drudgeon Master was to gently lead the players away from combat into creativity. In the following example, Mark was Coach Ela, the Drudgeon Master.

First, here are a quick set of characters:

Charlie H: Busby "Buzz" Bee-Beard is the servant of the transdimensional hive
Wailing Edmund: Half-Elf Sorcerer
Kali: a bookish Half-Elf Sorcerer
Zephryne Piper is a water genasi ranger
Elwick the Magnificent: rock gnome wizard.

Coach Ela (Coach) 11/04/2020
"Listen, locals, you realize there's no point in fighting me with weapons and spells and the like," it says.

Wailing Edmund 11/04/2020
I'm wailing.... it's in my nature....

Coach Ela (Coach) 11/04/2020
"I mean," says the creature, "that's so cliche."
"You think I'm going to fall to cliches?"

Coach Ela (Coach) 11/04/2020
The creature turns perturbed to Buzz -- "oh, I see. One of you has some enthusiasm. That's novel."

Elwick the Magnificent (Joey) 11/04/2020
"I know just the thing!" Elwick pulls out a page from his spell book and quickly scrawls a quick motivational poster which he proffers to the Alack. YOU CAN DO THE THING!(edited)

Coach Ela (Coach) 11/04/2020
The creature cocks its head at Wailing's Wailing.

Charlie H 11/04/2020
Buzz follows the taunt with more enthusiasm - enthusiastic hitting with the staff to be precise

Coach Ela (Coach)
"There's always one," the Alack says in the vague direction of Buzz
The Alack seems a bit distressed by the poster.

To overcome this Alack, this team relied rather heavily on bees:

Charlie H
Buzz runs over to Elwick and pours bees in his robe - That will motivate most people!

AvraeBOT
Elwick the Magnificent makes a Constitution Save!
1d20 (9) + 2 = 11*
(* This simulates a roll of 9 on a 20-sided die plus a constitution bonus of 2.)

Charlie H
There he goes!

Zephryne (naomi)
jumps up from the bench and throws Inigo's ball of yarn from the folds of her robes Inigo, fetch!

Charlie H
Buzz is proud

Elwick the Magnificent (Joey)
Elwick yelps as is robes fill with bees.

Kali (Ashwathy)
Rounds up all the puppies in the neighbourhood

Elwick the Magnificent (Joey)
His hastily casts a light cantrip on the bees, so they glow merrily.

Charlie H
Quick my gnomish friend - no time to worry about bees - give us some fun!

Though Charlie H calls for fun, it is clear that the camplaign has indeed found its fun, and it's made of bees, creatures who have suffered their own pandemic in recent years but here were a symbol of anarchic fun and creative play.

After the combat scenarios and long recovery story arcs, the players had a chance to narrate their epilogues in a Discord Channel called "the aftermath." This was a chance to reflect on their recovery process but also either to alleviate their woes or cause a bit more misery for their characters.

Accentuating the negative

It might seem from the outside that dragging a group of traumatized players through the muck of scenarios emphasizing misfortune might be the last thing someone should do during a pandemic. Even university administrators were shifting their emphasis away from the language of "rigor" to the rhetoric of compassion and student support. Or should we say, the balance shifted from talk of challenging academic curricula to the challenges of students in lockdown.

However, we found the opposite was true. By placing students in a parallel scenario, in a magical mirror of their pandemic plight, we were able to give them an opportunity to work their way through their challenges, creatively, collaboratively, and indeed remotely.

Also, references to the COVID-19 pandemic were at most oblique, not that students or other participants needed to be reminded why they were playing a table-top game online over Discord and Zoom. For example, Rob opened a number of camplaigns, playing a coughing pangolin who runs across the scene, pangolins being one of the suspects in the chain of transmission of the COVID-19 virus to humans in the first place. This light touch helped us keep the game in the realm of healing rather than re-traumatizing our students by dwelling on more serious or literal mappings of their own plight onto this scenario. Here I am referring to the concept of "mapping" as described in improv as a process of producing one scenario by implying parallels to an analogous yet very different one. For example, a woman is upset that her husband is cheating on her with another Netflix series he

is binging-watching. Breaking his streaming loyalty in this case is mapped onto breaking his relationship loyalty.

This concept of "mapping" relates to another concept in role-playing games, "bleed." "Bleed" refers to the tendency of in-game events to affect real-world emotions and vice versa (Bowman 2013). Bleed happens when friends squabble in real life about the offenses of their characters in game. It can also include moments when in-game actions or events trigger harmful, real-world psychological responses, especially prevalent with players who have pre-existing vulnerabilities (Bowman 2013). During the time of this global pandemic, wary of this phenomenon, we directed our DMs to keep a careful eye on the bleed. If we were to offer a salve for the isolation of lockdowns, for example, we might not want to have the Endless Ennui ultimately succeed in overwhelming the parties on their camplaigns. If we did not want to reinforce the anxiety and depression of the traumatic closure of in-person learning environments, we probably should not let the Desolate Despair's attacks of Dreary Drear or Crumpled Hope overwhelm our

players. No doubt, losing such a game could be psychologically beneficial or even enjoyable, depending on a person's disposition toward play or how the defeat was narrated and received, but given the severity and uncertainty of the crisis, we tried to be especially mindful of the players' states of well-being and how this mapping and the challenges of the DMs were impacting them.

One sign of the students' positive response to this experience could be seen in their enthusiasm and creativity during their camplaigns. Another, were their additions to the game, including the King of Deals Pawn Shop and Junkery, created by Rob's students. Rob's students also created their own heist-centered camplaign independently called the Glitter City Bank at Knifepoint. This creativity, we argue, is a key to the healing balm we were trying to offer, not in the form of escape and distraction, but in the form of processing through creative play, laterally connected to the source of player woe.

Further study would be needed to examine the psychological effects, but student feedback suggests their experiences were positive.

student1:

This exercise was coOoOol. It was interesting to combine the elements of storytelling with literary devices in a cooperative and communal manner, when much of writing is solitary and, naturally, not interactive. Fun way to wind down the semester, especially with the circumstances as numbing and neurally-constipating as they are. Specifically, I valued the creativity in how we could choose to combat monsters, and the intuition in crafting our characters and configuring them literarily in contrast to our classmates'. AAA+

student2

I enjoyed the netprov. I remember seeing certain people play Dungeons and Dragons in my high school. I kinda understand the hype now. It's all about creating your own story in an established world. It's a scary but freeing thing. I am a Creative Writing Major and I'm taking a Fiction class this semester. That's not the main thing I'm trying to get into but it was interesting to write in a more mythological way. But I used real life aspects to inform it. I wouldn't say it's for

everybody. You have to become invested in your character, the story, and the world.

Thus far, we have staged Fantasy Spoils in 3 distinct seasons in games from one player (and a DM) to over one hundred, separated into smaller breakout rooms for the camplaings. So far, five to eight players have been optimal sizes. The majority of games thus far have been played with undergraduate students as part of their writing courses but it has been played at two conferences, including ICIDS 2020 in Bournemouth. In addition to the games sessions we have coordinated, the game has also been staged by Paul Eccheverria (Wayne State University) and Astrid Ensslin (University of Alberta). Game play varied widely based on the collective imagination of the players.

Because (real life) experience levels with role-playing games varied widely, game-play followed suit. Those who had played similar games before were quick to take up the comical or parodic play environment, and matching this tone, described their characters' actions with humor and detail. Newcomers were a bit more reti-

cent, answering prompts from the DM or NPCs in shorter or more plain-spoken descriptions. While an experienced player might have their half-Orc fighter, slam his hand on the counter of our in-game coffee shop, Proving Grounds, and demand an artisanal caffeinated beverage, the newer players would meekly accept the generic cup of sludge and then take it to a table to sit.

Similarly, combat play also varied depending on experience level. Newcomers to the game tended to be more tentative with their actions, whether trying a traditional attack or some alternative intervention, such as asking the monster a question. More experienced players tended to choose more elaborate or absurd choices, particularly once they realized that traditional combat techniques, such as swinging swords or shooting arrows, would not succeed as indicated by the responses of the DM. In the same way, while more experienced players read even subtle cues about the nature of the gameplay, newer players needed to be told explicitly that these types of conventional attacks probably would not succeed.

The biggest challenge to the DMs in all of these play throughs was to convey this message that these psychologically based monsters would not be defeated through traditional combat approaches. Though TTRPGs may be "quantified interactive storytelling), as Schick (1991) calls them, *Fantasy Spoils* camplaings are not so much about high dice roles, powerful weapons, and high skill checks. In fact, our training for the DMs explicitly eschewed such play. We wanted to ensure that Fantasy Spoils camplaings hinge on collective, collaborative problem solving. An Alack of Motivation can no more be slain by arrows than its psychological counterpoint. Endless Ennui cannot be defeated with the simple swing of an ax. Like our other netprovs, Fantasy Spoils is meant to disrupt or counteract the cultural logic of scoreboards and bank tallies. The treasure, in the terms of the games, is not discovered once the dragon has been slain, but when the players are drawn out of their own dread into creative engagement. And in our quantified, gamified world, to turn away from such scoreboards, we argue, is a radical and therapeutic act.

Each game varies, but what remains constant is a sense of overcoming some dreadful in-

ternal malaise not through combat but through creativity. In that way, *Fantasy Spoils* was born as a COVID-19 pandemic coping strategy, though we suspect it can serve any moment of denouement because after any quest, fantasy spoils.

Conclusions

Our experience with *Fantasy Spoils* supports a growing body of research around the therapeutic benefits of carefully managed role-playing games. However, this netprov may have been particularly beneficial to players because of the context in which it was played. Staged as collaborative play during the time of a global pandemic, *Fantasy Spoils* offered an opportunity for connecting with fellow students, online conference attendees, colleagues, and other creative writers at a moment of devastating and traumatic separation. As our in-person gatherings were replaced with visually deman-

ding video-conference sessions, Fantasy Spoils, along with other Discord-based games, offered collaborative, creative play through less taxing audio and text-based media. As opposed to the resource-intensive strain of the high-definition video dream, the world of *Fantasy Spoils* was generated by the collective imagination of the players. More importantly, in the digital world of likes and levels and other scoreboard achievements, *Fantasy Spoils* focused on repair and reconnection with others. In place of button-mashing and power fantasies, it offers a collective reflection on recovery. In place of simulations of terrifying monsters with overwhelming hitpoint counts, it offered internal monsters, who could be overcome only through creative, collective storytelling. *Fantasy Spoils* brings players out of the world of levelling up in hopes to help us all level off in this unusual tempestuous time.

Note: We are currently developing a manual to give others the materials they need to stage their own playthrough of *Fantasy Spoils*.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank ARDIN and the ICIDS community and all those who have helped us stage *Fantasy Spoils*, either as a Drudgeon Master or player. Special thanks to Laura LaBounty who designed the *Fantasy Spoils* logo and font.

texts of discomfort

References

Burns, K. (2020, October 29). How to Get Started With Dungeons & Dragons. Wired. https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-get-started-dungeons-and-dragons

Limbong, A. (2020, June 29). "Dungeons & Dragons" Tries To Banish Racist Stereotypes. In All Things Considered. https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/29/884824236/dungeons-dragons-tries-to-banish-racist-stereotypes

Seattle, I. (1987). Invisible Seattle: The Novel of Seattle, by Seattle. Function Industries Press.

Wittig, R. (1994). Invisible Rendezvous: Connection and Collaboration in the New Landscape of Electronic Writing (1st ed.). Wesleyan.

Wittig, R., & Marino, M. C. (2020). Fantasy Spoils | After the Quest, a netprov. Meanwhile Netprov Studios. http://meanwhile-netprov.com/fantasyspoils/

Wittig, R. G. (2011). Networked Improv Narrative (Netprov) and the Story of Grace, Wit & Charm [University of Bergen]. https://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/6305

Images

1. The Fantasy Spoils logo created by Laura LaBounty
2. Selection from the *Manual of Monstrosities* online via CritterDB.com
3. Selection from the *Manual of Monstrosities* online via CritterDB.com
4. Selection from the *Manual of Monstrosities* online via CritterDB.com

Rob Wittig plays at the crossroads of literature, graphic design and digital culture. A Silicon Valley native, he co-founded the early, legendary IN.S.OMNIA electronic bulletin board with the Surrealist-style literary and art group Invisible Seattle. Rob is a proud Master of Digital Kultur from the University of Bergen, Norway, and is Assistant professor in the Art & Design and English, Linguistics and Writing Studies departments of the University of Minnesota Duluth. His latest work Netprov, Networked Improvised Literature for the Classroom and Beyond is forthcoming from Amherst College Press.

Mark C. Marino is a writer and scholar of electronic literature living in Los Angeles. He teaches writing at the University of Southern California where he Directs the Humanities and Critical Code Studies Lab. He is also the Director of Communications for the Electronic Literature Organization. His most recent book is Critical Code Studies (MIT 2020). He is co-director of Meanwhile... Netprov Studio with Rob Wittig.

https://www.markcmarino.com
https://www.haccslab.com