

Casting Die: Classical Reception in Gaming

For most of the last 2000 years, a person's first experience with the ancient world was receptive and interpretive. Whether it be reading an ancient text, looking through a book on myth, or even watching a Hercules movie, Greco-Roman culture was something presented to an audience, even if that audience does help to determine what the classical stories and figures mean (*pace*, e.g., Martindale & Thomas 2006). However, the modern world of video and tabletop gaming has started to change that. Now, many people first encounter the Classics when they are playing as or against figures from ancient culture (Christensen & Machado 2010). Whether battling a minotaur in a *Dungeons and Dragons* session or commanding legions in *Rome: Total War*, gamers now participate actively in the experience of classical and classically-inspired worlds, finding their own way through ancient myths or collaborating with other players to create new stories. Classical material has become a powerful tool for game designers, who use it to develop recognizable interfaces, structure meaningful play, and increase player engagement. As both interactive and designed experiences, games and gaming work to form a fundamentally different relationship between modern and ancient materials than other media (see, e.g., King 2002), and need to be studied on their own terms.

The papers in this conference panel will discuss several examples of Classical Reception in gaming, across both physical and digital media and from a variety of perspectives. The papers will discuss these games as narratives and alternate histories, analyze the relationship between game mechanics and classical materials, and most importantly how the players of these games interact with the classical world. These papers will also discuss the cultural and pedagogical implications of this medium's unique relationship with Ancient Greece and Rome.

The first two papers in this panel will focus on tabletop roleplaying games, with discussions of *Dungeons and Dragons*, which interacts with antiquity in a limited matter, as well as gaming systems focused primarily on Ancient Greece and Rome. The last three papers will focus on electronic media, examining several of the video games that have played the largest role in influencing the way that gamers, including our students, see the ancient world. These games include *Rome: Total War*, the *God of War* series, and *Civilization 6*, arguably the most important games to take inspiration from the Classics. All papers will place a special focus on the special and unusual relationship gaming can build between the ancient world and the 21st century player.

Bibliography

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Ghita, C., & Andrikopoulos, G. (2009). "*Total War* and Total Realism: A Battle for Antiquity in Computer Game History." In D. Lowe & K. Shahabudin (Eds.), *Classics For All: Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture* (109-126).

King, G. (2002) "Die Hard/Try Harder: Narrative, Spectacle and Beyond, from Hollywood to Videogame" in King & Krzywinska, eds. *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*.

Lowe, D. (2009). "Playing with antiquity: Videogame receptions of the classical world." In Lowe & Shahabudin, eds. *Classics For All: Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture* (62-88).

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Five papers; A/V necessary