Introduction

A Look Back

In its December wrap-up of the "Top 10 Library Stories of 2007," *American Libraries* magazine cited gaming because "it was the year gaming caught the imagination of libraries."[1] And what an amazing year it was. In an uncharacteristically (for our profession) viral and rapid way, videogame services in libraries broke through the niche, cult-like status that had relegated them to something only geeky nerds did at home in the basement. As videogaming went mainstream in the United States with the introduction of new games and consoles that appeal to a much broader audience, so, too, did it gain traction in all types of libraries. In many places, the immediate reaction to "videogames and libraries" is no longer an automatic, "No way," but rather a, "Let's talk about it—this might have some value for us." In a year that saw two high-profile attempted library closure cases (Jackson County, Oregon, and the Environmental Protection Agency) and increased funding pressures across the country, videogames overwhelmingly generated positive reviews, reactions, and support in many communities.

In this follow-up to my 2006 volume on this subject, we can acknowledge this success but take a step back and examine a more holistic view of gaming in libraries, because despite the emergence of videogames in libraries over the last three years, gaming in libraries in general is not new at all.

Historically, libraries have provided services that were either directly or tangentially related to gaming. For example, chess clubs have met in libraries for decades. Many libraries have board-game collections available for in-house use or for circulation. Most weekday afternoons, kids take over public library computers to play *Runescape*

and other online games with their friends. And then there is the summer reading program public libraries offer every year. As Liz Lawley noted in her closing keynote speech at the 2006 Internet Librarian conference, what is summer reading other than a giant game to get kids to read? "It's really a game for kids—it has rules, guidelines, a goal, and prizes—and it works for more than just kids."[2]

In 2007, Eli Neiburger, Associate Director of Information Technology and Product Development at the Ann Arbor District Library, published the first full book on this subject.[3] *Gamers . . . in the Library?!* has found a wide audience within the profession because it explains why gaming is a legitimate library service on its own and is not just a loss leader to get kids in the door. It details how to run gaming tournaments on any budget and offers a wealth of advice and recommendations for gamers and nongamers alike. In the first chapter, titled "This Is a Library, Not an Arcade and Other Entirely Artificial Distinctions," Neiburger compares offering social gameplay to storytime (in fact, the draft subtitle of the book was "Just Like Storytime, Only Louder and Smellier").

> We've found how beneficial it can be to take the content our users would normally consume individually, at home, and make a social event out of that consumption. We're adding value. Sure, Dad could check out and take home *Who Took My Hairy Toe?* and read it at bedtime, and that's great, but it's even better when parent and child can come to the library together, hear Shutta Crum read it her way, and laugh, smile, and be scared along with other parents and children. The added value is the quality of the storyteller,

the distinct, engrossing experience, and the social interaction for kids and parents that at-home consumption of content does not provide. . . . Hosting a videogame tournament at your library is just like storytime. You're taking content that players would normally consume at home . . . , adding distinct value to the experience, and building a highly social event out of it. This is as traditional as library programs get. It's what we do![4]

A Look Forward

In this issue, we'll spend less time looking at the gaming world outside the profession in order to focus on the more unique services libraries have begun implementing. The previous issue was intentionally a broad overview to help introduce a relatively new topic and stimulate discussion within libraries. Similarly, this volume is not meant to be an academic treatise; rather, it is a view from the ground level up for—and for the most part by—practitioners who want to explore the wider range of intersections with gaming in our profession.

While more and more libraries of all types are offering open play and tournaments for videogames, others are returning to more traditional roots of gaming services in libraries, and an ambitious group of librarians pioneers new services with new audiences. As we will see in the next chapter (and indeed throughout this volume), gaming services are not new at all in libraries, and there are many ways to incorporate new ones into familiar, existing services.

We will hear from nine innovators in the field, each of whom spent 2007 taking gaming in libraries in new directions, providing inspiration and leadership. I have had the good fortune to meet most of these people in person and learn firsthand from them how their unique, broader vision of gaming can transform library services, making them even more educational and/or social and/or interactive. Their efforts to teach others the benefits of gaming (for patrons and librarians) has inspired me, and I thank them for their courage and dedication to providing the models that help illustrate the whats, whys, and hows for what can sometimes be a difficult-to-understand-how-this-relates-to-libraries topic. Talking points at the end of each chapter summarize the themes of the case studies and can be used when discussing gaming services in libraries.

One last note about recent developments outside of the library world. In 2007, P3: Power Play Publishing released *The Videogame Style Guide and Reference Manual* and noted the official spelling of *video games* as one word *(videogames),* not two.[5] I have had trouble adapting to this convention myself, but this *LTR* represents my first full effort to finally integrate this new spelling into my own writing. Therefore, although it may look strange to you at first, I will be using the single-word reference throughout this publication. Hopefully it will have become second nature to all of us when we get to the end.

> The Videogame Style Guide
> and Reference Manual
> www.gamestyleguide.com

Finally, this issue of *Library Technology Reports* is dedicated to Brent and Kailee, who first taught me the power of videogames, and both of whom I still miss very much. I also want to thank Kathryn Deiss, who teaches me something new every day and inspires me to look at the world in new ways.

Notes

1. "Top 10 Library Stories of 2007," *American Libraries* 38, no. 11: 48, as cited on the *American Libraries* Forum Web site, http://al.ala.org/forum/viewtopic.php?p=21 (accessed Dec. 20, 2007).
2. Elizabeth Lane Lawley, "Social Computing and the Information Professional" (closing keynote address, Internet Librarian 2006 conference, Monterey, CA, Oct. 23–25, 2006), discussed in Jenny Levine, "Social Computing and the Information Professional," The Shifted Librarian blog, Oct. 26, 2006, http://theshiftedlibrarian .com/archives/2006/10/26/20061025_03_il_social _computing_and_the_information_professional.html (accessed Jan. 13, 2008).
3. Eli Neiburger, *Gamers . . . in the Library?! The Why, What, and How of Videogame Tournaments for All Ages* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2007).
4. Ibid., p. 10.
5. David Thomas, Kyle Orland, and Scott Steinberg, *The Videogame Style Guide and Reference Manual* (Power Play Publishing, 2007), p. 65.