an invaluable text for those working on LEGO (aided by a comprehensive resource guide included in an appendix) and related transmedia phenomena but it also offers an example of the depth and detail for which such scholarship should strive. Jason Mittell's afterword thoughtfully cautions against allowing such inquiry to codify into a discipline. Instead, he urges readers to "take inspiration from its cross-disciplinary strengths and keen insights, but also recognize its gaps" (p. 272). The book primes the reader for this very sort of engagement, offering rich insights, thorough research, and sharp analyses and providing models of exploration that are as carefully considered and open-ended as the LEGO system itself.

—Meredith Bak, *Rutgers University-Camden, Camden, NJ*

Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds
Joseph P Laycock
Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015. Notes, bibliography, index. 349 pp. $29.95 paper.
ISBN: 9780520284920

I am old enough to remember what Joseph P. Laycock describes as the 1980's "moral panic" concerning Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). I was a casual player of the game at that time, and I also enjoyed the Saturday morning D&D television series that aired from 1983 to 1985. My parents, to their credit, never bought into the anti-

D&D hype that Laycock explores—I think they harbored a fundamental mistrust of evangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson—yet, neither did they join in my or my sister's game sessions or even ask much about D&D.

Laycock's general thesis is that role-playing games (RPGs) and religion share a number of characteristics, including their construction of multiple worlds and the ability of their adherents or players to move between these worlds (and also to transform themselves through this movement) and that both games and religion can be viewed using the same set of cultural and sociological lenses. He also asserts that religion essentially needed to attack role-playing games, especially D&D, to assert its own "reality" and relevance during a time when such concepts were commonly being called into question sociologically (the rise of cults and the increase in urban and suburban violence, for example) and through the media (the proliferation of occult-based films and books as well as evangelical programming). Ironically, Laycock argues, the very role-playing games that the Christian right and parental concern groups such as BADD (Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons) were attacking could be used to deconstruct their own agendas and to point out the constructed nature and potential abuses of religion when viewed as game.

Laycock's book is divided into two parts: first, a well-researched description of the moral panic concerning D&D and other role-playing games from the 1970s through the 1990s; and, second, a cultural analysis of this moral panic. In the first section, Laycock presents meticulous

research into the events of the early role-playing game era, from the development of D&D and other RPGs, such as Vampire: the Masquerade, to crime stories to media reportage. This section gathers disparate strands in a thorough and compelling fashion, painting a picture of American society (particularly middle-class suburban U.S. society) struggling to come to grips with new paradigms in play and in youthful identity seeking. Reading these chapters brought back memories of my elementary school classmates debating whether Bloody Mary would appear in the bathroom mirror if we called her. Such was the period I grew up in: the occult was almost a part of daily conversation.

In the second section, Laycock weaves his historical research together with sociological analysis, pointing to ways in which self-styled religious leaders and talk show hosts influenced the thinking of millions of Americans, connecting dots between crime and role-playing games in ways that benefitted these media figures. Here, also, Laycock points to ways in which these ideas continue to echo through present-day culture, from schools forbidding children to act out super-hero roles to the moral panic ten years ago over the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* series and their narratives about wizards, werewolves, and vampires. Easy answers and unexamined connections between play and violence, Laycock suggests, are detrimental to the health of society.

I found much to recommend in this book, especially Laycock's extensive research into the early days of role-playing games and their place in the U.S. media web of the 1970s and 1980s. As someone who studies "geek culture" and gaming in particular, this is a corner of my world not often explored by academics. Compared to today's common testimonials about how D&D allows players to build their identities, imagine new realities, and even affect social change, the events and ideas Laycock writes about were truly horrifying. I also found his connections between gaming and religion to be inspired.

Yet, in spite of these successes, I would question two elements of the book, one minor and one more significant. First, I take issue with Laycock's assertion that "Much ink has been spilled over such problems as whether fantasy role-playing games are more like a game, a narrative, or a performance. To remain relevant, the study of fantasy role-playing games must expand its horizons and seek new directions of analysis" (p. 12). As a performance studies scholar, I think the question whether RPG's are games, narratives, or performances is extremely relevant to both sociological and cultural analyses; indeed, definitions (which continue to drive debate) are crucial to our common understanding of any given performative act, including gaming.

But, as I said, this is a minor quibble. More significant in my mind is that, as noted, Laycock devotes much of the book is to sociocultural events from the 1970s through the 1990s, with particular emphasis on the 1980s. This leads the analysis section to focus on these events to engage questions about organized religion, the media, crime, and play and imagination. This historically based strategy works well when Laycock adresses historical events, but I wish he had given more weight to today's issues such as costumes in schools, the rise of fan culture and children's

place within it, and online fantasy-based creative-writing spaces. Even a mention of sociological and cultural relevance of D&D in its most recent incarnation (D&D Fifth Edition) would have been welcomed. I hope that other scholars pick up Laycock's threads and explore today's player transformation, world building, and cultural contexts.

In the final analysis, this book deserves a place in the library of any scholar of games as cultural texts—and especially those interested in religion and games. I will refer to the text often as both an effective analysis of the impact RPGs have on culture and as a masterful example of historical research into play and its place in society.

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Playing to Win: Sports, Video Games, and the Culture of Play
Robert Alan Brookey and Thomas P. Oates, eds.
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015. Introduction, contributors, index. 251 pp. $26.00 paper.
ISBN: 9780253015020

In assembling the collection of scholarship that comprises *Playing to Win*, Robert Alan Brookey and Thomas P. Oates make a solid contribution to the growing body of literature analyzing sports video games. Relying on a group of researchers from sports studies and video game studies, the book offers great diversity in its coverage

of why we should take sports video games seriously and offers critical insights into how we can think about them meaningfully. The major drawback of the book is one of timing, because much of the work seems to be written well before the book was published.

Divided into two sections, "Gender Play" and "The Uses of Simulation," Brookey and Oates set up the volume with an introduction that lays out the importance of sports video games by invoking games from *Pong* (1972) to *Madden NFL* (1988, 1990–present) to demonstrate that sports games are a key part of both a video game history and the contemporary video game market. Chapters range in focus, but most address representations of sports in video games like *Madden*, *FIFA*, and *Pro Evolution Soccer*. However, some contributions reach beyond the text of video games and consider elements like fantasy sports, e-sports, and the advertising surrounding games.

The strength of the collection is its breadth. In taking on a number of different kinds of topics, Brookey and Oates have assembled a collection that encourages the reader to think beyond any singular way of examining sports games. For example, I find the inclusion of an analysis of fantasy sports players in chapter 4 particularly commendable.

Beyond the specific topics discussed, the group of authors also demonstrates a commitment to multiple methodologies because it includes scholars from a number of fields—most notably some who primarily analyze video games and some who primarily analyze sport. The mix of the two groups may sometimes leave one or the other wanting more, but overall the

In "Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds", Joseph P. Laycock argues, "Much of the energy that evangelicals put into framing fantasy role-playing games as either madness or a heretical religion was actually a defense mechanism to assuage their own doubts. Dungeons & Dragons controversies concern the role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), which receives significant attention in the media and in popular culture. The game sometimes received negative coverage, especially in the early 1980s during the game's early years. Because the term D&D may be mistakenly used to refer to all types of role-playing games, some controversies regarding D&D mistakenly pertain to role-playing games in general, or to the literary genre of fantasy. Part of the Article contents. Abstract. Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion and Imagined Worlds. By Joseph P. Laycock . Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. xiv + 349 pp. $29.95 paper. Dangerous Games consists of eight chapters broken down into two parts, as well as a substantial introduction and conclusion. The introduction sketches out the categories of fantasy role-playing games and moral panic by theorizing "the complex relationship between fantasy role-playing games and religious worldviews" (13).