
This study describes interviews conducted with special collections librarians and archivists at Duke University, Bowling Green State University, the University of California-Riverside, Indiana University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to determine how role-playing games are collected and used in these institutions’ special collections, particularly those with an emphasis on similar themes and formats in popular culture.

Each librarian and archivist reported heavy usage of his or her institution’s popular culture collections and that such items have varied applications across a variety of academic disciplines. Yet, while they do not all actively collect role-playing games and related ephemera for the reasons identified in this study, they agreed that role-playing games will increase in popularity as a collecting focus in university special collections.

Headings:

College and university libraries – Special collections

Collection development in special libraries

Popular literature
ROLE-PLAYING GAMES IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: IDENTIFYING REASONS FOR UNDERREPRESENTATION AND POTENTIAL VALUE FOR RESEARCHERS

by
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1. INTRODUCTION

Role-playing games (RPGs) are a popular form of entertainment in which participants take on the role of fictional characters and interact with others to act out a story or adventure, typically in a fantasy or science-fiction setting (Schick 8). The RPG as it is known today had its inception in the 1970s and exists in many forms including tabletop games, live-action RPGs, video games, and massive multi-player online RPGs (MMORPGs). Despite being maligned at times for their appeal to societal outcasts and for a mistaken belief that such games encouraged dabbling in witchcraft and a loss of touch with reality, RPGs have remained more or less consistently popular over the decades. Their appeal has grown in recent years as teachers and librarians have realized RPGs’ value as a tool for teaching cooperation and problem-solving in an imaginative way (Bowman 61).

To that end, many public and school libraries have begun to include RPG material in their collecting scopes, often as a way of encouraging younger patrons to take part in a constructive social activity, sometimes in the context of formal game sessions. Consequently, a moderate amount of literature has appeared in the last few years illustrating the value of acquiring RPG materials and providing guidelines for public librarians on how best to incorporate such items into a collection. However, while many special libraries acquire thematically similar material (comic books, graphic novels, science fiction books and ephemera) very few have made the decision to acquire RPG
materials and there exists almost no literature on the subject. The ultimate goal of this research paper is to explore the reasons why few special libraries have opted to acquire this type of material.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lawrence Schick defines a role-playing game as any form of “quantified interactive storytelling” in which a participant or a group of participants take on the roles of fictional characters (either self-created or taken from an existing source) and play as these characters to act out a story or adventure (Schick 8). In addition to players, most RPGs often have one participant who serves as the designated “Game Master” (GM), the director/referee/storyteller who guides the action for the players (Schick 9). RPGs typically take place in fantasy or science-fiction settings, but can draw from just about any genre, and they exist in many different forms. Tabletop RPGs are conducted in small groups, often using pencil, paper, dice, and miniatures as supplements to enhance the gaming experience; Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), the first mass-produced and arguably the most famous RPG, is an example of this type. The tabletop category also incorporates collectible card game RPGs, like Magic: the Gathering. Live-action roleplaying (or LARPing) is a rather more theatrical type of RPG in which groups of various sizes use costumes and props to act out a story (Stark 11). RPGs also exist in different forms of electronic media such as video games or online RPGs. Some of the latter are designed so that large numbers of players can participate at once, a fact which coined the phrase “MMORPG” or “massive multiplayer online role playing game,” of which World of Warcraft (WoW) is one of the best-known examples (Winget).

These are only a few examples of the various RPGs that have been published over the years. There are literally hundreds of different RPG titles that are available for purchase, and this number does not include the various homebrewed RPG systems. It is well
beyond the scope of this review to try and explore each RPG; however, it is necessary to understand the history and significance of the most iconic of RPGs in order to demonstrate the impact that these games had on popular culture.

Participant-driven storytelling has existed for centuries, but the modern RPG has its roots in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, when war games or “kriegspiel” were popular among the European militaries as a type of training exercise (Ewalt 33). These games simulated military maneuvers using playing pieces and battle mats; dice were rolled to simulate randomness and a referee kept score and dictated the movement of “troops.” More elaborate setups used miniatures to represent troops and had battle mats that included scaled terrain. Such was kriegspiel’s popularity that the games gained a following outside of the military, and the first mass-marketed war game was released in 1913 (Ewalt 34). These games continued to be popular well into the twentieth century (Peterson 6).

In the early 1970s, University of Minnesota students and war game enthusiasts E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson adapted these war game rules to develop a fantasy adventure module which became popular among the local war gaming circles. These homebrewed modules would eventually develop into the world’s first commercially-available RPG, Dungeons & Dragons (“Dragons in the stacks” 64). Launched in 1974, D&D laid the foundation for just about every other fantasy RPG that came after and spawned numerous similar games; some of these games consisted of original material, others were based on existing popular culture, such as the Star Trek RPG or Call of Cthulhu, an RPG based on H.P. Lovecraft’s stories (“Dragons in the stacks” 64). D&D was hugely popular, selling millions of copies in its early years. In spite of—or perhaps
because of—increased notoriety in the 1980s due to a rash of unfounded speculations that linked the pastime to Satanism and occult practices, D&D enjoyed strong sales up through the 1990s, when video game RPGs began to cut into its profits (Ewalt 100). It is, however, enjoying something of a resurgence today, due in no small part to the popularity of blockbuster fantasy films such as the Lord of the Rings trilogy (Peterson 7). With nearly thirty years of history, five editions, and hundreds of books and miniatures to supplement the gaming experience, D&D remains the world’s most iconic RPG and an important part of popular culture during the second half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Educators’ and librarians’ attitudes toward RPGs began to shift in the early 2000s. While these games had previously been viewed with indifference or even scorn—fueled in no small part by the lingering associations with Satanism and deviant behavior—RPGs suddenly became viewed as a valuable learning tool for stimulating creativity, teaching teamwork, and encouraging further reading and study (Bowman 24). This value stems from the fact that players are the ones who drive the narrative, and the games therefore have the potential to be more engaging than watching a fantasy movie (Shick 67). As online RPGs have become more popular, researchers have begun investigating ways in which MMORPGs such as Second Life can be used to facilitate online learning.

The implications for public and school libraries are especially significant, as these institutions have long supported games, social events, storytelling, and theatre as methods of enriching the community (“Everyone plays”). In a 2011 article from the journal Collection Building, Dan Sich advocates that libraries with a tradition of supporting these types of activities for their patrons should consider adding RPGs to their programming
and their collecting focus. Scott Nicholson, an assistant professor at Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies and an authority on game use in libraries, has written a number of articles advocating that libraries consider expanding their collection development policies to include RPGs. Nicholson found that over seventy percent of public libraries support gaming in some form (“Playing in the past”), and he expects that this number will increase.

A small body of collection development literature has appeared within the past decade in order to advise librarians of the best-practice policies for adding RPGs to a library’s collecting scope. Cason Snow advocates purchasing RPGs from local game stores in order to support local businesses and to give librarians the chance to examine the product first-hand; purchasing RPGs and related materials from the publishers or from online booksellers are alternate options (“Dragons in the stacks” 68). In addition, many RPGs are available for purchase in PDF format (Sich 63). In early 2013 for instance, Wizards of the Coast, the company that owns Dungeons & Dragons, announced that it would be making hundreds of “vintage” D&D modules, books, and supplements available for purchase as PDFs (Gilsdorf). Sich however advises against purchasing PDFs so as to avoid running into issues related to copyright restriction and instead suggests that libraries use free downloadable RPGs (Sich 64). Another option is for libraries to purchase an RPG subscription service; the cost for such services is relatively low and they provide tools such as character builders and pre-generated adventures that can be useful (Vos 24).

RPGs have largely remained a collecting domain for public and school libraries, although there are some select academic and special collections which acquire such
material. For example, the Murray RPG Collection at Duke University contains thousands of RPG games, cards, miniatures, and magazines. It is the largest collection of its kind in existence and the only one dedicated exclusively to the collection and preservation of RPG materials (Lewis 167). Various other special collections contain examples of RPG materials, but these items do not represent a major collecting focus for these repositories and are typically part of a larger collection of popular culture materials that often includes graphic novels, comic books, video games, and ephemera related to science-fiction or fantasy books and movies. There is a growing interest in this type of material for use in scholarship related to literature, history, and popular culture (Buhle). RPGs have applications in all of these areas of scholarship, and are additionally of potential interest to researchers studying psychology and human behavior, due to the games’ increasingly being used to promote social skills and cooperation.

Yet while RPGs have a long and important history both as a form of recreation and as a learning tool, they have applications in many disciplines and areas of study and are being incorporated into collection development scopes, it is interesting to note that very few special collections, particularly in universities, have made a similar decision. This research will attempt to explore and to gain an understanding of the reasons why RPGs remain an underrepresented collecting focus in special collections.
3. METHODOLOGY

For purposes of this study, the researcher used as the operational definition of RPG the definition provided by Schick and outlined in the literature review. Thus, the RPGs and associated materials can take just about any form, so long as they are a form of interactive storytelling involving a player or group of players taking on the roles of fictional characters for entertainment or educational purposes. The main emphasis of the research was on tabletop and card RPGs, as most of the collections investigated seem to focus upon these types of material. A couple of the identified repositories do specialize in video games, and these curators were able to provide insight into the growing interest in these items.

The first step in the methodology was to identify special collections with curators who are knowledgeable about RPGs, particularly with regard to collection development. The repositories ultimately fell into one of two categories: those that contained RPG materials, and those that did not but that had a collecting scope that focuses on thematically similar popular culture materials. If a repository contained any RPG materials, they were counted in the first category. By focusing upon those who collect thematically similar items to RPGs, the researcher hoped to be able to come to conclusions regarding why these types of games are underrepresented.

To that end, the researcher identified the following special collections upon which to focus for purposes of this research:

- Edwin and Terry Murphy Collection of Role-Playing Games, 1972-2009, Duke University
• Games and Trading Card Collections, Bowling Green State University (BGSU)
• Eaton Collection, University of California at Riverside (UCR)
• Slocum Puzzle Collection, Indiana University (IU)
• Gaming Initiative, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

Other collections which were considered were the Cary Collection of Playing Cards at Yale University and the UT Videogame Archive at the University of Texas-Austin. These repositories were not consulted for a variety of reasons, the foremost of which was that neither had on staff an archivist or curator who was sufficiently knowledgeable about the collection’s history and acquisition.

The researcher selected these repositories after some initial consultation with Will Hansen, assistant curator of collections at Duke University’s Rubenstein Library and an authority on RPGs and special collections. As a result of his work with Duke’s Murray Collection and professional collaboration, Hansen is familiar with various archivists and curators who specialize in these items, and was able to provide a list of potential repositories which might be of interest. Each of these repositories either contains RPG materials or collects thematically similar materials such that RPGs could theoretically fit within the collecting scope.

Following the identification of suitable repositories, the researcher contacted the curators of said repositories to determine if they would be willing to assist in the research process. A list of interview questions was formulated, which were subsequently submitted to the research adviser and to the UNC-Chapel Hill IRB and revised accordingly based on feedback.
The ultimate goal of the interview questions was to try and gauge the following main points:

1. Types and formats of materials collected
2. Reasons for deciding/not deciding to include RPGs in the collecting scope
3. Research value of the materials
4. Any challenges or special considerations associated with collecting RPG materials

Interviews, with the exception of one subject whom the researcher spoke with in person, were conducted via telephone. Prior to each interview, the subject was sent both the interview questions and the consent form via e-mail to allow him or her the opportunity to review the material. The length of each interview varied, with the shortest lasting twenty-five minutes and the longest taking just under an hour. During the interviews, the researcher took notes on a laptop, creating a separate document for each subject. These notes were later collated into a single file to allow for more convenient perusal.

Following the interviews, the researcher examined the responses and sought to determine whether there were common themes in the participants’ responses to the questions. There were two possible outcomes of the data analysis: if the interviewees’ responses displayed a number of similar answers, then one can reasonably assume that there are issues and trends common to most repositories that collect RPG material and, if these issues were addressed, could lead to a rise in the collection of RPG items. If the replies are varied, the information is nevertheless valuable as one could conclude that the
lack of consensus among curators on how to collect such items is itself one of the reasons for why RPG materials are underrepresented in repositories.
4. LIMITATIONS

The largest and most obvious limitation of this research is that the researcher consulted with a small, select group of archivists and curators rather than a random sampling from a larger pool of subjects. This was deemed necessary for purposes of the study, as not all curators will have knowledge about the collecting value of RPG items and thematically similar materials—hence the emphasis on curators with a collecting focus in popular culture, especially popular culture related to science fiction/fantasy or games.

However, it is of course necessary to note that the opinions that these experts express regarding the collecting of RPGs do not represent the entire picture of why RPG materials are an underrepresented area in most special collections. More research will need to be conducted among curators and among potential donors of RPG materials to account for that discrepancy. Nevertheless, this research provides an initial exploration into these reasons.
5. FINDINGS

5.1 Review of Holdings

The Edwin and Terry Murray Collection of Role-Playing Games, housed at Duke University’s Rubenstein Library, is the most comprehensive collection of RPGs consulted for this study, and is the largest institutional collection of this nature in the country. The collection consists of 450 boxed sets of gaming material and around 2,300 printed volumes such as modules for game universes and rulebooks. There is also a series of magazines, fanzines, and serials on the topic of RPGs. The collection, in addition to this material, also contains dice, battle mats, and miniatures used in playing tabletop RPGs. Finally, the collection also houses a series of manuscripts and notebooks that the Murray brothers—the donors of the materials--created for their games; these items consist of handwritten notecards containing character statistics and hand-drawn maps of dungeons. In total, the collection is around 250 linear feet and consists of over 10,000 separate items.

The other repositories consulted do not contain nearly as extensive a collection of RPG material, though all do contain a wide variety of thematically-similar items. BGSU maintains a small, topic-specific collection of RPG materials and cards, but it is not intended to be a comprehensive, research level collection. The Eaton Collection at UCR specializes in science fiction books, monographs, manuscripts, fanzines, ephemera, and realia but also houses a small number of RPG items. UIUC’s Gaming Initiative, while collecting mainly vintage and currently-circulating video games, has also made some small purchases of scenario guides, adventure modules, and D&D rulebooks. Only IU’s Slocum Puzzle Collection has made no move toward acquiring RPG material for the
collection, although curator Andrew Rhoda acknowledges that they may move in this direction in the future.

5.2 Reasons for Collecting

The interviews reveal that often the impetus for including RPG materials in a university special collections is that a former curator or dean was particularly interested in these items as an area in which to focus collection development. Often, they choose to focus on RPGs or related materials because these items are directly related to a particular university’s curriculum or areas of specialization. For example, the Browne Popular Culture Library at BGSU was founded in 1969 as a response to BGSU being the first American university to offer a major and minor in popular culture. Dr. Browne developed the library as a resource for students specializing in these academic areas. UIUC had a long history of focusing on engineering and the sciences, which made video games a logical collecting focus when a former head of collections was exploring unique areas in which the university libraries could create collection development specialties.

Duke’s Murray Collection is unique in that the special collections librarians did not initially intend to acquire RPGs for the University’s special collections. Instead, the collection came in the context of a larger “pulp culture” collection donated by two brothers and consisting mainly of comic books and science fiction materials. The RPG items were included with this larger donation, and the University decided that it wanted to add these items to the collection as well.

“It’s distinctive, no other library is collecting it intensively, and the Duke library could make a name for itself,” said Will Hansen of the rationale to acquire the RPG materials.
It’s a topic of increasing interest at Duke because it connects to all sorts of literary genres and gender issues. So it had connections to other collecting scopes at Duke. Also, these items, while readily available now, will someday probably not be so it’s good to have them before they become “collectible.”

5.3 Value for Research and Curriculum

A common theme observed during the interviews is that students and researchers at the various institutions consulted are using RPG materials specifically and popular culture items in general with increasing frequency. A second observation was that such items have applications in a wide variety of subject areas extending beyond game theory and the history of gaming.

One of the most common reasons RPG materials and related popular culture materials are studied is in conjunction with literature courses or literary analysis. “There is a science fiction studies designated emphasis,” said Melissa Conway, head of special collections and archives at UCR. “We have three professors who teach in the area and who ended up coming [to the Eton Collection] based on the strength of our collection.” Hansen echoed this view, noting that classes in utopian literature and vampire literature have used the Murray Collection has supplements to the course reading, as did Nancy Down, head of BGSU’s Browne Popular Culture Library, who explained that there is currently a great deal of interest in the study of comic books and romance novels, and that these items in particular are heavily used by students, faculty, and outside researchers. Even the Slocum Puzzle Collection has literary ties: “Poe and Carroll, for instance, were fascinated by puzzle theory,” says curator Andrew Rhoda, “and there was a course comparing puzzles to literary theory and analysis.”
Additionally, many of the special collection librarians consulted reported that their RPG and popular culture items have ties to disciplines other than literature, ranging from art to mathematics and beyond.

“Quite a few departments use the puzzle collection for reference and for teaching classes, in addition to the more obvious entertainment value. An art professor regularly uses the puzzle collection, and teaches an entire class on puzzles and art—how puzzles can be art objects in addition to being mental exercises. Advertising and marketing related to the puzzles also has research value. Elementary schools come in and use the collection as part of their teaching, though generally not part of a particular class but as a way of getting kids interested in math. The math department uses the collection for research, as do cognitive scientists, who sometimes include the collection in their coursework.”—Andrew Rhoda.

“The library science school is very interested in libraries collecting games. The communications and media studies department use the collection fairly regularly. They had a class studying portrayals of Native Americans in popular media—vintage games and current games, etc. But our main research needs have been for a ‘preserving virtual worlds’ project.”—David Ward, reference services librarian at UIUC

The ties to video games are especially significant, as many RPGs are available in video game format and are thematically similar in a number of ways. As video games become an object of increasing cultural significance, so too will RPGs by extension:

“As a format, there is also increasing interest in material culture and “media archaeology” and other kinds of disciplines kind of related to the history of the book. One of the interesting things about this collection is that it’s related to the development of video games and computer games. They fall on this continuum and inspired a lot of these types of game. As people research these, they’ll want to consult RPGs”—Will Hansen

5.4 Issues Associated with Collection Development

As a collecting focus, RPGs and associated materials present several unique obstacles for the special collections librarian. Such obstacles include various concerns related to acquisition and preservation. The question of how best to acquire, describe, and preserve
such items has likely contributed to the fact that many special collections are hesitant to incorporate these materials into existing collections.

With regard to acquisition of the actual items, the most significant issue that subjects reported was that potential donors of RPG material typically do not view their items as being of academic interest. “The people who deal in this sort of material and who are the practitioners of the field don’t have much of a history of partnering with institutions that might collect this sort of thing. Not a lot of people are aware that libraries would actually want some of this stuff,” Hansen said. Attempts by the Duke University library to acquire additional historical materials from the creators of D&D failed to come to fruition for essentially this reason.

A second collection development issue is that RPGs can consist of video game consoles, boxed game sets, and various other realia in addition to books and manuscripts. This means that special collection staff that are primarily versed in preserving more “traditional” materials must become educated in and at times engineer solutions for the safe storage and use of more unusual items. It can be a daunting task that may make many repositories hesitate in collecting RPGs and related material, even if they had an interested donor. Games, especially board games, can be particularly challenging in part because of the number of associated pieces, all of which must be accounted for in the item description and checked for after each use by a patron.

“There are particular conservation or housing needs to address because the items are 3-D, have many pieces, lots are fragile. Some have mercury or other toxic materials (mercury was added for dexterity purposes). This in addition to more “normal” curatorial work. . . . The size of some items makes them difficult to handle. Housing is an issue. Wooden puzzles can be problematic because you need to acclimate them to new environments to deal with humidity. We do have an offsite storage facility, and that does help with the storage issues.”—Andrew Rhoda
“The Murray collection sat unprocessed for about a decade because it’s a daunting collection in terms of material type. We had a number of interesting conversations about processing challenges. One challenge is the sheer range of formats and materials and how exactly to preserve those materials and what guidelines to have in place for use of the materials. . . . the collection came with lots of “loose” miniatures in addition to ones still preserved in packaging. [The manufacturers] cheaply produced objects intended for immediate use and there was absolutely no intention for them to be preserved for long term use. The alloys were cheap, and some [miniatures] were malformed and disfigured as a result of this. We made the decision to preserve everything in an original package. Loose [miniatures] were either returned or discarded because we had no way of classifying what they were. The exceptions were the hand painted minis and some that were mass-produced but were in very good shape. Housing is still a challenge because [these items] are currently wrapped in acid free paper in boxes. It’s hard to find what you’re looking for.”—Will Hansen.

Finally, special collections must determine how best to describe these holdings such that users can determine if an item will be useful and how to best go about locating it in a finding aid. Given that RPG collections usually consist of a variety of materials other than books and manuscripts and collect items from a number of gaming companies, curators must develop unique ways to represent the contents of a collection.

“There were questions about whether to describe [the materials] in a finding aid or whether to catalog them and have catalog records. Ultimately we have kind of a hybrid—they have barcodes but are also listed within the finding aid for the collection. It’s the most sensible way to give researchers access to all of the items. With the finding aid itself, it has an Excel spreadsheet with all the materials listed so that people can sort by the “universe” and a number of other characteristics”—Will Hansen.

5.5 The “Stigma” of collecting RPGs

In spite of the various challenges associated with building relationships with potential donors, determining best practices for preservation, and crafting useful finding aids, many of the subjects interviewed cited “academic snobbery” as one of the main reasons why RPGs—and popular culture items in general—remain underrepresented in
university special collections in spite of the considerable value that such items have for curriculum and research needs. Whereas the value of manuscripts, books, and other materials related to more “serious” disciplines is usually not questioned, “people, particularly in academic libraries, need to establish that there is a curricular or research need for popular culture materials,” according to David Ward. It is a stigma that dates back to early debates about the librarian’s role as “gatekeeper” and the notion that “low culture” has no place in an institution of higher learning. Early curators of popular culture have had to justify their collecting decisions since academic libraries first began to take an interest in popular culture. Nancy Down noted that BGSU’s early courses in popular culture were not viewed highly by the faculty in the more serious disciplines, and Melissa Conway noted similar skepticism at UCR:

“The University librarian when the [Eton] collection was placed at Riverside liked science fiction, and his reasoning was that if no libraries collected science fiction and it was this popular, then someone ought to be collecting it. It was a visionary approach, and it was ridiculed at the time. The collection languished and the librarian moved away. The person who succeeded him had a similar philosophy. But still, professors who wrote in that area were not given respect. [Science fiction] was not considered literature, not considered to be of any real importance.”—Melissa Conway

These negative attitudes persist but are slowly becoming more positive as games become a more popular area of study and also as older librarians and curators retire. The earliest RPGs came into existence in the 1970s and 1980s and as individuals who grew up with the games enter curatorial professions, the idea of these games as items worthy of collection becomes less far-fetched:

“It could be a generational thing. Special collections librarians who are entering the field have exposure to growing up with this sort of thing, and are therefore maybe more open to seeing academic applications. There are also academics who are more interested in this sort of thing.”—Will Hansen.
6. CONCLUSIONS

RPGs have been a popular recreation activity for several decades and constitute a significant area of popular culture. In spite of this, RPGs remain an underrepresented collecting area in university special collections, even in those with a focus on similar themes in popular culture. As has been explored in this paper, there are numerous reasons for this underrepresentation, including unique issues related to item preservation, a prevailing attitude of disdain toward collecting such items at academic institutions, and a lack of awareness on the part of both donors and repositories that RPGs are a potential collecting area.

The future of RPGs as an area of interest for collection development is uncertain but as popular culture items become of increasing interest to researchers, it seems likely that more academic institutions will seek to acquire RPGs and related materials for their special collections. All of the subjects interviewed agreed that popular culture is considerably more respected as an area of academic interest today than it was in decades past:

“Critics of the Beatles derided them, but today we realize their importance and their influence. We can no longer ignore popular culture’s influence, for what it’s done for science, for space travel, for its impact on literature (like Philip K. Dick). A lot has changed.”—Melissa Conway

“I was an English major and would never have read science fiction or romance. That has really changed. [Popular culture] is more integrated into the disciplines. Popular culture now has more respect than it ever had.”—Nancy Down.

“I think it’s inevitable that RPGs are going to become more collectible. It might be in the context of sci fi items or things related to a particular author, but they will be more commonplace in special collections. Collectors are also going to try and find an institutional home for the materials, and those with the money will
potentially want to endow a collection in the field. This sort of item might inevitably be collected in a museum context as well.”—Will Hansen

In addition to the issues already addressed in the paper, curators may face challenges related to the collection of emerging types of popular culture, such as electronic popular culture, or even internet culture. Nancy Down says that BGSU is exploring various options of collecting and studying this type of information, such as data mining, and it is probable that other universities will follow suit. As collection of RPG materials becomes increasingly popular, archivists will also wish to develop collection development standards or best practice guidelines to help advise archivists who are making their first forays into this area. The development of such guidelines and the challenges associated with collecting emerging varieties of popular culture could form the basis for future areas of research.

Regardless of whether or not RPGs become a well-developed collecting focus in university special collections, the fact that there is interest has significant connotations for what researchers, archivists, and instructors consider to be of value. Special collections have moved beyond the days where it was only acceptable to acquire books and manuscripts related to “serious” academic disciplines. RPGs are an indication that what has traditionally considered to be archival is evolving, and archivists and curators will need to change both their collecting practices and their notions of the archival profession in order to remain relevant.
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Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Please describe in detail the contents and/or collecting scope of the __________collection (will vary depending on the person consulted.) If the collection houses RPG materials, ask specifically about those.

2. How are these items used for research?

3. What is the value of collecting this sort of material?

If institution collects RPG materials:

4. Why did your institution make the decision to include these types of items in the collecting scope?

5. Did you face any unique challenges or issues associated with collecting RPG materials?

6. Why, in your opinion, do so few repositories choose to acquire this type of material?

If the institution does not collect RPG materials:

7. Has your institution ever considered including RPG materials in the collecting scope?

8. If so, why did you ultimately decide not to? If not, why was this not a consideration?

9. Why, in your opinion, do so few repositories choose to acquire this type of material?