



## Letters

To the Editor:

David Lewis Schaefer is spot on when he criticizes the field of Game Studies for its political bias and general lack of worthwhile content (“The Games That Academics Play,” Summer, 2020). I have been active in the field of game scholarship since 2001 and have watched the field mirror the bad trends of the humanities in general. I had hoped that game scholarship, being new, might go in a better direction. Alas, as Professor Schaefer points out, game studies is largely a leftist enterprise.

All is not lost, however. First, the content of games is generally everything a traditionalist would want it to be, with the result that game scholarship tends to be a stream of frustration hurled at the game industry—why can’t it be more progressive? In games—speaking in general terms, of course, as there are always exceptions—there are gods, and there is good and evil. That is a stark contrast to the generally godless and meaningless real world we have created, and is a powerful source of many games’ popularity. The human person yearns for significance and

nobility, a significance and nobility that our contemporary world, informed by our nihilist humanities departments, lacks. The games’ popularity also stems from their use of the trope of “lost civilization.” In almost all fantasy games, there is an ancient race of beings who did marvelous things; their ruins now dot the landscape. The protagonist’s goal is to uncover the ancient magic and use it to revitalize the world. This is the situation young people experience in daily life: Saint Patrick’s Cathedral stands as a reminder of a lost nobility amid a desert of steel-and-glass cubes in midtown Manhattan. It has been one-hundred years since the West lost its energy to build, write, and compose artifacts that uplift the human spirit. Gamers sense that something has been lost and they ache to bring it back. This yearning for a lost civilization was best and first expressed in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, a traditionalist, a conservative, and a Catholic. His influence on games is immense, and generally ignored by games studies scholars. He doesn’t fit the narrative. The fact that his ideas live on in games is a sign that people yearn for the world of long ago. All is not lost.

Secondly, we can be optimistic about games in the university because there is an engineering side to it. *AQ*

readers should pay strict attention to terms. “Game Studies” are the leftists. “Game Design” and “Game Development” are software engineers, whose modus operandi are closer to applied economics than anything else. Game designers try to build little societies that are entertaining to their users. They are concerned with incentives, utility, systems, and policy. Game design is a fascinating laboratory for social experimentation, and game designers are learning amazing things about the way human communities function. In a case from the early 2000s, for example, the designers of *Second Life* discovered that taxing people depressed their in-game activity, whereas granting them property rights and allowing them to retain the fruits of their labor increased it. Who knew?

Games are an important cultural artifact, one that deserves study by fair-minded scholars and, quite possibly, a powerful ally in the mission of organizations like NAS.

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To the Editor:

I read the article by Bruce Gilley in *Academic Questions* (Summer 2018) and I differ on his views on how to

help developing nations. He is suggesting that charter cities should be established near developing nations, so that they would have something to emulate.

My opinion is that knowledge that all men should know should be made available to the common people of developing nations by translating this knowledge into their vernaculars. With this knowledge, I am sure, they will bend their minds so that they could develop their vernacular cultures into something that will help them cope with modern life. Hence, the need for UNESCO and some other international body to help developing nations put up translation centers, so that these translations can happen.

Such was the case with England during the time of Alfred the Great in the Old World, and with Spain during the Middle Ages, when Alfonso X ordered the translation of all knowledge into Spanish and which ushered in the era of the Enlightenment during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella and the achievements of the Spanish Empire. For the Modern Period, I have Japan as an example, but I’m still researching the details of the Iwakura Mission during the Meiji Period in Japan.

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