

## Editorial

Gabriel Elvery and Francis Butterworth-Parr

Guest Editors for the Special Issue

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*Press Start* 2022 Editorial Board

### Vol. 8 No. 1: Digital Heroisms Special Issue (January 2022)

This special issue is the result of a collaboration between *Press Start* and the Digital Heroisms symposium (a student-run research initiative supported by the University of Glasgow). Digital Heroisms was scheduled to run in person on the 5th of August 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the in-person gathering and, instead, the event took place online. Given the symposium was created to bring together scholarship addressing the changing nature of heroism in a digital world, doing so in an online format—although initially unintended—was apt. The symposium was hosted on a Discord server and the video game *RuneScape* (Jagex, 2001) simultaneously, which allowed participants to be together, at a distance, using both webcams and a fantasy world. The event can be viewed on the [Glasgow Games and Gaming Lab](#) blog.

Our call for papers asked authors to consider the meaning of heroism in relation to the digital world. Where readers once understood heroism through a Gilgamesh, a Frodo, or a Katniss, the digital subject can now figure heroism through actions, decisions, and events that are in many ways their own. In a contemporary moment enabled and mediated by a multiplicity of digital spaces, the way we conceptualize heroism is both enabled and contaminated by games, the virtual, and ever-increasing screen time. We wanted to address questions such as how the realm of

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the digital, functioning as a receptacle of imagination, can equip players with the means to express the self, and consider how digital spaces can serve as a conduit for both ludic and fantastical impulses. We believe that heroic research must adapt to this interactive environment—its places, its communities, its values—if it is to keep a handle on the heroic constellation formed of digital, creative, and imaginative spaces. In order to explore this, the authors in this special issue address contemporary configurations of heroism situated across three distinct media landscapes.

This issue is the result of heroic efforts by our peer reviewers, editorial team and, most importantly, our authors who, under difficult circumstances, produced exceptional work. We thank you all!

With special thanks to the Digital Heroisms Organising Committee:  
Francis Butterworth-Parr (University of Glasgow)  
Gabriel Elvery (University of Glasgow)  
Jack Parkinson (University of Glasgow)  
Monica Vazquez (University of Glasgow)  
And the *Press Start* team.

Mairi Power's article, "'The New Heroism' in Jennifer Egan's 'Black Box'" explores how Egan's 2012 Twitter serialized novel "Black Box" experiments with new formulations of heroism native to 21st-century social media and gaming culture. Power deftly navigates the video gaming homages and metaphors, including but not limited to "the idea of tutorials, the contingency of gameplay, and the impression of control" (p. 6) in "Black Box" to expose video gaming's increasingly stark impression upon contemporary American fiction. Power's argument, that "the cyborg is tied to the collective female heroism endorsed by 'Black Box's' new heroism manifesto, amplifying the dualism of gender by separating these heroes on the basis of gender and not allowing these women the individual glory granted to the male hero" (p. 13), gestures towards a productive cyborgic identity produced in Egan's prose. This warrants further investigation, particularly at the intersections between game studies, literary studies, and contemporary feminism.

Next is Matthew Horrigan's "Playing for the Legend in the *Age of Empires II* Online Community," which leverages a new aesthetic mode of experiencing games lying outside purely agonistic objectives. Horrigan proposes "playing for the legend" as a valuable descriptor for emergent gameplay designed to delight in off-piste strategies. Horrigan deploys an eclectic, creative analysis of *Age of Empires II's* (Ensemble Studios, 1999) streaming, esports, and competitive communities to show how playing for the legend "expresses through competitive acts a persona whose charisma persists whether or not victory is attained" (p. 36). The author thereby offers game studies a nuanced framework for exploring unconventional digital heroic acts in the increasingly relevant fan, streaming, and esports communities.

Finally, Katherine Owens's "Composing the Hero: Musical Gender Construction of Fantasy RPG Heroes" compares the heroic leitmotifs of *God of War* (Santa Monica Studio, 2018) and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017) to explore how video games produce gendered heroes through in-game music. Focusing on main characters Kratos and Aloy's themes, Owens demonstrates how the musical feminine and masculine tropes deployed by each game's respective composers creates a "highly mediated gender experience of gameplay" (p. 43). This careful, astute exploration of two of gaming's most iconic contemporary digital heroes produces a soundscape for gendered heroism as expressed by AAA gaming. By analysing gaming contexts indebted to mythological inspirations, Owens demonstrates how blended sonic and ludic aesthetic strategies contribute to the ongoing mythologisation of gender and heroism.

We would like to once again thank our conference organisers, editors, reviewers, and authors for all their hard work and dedication throughout the process of bringing together this wonderful special issue. You are all academic heroes!

**Best wishes from the *Press Start* editorial board!**