# Gods and Greeks: a study of an immersive RPG in a museum setting

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## Keywords
Museums; immersion; RPGs; engagement; edutainment

## INTRODUCTION
Recent decades have seen a renewed focus on the affective "experience" of a museum. Museum visitors are seeking novelty, and museums are responding with an array of multi-dimensional experiences that are emotional, sensorial, aesthetic, recreational, and social, as well as educational (Antón et al., 2018). This shift is transpiring along two primary axes: play and technology, which are united by their shared characteristics of interactivity and support for immersion.

As museums attempt to find ways to create these multi-dimensional experiences, they are increasingly turning to new technologies. The integration of interactive technology to the museum setting has a positive benefit on visitors' experiences and creates opportunities for immersion that were previously unattainable (Campos et al., 2011; Vermeeren et al., 2018), but this is correlated to the execution of technology more than to any of its inherent virtues (Hornecker & Ciolfi, 2019). The quality of museums' use of technology is haphazard - it can be very context dependent, and has been criticised for causing isolation, having poor quality, and creating inconsistent user experiences (Roussou & Katifori, 2018; Economou & Meintani, 2011). These factors are known to cause a reduction in interactions between visitors, which is a deeply valuable aspect of museum engagement (Vermeeren et al., 2018). The sweet spot for museum experiences are those that are designed to enhance these interactions (Ryding et al., 2021). There is considerable challenge to designing technology with the goal of deepening a fundamentally material experience, without impeding learning or breaking immersion.

This is where play and immersion come in. The increased interest in immersive experiences has emerged as an extension of the cultural sector's uptake of novel technologies. Immersion is proposed as a solution to many of museums' problems with technology, yet there is no set definition for what an "immersive" experience is. To better understand immersion, and to assess whether it can be generated by a gameful experience in a museum, we propose a study of a role-playing game set in a museum context. Gods and Greeks has been designed in collaboration with the

**Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2023**

Hellenic Museum in Melbourne and seeks to investigate how museums can design and use games to effectively generate educational, social, and entertainment value.

The Hellenic Museum is dedicated to preserving and showcasing Greek art and history, and aims to present a holistic experience of Greek culture and the contribution it has made, and continues to make, to society today. As a small, independent museum that survives on volunteer work and piecemeal funding, large investments in technology must be carefully selected and can take years to finance and execute. However, there are some more subtle, but highly impactful ways that museums of this size are able to capitalise on immersion. Gods and Greeks is a mythology inspired tabletop role playing game (TTRPG), where players will take on the role of demigods - children with one mortal parent and one divine parent – and adventure through ancient Greece, immersing themselves in the museum's content through play. By drawing on elements and features of the exhibitions, the interactivity of the game will engage the participants in the Hellenic Museum, allowing them to relate to the experiences of history through the story. Stories are unique in their power to be educational but also reverential, qualities that museums seek to embody. There is an elegant parallel between running an RPG, which is a collective storytelling experience, and the oral traditions that have ensured the continuation of many epic stories like the Iliad and the Odyssey, in addition to a wealth of mythology.

This paper presents Gods and Greeks as a case study of a low-tech museum program that will provide insights into the symbiotic relationship between education and entertainment to generate experiential immersion. Gods and Greeks will be run in January 2023, and will investigate:

1. **The Design:** research findings will emerge from reflections on the practical activities of designing and making the game, and an analysis of the module as an education tool for the museum will be conducted.

2. **The Execution:** focus groups will be conducted with the Game Masters (GMs - the people who will run the game), and with museum staff to understand the success of the event.

3. **The Effect:** a survey of participants will capture:
   a. how they felt before game and their motivations for participating
   b. how they felt after the game and whether it changed their relationship to the museum
   c. how immersive they felt the experience to be and what factors contributed to this

The findings will contribute to museums' understanding of how to design and use games to effectively generate educational, social, and entertainment value.

## BIO

Nellie Seale is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. Her work examines the intersection of games, technology, and museums. Nellie is also an artist and a game designer, and her other research interests include Megagames, accessibility in games, and games as cultural heritage.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by funding from Australian Government's Research Training Program, and the University of Melbourne Faculty of Engineering and IT Ingenium Scholar's Program. This research is being conducted in collaboration with the Hellenic Museum.

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