LORE-Drop: Museum Game Design

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INTRODUCTION
Drawing on work presented at DiGRA Australia 2023 (Seale et al. 2023) describing plans to run an immersive RPG in a museum, this paper presents the outcomes of the study. LORE, a Greek mythology module for Dungeons and Dragons 5th edition was run at the Hellenic Museum in March 2023, and was designed to probe the tension between the museum as a learning environment, a place of social leisure, and an austere historical authority. There is a growing body of research that demonstrates how effective games can be at engaging museum visitors (Beale, 2011; 2014; Kelly & Bowen 2014; Cordova-Rangel & Caro, 2021). However, "museum games" are an emerging class of game that are yet to receive adequate attention in comparison to studies on serious (Antoniou et al., 2013), impact (Squire, 2021), or educational games (Jemmali et al., 2018).

Typically, the design of museum games derives from the design of educational and serious games (Antoniou et al., 2013). However, this often results in an assumption that the qualities of a good serious game correspond to the qualities of a good museum game, and this misses a key underpinning of the museum as a leisure environment, as well as a range of other affordances of museums for games and play. Leisure games in the museum are most frequently explored in terms of the best way to showcase pre-existing video games as an art form (Lucas, 2023; Maxwell, 2023; Appleby, 2023). While this is closely linked to considerations of how accessible a game is within a gallery environment and its appeal to different audiences and also intersects with the challenges museums face in the deployment of digital technologies such as virtual reality (VR), these games are have not been designed for the museum specifically. This work both falls into the trap of the digital fallacy (Stenros & Waern, 2011) and does not extend to the challenges of design for a museum game.

There is an emerging body of literature examining the design processes of museum games, however, the majority of work describes a specific case study of creating a digital game (Aguirrezabal et al., 2014; Nilsson et al., 2016; Froschauer et al., 2012). This makes it challenging to broadly contextualise the process of game design to museums' needs, and points to a gap in theory for museum-game design. David Schaller (2014) is a notable exception to this, presenting a theory of intrinsic and extrinsic game design for museum content. Intrinsic gameplay is described as marrying gameplay and content, where the museum content and game mechanics

create affordances for each other and are inextricable. Conversely, extrinsic gameplay is where the content of the game and the mechanics or systems are entirely separate. Extrinsic gameplay has the benefit of being easier to apply more broadly, but intrinsic gameplay, while more intensive to design, is able to generate deeper engagement with museum content. This is often where the term gamification is applied, and museum games are critiqued for being peripheral to exhibitions or "tacked on … as an afterthought" (Berndt, 2011, p.1). To avoid this, we elected to employ a game as an event, elevating it away from being a gimmicky add-on to the museum visit, but allowing us to make design decisions that prioritised the player experience. As Schaller says, "Museum games can be a powerful meaning-making experience for players, but only if we understand that what makes games fun is also what makes them meaningful." (2011, p.261).

This study allowed us to identify a series of barriers and tensions in museums' design and use of games. This includes the complexity of the museum as a setting and the values of the museum visitor; museums' desire to educate subtly without compromising on the leisure experience of the museum; tensions in the goals of museum game design; and the limitations in the institutional capacity of museums when it comes to games. While museum staff were enthusiastic about the potential for games, they struggled to identify what kinds of games they would run and how to link their wider programming goals to game design. While these tensions provide a rich research context for future work on museum games, LORE also demonstrated the value of leaning on extrinsic gameplay, and on roleplaying games especially, with the Hellenic Museum seeking out future game projects.

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.

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