

## Abstract

### **Tabletop role-playing games scenarios from the perspective of literary theory.**

#### **Quentin 2004–2014**

In tabletop role-playing games players assume the roles of characters in a fictional setting. The clue of the games is telling a story. One of the participants is called Game Master and they are responsible for the plot, in which player's characters are involved. The story is usually based on a scenario, which Game Master can write themselves or use one of the texts published in rpg magazines, official books or the Internet.

I place my research in a context of ludology. This term was popularised by Gonzalo Frasca in 1999 to name a discipline focuses on games and play activities. It is important to emphasize that foreign researchers (like Frasca, Jesper Juul, Frans Mäyrä) are focused mostly on videogames. Polish scholars, especially from Games Research Association of Poland, pay more attention also to other games like role-playing games or board games, but also on using game mechanics in everyday life situations (gamification). In other countries, for example in Denmark, scholars can get a degree in game studies. In Poland it is (and most likely will remain) impossible.

The most important question for my dissertation is: are role-playing games scenarios literature? I analyse research of Jerzy Zygmunt Szeja and Michał Mochocki. They both claim that rpg scenarios could be seen as a literary genre. Szeja's research are based mostly on Aristotel's Poetics, Mochocki's – on literary determinants by Henryk Markiewicz. I can not fully agree with their conclusions, mostly because the gradation of literary in scenarios – according to both Szeja and Mochocki some of the text are more literary, some are less. But contemporary literary theory gives tools to study many kinds of texts, including role-playing games scenarios.

The methodology most useful for my research is narratology. The story schemes in role-playing games was analysed before by scholars like Agnieszka Fulińska, Jakub Janicki, Michał Mochocki and Stanisław Krawczyk. I use narratology in its less structural form, not only to recreate the scheme behind a story, but to study stories in broader cultural contexts.

The dissertation is also about the Quentin competition. It is organised since 1999 and is one of the biggest and most popular competitions for role-playing games fans in Poland.

The jury chooses each year a winner and two honorable mentions. I analysed these texts from editions 2004 to 2014. The aim was to verify Szeja's and Mochocki's theories about the evolution of scenarios. My research did not prove the argument that those texts are evolving to more literary form. Only some of them are very similar to a novel and written not only to be useful for Game Master, but also to give the recipient a pleasant reading experience. Others are more like instructions to the game, with less artistic impact and more mechanics, and other elements that could disturb the reading process. But the tendency has not been changing in time, it depends on author's attitude only.

In all (not only winning) scenarios from analysed editions I studied literary themes, especially intertextual elements, like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* used as a basis to the story in the universe of *7th Sea* game. Other significant themes are for example: journey, family, madness, religion and murder. Themes that are found in role-playing game scenarios show that this activity is strongly connected to other texts of culture. It reflects topics that are present in books and movies, but the inspirations are used very creatively to make the new fascinating stories.