

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Everyone Plays at the Library: Creating Great Gaming Experiences for All Ages. By Scott Nicholson. Medford, N.J.: Information Today, Inc., 2010. 232 pages (soft cover). ISBN 9781573873987. US\$39.50.

Gaming in libraries has become a popular area of interest in the last several years. The author of this book, Scott Nicholson, is one of the pre-eminent names associated with games and libraries. He is an assistant professor at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University, Syracuse, head of the Library Game Lab of Syracuse, and one of the founders of the American Library Association's Games and Gaming Member Initiatives Group. He also contributes to several websites about gaming in libraries, most notably www.boardgameswithscott.com.

There is no shortage of recent books on gaming in libraries. The key idea distinguishing the content of *Everyone Plays at the Library* is games as social experiences. Nicholson emphasizes that "the focus is not on the game itself but how games can be integrated into a library program and how different types of gaming experiences can meet different library goals" (p. 31). Nicholson brings a wealth of personal knowledge and experience to the book, offering a broad range of game recommendations organized by genre and suitability for particular age groups and providing context for how these games meet common library goals.

The book states that the content is suitable for all types of libraries, but those individuals working in school and public libraries will probably get the most use out of it. As Nicholson notes, gaming is commonly used in public libraries to reach underserved patrons, provide recreational programs, or act as a community hub, which may or may not be included in the mandates of other types of libraries. However, creative librarians in other settings who want to do something fun for a class or program may also find value in this book since it offers suggestions for all ages.

The book is divided into three parts. The first is an introduction to gaming and libraries, including a discussion of how gaming programs fulfill common library mission statement goals. The second part can be best described as a sort of "reader's advisory" for librarians looking to incorporate games into programs and services. Each chapter in this part covers one of the five "gaming experience archetypes": knowledge, strategy, action, narrative, and social gaming.

The third part focuses on the logistical details of providing gaming programs, such as facilitation, marketing, and evaluation.

One of the major strengths of this book is its inclusivity; all types of games are reviewed, including word, board, card, and live-action role playing games, as well as "big games" like murder mystery party games. Nicholson does a fine job of debunking the marketing hype of the video game industry. He argues that libraries do not need to buy the newest, most heavily advertised games in order for their program to be a success because quality of game play and enthusiastic staff are much more important factors. The word "gaming" is now often closely associated with digital gaming, so Nicholson's broader look at games in multiple formats is appreciated, especially when digital gaming has substantially higher costs and technology requirements.

Another strength of this book is the quality of the reviews. Other literature has covered the role of gaming in libraries and how to adequately plan gaming programs, but very little material offers library-focused game recommendations with the same depth and breadth. Each game review is categorized broadly by "gaming experience archetype", and is tied to common library goals. The cost of the game, number of players, complexity level, recommended age group, length of time required for play, and skills used (e.g., strategic planning, teamwork) are also included.

Overall, this book is recommended for anyone who is looking to incorporate gaming into library or educational programming in some way. It may even be of interest for anyone just looking for a good game to play (especially if one wants to know what skills are being developed through game play). The author's enthusiasm and experience with games shines through, which makes the book a pleasant and informative read. It also costs considerably less than the newest blockbuster game for Playstation 3 and will likely have a longer shelf-life.

Dale Storie

Public Services Librarian

John W. Scott Health Sciences Library

2K3.28 Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre

University of Alberta

Edmonton, AB T6G 2R7, Canada

E-mail: dale.storie@ualberta.ca