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Editorial

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The Journal of Virtual World Research’s “The Dark Side” issue dives into some fascinating ideas about how evil is represented in the virtual worlds of digital games. This issue includes five articles elaborating on the motivations for evil acts and their outcomes, hostile competitiveness, classification of deviant leisure, how immoral acts are determined, and our ability to thwart these cruel activities in the virtual environments and games.

The name of this special issue, “The Dark Side” is purposeful. It takes a critical look at the things we consider evil within virtual worlds. These five manuscripts address the types of activities that constitute evil, the rationale and intentions for these actions, and the impacts of these malicious events. This issue is led by a close team of editors, some of whom have delivered accomplished work in the past. They are: Dr. Angie Cox, Professor of Business Technology and Process Improvement, residing in Wichita Falls, Texas, USA, as the prime editor; Dr. Felipe Becker Nunes, Professor of Informatics in Education, from Santa Maria, RS, Brazil; Dr. Miao Feng, Research Scientist, from Chicago, Illinois, USA; and Dr. Oskar Milik at Northwood University, Midland, Michigan, USA.

The team is far from nefarious; however, they had no problem curating five splendidly evil articles that are sure to appeal to the innocent and wicked audience alike.

In the first article, **“Beyond Evil and Good in Online Gaming. An Analysis of Violence in ‘Overwatch’ Between Demonization and Proactive Values”** by Enrico Gandolfi and Francesca Antonacci, we see a study centered on the significant violence that can result from video games. The researchers analyzed user-generated content associated with the popular video game, Overwatch, from online sources such as Reddit and YouTube comments. Their theoretical framework supporting this

study came from the Educational Sciences, Philosophy, and Media Studies. Their guiding research goals were understanding (1) what constitutes proactive violence in video games beyond the simplistic distinction between negative effects and superficial outcomes? and (2) the possibility to create online environments where violence is discussed in a nontoxic and non-disparaging way? Results indicated that there are alternative perspectives that can be used to understand violence and aggressiveness. Their view supports a call for more attention toward meaningful ways to discuss a potentially meaningful concept beyond good and evil in-game experiences.

In the second article, by Dave McLean, Frank Waddell, and James Ivory, titled **“Toxic Teammates or Obscene Opponents? Influences of Cooperation and Competition on Hostility between Teammates and Opponents in an Online Game,”** the authors look at how hostile games influence negative behaviors among their players. Different types of games were compared, such as casual versus ranked competitions. Behaviors were compared on cooperation and team allegiance. An interesting finding occurred showing teammates to be more hostile to their own team members versus their opponent due to the competitive nature of the games. This draws an interesting picture of game dynamics and intercommunication. Players may perceive hostile communication among the team to be motivated to win. The study expanded Bounded Generalized Reciprocity Theory which predicts and explain social interactions by what others expect. This study demonstrated prosocial behavior in gameplay may depend factors beyond group membership such as team cooperation

For the third article, Kelly Bergstrom presents a theoretical piece titled **“Destruction as Deviant Leisure in EVE Online.”** This work classifies some actions by players in digital games studies. The world of EVE Online is particularly harsh and violent, and some players engage in gameplay that is often classified as "trolling," "griefing," and even potentially "cheating." This paper aims to change this perspective upon that form of play and instead show how certain players are trying to use their agency to undertake "deviant leisure," which creates situations of "fun," undermining capitalist ideals of efficiency and profit, especially in a digital game world. The piece uses interviews and discussions taken from earlier research and access that researching these actions in digital games would create greater value than merely classify it as cheating or trolling behavior. It uses a specific moment in EVE Online history, the assault on mining ships by suicide teams, as an example of how analysis through a leisure perspective gives important insight that was missed by classifying the actions as "cheating."

The fourth article, **“The Griefer and the Stalker: Disruptive Actors in a Second Life Educational Community”** by Jean-Paul Lafayette DuQuette, performs a case study in Second Life to look at two situations involving malicious actors. One of which was a griefer, and the other one was a stalker. The study investigated the ways in which the Virtual community came together to combat the harassment. Because freedom is inherent to Second Life, it leaves open apertures to trouble others. The manuscript provides understanding for those who are considering establishing Virtual World groups or who already have them. Additionally, it highlights precautions to educators, administrators, researchers, and game designers to consider as these conditions that exist in the virtual environment.

Finally, in our fifth work, Stefano Gualeni’s piece **“Artificial Beings Worthy of Moral Consideration in Virtual Environments: An Analysis of Ethical Viability,”** Gualeni tackles the question of whether it would be ethically viable to implement artificial intelligences that are worthy of moral consideration in virtual worlds, such as we consider in the real world. Specifically, it focuses on virtual worlds such as those that can be currently encountered in digital games and training simulations - interactive and persistent digital environments that are currently and almost exclusively designed to fulfill specific human needs. The final assessment puts responsibility in the hands of the game developers. This study finds the developers should be accountable for actions that can cause harm, offend, or hurt its players. This is an interesting perspective as morals are adapted from society, so therefore, we put the accountability to the owners and developers of these Virtual societies.