Tabletop Role-Playing Games in Chile: Early History, Context, and Adoption

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ABSTRACT

We present an overview of the beginnings of tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) play in Chile in mid 90s. Prior to this, TRPGs were mostly played by small groups in isolation from each other. This changed in the 1990s when TRPGs suddenly entered the public eye and saw an increase in popularity and visibility. We discuss particularities of the context that supported their avid acceptance and dissemination. The nascent Chilean TRPG scene consisted of a motivated, organized, and community-oriented generation of university-aged youth who partnered with supportive local government and institutional organizations to organize and host wide-ranging TRPG events in order to disseminate and share TRPGs as a hobby and form of entertainment. We also comment on some particularities of the Chilean context including the lack of a moral panic and strong institutional support. By discussing and understanding the early history of TRPGs in Chile we can provide insights into a local culture of play whose differences and similarities with others can help us better understand the medium.

Keywords

Role-playing games, tabletop role-playing, history, Chile, Concilio de Dragones

INTRODUCTION

In describing the history of tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), scholars have documented the haphazard and serendipitous way that early TRPGs became popular, albeit niche, as they spread across different social groups across the United States (e.g., Peterson 2012; Appelcline 2014; Peterson 2020). This narrative, one in which individuals traveled and either brought back a "weird game" or learned about the hobby from a friend of a friend, is not uncommon and seems to have been replicated as TRPGs spread across the world. While there are common narratives, each new country or region also had its own idiosyncrasies and style of "infection" that was influenced by local cultures and practices of play, socio-cultural context, and more.

For example, in Finland it was exchange students from the USA who, as early as the late 1970s, helped introduce TRPGs, with locally developed and published games eventually appearing in the mid-1980s (Stenros 2018). In Spain, TRPGs proliferated in the 1980s thanks the existence of public clubs whose interests in wargames began expanding into other forms. These clubs often operated under the auspices of cultural or youth departments of local government and were the primary agents responsible for translating and releasing TRPGs (Mizer 2013). Simultaneously, TSR's D&D-themed *Endless Quest* gamebooks, published by Timun Mas as the *Dungeons & Dragons Aventura Sin Fin* series, saw commercial success in Spain, also helping introduce many to the concept of role-play and the *D&D* brand (Deckard 2023, 44, 136). The early years of TRPGs in the Czech Republic (former Czechoslovakia) developed, firstly, in the late 1980's, where some small groups of players introduced *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* from abroad. After the Velvet Revolution and the transformation to a liberal economy market, TRPG dissemination developed thanks to a simplified and translated version of *Dungeons & Dragons* named *Dragon's Lair* created by Martin Klíma (Kabát et al. 2022). The arrival and distribution of TRPGs in 1970s and 1980s Brazil happened mainly through photocopies and was limited primarily to youth attending universities and elite colleges (Rodrigues Iuama and Falcão 2022). In 1991 a Brazilian TRPG industry was born with companies publishing both licensed Portuguese translations of *GURPS* and *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks and also local TRPGs such as *Tagmar* (Staff 2015). In Japan it seems that TRPGs were popularized alongside the introduction of early computer role-playing games such that the term "RPG" is more commonly associated with computer games, with tabletop games referred to as table-talk role-playing games (Kamm 2019). The case of the United Kingdom is well known for its business angle: in 1975 TSR co-founder Brian Blume, wrote a letter to Games Workshop offering a copy of *Dungeons & Dragons* for review in their Owl and Weasel newsletter (Appelcline 2014)[1]. Games Workshop co-founders Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson accepted the offer, loved the game, and signed a deal for *D&D*'s exclusive distribution in the UK.

That being, said, while the history of the development of TRPG games and communities in the United States is reasonably well known (e.g. Peterson 2020; Tresca 2011), for other countries there is a lack of information about their dissemination that considers their arrival, and the political, historical, or cultural factors that contributed to their massification. The case of Latin America, a region where most international products arrived due to the so-called 1990's globalization of the Global South (Dirlik 2007; Lopez 2007), post-dictatorship processes, or where they only became popular after Spanish translations were available (not accessible), is particularly under-studied. We believe that that the arrival and dissemination of

TRPGS, as a cultural phenomenon, should be studied in order to better understand the significance, implications, and idiosyncrasies of current Latin American TRPG players while also providing context for better understanding the global diversity of TRPG communities.

In this article we describe the case of Chile where, outside of small groups that neither coordinated nor communicated with each other, TRPGs would not arrive in force, take hold, and spread across youth culture until the mid to late 1990s. We will describe both the local social, cultural, technological, and political context we believe allowed for their arrival to happen and their spread to succeed. We describe what the early TRPG scene was like and how it consisted of a motivated, organized, and community-oriented generation of youth who partnered with supportive local government and institutional organizations to organize and host wide-ranging TRPG events in order to disseminate and share TRPGs as a hobby and form of entertainment.

SOCIO-CULTURAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND MEDIA CONTEXT

We will now examine a variety of different elements of Chile's socio-cultural, technological and media landscape in order to examine the role they may have played in providing a context in which TRPGs could take hold.

In the 1980s, access to imported (SF) and fantasy literature and materials in Chile was difficult and expensive (Rubio 2017). Also, there was virtually no local production as a result of the 1973 military coup led by Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet's government persecuted and exiled artists and creators and also imposed significant censorship of cultural materials. This period is known as the *apagón cultural* (cultural blackout) (Donoso 2013). This changed when Chile transitioned peacefully to a democratic government in 1990. The end of the dictatorship was quickly followed by a surge in the arts, culture, and literature (Brito 1994). In the case of literary writing, the boom of the 1990s was shared across a variety of genres (Apablaza 2019) including SF (Areco 2009) and fantasy (Johansson 2017). The case of SF is notable because Chile experienced a "golden age" in the genre starting in 1959 which lasted until the military coup with it later bursting into growth in the 1990s with a boom in the 2000s (Areco 2009). In all, Chilean literary production had a literary culture and tradition that included fantasy and SF thus providing a potential audience for TRPGs given the thematic overlap (e.g. fantasy TRPGs). What role did this play in the adoption of TRPGs? There are at least two explanations. First, the generation of youth coming of age in the 1990s did not grow up in a literary environment rich in fantasy and science fiction. Thus, when TRPGs arrived in the 1990s they did not find a ready-and-interested audience. However, given Chile's earlier history with science fiction and the post-dictatorship boom, it could also be argued that Chileans were starved for new material such that the arrival of TRPGs found a curious-and-hungry audience.

SF and fantasy in other media, like television and cinema, developed in a slightly different way. Chilean consumption of mass media, specifically TV and cinema, had been changing since the 1950s (Rinke 2013). Television quickly became the primary medium for the delivery of news, advertising, and political propaganda with a boom in home purchases of TV sets between 1965 and 1989 (Rinke 2013). By the 1990s there was one TV set for every five Chileans with a significant amount of programming imported from the United States. The lack of local TV production was

already being criticized by the 1970s together with concerns regarding the Americanization ("US-ification") of Chilean television programming (Rinke 2013). The military coup in 1973 imposed censorship in media including television and cinema. Famously the text crawl at the beginning of *Star Wars* was removed when the film was televised in 1985 presumably due to its mention of civil war and freedom fighters (Copano.news 2023). Chilean cinema was not particularly productive during the years of Pinochet's dictatorship. This void was, also, generally filled with American-produced content which was avidly consumed and viewed positively by youth. The arrival of private television (i.e., subscription cable television) in 1987 increased access to audiovisual media that improved variety in terms of content and themes (e.g., Japanese anime, Cabaña Rojas 2021). However, cable television would not expand significantly until the post-Pinochet 1990s (Fuenzalida et al. 2007). Overall, it could be said that Chilean youth and society's favorable view of American-created television and film could have contributed to a context in which the American origins of TRPGs would similarly be viewed positively. In fact, the 1983-1985 *Dungeons & Dragons* television series was broadcast on Chilean national television (although we are not aware of evidence of its effect on Chilean TRPG players).

Another relevant contextual element was the arrival of internet access. In 1992 Chile was first connected to the internet as we now know it and by 1993 Chilean academics had set up Latin America's first web server (Tanner 1999). While internet access was initially limited to academics (and university students), it quickly grew beyond this. By 1994, partly thanks to the deregulation of phone companies that allowed them to offer new services, internet access moved into the public sphere and saw the fastest growth in Latin America (Tanner 1999). By 1998 Chile had 17,821 server hosts in the .cl domain and 100-180K people were connected to the internet (approximately 1-2% of the population) (Tanner 1999). In terms of how internet access relates to the adoption of TRPGs in Chile, at least two factors played a role. First, it allowed for the development of and participation in online communities interested in TRPGs. For example, on June 6, 1995 a USENET discussion group (chile.juegos.rol, later re-named chile.rec.juegos.rol) was created (Farah 1995b) to encourage discussion around TRPGs, organize activities, and exchange information, ideas, and materials (Farah 1995a). While the group was small (~30 people voted on the resolution to create the newsgroup), it was through this discussion group (and similar online spaces) that many found fellow Chilean TRPG enthusiasts and organized and advertised early events. Second, access to the internet provided a means for learning about and accessing information and materials related to TRPGs that were otherwise unknown and unavailable (e.g. pdf files of rulebooks, see Orchard 2009).

Piracy, more specifically cultural attitudes regarding copying and sharing, played a role in the adoption and massification of games, videogames and, also, role-playing games in Latin America. Although there are not many studies regarding piracy in the region and its relationship to different kinds of media (Gómez Cruz 2022), the way piracy affected the spread of TRPG in Chile could have been inherited from the way in which other media disseminated in the region, such as videogames. These arrived in Latin America as early as the late 1970s in the form of coin-operated arcade machines (Penix-Tadsen 2016). Around the same time, some game consoles were also being imported. Garfías and Rivera (2022) note that in México, acquiring video game consoles legally was not possible during the 80's and 90's. In Argentina (Lomanto 2020) and in Chile most games were expensive or difficult to find. Thus,

playing in arcades, piracy, exchanging videogames between friends, and game rentals in small "mom and pop" stores was the norm (Ibarra 2023). Similarly, modding – here an activity that includes translating and adapting to local markets – was also widespread and commonplace, and, at least in Chile and Perú, that is how the local videogame industry developed (Wong 2021).The local media culture was one of sharing, copying, and modifying. Piracy was less associated with breaking the law and more about gaining access, adapting to local interests and needs, and dealing with the unavailability of materials. According to Rubio (2017), at the beginning of the 1990's, it was difficult for fans of all kinds of media to access different materials; literature fans would exchange badly translated photocopied novels, illegal movies would be copied and commercialized in VHS format, and having any kind of original material was seen as admirable. Regarding TRPGs specifically, there are anecdotal stories of players owning barely legible copies of rules manuals. These manuals were photocopies of photocopied photocopies, and largely illegible due to the loss of quality from being copies of copies of copies, etc. (Orchard 2009). This culture of acceptance and practice of piracy played a role in the adoption of TRPGs because it helped in their initial spread.

A final contextual element to consider is the potential role of local TRPG friendly or adjacent fan cultures. As noted earlier, in the 1970s and all through the 1980s there was limited access to SF, fantasy and later anime and other media in Chile because of the military dictatorship's cultural restrictions. There were similar social restrictions that limited social gatherings and organizations. These restrictions, applicable or not to fan organizations, would severely dampen the creation of communities similar to those seen in other countries (Sánchez-Barría 2022). That being said, Chile's military dictatorship started, in the 1980s, a process of liberalization of the economy that would continue into the 1990s after its end. This would have an impact on the adoption of TRPGs. As noted, the economic liberalization included opening the telephony market to private competition such that prices dropped, and phone companies competed by offering new services including internet access. Additionally, the development of the neoliberal system in Chile, as in other countries, aimed to empower civilians to self-regulate and develop agency over their consumptive habits, including different kinds of media and ways of relating to such media (Muriel and Crawford 2018). While the idea of forming groups of fans was still new at the beginning of the 90's and through the decade, this feeling of liberation would allow these kind of collectives to develop (Rubio 2017). In other words, the process of political and ideological liberation (both in the sense of the end of the military dictatorship and the adoption of neoliberal ideas), meant that people felt both liberated and excited to form groups and organize. As described earlier, some of the organization of what we now call fan communities would happen online with early TRPG players finding each other. In this way, the internet provided a medium to develop all kinds of participatory culture, especially regarding affiliation (being part of a community), expression (creating content) and circulation (shaping the flow of media), among other ways of participation (Jenkins et al. 2006). But, many other groups began organizing offline as well. An early notable example of Chilean fandom was the creation of the *Sochif* (Chilean Fantasy and Science Fiction Society) in 1988   (Sullivan 2021) who organized meetups and distributed a fanzine/bulletin (Saavedra 2003). As we will later see, early TRPG clubs, would be the primary engine of TRPG dissemination in Chile.

Overall, and in broad terms, we note that the local Chilean context was one that was deprived, due to the policies and restrictions of the military dictatorship, of the traditional cultural contexts enjoyed in other countries that allowed for TRPGs to find an audience. However, the combination of the end of the military dictatorship and its implementation of neoliberal economic policies saw a rapid shift in the availability of cultural materials and a desire in society for organizing and forming communities.

THE STAGE IS SET

As noted, there was a confluence of factors that created a context in which TRPGs arrived, spread, and took hold in Chile.

The rise of TRPGs in Spain in the 1980s (which continued and grew into the 1990s), itself partially due to the end of the Franco regime, meant that as Chilean markets for cultural products were opening up in the 1990s – there was a ready-supply for imports (TRPGs, but also comics, novels, etc.). This took place in Chile in a context where social practices supported and made significant use of piracy, exchange, rental, and informal distribution of these same products. These social exchange practices directly supported the creation of affective communities (i.e. fandom communities) interested in sharing and discussing these products (e.g. see Ibarra 2023 for the case of videogames). In turn, it was these early affective communities that would help propel the massification of science fiction and fantasy cultural products amongst which TRPGs were situated. This further strengthened thanks to access to the internet.

The return to democracy in 1990 also led to significant reductions in restrictions associated with social activity which were quickly taken up by youth organizations who soon began organizing activities, events, workshops, and eventually created spaces for the consumption, exchange, distribution, and access to the influx of new (to the Chilean context) cultural products. According to Rubio (2017), the 1990s were a golden age for fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts due to growth in local production, the influx of imported products, and their informal distribution.

The economic and social changes Chile was going through in the post-dictatorship years meant that many Chilean youth were in a transitory state. After all, this generation's participation in political activism had met their goal of "overthrowing" Pinochet's dictatorship with its restoration of numerous freedoms and civil liberties (Zarzuri and Ganter 2018). In the years following the return to democracy, many youths developed disaffection for politics and other forms of political organization. Since they were teenagers or young adults in the late 1980s, many had clear memories of repression, resistance, and the transition; thus, the term "post-dictatorship generation" does not fully capture their experience (Ros 2012). This led Chilean youth to assume a different position with regards to institutions and a desire to develop new ways of creating community and "being together" (Zarzuri and Ganter 2018). Muñoz (2006) argues that Chilean youth in the end of the 1980s was characterized by massification and de-individualization where individual identities sought strength by associating themselves within smaller affective groups. This process was then mediated by a neoliberal economic model that favored consumption and individualism. The result was the lack of large-scale youth social

movements and instead one of smaller movements associated with specific cultural media, styles, and aesthetic tastes all focused on affective relationships (Muñoz 2006).

Thus, youth organizations quickly sprang up and were created as spaces for socialization, entertainment, learning, the creation of affective ties, and developing specific cultural practices (Duarte 1997). This process is sometimes referred to as the neo-tribalization of youth (Zarzuri and Ganter 2002) due to the heterogeneity of interests and practices.

THE EARLY CHILEAN TRPG SCENE

While there were TRPG players in Chile prior to the 1990s, these were mostly Anglo-speakers and generally members of the upper social classes. The games themselves were purchased abroad or brought back by students who had travelled as part of exchange programs (Orchard 2009). Generally, TRPG play happened in private homes; player groups were not aware of each other or, at most, knew of others within the same school.

The earliest known named TRPG clubs would not form until the 1990s in the University context. These clubs became the basis of early dissemination of TRPG materials, initially photocopies of English-language manuals. According to Orchard (2009) the first Chilean store to sell Spanish-language TRPG materials was *Rivendel: El Concilio*, though others would soon follow (e.g. Verminard, as mentioned in Contreras 2001). Simultaneously, TRPGs began appearing in (also new at the time) comic book stores – partly because Spanish comic book and magazine publisher *Ediciones Zinco* began, in 1992, publishing Spanish translations of TSR Inc's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* products (Surf 2023). Zinco also produced at least two "introduction to role-playing" magazines (*Guía del Juego de Rol* in Nov 1992 and *Guía Básica del Juego de Rol* in 1994) and published a Spanish-language edition of TSR Inc's *Dragon* magazine, all of which were available through magazine distribution channels (Surf 2014). Zinco's *Guía Básica del Juego de Rol* (see Figure 1) and issues of *Dragón* magazine saw distribution in Santiago street corner newspaper and magazine kiosks. For those who already played TRPGs this was a huge surprise. For others, it became their entry point to the hobby. For example, in the letters section of the October 1994 issue of *Dragón* magazine, Felipe Herrera, a Chilean player, describes how "thanks to you, I was able to know that someone else plays TRPGs in my city: Santiago, Chile" (Herrera 1994). The magazine's editors' reply points out they are aware of the challenges of getting access to TRPGs and note how they have heard similar concerns from other Latin American readers (Dragón Staff 1994).

Beyond these publications, some people state that they got involved in TPRGs through TRPG University clubs and events (*eventos)*[2] organized in Santiago during the mid 1990's. One such example, the *Club de Rol de Injenieria* [sic] (CRI, the Engineering Role-Playing Club) was founded in 1995, at the University of Chile's Faculty of Engineering by a group of students, with the goal of disseminating TRPGs. The *CRI* became a well-known organizer of events, the biggest and best-known was *Concilio de Dragones* (Council of Dragons) (Orchard 2009). This event, which was held at Universidad de Chile drew, across its first two installments, around 1500 attendees all aged between 17 and 30 (Nardin, Goycoolea, and Zagal 1999).

Figure 1: Zinco Ediciones 1994 magazine "Basic Guide to Role-Playing Games"

In a span of few years, numerous other TRPG clubs and organizations sprung up, and the number of events also grew (see Table 1). By 1999 this resulted in the formation of the *Agrupación de Jugadores de Rol de Chile* (AJR, Chilean grouping/association of role-players)[3]. This was a national TRPG advocacy group, fundamentally led by university students from Santiago, whose goals were to (1) inform the general public about TRPGs and disseminate information regarding their value as a healthy form of entertainment, (2) promote the activity of playing TRPGs, and (3) support others in their efforts related to TRPG play (AJR 1999). The organization specifically stated their dedication to combatting misinformation regarding TRPGs (AJR 1999). One of the things the creation of the AJR allowed was access to government funding and space for the support of activities. A second thing it allowed was a streamlining of collaboration with private entities including game companies, local game distributors, and other organizations.

Year	Event
1990	• End of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. Patricio Aylwin democratically assumes as president.
1991	
1992	• Chile connects to the Internet.
1993	• First Chilean internet servers (on .cl domain) • Larger Universities provide internet-related services to students (e.g. email, usenet)
1994	• End of Patricio Aylwin's presidential term • Internet massification and first online publications
1995	• Possible 1st TRPG event organized in collaboration with INJ (now INJUV) • *Club de Rol de Injeniería* (CRI) founded (Universidad de Chile) • Chilean TRPG-related USENET group created (chile.juegos.rol) • TRPG workshops for novice players (organized by CRI) • *Primer Gran Encuentro de rol* (October 19-20) (organized by CRI)
1996	• *Concilio de Dragones I* (Julio 13-14) (organized by CRI)
1997	• *Concilio de Dragones II* (June 13-15) (organized by CRI) • Verminard Store (specialized in TRPG products) opens
1998	• *Convención Nacional de Juegos de Fantasia* (for-profit event, CRI participates in organization)
1999	• *Concilio de Dragones III* (June 16-18) (organized by CRI) • *Agrupación de Jugadores de Rol Chile (AJR)* was founded • *2da Convención Nacional de Juegos de Fantasia* (July 17-18) (for-profit event, AJR participates in organization) • *Concilio Nocturno* (October 30-31) (overnight event, organized by CRI)
2000	• *Concilio de Dragones IV* (September 22-24) (organized by CRI) • *Cóctel de Wyrms (May the 5th)* • Online TRPG IRC in Chile

Table 1: Key events (*eventos*) in early TRPG history in Chile as compiled by authors.

Events

Of all the TRPG events that took place in Chile in the 1990s, the largest and most famous is undoubtedly the *Concilio de Dragones* (Council of Dragons) which took place in the Beauchef campus of the University of Chile located in downtown Santiago (Orchard 2009). These events had a significant impact on the high-school and college-aged science-fiction and fantasy fans at the time (Rubio 2017). Between 1996 and 2008 a total of 12 Concilio events took place with additional smaller events such as *Concilio Nocturno* (Nocturnal Council, an overnight event starting in late afternoon/evening) and *Cóctel de Wyrms* (Wyrms Cocktail, usually a shorter one-day event).

Documentation for the 3rd *Concilio de Dragones* (1999), created to secure funding and support from the University of Chile, highlights the importance of the event due to its significance in the Chilean TRPG scene as the premiere event for play, exchange, and the creation of broader awareness around TRPGs. Earlier versions of

Concilio drew attendees from all over Santiago and also from other cities such as La Serena, Valparaíso and Concepción (Nardin, Goycoolea, and Zagal 1999).

The main organizing group behind the *Concilio* events was the *Club de Rol de Injenieria* (CRI). The goals of the club were to encourage TRPG play and to "spread the word". CRI's first major activity was to organize, in 1995, a TPRG event called the *Primer Gran Encuentro de Rol* (First Great Gathering of Roleplaying). Despite the name, evidence suggests that it was not quite the first event, with an earlier event – organized by a different group of students in collaboration with the *Instituto Nacional de la Juventud* (National Youth Institute of Chile, INJUV). The only currently known report of this first event is an indirect mention in *El Mercurio* newspaper (Sepulveda 1995).

The *Primer Gran Encuentro de Rol*, numerous TRPG workshops, and the 1st *Concilio de Dragones* took place in the cafeteria of the Faculty of Engineering. The event's primary focus was hosting tables where people could sign up to play a variety of TRPGs, including sessions for novices. The poster for the 1st *Concilio* boldly claims that the event features "Todos los juegos!" (All the games!) with a list including *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Dragonlance*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Conan*, *Stormbringer*, *Pendragon*, *Mechwarrior*, *Star Wars*, *Paranoia*, *Cyberpunk*, *Shadowrun*, *Aliens*, *Vampire*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Kult*, and *Toon*. Other games are also listed, including homebrew games (or campaigns) such as *Gheetha*, *Ragnarok*, *Sin City* and *X-Men*. The variety of games and the workshops/sessions for newcomers to the hobby, and the events' size and longevity are the primary reasons for its importance in the massification of TRPGs in Chile.

Furthermore, the early *Concilio* events (and similar smaller ones) were always held in collaboration with other role-playing clubs and organizations - usually listed as co-organizers on the promotional materials. For example, the poster for the 1st *Concilio* lists two additional role-playing clubs (*Los Hijos de Verminard* and *Los Caballeros de Uroboro*) in addition to the *CRI* (see Figure 2). These other clubs were generally made up of groups of friends and their size was small.

Although early events were focused on role-playing games, their organizers made significant and concerted efforts to "broaden the tent" by inviting and featuring other related communities of interest such as Star Wars fan clubs. Again, the poster for the 1st *Concilio* lists additional activities including an all-day anime festival, jugglers, fantasy artists, and panels on Star Wars, Tolkien, and Babylon 5. Other featured games included Go and *Magic the Gathering*. Later *Concilio* events would include displays and demonstrations of ancient weapons and armor, music concerts, modeling expos, vendor tables and booths, and theatrical presentations (Nardin, Goycoolea, and Zagal 1999).
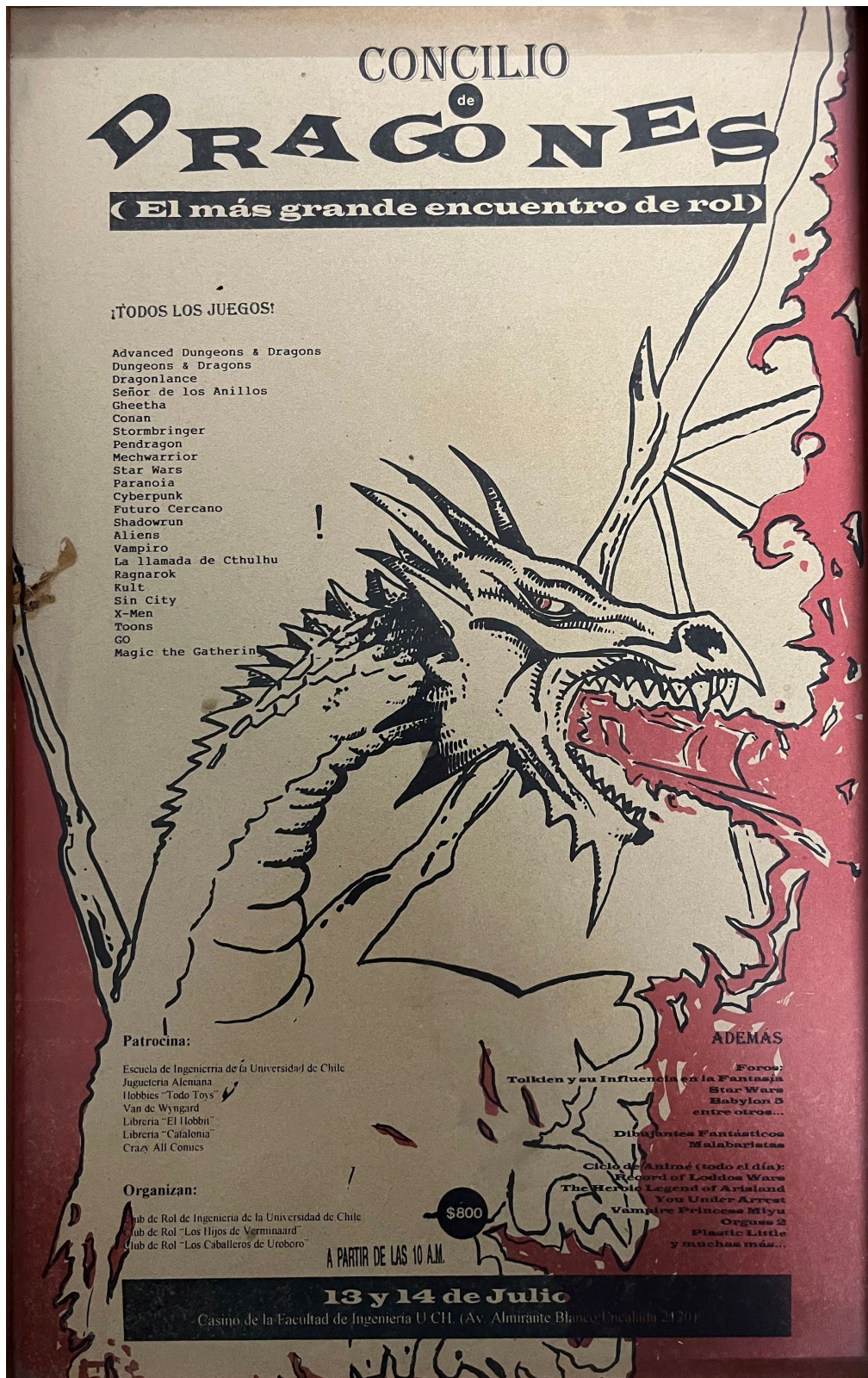
Figure 2: Concilio de Dragones poster (photo by Marcos Goycoolea, used with permission)

Thus, the early TRPG events like *Concilio de Dragones* created a space where TRPG players formed community not only with each other (e.g. bridging across different universities and disparate player groups) but also across shared interests. The events

allowed fans to begin to formalize and broaden the reach of their fandoms – small groups of friends who could connect with other small groups, meetings of people who otherwise had only met online, and more. Over the years, different budding fan groups and organizations would collaborate and participate in *Concilio* and similar events including: *Sociedad Tolkien Chilena* (Chilean Tolkien Society), *Star Wars Chile*, *Babylon 5 Chile*, historical re-enactment groups, X-Files fan groups and more (Rubio 2017). In a way it was TRPG events that served as the broader umbrella that catalyzed modern Chilean fandom.

Players

In his study of the Chilean TRPG scene, Orchard (2009) identifies three generations of role-players. The first generation consisted mostly of university-aged men who learned of TRPGs from English-language rulebooks (or photocopies of), had knowledge of English (enough to read/understand the rulebooks), played mostly with friends, and had attended private schools and were part of the Chilean upper class (Orchard 2009). Orchard's second generation is slightly broader in age groups – now including teenagers. This generation learned of TRPGs from events like *Concilio de Dragones*, role-playing clubs, online communities, and/or media and press coverage. This generation is slightly broader in terms of socio-economic status, and knowledge of English is no longer common (Orchard 2009). The third generation of Chilean TRPG players (defined as players entering the hobby in 2003) are similar to the 2nd generation, but benefitted from greater access to original and translated TRPG materials available commercially in Chile, a broader range of events and clubs to join, and greater knowledge of cultural products and interests that, by this time, had broader mass market appeal (e.g. *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* novels and films) (Orchard 2009). Overall, players were young – with the majority between 18 and 23 years of age (Orchard 2009).

In terms of the gender identity of the early Chilean TRPG players, Orchard's 2009 study notes that there was a clear gender imbalance, with most players identifying as male. In his survey study, 27% of his participants identified as female. This might be an improvement over earlier years – a spreadsheet of registered game masters for *Concilio de Dragones III* (1999) has only six people with first names commonly assumed to be female at the time – representing a mere 10% of the list of GMs[4]. While this data point is not representative of the Chilean TRPG community at the time (i.e., it might be the case that women were under or over-represented amongst game referees), it does provide at least a point of comparison. While there is not currently much empirical evidence on the demographics, it is probably fair to say that, sadly – and as is common across most TRPG player communities (Williams et al. 2018)– most participants were male.

CURIOUS CHARACTERISTICS OF TRPGS IN CHILE

We have described the context in which TRPGs arrived commercially in Chile and some of the characteristics of the early Chilean TRPG scene. We will now discuss some peculiarities or points of interest in this regard. These are not necessarily unique but they provide additional context for understanding how the reception of TRPGs in Chile was shaped.

One-Step Removed from the Source

While role-playing games first made their way to Chile in English via disparate individuals, they would not become widespread until Spanish translations existed. Therefore, the spread of role-playing games in Chile ran parallel (albeit delayed) with the commercialization and uptake of Spanish translations happening in Spain. TRPGs began their ascendant popularity in Spain approximately a decade after their appearance in the United States and this lead proved beneficial to Chilean players.

Role-playing in Spain was introduced primarily through formal clubs and organizations dedicated to wargaming and modeling (Mizer 2013). The death of Spanish dictator Franco in 1975 and the consequent decline of Francoism led to a growth of interest in fantasy and science fiction literature, as well as (early) videogames.

However, it took a few more years for TRPGs to really take hold in Spain. One early milestone was the first Spanish translation of *D&D* published by Dalmau in 1985 (Sevillano Pareja 2008, 297). However, this translation was a commercial failure and *D&D* would not see commercial success in Spain until it was published, in its *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition* incarnation, by Ediciones Zinco seven years later (Deckard 2023, 40). However, the remainder of the 1980s saw rapid growth with a number of other notable Spanish publishers such as *Joc Internacional* in 1985, *Diseños Orbitales* in 1989, and *La Factoría de Ideas* in 1993. These were all dedicated entirely (or almost entirely) to licensing the rights to, translating, and publishing English-language TRPGs. A notable exception was *Joc Internacional*'s 1990 game *Aquelarre*, a Spanish-made medieval fantasy TRPG. Many publishers relied on the Spanish role-playing clubs who also mediated the discussions and communications around TRPGs via their own magazines and fanzines (Mizer 2013). Spain's TRPG market stabilized and began to have a significant presence in 1992 when Ediciones Zinco began publishing numerous *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* books (Sevillano Pareja 2008). The growth of the Spanish TRPG scene (and industry) was sustained throughout the 1990s and by 2002 there were over 180 role-playing related publications and 13 dedicated publishers (Cabrero Sañudo 2010).

The Spanish translation boom benefitted, and arguably helped create, the Chilean role-playing scene. Given the language intelligibility between both countries, Chilean role-playing stores concentrated on obtaining and disseminating role-playing manuals translated in Spain. Thus, the language barrier that had originally relegated TRPG to limited circles was overcome. Furthermore, the high volume of products available meant it was also easier to support player interest. Now, this did not necessarily mean a reduction in piracy. Anecdotal evidence indicates that manuals continued to be photocopied. Regardless, access to TRPG material in Spanish allowed the Chilean gaming community to grow exponentially in the early years.

Media Coverage and the Satanic Non-Panic

During the 80's and early 90's, there were several moral panics because of the supposed linkage between TRPGs and satanic activities or practices. For instance, in the United States during the 1980's, TRPG were perceived as a threat to traditional social values (Laycock 2015; White 2018), and the media linked them with satanic cults and activities (Wilson 2019). Similarly, in Spain in 1994, the media captured the public's imagination with the so-called "crimen del rol" (role-playing crime): a case in

which two young men murdered a 52-year old man. Several TRPG manuals were found in one of the murderer's home and it was alleged they were motivated to kill by a TRPG. Although the police investigation found no links between roleplaying activities and the killers' motives, the damage was done. After this, Spanish media paid special attention to any kind of crime that had even the vaguest connection to TRPGs and reinforced the notion that role-playing, as an activity, was somehow triggering criminal pathologies in its players (Tizón 2020).

As discussed, early TRPG culture in Chile is linked to the arrival of foreign products after Pinochet's dictatorship, especially from the United States and Spain. It could be assumed that Chilean media would reprise the negative discourse regarding TRPGs that occurred in the US and Spain. In fact, there was indeed a moral panic in Chile in the late 1990's and early 2000's regarding the (alleged) satanic and sexual connotations of Japanese anime (Cobos 2010), and their excessive violence (Cornejo and Jimenez 2006). Surprisingly, a moral panic did not develop in the same way for TRPG communities and players.

Even though there was knowledge in Chile regarding the Spanish "role-playing crime", Chilean mass media reporting on TRPGs did not replicate the negative, sensationalist, nor moralizing tone seen in Spanish press coverage. Chilean media coverage was generally more neutral with regards to TRPG and often acknowledged the negative rumors regarding TRPGs, provided definitions and explanations and engaged with players and player communities.

For example, the August 2001 edition of the *Conozca Más* magazine (Contreras 2001) featured TRPGs on the cover with a photograph from the 2000 *Dungeons & Dragons* movie, the title *El Mundo Mágico de los Juegos de Rol* (The Magical World of Role-Playing Games), and a subtitle that asks *El boom entre los jóvenes ¿son peligrosos?* (a boom amongst youth, are they dangerous?) (see Figure 3). The article itself, extended over a generous six pages, begins noting how TRPGs have a bad reputation, a sort of "black legend", due to crimes associated with role-players including an apparent mass suicide event in USA in 1985. However, the article makes no further note of this and quickly moves on to a brief definition of role-playing games and a discussion of their arrival in Chile. A box callout describes the existence of the *Agrupación de Jugadores de Rol*, and its dedication to the dissemination of role-playing and communication regarding the positive effects of role-play on the community. The *Conozca Más* article continues with interviews and perspectives from the owners of the TRPG store *Verminard* and players – all of whom relate the potential benefits of role-playing – before concluding with the point of view of a psychologist whose perspective, in line with the tone of the rest of the article, is balanced and refrains from characterizing role-playing games as negative or something to be wary of (Contreras 2001).

An episode of the open-access television pop-science program *Enlaces* (on air 1992-2007) also highlights the phenomenon of role-playing in Chile and, like the *Conozca Más* article, takes care in defining what TRPGs are. The episode in question, titled *El Infinito Placer de Jugar* (The Infinite Pleasure of Play; S4, E8) (Rosenblatt 1997), has an almost documentary feel, since it also records and documents some role-playing social events. The apparent purpose of the program was not to pass judgement on TRPGs but rather to inform. The program interviews both a philosopher and a psychologist, both of whom provide a marked positive opinion on role-playing. While the episode does bring up the Spanish "role-playing crime", it asks the viewer

to consider "at what point does it become dangerous to fantasize?" before concluding that the scholarly opinion on role-playing games is far from conclusive.

Another example, this time from a May 1995 edition of *El Mercurio*, one of Chile's largest circulating newspapers, features an article titled *Juegos de Rol en Chile: La Embriaguez de la Imaginación* (Role-Playing Games in Chile: The Drunkenness of Imagination) (Sepulveda 1995). The article discusses the "new form of entertainment" provided by role-playing games in a way that positions the activity as foreign to traditional Chilean youth activities. As with the television episode, the "role-playing crime" is brought up, role-playing games are defined, and the bulk of the article is dedicated to describing a large role-playing event that took place in the National Youth Institute. The article presents the opinions of at least three dungeon masters/referees with regards to the role-playing-related crimes in Spain and the US. Their responses are notable in their defense of role-playing, noting that people with homicidal intentions would act that way regardless of their hobby. Again, the article features an interview with a psychologist. This time, however, their opinion is markedly negative: the psychologist claims that Chile might see a crime similar to the one in Spain. However, the article concludes by leaving the possibility open for interpretation regarding the values/dangers of TRPGs – assuring the reader that it is still too early to provide a conclusive statement in this regard. The article highlights the general excitement in youth around TRPGs noting the existence of at least 17 clubs in the Universidad Católica de Chile (one of Chile's largest public universities) and claims other universities will see similar growth in youth participation and organization.

Thus, it is possible to argue that there never was a moral panic in Chile akin to what happened in the United States or Spain during the 1980s and 1990's respectively. Instead, Chilean media coverage of TRPGs generally followed the following pattern:

1. Try to explain to a general audience what a role-playing game is and how they are played. TRPGs are presented as a novel and unique phenomenon/activity amongst Chilean youth (and society).
2. Provide the perspectives and opinions of TRPG players, primarily through formally constituted organizations. Their opinions are invariably positive.
3. Make note of moral panics that occurred in other parts of the world without dwelling on the details or veracity of specific events.
4. Refer to some sort of expert, e.g. a psychologist, to report on their perception of the TRPG phenomenon.
5. Conclude with some form of rhetorical question and leave it open to the audience for them to form their own opinion regarding TRPGs: e.g., are they dangerous or simply an innocent form of entertainment?

Chilean media coverage rarely focused on value judgements, nor did it collect the opinions of anti-TRPG groups or "moral crusaders" including religious organizations. Simply put, the idea that TRPGs presented a direct and imminent danger to their players or society, was apparently never provided a mass-media platform in Chile.

Figure 2: *Conozca Más* magazine, with TRPGs featured as the cover story: A boom amongst youth, are they dangerous?

Institutional Support

Institutional support was crucial in the early years of Chile's TRPG scene. For example, the early *Concilio de Dragones* events could never have happened without help from the Universidad de Chile who supported the organizers with direct funding and access to physical space (Nardin, Goycoolea, and Zagal 1999). Other groups were able to secure space (and often also funding and administrative support) for their events and activities from government institutions, public libraries, and more.

While the financial and administrative support was important, it was the space provided that was key because it allowed for: an increased visibility of TRPGs amongst youth, opportunities to learn how to play, and existing groups to connect and strengthen their ties. All of this then supported the rapid growth of the scene. In the context of the *Concilio de Dragones* events, it is telling that, according to Rubio (2017), the events stopped taking place when the dean of the College of Engineering withdrew support for the use of the space for *Concilio de Dragones XIII*, and the CRI were unable to secure another venue. At this point "the last flames of role-player's hopes were extinguished" (Rubio 2017, 90).

Institutional support also proved helpful in that it helped legitimize the existence and significance of role-playing in general.

FUTURE WORK & CONCLUSIONS

This work is a first step in examining the early history of TRPGs and their adoption in Chile. There are many questions left unanswered such as, what role did specific

people play in the early years? How was it that TRPG materials first came to be imported? Was it by chance? We have also not described what those initial cultures of TRPG-play were like. Was playing a TRPG in Chile, across different groups, meaningfully distinct from how they were played in other countries? An investigation collecting the stories and perceptions from the people who actually were part of the TRPG groups mentioned, and that organized the events that made TRPGs popular in Chile during the 1990s, could help answer these questions. We were not able to find much work that took into consideration the voices of these protagonists by looking back into the events that took place during that time, just a few primary sources, mostly secondary and even tertiary sources. Existing work regarding the history of TRPG in Chile is currently mostly anecdotal or limited to a brief section of a work about more contemporary players. We are currently starting to interview early players to corroborate existing sources, understand how they perceived those early years, what their motivations were, and the role the contingencies we identify played in their activities.

Similarly, we plan on researching and analyzing in greater depth the role that the early internet played. We argue that online communities were a key factor in allowing communication, linkage, and organization among Chilean TRPG players. A study of the archives of the TRPG Usenet group chile.juegos.rol, for example, could help us better understand the impact of the internet on the dissemination of TRPG groups and games.

After this review, it can be established that the arrival of TRPGs in Chile was similar to their arrival in other countries, although with some peculiar characteristics. Among these, the most remarkable would be the media representation and the institutional support that allowed TRPG communities to organize large-scale events, get to know each other, collaborate with other fan/hobbies communities, and have public spaces to share, disseminate, learn about new or different tabletop games, and, ultimately, play. The media representation that did not accommodate the global satanic discourse, and was mostly neutral, facilitated a national and social perception of TRPG as "simply another hobby" during the 1990s. In this regard, it would be interesting to analyze how TRPG were related at the time to more accepted cultural products. For instance, were they perceived as literature or as video game byproducts? Maybe their relation to genre literature allowed a comprehension of them as a kind of "intellectual hobby" that was an alternative to video games, which were just becoming more massive and were still perceived with some skepticism.

By providing an account of how TRPGs formally arrived in Chile, and describing the local contingencies that supported their broader adoption, we broaden our understanding of TRPGs as a medium. Our work also reminds us that we should not take for granted that the adoption and success of a cultural medium of play and expression is predetermined by its intrinsic merits. While we do not make any causal claims regarding TRPGs success in Chile, we wonder how things might have been different if, for example, Chile's dictatorship had lasted longer, or if there had not been an external source from which Spanish-language TRPG products could have been imported. Perhaps, Chile would not have a TRPG scene – but rather only have small, isolated groups of players? We look forward to similar investigations and histories from other parts of the world.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson provide a different account. Steve Jackson had written a short note about D&D "promising more news when I've played it" and later received a copy with the aforementioned letter, but written by Gary Gygax instead of Brian Blume (Livingstone and Jackson 2022).

[2] "Evento" (lit. event) is a term used in Chile to refer to social gatherings similar to conventions ("cons", and specifically fan conventions) that gather people with similar hobbies, ideologies, ideas, or that practice a similar sport or activity (TRPG in this case) for a given time in a physical space. Regarding size and activities in this kind of event, related to TRPG or similar cultural products (anime, videogames, movies, etc.), these resemble usual geek-culture conventions in terms of activities like workshops, talks, showcases, concerts, etc., but their size can vary greatly. For example, the term is used indistinctly for a weekend long large-scale event in a big venue like a hotel, university, event center, etc. or a one-day small-scale event that takes place in a single auditorium. Events can be free or not, but this is not necessarily related to the size of the venue or attendance. Regarding who organizes them, these could be run by groups of people, like student clubs, which obtained some space to use as a venue, or by organized collectives with legal representation that are able to receive government funds or have private funding. We will continue to refer to these kind of activities as "events" (meaning "eventos") throughout the rest of the text, since this is the ingrained way that fandom groups in Chile refer to such meetings to this day, but please keep in mind the aforementioned considerations.

[3] Author Zagal is one of the founding board members of the *AJR* and also participated in, and later helped organize several TRPG events in Chile in the 1990s including multiple installments of the *Concilio de Dragones*.

[4]https://www.conciliodedragones.cl/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/InscripciondeMaster_sincorreos.xls