

# Introduction

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In the spirit of the current special issue on constructed languages, I wanted to consider how popular culture functions like a language, and for that I looked to the work of linguist Arika Okrent. In her book *In the Land of Invented Languages*, Okrent writes:

The variety of shape, pattern, and color found in the languages of the world is a testament to the wonder of nature, to the breathtaking array of possibilities that can emerge, tangled and wild, from the fertile human endowments of brain and larynx, intelligence, and social skills. (5)

This idea could easily describe popular culture, which demonstrates its own variety of shapes, patterns, and colors across a wide assortment of media, platforms, and technologies. Popular culture is a language in and of itself, one that features numerous dialects that take the form of movies, TV, novels, comic books, video games, board games, and more. Fans of popular culture texts learn to speak this language, using it to converse with other likeminded individuals and create communities that forge connections via references that only other fans truly understand. From Whovians to MSTies, from Trekkies to Warsies, and from Sherlockians to members of the SPN family, fandoms speak the language of popular culture but do so in a plethora of different accents.

It is the job of popular culture scholars to decode these various vernaculars and thereby understand the relationship between popular culture and fans, or popular culture and society, or popular culture and other forms of culture. In this way, popular culture scholars are not unlike linguists. Again, I turn to Okrent who contends:

The job of the linguist, like that of the biologist or the botanist, is not to tell us how nature should behave, or what its creations should look like, but to describe those creations in all their messy glory and try to figure out what they can teach us about life, the world, and, especially in the case of linguistics, the workings of the human mind. (5)

Popular culture scholars similarly study popular texts and those who consume them to understand what they can tell us about life, the world, and the workings of the human mind. In other words, to paraphrase Douglas Adams, we study popular

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culture and its fans to better understand life, the universe, and everything. In our capacity as researchers of popular culture, we study films, TV, video games, comic books, and the like to translate their specific languages and uncover how they both reflect and shape society. We also study these texts to explore how fans, those who immerse themselves in the dialect of different popular texts, use these languages to connect with one another. Doing so helps us recognize the impact that these texts have on people and the world(s) they inhabit.

The reviews collected in this issue all discuss books or other texts that demonstrate the range of the popular culture dialect. First, in keeping with the special issue, one of the guest editors provides a review of David Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves to Sand Worms, the Words Behind World-Building*. This seminal text presents an introduction to those unfamiliar with constructed languages or conlangs. Then, Gabrielle Stecher of Indiana University Bloomington looks at Ruby Blondell's monograph *Helen of Troy in Hollywood*, which analyzes onscreen depictions of the woman whose face "launched a thousand ships" to understand what such portrayals reveal about numerous sociocultural issues. Next, Adrielys Calderon Ortiz of the Ohio State University reviews *Monstrous Things: Essays on Ghosts, Vampires, and Things That Go Bump in the Night*, which collects some of media scholar Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's essays on supernatural creatures. Dennis Owen Frohlich of Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania returns to tell readers about Dale Leorke and Daneille Wyatt's book *The Library as Playground: How Games and Play are Reshaping Public Culture*, a look at how libraries around the world use games and play to reach new audiences and publics. Finally, frequent reviewer Elizabeth Shiller briefly analyzes the blockbuster film and cultural phenomenon *Barbie* while Hee-seong Lim offers insight into the K-drama series *The Glory*.

Before I send you off to read these thoughtful and engaging reviews, I would like to take a moment to recognize my new assistant editor, Casey O'Ceallaigh of the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. I will let Casey introduce themselves:

Casey is a lecturer at UW - Whitewater who received their PhD in English: Media, Cinema, and Digital studies from UW - Milwaukee in 2023. Their research focuses on game and sound studies as well as digital rhetoric. They have published chapters in collected works such as *Gender and Sexuality in Video Game Sound* edited by Dana Plank, *Live Streaming Culture* edited by Bo Ruberg, and *Approaches to Digital Game Studies* edited by Josh Call.

When they are not teaching or researching, you can find them either playing games or making them.

I greatly appreciate Casey's invaluable input on the content and writing of these reviews, as their feedback helped me ensure that the Reviews section is once again as well-written as possible.

As always, I want to encourage readers of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* to reach out to me if they would like to submit their own constructive reviews. We have helpfully provided links to several publishers' websites in the "Submitting Reviews" section of the PCSJ website, and you are welcome to browse titles published within the last two years to see if there are any you might want to review. We also need reviews of films, TV shows, games (both digital and analog), comic books, and other recent popular texts, and I urge readers to submit suggestions. If you would like to review something for the PCSJ, please reach out to me via email at [chrstphrolson@gmail.com](mailto:chrstphrolson@gmail.com). Now, on to the reviews.

#### Works Cited

Okrent, Arika. *In the Land of Invented Languages: Esperanto Rock Stars, Klingon Poets, Loglan Lovers, and the Mad Dreamers Who Tried to Build a Perfect Language*. Spiegel & Grau, 2009.