

Magia i Miecz Magazine: The Evolution of Tabletop RPG in Poland and its Anglo-Saxon Context

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Abstract: The paper analyses the evolution of tabletop RPGs in Poland through the prism of *Magia i Miecz* (1993–2002) – the first, and for a long time the only commercial Polish RPG magazine. This evolution is discussed by means of the “classic” Gamism-Narrativism-Simulationism model, and with reference to the history of RPGs in the English-speaking world. Even though they reached Poland 20 years after their birth, when simulationism and diceless storytelling were well-known abroad, *Magia i Miecz* did not import all playing styles at once. Instead, Polish RPGs went through the same developmental stages as in the USA: from gamism, across simulationism and narrativism, to diceless storytelling to dice-friendly storytelling and New Style / indie.

Keywords: *Magia i Miecz*, role-playing games, RPG, GNS model

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is an analysis of the evolution of tabletop RPGs in Poland, as seen through the prism of *Magia i Miecz* (1993–2002): the first and most of the time the only commercial RPG magazine on the Polish market. This evolution will be considered with reference to the history of RPG in the English-speaking world, most notably in the USA, and analysed with the use of the “classic” Gamism-Narrativism-Simulationism model.

The Threefold Model, developed collectively on rec.games.frp.advocacy group (1997; see also Kim, 2007) and summarised by John H. Kim (1998), distinguished three playing styles: gamism, simulationism, and dramatism (GDS). These were later renamed by *The Forge* community and Ron Edwards (2001) into gamism, simulationism, and narrativism (GNS), and in 2003 termed as “creative agendas” part of The Big Model (Edwards, 2003). The reception of the three styles/agendas was mixed; nevertheless, they tend to be referenced to in most academic discussions about the history or styles of RPG (e.g. Cover, 2010, Kindle, chapter 9, section “Limitation of Genre: Different Player Perspectives”; Peterson, 2012, Kindle, footnote 496; Tresca, 2011, Kindle, chapter 3, section “Narrative”; Mäkelä, Koistinen, Siukola, Turunen, 2005). It has produced a lasting impact on popular RPG theory in the industry media, and its use was extended also to LARPs – live action role-plays (as adapted by Bøckman, 2003).

For the purpose of this article, we will use the “classic” GNS triad from before The Big Model, the reason being its historical relevance. The time period analysed here ends in 2002, when GNS’s expansion into The Big Model was not around yet. The old GNS may not be the optimal template to analyse present-day role-playing practices, but it seems an appropriate framework to map the evolutionary stages of tabletop RPG – especially, its 1996+ period in Poland, when the triumph of narrativism (storytelling) over gamism corresponded with the debate about these very concepts on English-speaking discussion groups. It was the GDS/GNS model that was used to think and write about the RPG experience in the late 1990s / early 2000s. Polish authors and opinion leaders, who frequented those English forums, were introduced to this conceptual framework, made their choices about preferred playing styles, and reflected the choices in their RPG writing. Thus, it might have had direct influence on the Polish RPG scene.

In the tables below, each text is labelled as follows:

- G = Gamist, if its main concern is winning, levelling up, and game mechanics: its balance, fairness, application, selection of mechanics-driven challenges;
- Sim = Simulationist, if its main concern is the accuracy (“realism”) of game mechanics in its simulation of physical/biological/psychological phenomena (e.g. in combat) and the realism of the setting;
- N = Narrativist, if it focuses on the storytelling qualities of the RPG experience as similar to literary/film fiction, e.g. by focus on dialogue, narration, genre conventions, plot development, character personality and relationships;
- Sim/N = Simulationist/Narrativist, if it focuses on psychological realism in character behaviour (and acting) and on verisimilitude (or internal logic) in the working of the fictional world in its social, economic, legal and other aspects.

All translations of Polish titles and quotations to English are ours.

2. Year 1993: Origins in Pure Gamism

The main content of issues 1–5/1993 was *Kryształy Czasu* (*Crystals of Time*), a complete handbook to a fantasy game published in instalments, concerned with races, character classes, game mechanics, sample scenarios, character generator, character development, the geopolitical environment etc. The game was similar to *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax, Arneson, 1974): dungeon crawls and quests focused on beating traps and monsters, collecting loot and experience points, and levelling up. “Initially, *Dungeons & Dragons* was largely gamist, doing little to encourage in-depth role-playing or any form of storytelling” (Tresca, 2011, Kindle, chapter 3, section “Narrative”), and such were the *Crystals*. Artur Szyndler says that RPG is about “experiencing exotic and fantastic adventures in magical worlds” (1993a, p. 4), echoing the view of D&D’s author Gary Gygax (1987; 1989), as cited in Tresca (ibid.). It was this D&D-like game, with a very complex dice-based rule system and cliché fantasy world, that was first available in Polish and was central to the only RPG magazine on the market. Hence, the foundations for the RPG fandom laid by the *Magia*

i Miecz (further referred to as MiM) magazine assumed gamism as the expected playing style.

Initially, *Crystals of Time* occupied so much space that little was left for other magazine content. In issues 1–5/1993 (between 36 and 48 pages each), about 15–20% of the text was used for regular sections: editorial, letters to the editor (starting in 3/1993), game reviews, info on Polish SF/game clubs, and a final section on non-RPG games: miniature models in 1/1993, LARP in 2/1993, and strategic wargaming from 3/1993 on. Beside these “regulars”, the rest was simply a part of *Crystals of Time* handbook, with a maximum of three other texts (none in 1/1993; a short story in 5/1993).

2/1993

Author	Title (with English translation)	Content	Playing Style
Victor + T. Stępień	“X przykazań Mistrza Gry” (The GM’s Ten Commandments)	encourages players to act out dialogues, GMs to diversify the speech of NPCs, and everyone to pay attention to the physical realism, e.g. that carrying a heavy load should decrease agility (based on the 122 issue of <i>Dragon Magazine</i>)	Sim/N
Jacek Brzeziński	“Charakter postaci a specyfika sytuacji w RPG” (Character’s alignment versus situational specifics in RPG)	talks about psychological realism and how different alignments (good/evil; law/chaos) result in different responses to the same situation	Sim
Carlos M.	“Wpływ gier Role-Playing na zmiany w psychice” (Influence of RPG on mental changes)	not relevant to playing styles	–

3/1993

Author	Title (with English translation)	Content	Playing Style
Anonymous	“Samotna przygoda” (The Lonely Adventure)	how to run a scenario for only one character; focused on difficulty levels of traps and monsters, healing options, etc.	G

Author	Title (with English translation)	Content	Playing Style
Paweł Opara	“Czarownik Damazy o niewidzialności” (Sorcerer Damazy on Invisibility)	long essay on the practical aspects and theory behind Invisibility spells, with expansion of game mechanics	G/Sim

Apart from the three articles heralding the advent of simulationism, no other text (including scenarios) in issues 1/1993 to 5/1993 reached beyond gamist fantasy. Sample single-player adventures published in the early issues served as tutorials to the *Crystals of Time* mechanics. Full scenarios for adventuring parties, published in 4/1993 (“Przygoda: Nieproszony gość” [An Adventure: Uninvited Guest]) (Anonymous, 1993b) and 5/1993 (“Demoniczna Horda” [Demonic Horde]) (Szyndler, 1993b), were typical dungeon crawls with traps, monsters and treasures; “Demonic Horde”, specifically, was later remembered as the epitome of this gaming style (Mochocki, 2007, p. 35).

3. Early 1994: Towards Simulationism

With 5/1993, the publication of *Crystals of Time* “core books” was almost completed. More spells, items, monsters, scenarios, settings and new rules were yet to come, but merely as expansions (however, as Adrian Kuc insists, for spellcasting character classes it was necessary to have access to descriptions of spells from MiM 6/1993 [personal communication, 2016]). Plus, *Magia i Miecz* grew in size: first to 66, then 82 and more pages. Thus, in 1994 the hegemony of *Crystals of Time* was over.

There finally was enough space to make it a genuine magazine, not a serially published game handbook with tiny additions of magazine content. The issue 1/1994 brought a large dose of simulationism, “a simulationist sort of approach where realism in the storyworld is privileged over game rules” (Cover, 2010, Kindle, Chapter Notes, section “Chapter 7”). In MiM, it took the form of calls for “realism” in game mechanics and world/character behaviour. It also opened a long-continued cycle

of popular science texts about the history, technology, economy of real-world cultures (most notably, European Middle Ages), which should help gamemasters create more believable (= realistic) settings. Very much like the 1977 game of *Chivalry & Sorcery* (Simbalist, Backhaus, 1977) in the US, whose “authors strove to depict a plausible world, one where the actions of characters had a coherent and believable context” (Peterson, 2012, Kindle, section 5.10: “D&D among the RPGs”).

1/1994

Author	Title (with English translation)	Content	Playing Style
Jacek Brzeziński	“Błędy i wypaczenia” (Errors and distortions)	talks a lot about immersion in the character’s mind, but not for the sake of immersionism – his main concern is realism, and he sees immersion as the necessary means to achieve it; “The genuine realism of the game needs good and thorough immersion in the character’s psyche” (Brzeziński, 1994a, p. 16)	Sim/N
Paweł Opara	“Fenomen Magicznego Pocisku” (The Phenomenon of the Magic Missile)	a manual on the use of Magic Missile spell, with quasi-realistic attention to detail, to cause-effect relationships, to context and environment (e.g. even though the magic missile deals little damage, it will disarm an opponent if it hits him/her in the hand, or blind him if it hits the eyes, or knock over a mounted warrior if it hits the horse’s leg)	Sim
Robert Zegar	“Rycerz” (Knight)	about medieval knights	Sim
Artur Szrejter	“Czy Wikingowie mieli rogi?” (Did the Vikings have horns?)	about Vikings	Sim

After 1/1994, the “GM’s Almanac” section frequently included: a) historical texts intended as guidelines for quasi-historical settings: about horses; swords; armoured warriors; Viking runes; medieval executioners; religious orders and monasteries; mythological creatures etc.; b) non-historical texts which clearly addressed fantasy settings, but took the serious “realistic” tone like the above-described “Phenomenon of the Magic

Missile”. Such were e.g. “Pułapki” (Traps) in 3/1994 (Minberg, 1994) and “Vademecum...” in 4/1994 (Anonymous, 1994; see the table below). On the downside, the tendency to realism led to the increased complexity of game rules and loads of detailed information, which is again parallel to the American case of early simulationism, as exemplified by *Chivalry & Sorcery*. Peterson says: “As the realism rose to vertiginous heights, the playability of *Chivalry & Sorcery* precipitously plummeted” (2012, Kindle, section 5.10: “D&D among the RPGs”). He also quotes Lewis Pulsipher’s opinion from the issue 5 of the *White Dwarf* magazine: “C&S is the fantasy role-playing expression of the wargamers who favour realism and simulation, while D&D is the expression of playability fans who want a good game, not simulation” (as cited in: Peterson, 2012, *ibid.*).

Despite the loud calls for realism, gamism was still heavily present in MiM. For example, in the issue 2/1994 another fantasy game for beginners was published, short enough to fit into one edition of the magazine: *Oko Yrrheda* (*The Eye of Yrrheda*) by Andrzej Sapkowski. The issue 3/1994 described *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax, 1977, 1978), its various worlds and supplements, and it contained one scenario for AD&D. Also in 1994, texts and scenarios for *Warhammer Fantasy Role Play* (Halliwell, Priestley, Davis, Bambra, Gallagher, 1986) began to appear, and in the late 1994 MiM’s publisher (Mag) released the Polish edition of WFRP (in a book format). All four games featured in MiM were heroic fantasy with dice-based rule systems presented with a gamist attitude. At the same time, the “GM’s Almanac” in 1994 was strongly leaning towards simulationism, and also started to give floor to narrativism. The contents of issue 4/1994 are a representative sample of this mixture:

4/1994

Author	Title (with English translation)	Content	Playing Style
Ken Rolston	“Element ryzyka” (Element of Risk)	scenario for WFRP (from the issue 107 of <i>White Dwarf</i>)	G/N
Chris Felton	“Nie potrzeba nam psycholi” (No Psychos Needed)	text for WFRP players on the psychology of elves, dwarves and halflings (from the issue 92 of <i>White Dwarf</i>)	N

Graeme Davis	“Ręka przeznaczenia” (Hand of Destiny)	for WFRP GMs, on the use of Destiny Points (from the issue 88 of <i>White Dwarf</i>)	G
Rafał Gatecki	“Karczmarzu, piwa!” (Beer for us, innkeeper!)	detailed description of how taverns/inns work	Sim
Anonymous	several articles on 27 pages	huge expansion of the set for <i>Crystals of Time</i> : magical items, monsters, minor gods, elixirs, spells	G
Anonymous	“Vademecum cen” (Vademecum of prices)	the presentation of buildings and fortifications’ prices; written for <i>Crystals...</i> , but with simulationist agenda (technological and economical realism), including detailed accounts of size, capacity, price, garrison, maintenance, construction time for castles, towers etc.	Sim
Tomasz Kołodziejczak, Jacek Komuda	“Pięć lampek” (Five lamps)	short story set in <i>Crystals of Time</i>	N
Jacek Brzeziński	“Prezentacja świata” (Presentation of the Setting)	a GM’s guide which glorified the storytelling skills and believable acting as a means to enhance realism	Sim/N

The last item is of special interest. Brzeziński’s conclusion heralded the coming of narrativism: “role playing game is first and foremost two things: role playing and narration (plus, of course, imagination); rules are just an addition – sometimes unnecessary” (1994b, p. 24). For Brzeziński, however, the Story is not the primary concern – Realism is. He sees narration and acting as merely the means to achieve greater realism. Ultimately, he wants scenarios to be realism-driven – not story-driven: “the realism of reality demands that not everything in this world should revolve around your scenario” (ibid.). This is why his argument is not to be separated from simulationism.

4. Number 10: Narrativism Enters

The issue 5/1994 (10 in general) took horror as its main theme – perceived as a novelty in Poland at that time. The editorial says: “Some of you will

now ask what horror has to do with RPG. With no doubt, this genre is rarely found in role playing games” (Hunter, 1994, p. 1). The contents are as follows:

5/1994

Author	Title (with English translation)	Content	Playing Style
Artur Marciniak	“Call of Cthulhu”	description/review of CoC RPG	–
Jerzy Szytak	“Oblicza horroru” (The Faces of Horror)	historical overview of horror in literature and film	N
Andrzej Miszkurka, Tomek Kreczmar	“Włos się jeży, czyli jak przestraszyć graczy” (Hair Stands On End, or How To Scare Your Players)	GM manual (see below)	N
Zbigniew Wałaszewski	“Wampir – książę krwi” (Vampire – Prince of the Blood)	description of vampires	N
Jacek Komuda	“Kat i jego warsztat pracy” (Executioner and His Workplace)	description of medieval executioner’s work	Sim
Jakub Żurek	“Drużyna na chorobowym” (Adventurers on Doctor’s Leave)	GM manual: description of mental and physical diseases; their game mechanics; dice-based generator	G/Sim
Andrzej Miszkurka	“Dom” (The House)	scenario for <i>Crystals of Time</i>	G/N
Artur Marciniak	“Duch” (Ghost)	scenario for <i>Crystals of Time</i>	G/N
Anonymous	another 20-page long expansion set	spells, monsters, herbs, treasures	G
Jacek Piekara	Sługa Boży (Servant of God)	horror fantasy short story	N

Narrativism pushed simulationism to the margins in “GM’s Almanac”. A gamist section of *Crystals of Time* is still present, with catalogues of spells, monsters etc. full of numerical game statistics. The two *Crystals of Time* scenarios do not abandon rules-heavy combat encounters either – but in the storyline and in instruction for gamemasters they strongly support the idea of building a scary emotional experience through narrative. “The House” was then long remembered as a “new quality” in scenario writing.

The central text “Hair Stand On End...” was an open “manifesto” of narrativism as GM’s creative agenda. It promised: “your scenarios will start to resemble the best stories by Lovecraft or Poe” (Miszkurka, Kreczmar, 1994b, p. 13). For the first time in MiM, GM’s manual did not focus on game mechanics or realism, but on the evocation of emotions through narrative means; in this case: how to make players scared. In the American context it had also been the horror genre that pushed RPG towards literariness, including the influential *Call of Cthulhu* (Petersen, Willis, 1981). As Mackay has it, *Call of Cthulhu* together with *Stormbringer* (St. Andre, Perrin, 1981) and *Middle-earth* (Charlton, 1984) “emphasized the literary roots that were a background to, but not the main focus of early game design” (2001, p. 17). In a similar vein, game designer John Wick says:

The first four editions of D&D are not role-playing games. You can successfully play them without role-playing. *Call of Cthulhu*, on the other hand, is a game you cannot successfully play without role-playing. If you try it, you get... well, you actually violate the basic tenant of the game: to make yourself scared through your character’s choices (2014).

He does not reach for the term narrativism, but his further comment leaves no doubt that he advocates the narrativist claim to get rid of game mechanics if it harms the story quality:

if the most important part of your game is balancing the damage, rate-of-fire, range modifiers, damage dice, ablative armor, dodge modifiers and speed factors, you aren’t playing a role-playing game. You’re playing a board game.

And you need to stop it. Because all that crap is getting in the way of telling a good story. As a GM, your job is to help the players tell the stories of their characters (Wick, 2014).

It may be said that in Poland, MiM 5/1994 did a similar thing that *Call of Cthulhu* had done in the USA: it opened eyes to the storytelling potential of RPG by showing how horror scenarios can generate the same emotions as film/literature.

5. Late 1994: Back and Forth

After the issue 5/1994, narrativism did not push back simulationism immediately. On the contrary, 6/1994 did not follow either the horror

theme or the narrativist agenda. It retained the gamist/simulationist profile, e.g. with “Długa droga do domu” (Long way home) by Maciej Kocuj about the realities of living in a medieval castle, or “Vademecum walki” (Vademecum of combat) by Szyndler: rules expansion for *Crystals of Time* to make combat more realistic. Horror strikes back in 7/1994 with “Dom II: Urodziny Alvina” (The House II: Alvin’s Birthday) by Miskurka and Kreczmar, but gamist *Crystals of Time* and simulationist “GM’s Almanac” still hold ground. Narrativism would not triumph until next year.

6. Year 1995: Narrativism Rises

The issue 1/1995 injects another dose of narrativism. “Dynamika akcji. Przeszkody i metody” (Dynamics of Action: Obstacles and Methods) by Ad In puts strong emphasis on keeping the players involved in narrative action. And more importantly, another RPG system shows up: *Strefa Śmierci* (*Death Zone*), a science-fiction game, to be published in MiM in a series of texts throughout upcoming months. On the first page, the authors declare:

Game rules are not important. [...] What is important is what you are telling your players and how they are playing their characters. [...] The main task of the gamemaster is to create an interesting story [...] personality of characters, acting out dialogues and emotions matter much more than combat, in which players most likely will fail (Kołodziejczak, Brzeziński, 1995, p. 40).

Parallels to the storytelling manifesto of the American edition of *Vampire: the Masquerade* (Rein-Hagen, 1991) are hard to overlook.

Death Zone broke the monopoly of fantasy. Throughout 1995, the constant presence of gamist *Crystals of Time* was counterbalanced by the narrativist *Death Zone*, and some materials for *Cyberpunk 2020* (Pondsmith, 1990; its Polish version published by Copernicus in 1994). In mid-1995, game materials for *Call of Cthulhu* made their way on MiM’s pages, and stayed there for good, especially as MiM’s publisher (Mag) released the Polish edition of the game. At the same time, simulationist voices for realism did not go away: Smoq writes “Więcej realizmu!” (More realism!) in 2/1995 and “Jeszcze więcej realizmu” (Even more realism) in 7–8/1995,

and “GM’s Almanac” on realistic technology and human behaviour continues.

Also, within the “more realism” voices there are ones calling for deep immersion in character. Dariusz Paszkowski in “Kroniki awanturnicze” (The Adventurous Chronicles) in 4/1995 says: “The point of role-playing games is first and foremost the ability to immerse in your role” (p. 22-23). In 10/1995 Maciej Nowak takes the same attitude in “Chleb najemników” (Bread of Mercenaries), and Adam Matusiewicz in “Szanujmy wspomnienia” (Let’s Respect Memories) highlights the importance of building a past for player characters. Should we be using Bøckman’s (2003) adaptation of GNS to live action role play, which distinguishes dramatism, gamism and immersionism, we would classify this as the latter. In the original GNS model, it would be narrativism (immersion in the character’s actions and emotions within an unfolding story).

Generally, in 1995 MiM – and the MiM-animated RPG community in Poland – reached adolescence. MiM already covered all major genres: fantasy, s-f and horror; and gave voice to all playing styles in the GNS model. Also, fantasy was associated with gamism and simulationism, horror with narrativism, and SF (*Death Zone*) with simulationism and narrativism. *Crystals of Time* and gamism did not go away, but were marginalised. The strategic games section (hex-and-counter board games, mostly), which had been present since 1993, was abandoned in 1995.

The issue 12/1995 was focused on narrativist horror again, with Miszkurka and Kreczmar’s how-to-scare manual “Włos się jeży II” (Hair Stands On End II); with a text about Lovecraftian Dreamlands by Emil Leszczyński; and a CyberCthulhu section translated from the issue 2/1992 of *Interface* (Hockabout, 1995). In the editorial to MiM 12/1995, the authors say “We’ve decided that the next issues of MiM can be more difficult; that we may print stuff dealing with more complex aspects of RPG” (Marciniak, 1995, p. 1).

These are RPGs published in Polish by the end of 1995: *Kryształy Czasu* (1993, in *Magia i Miecz*), *Oko Yrrhedesa* (1994, in *Magia i Miecz*), *Warhammer Fantasy Role Play* (1994, Mag), *Cyberpunk 2020* (1994, Copernicus), *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (1995, TM-Semic), *Call of Cthulhu* (1995, Mag), *Zły Cień: Kruki Urojenia (Evil Shadow: Crows of Delusion)* (Greczyszyn, 1995, Szaman). The latter game was a local production set in early medieval

Poland, mixing the historical geopolitics with Slavic demonology and magic. In GNS terms, it was the epitome of simulationism-gone-too-far, with rulesets as detailed as to list battle statistics of a single ant (Wikipedia, 2014). It did not make it to MiM's pages and soon sank into oblivion.

7. Years 1996–1999: Storytelling rising

In years 1996–1999, the Polish RPG market grew significantly, welcoming local editions of: *Vampire: the Masquerade* (1996, ISA), *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* (1997, Mag; orig.: Rein-Hagen, 1992), *Middle-earth* (1996, Mag), *Shadowrun* (1997, ISA; orig.: Charette, Hume, Dowd, 1989), and *Mage: the Ascension* (1999, Warszawa; orig.: Wieck, Earley, Wieck, 1993). Also, original Polish games came out. 17th-century *Dzikie Pola* (Komuda, Baryłka, Jurewicz, 1997, Mag) was clearly inspired by Henryk Sienkiewicz's historical fiction. The book edition of Sapkowski's *Oko Yrrheda* (1999, Mag) was probably a market move to capitalise on the then-bestselling *Witcher* novels. All these games feature storytelling/narrativism, many of them openly self-identify as such (the *World of Darkness* series [i.e. *Vampire...* and *Werewolf...*], *Dzikie Pola*). Some use settings of literary fiction. As an exception comes the release of the D&D-like *Crystals of Time* in book format (Szyndler, 1998, Mag), which had been promised by the publisher many years earlier, now mockingly advertised as “the longest awaited RPG in the world”: a late legacy of the gamist roots.

MiM gave priority to titles published by Mag, but not exclusively: content for other games also appeared every now and then. Combat- and rules-oriented games (e.g. *WFRP*, *Legend of the Five Rings* [Wick, 1997], *Deadlands* [Hensley, 1996], *Earthdawn* [Gorden, 1993]) still received content with floor maps and monster stats, so narrativism did not reign supreme – but it established ground as the “advanced” and “ambitious” playing style, and was endorsed by gamemaster's manuals even for sword-and-sorcery settings.

Throughout 1996 and 1997, a number of authors encouraged the narrativist approach. In 1/1996, Rafał Gałęcki writes “Narodziny storytellingu” (The Birth of Storytelling), promoting the ideas championed by the *World of Darkness* series. The debate of “role-playing vs. roll-playing” increases,

with “Z kostkami czy bez?” (With or Without Dice?) by Łukasz M. Pogoda and “Parę słów o walce” (A Few Words on Combat) by Michał Niewęglowski (both in 3/1996). Beyond *Magia i Miecz*, ISA published the Polish edition of *Vampire: the Masquerade*. In 7–8/1996, MiM published the first game materials for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*, as MiM’s publisher was releasing the Polish edition, too. Since then, the *World of Darkness* also had its section in MiM. Marcin Mortka’s “Warhammer a storytelling” in 9/1996 is an example of the idea of storytelling (to be termed as narrativism under GNS) transplanted to other settings, including these fantasy settings that had long been associated with gamism. As discussed by Mochocki (2007, p. 182), up to the early 1996, narrativism was promoted as a creative agenda that should be more extensively used by scenario writers, yet without giving up on the gamist legacy of game mechanics and tactics. Since late 1996, some authors, such as Mortka, started to reject the use of game mechanics entirely.

In 9/1997, Miłosz Brzeziński advocates strict adherence to the model of detective fiction in *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios, pointing to Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Raymond Chandler, making the same claims about “similar commonality” of plots as Kenneth Hite (2007). For the first time in MiM’s how-to scenario guides, someone discussed the narrative structure of the RPG scenario as a whole – as opposed to the individual motifs or techniques. This marks the transition to “advanced scenario theory”, as termed by Mochocki (2007, p. 174), which was developed since 1998 and unequivocally glorified storytelling. (At the same time the Gamism-Narrativism-Simulationism theory was being hotly discussed in the English-speaking online communities.) In 5/1998, the first part of “Interaktywne narzędzia” (The Interactive Toolkit) by Chris Kubasik was published (from the issue 50 of *White Wolf Inphobia*), a radical storytelling manifesto, to be continued for the upcoming two issues. In 7–8/1998, Tomasz Andruszkiewicz promotes the classic three-act drama structure as the basis for RPG scenarios, insisting on parallels in the “dramaturgy” of literature, film, music and RPG (1998, p. 57). The issue 12/1998 brings Ignacy Trzewiczek’s “Opowieść o zemście” (A Story on Revenge): a *Warhammer* scenario in the uniquely Trzewiczek style which could be called “radical storytelling”. He openly admits that his gamemastering style leads players through the adventures as if through

a fast-paced action film: captivating and exciting, but not open to player's agency (1998, p. 53). The MiM 12/1998 debut leads to a series of "GM's Almanac" texts written by Trzewiczek under the heading of "Jesienna gawęda" (The Autumn Tale), first of which came out in issue 1/1999. Trzewiczek writes more "Autumn Tales" for MiM in 1999, and ultimately launches his own *Portal* magazine in late 1999.

8. MiM's Last Years: 2000–2002

The appearance of *Portal* was an important milestone. Prior to that, MiM had been the one and only professional (i.e. not fanzine) RPG magazine that managed to last more than a few issues. *Portal* was the only MiM's competition on the small market, positioning itself as more ambitious and sophisticated. It focused on the narrativist agenda, with strong presence of simulationism in historical games (*Dziki Pola, Szermierz* [M. Główka, R. Główka, 1999, printed in *Portal* #1]) and in military aspects (thanks to REMOV as firearms expert and Nurglitch as fencing practitioner).

In the last years, MiM competed with *Portal* in delivering high-quality storytelling content for advanced gamemasters. It was not really a market competition, though, as many of the same game systems were covered in both, and the readers typically read both. Also, many of the same authors published in both, maintaining friendships or romantic relationships over the MiM-Portal rivalry. For example, in *Portal* 4/2000, Maciej Szaleniec in his "Opowieść ponad wszystko" (Story Above All!) guide for scenario writers goes as much as to recommend reading serious academic literary theory (p. 111). In MiM 11/2001, in her own guide "O tworzeniu intrygi" (On the Construction of Intrigue), Joanna Szaleniec also promotes story-driven RPG, but takes issue with Trzewiczek-style "filmic" approach, bluntly calling it a "fundamental mistake" to quench player's agency through linear plots (p. 59). Simultaneously, both Maciej and Joanna Szaleniec write story-driven scenarios published in MiM throughout 2000–2002 (in *Portal* as well), some authored by her or him alone, some written in collaboration. Their hallmarks are: 1) cut-scenes about NPCs narrated to players even though the characters are not around to witness, and 2) plot structured in "layers", discovered one by one. Typically, player

characters get involved in the plot only to find out they have been misled about the nature of the conflict, and need to reassess the situation. For example, in the second layer the suspects turn out to be innocent, whereas the quest-givers and their motives start to look suspicious (Mochocki, 2007, p. 181). The most complicated scenario of this type has no less than five layers (Szaleniec, 2000b).

On the other hand, MiM also wanted to cater to the needs of beginners and players who preferred the traditional gamist/simulationist approach, whereas storytelling dominated in opinion writing and how-to guides. There was, however, a novel approach to the role vs. roll playing debate, coinciding with two specific games: *Legend of the Five Rings* (2000, published by Tori) and *Deadlands* (2000, Mag). These games took effort to bridge the gap between story and mechanics by their interconnectedness, i.e. key elements of the narrative setting or its aesthetics interwoven with game rules. This was not an entirely new phenomenon, having been observed as far back as in *Call of Cthulhu's* (1981) Sanity points (Hite, 2007, p. 35; Nephew, 2003, p. 4; Dormans, 2006). But in 2000–2001 in Poland it exploded: on the one hand, *Legend of the Five Rings* with mechanics of honour, humiliation, and formal apology and *Deadlands* with the poker card bluff mechanics for duels at high noon, on the other hand the New Style / New Wave series (see below). This promoted the view that well-crafted game mechanics can support and enhance, not ruin, the story experience, as exemplified, for example, in Trzewiczek's "Rzecz o turlaniu" (On Rolling) in *Portal* 12/2002: a long argumentative essay concluded as follows:

I know a couple of experienced GMs. They started with dice. Then they got dicephobic, went all storytelling... And now? They got over it. Recovered from dicephobia. They have gone through this illness and beaten it. [...] How about you? (Trzewiczek, 2002, p. 20).

The 2000–2002 era can be called the time of 'dice-friendly storytelling'. Another centre promoting the narrative qualities of RPG was "Quentin", an annual competition for the best Polish RPG scenario. Started in 1999, it developed throughout the 2000s and is still continued. In 2000, two of its jurors wrote a guide + statement "Quentin – kilka słów o konkursie, czyli garść uwag o tym, jak PISAĆ dobre scenariusze" (Quentin – a few words about the competition and some comments on how to WRITE

good scenarios) (Pogoda, REMOV, 2000). As Mochocki observes (2007, p. 73), they repeated the claim to literariness three times on a single page: “This is a literary competition”; “scenario is a literary work”; “written adventure is a normal literary text which requires hard work” (Pogoda, REMOV, 2000, p. 104). “Quentin” was connected to MiM in more than one way: not only was it created by MiM’s (and *Portal*’s) regular authors, but also formed a partnership with MiM to guarantee the publication of the winning scenarios. Also, it was *Magia i Miecz* (12/2000) that published the above-cited text by Pogoda and REMOV.

Generally, MiM, *Portal* and “Quentin” were not separate communities but nodes in one relatively small national scene, connected via many of the same leading figures, and with the unquestioned dominance of the narrativist discourse. Differences of opinion concerned the desired level of player agency, open vs. directed endings, total rejection vs. marginalisation of dice rolls, etc., yet no-one in late MiM or *Portal* would question the primacy of the story (Mochocki, 2007, p. 74).

9. Portal and New Style / Nowa Fala

Up to this point, the history of RPG in Poland can be traced through the lens of *Magia i Miecz*. The last episode, however, is connected only with *Portal*: the birth of small-format indie (independent) RPGs. In 2000, *Frankenstein Faktoria* by Joe Abrakadabra and Ignacy Trzewiczek opens the line of Nowa Fala (New Wave) games, following the Anglo-Saxon trend called New Style. Pioneered by John Tynes’ *Puppetland* published originally online (1995), New Style was officially launched as a series with James Wallis’s *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1998), to be followed by other games, including *Puppetland* in print form (Tynes, 1999). In Poland, *Frankenstein Faktoria* was the first of such small-format indie games. Next to that, Portal Publishing issued the Polish edition of *The Extraordinary Adventures...* (Wallis, 2001) and more original Polish games – some of which were soon published abroad. The first Polish RPG with a foreign edition was *Frankenstein Faktoria* (2001, Edge Entertainment, in Spanish), whereas genuine international acclaim was won by Michał Oracz’s *De Profundis* (2001), with its several editions in English,

German, and Spanish, and a nomination for the 2002 Diana Jones Award for Excellence in Gaming.

10. Conclusion

In 2000–2002 the Polish RPG market reached full maturity. Not only had it completed all evolutionary stages from dungeon crawls, across storytelling, to indie New Style, but also it started to generate games that reached international public. With regard to the focus of this study, it is interesting to observe that it was indeed the same evolutionary cycle – even though it did not have to be! In 1993, when *Magia i Miecz* was first published, both simulationism and narrativism (including WoD storytelling) were already around. Importing tabletop RPG from the Anglo-Saxon countries, MiM could actually begin with storytelling, or with a mixture of the creative agendas. Business-wise, it could even make more sense to reach for the newest developments or best practices. Instead, as shown in the table below, the evolutionary steps were exactly the same as they had been in the US, only that in Poland the changes came at a rapid pace. In detail:

1. MiM started with gamist dungeons heralded by *Crystals of Time*, a home-brew clone of D&D – 20 years after D&D.
2. Next came simulationist concerns about realism; in the USA 3 years after D&D, in Poland a few months after *Crystals of Time*.
3. Then, “the narrative turn” brought by horror games: in MiM it came 1 year after *Crystals of Time* (in the memorable 5/1994 issue), while it had taken 7 years in the USA to move from D&D to *Call of Cthulhu*.
4. Soon storytelling manifestoes came, with MiM’s 2-year evolution from narrativism to *Vampire: the Masquerade* (1994 to 1996), equivalent to 10 years in the USA (counted from CoC to *Vampire...*).
5. Finally, it took 4 years in Poland to go from diceless storytelling (*Vampire...*, 1996) to integrated story-mechanics in large-format games such as L5R (2000) and *Deadlands* (2001) and to indie small-formats (*Frankenstein...*, 2000). Analogically, it took 4 years in the US from the same *Vampire...* (1991) to *Puppetland* (1995) and 5 years to *Deadlands* (1996).

At that point, Poland was merely three years behind with local translations of the given games (L5R came out in 1997 in English, in 2000 in Polish; *Munchausen* – 1998 and 2001). After that, the Polish RPG scene seemed to develop parallelly to the world’s stage, with the foreign editions of *Frankenstein Faktoria* (2001) and *De Profundis* (2001) initiating two-way exchange.

Evolutionary steps	English-speaking world	Poland
origins in gamism	1974 (D&D)	1993 (<i>Crystals of Time</i>)
rise of simulationism	1977 (<i>Chivalry & Sorcery</i>)	early 1994 (MiM: “GM’s Almanac”)
rise of narrativism	1981 (<i>Cthulhu...</i>)	middle 1994 and 1995 (MiM: <i>Death Zone; Cthulhu...</i>)
storytelling (<i>World of Darkness</i>)	1991 (<i>Vampire...</i>)	1996 (<i>Vampire...</i>)
dice-friendly storytelling	1996 (<i>Deadlands</i>), 1997 (L5K)	2000 (L5K), 2001 (<i>Deadlands</i>)
New Style (indie)	1995 (<i>Puppetland</i>), 1998 (<i>Munchausen</i>)	2000 (<i>Frankenstein</i>), 2001 (translation of <i>Munchhausen</i>)

Afterword

With the development of free and 24/7 available online RPG portals and communities came the demise of print magazines. *Magia i Miecz* closed down in 2002. *Portal* followed suit in 2003, to be replaced by the publisher with a cheap, short and light-hearted *Gwiazdny Pirat* (Star Pirate), which survived in print until 2007. Then, it became a free online zine about RPG and other non-digital games, and was published until 2013. It was assumed that the time for print RPG magazines had definitely passed. Therefore, it came as a great surprise when Kuźnia Gier bought copyright from Mag and resurrected MiM after a successful crowdfunding campaign in 2014, raising nearly 100.000 PLN: 395% of the funding threshold (Stachyra, 2014). The new *Magia i Miecz* comes out quarterly in print, ebook and audiobook formats, having released four issues in 2015 and four planned for 2016. This is, however, a different story, which might be worth a separate study.

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¹ Although in our journal we follow the APA style, in this part of the bibliography we decided to use the traditional numbering of the magazines in question, since this kind of numbering had been used by their editors and the readers and researchers of them are highly accustomed to it. In the numbering of *Magia i Miecz* the first figure indicates the number within the given year, the figure in brackets - the overall number of the issue, and the last one (after the slash) - the year of publishing. In the case of the 1993 issues there are no numbers in brackets because it is the first volume of *Magia i Miecz*. In the case of the *Portal* magazine we name only the overall numbers of issues.

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Magazyn „Magia i Miecz”: Ewolucja narracyjnych RPG w Polsce i jej anglosaski kontekst

Abstrakt: Artykuł omawia ewolucję narracyjnych gier fabularnych w Polsce przez pryzmat „Magii i Miecza” (1993–2002), pierwszego i przez długi czas jedyne komercyjnego czasopisma RPG w kraju. Ewolucję tę analizujemy, opierając się na „klasycznym” modelu: gamizm–narratywizm–symulacjonizm, i w zestawieniu z historią RPG w krajach anglojęzycznych. Mimo że do Polski RPG dotarły 20 lat po swoich narodzinach, gdy symulacjonizm i bezkostkowy storytelling były już dobrze znane za granicą, *Magia i Miecz* nie od razu przejęła wszystkie style grania. Polskie RPG przeszło przez te same etapy rozwojowe co amerykańskie: od gamizmu, przez symulacjonizm, narratywizm i bezkostkowy storytelling, po kostkowy storytelling i gry Nowej Fali / indie.

Słowa kluczowe: gry fabularne, RPG, „Magia i Miecz”, model GNS
