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H.G. Wells' *Floor Games* and *Little Wars*: Encoding Games And Their Rules

Rulebooks and instruction manuals, particularly for games, possess a distinct purpose, that is, to present the procedural elements of a game's tasks, in all of their combinations and permutations. In modern rulebooks for board games or in table top games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, the formatting of the text mimics the styles of technical writing documents, replete with graphs, tables, charts, bulleted lists, and chronologically-minded sections that allow for easy reference and access to the game's mechanics. Two of the earliest examples of the genre, however, H. G. Wells' *Floor Games* (1911) and *Little Wars* (1913) do not follow a modern technical style. While Wells' goal was to present children with a few ideas for games and how to play them, his writing style is neither direct nor objective. Wells writes prosaically and with a lyrical vocabulary replete with anecdotes about Wells' sons; comments on politics, colonialism, history, and the educational value of games; and photographs and marginal illustrations to accompany the explanations. Their value, however, as a piece of gaming history, is important because they provide a foundation of rules upon which modern tabletop gaming (and indirectly, video gaming) have been built.¹

In encoding these two texts then, one must be conscious of how to tag the actual rules of Wells' games, making them both distinct from the narrative and aesthetic aspects of the text, and in relation to each other as interdependent units in a larger system. This is apropos of Espen Aarseth's argument that the study of games must pay special attention to a game's unique features: its mechanics. Games produce actions and operations through a system of cause and effect. The underlying rules of operation, whether understood by a player (in the case of tabletop or board games) or a machine (in the case of video games), are the most integral part of understanding how the game will work and be experienced in practice. Therefore, the encoding of rule-based or game-centric texts must be conscious of the functional properties of the game in question, and treat them as special qualities of the text that, especially if obfuscated by creative prose, should be systematically marked.

This presentation will approach the issue of TEI and how it can be used in creating digital editions of texts that illustrate the rules, concepts, and play of games. As a work in progress, the conclusions will not be absolute, but will be an attempt to understand how in dealing with texts like Wells', TEI can help parse the underlying actions a text recommends, and their interdependent nature. The questions to be explored in this presentation will be:

- 1) Where can we look to find other examples of rules or procedural elements being encoded in TEI, specifically the P5 guidelines? (Tomasek and Bauman as well as Bethke both provide starting points to the answer of the this question.)
- 2) What would a TEI customization that focuses on encoding game rules look like?

- 3) How do we encode the actual logic of the rules, as opposed to just the spatial formatting; in places where Wells does actually attempt to format the rules in an objective way, how can the markup for this section coincide with the prosaic styles of other sections?
- 4) How do encode suggestions and possibilities (since Wells is hardly ever dictatorial about how the games should be played) over more strict declarations of procedures?

From this project, what we can hope to gain is a set of methods to be adopted, improved upon, and customized to fit the needs of others who would seek to encode other documents that follow an internal procedural logic like that of game rules. For such culturally important objects, standards do not yet exist (as far as my research has revealed) an adaptable schema for game rules and their representation. This project will be the first step in resolving that issue.

1. Gary Gygax reports that he adopted several of Wells' rules for *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Chainmail*.

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