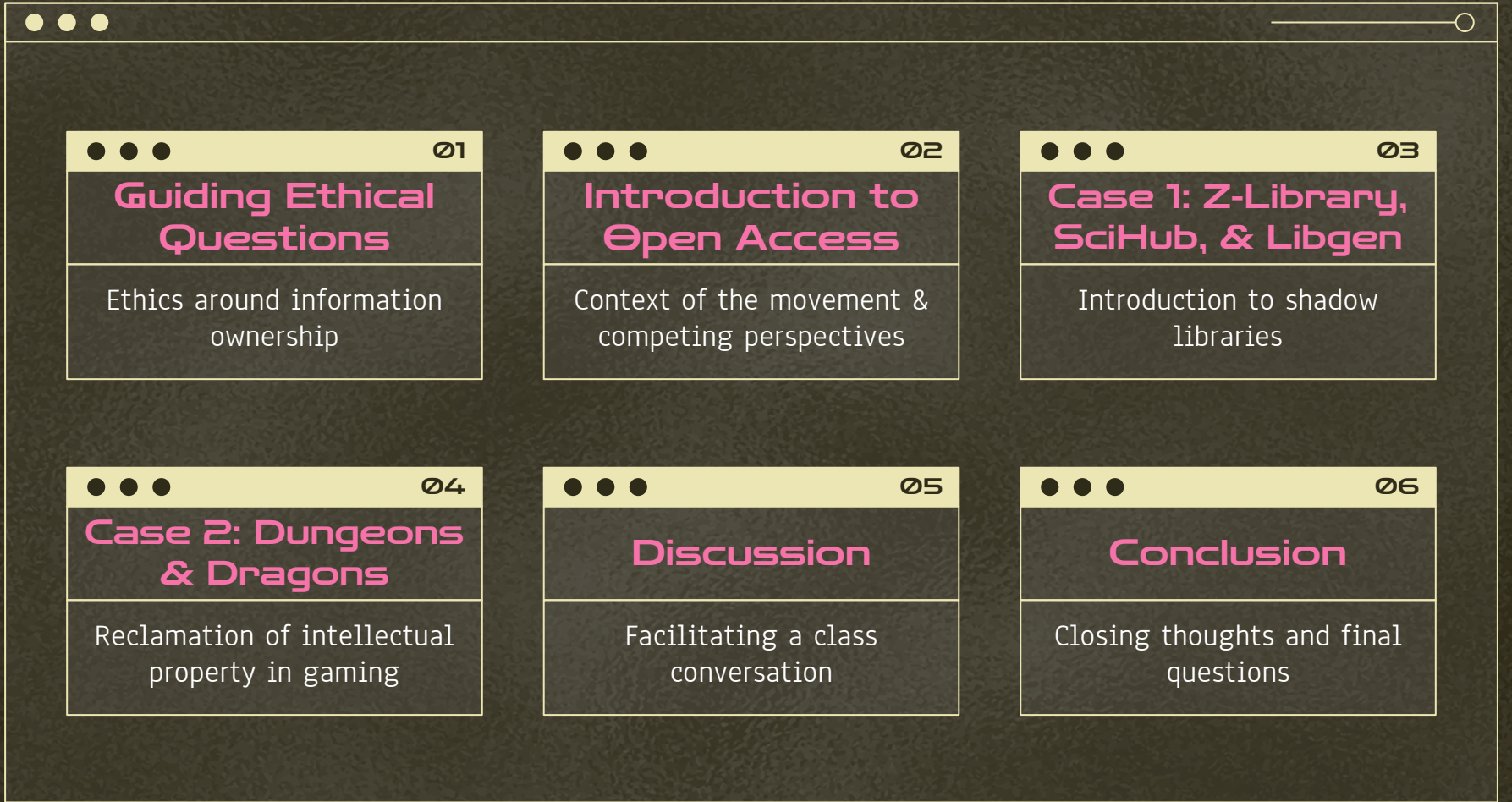


Shadow Librarians and Dungeon Masters

Exploring Ethical Questions Around
the Democratization of Information



Megan Cross
Carrie Dean
Sammie Killmer
James Onorevole
Sam Winemiller



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Guiding Ethical Questions

Ethics around information ownership

02

Introduction to Open Access

Context of the movement & competing perspectives

03

Case 1: Z-Library, SciHub, & Libgen

Introduction to shadow libraries

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Reclamation of intellectual property in gaming

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Discussion

Facilitating a class conversation

06

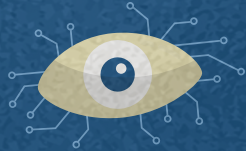
Conclusion

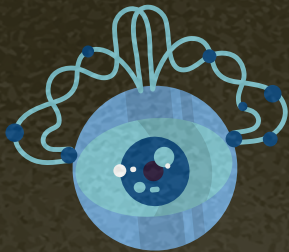
Closing thoughts and final questions

Guiding Ethical Questions

Openness and Ownership of Information

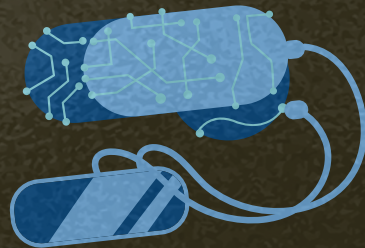
- What information should be openly accessible?
- What are the limits of info openness and ownership?
- Who gets to draw those lines?





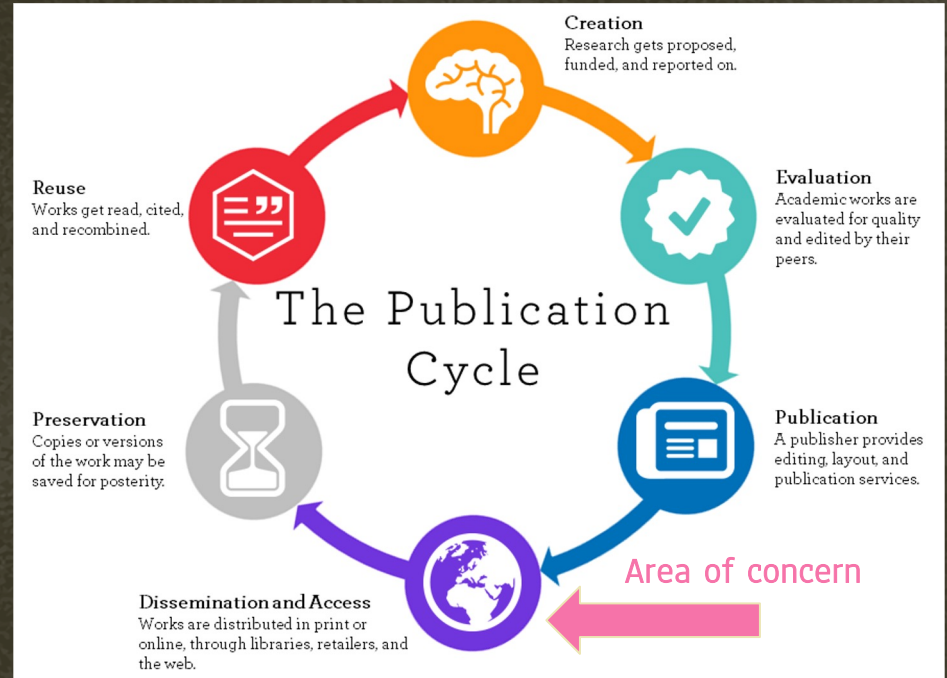
Case #1: Z-Library, SciHub, & Libgen

Understanding how Shadow Libraries challenge the walls around information built by corporations.



Academic Libraries







- Information privilege
 - Libraries pay (and break) big deals with publishers for access to platform with desired information



How did we get here?

“Information is power.
But like all power,
there are those who
want to keep it for
themselves.”

– Aaron Swartz

Profit	Company	Industry
2% <small>of \$173.8 billion</small>		Retail
9% <small>of \$98.7 billion</small>		Automobile
11% <small>of \$110.9 billion</small>		Search
21% <small>of \$229 billion</small>		Computing
37% <small>of \$2.8 billion</small>		Scholarly Publishing
39% <small>of \$608 million</small>	 Taylor & Francis Taylor & Francis Group	Scholarly Publishing

Communities Impacted by Publishing Practices

Students



Image 1

Researchers

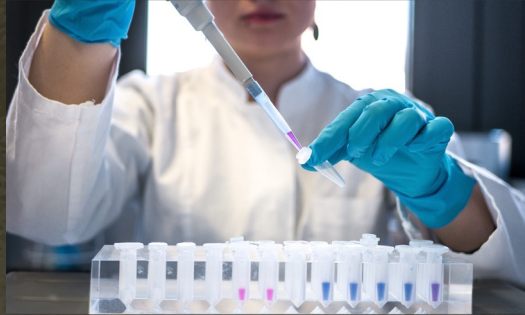


Image 2

Libraries



Image 3

Does Open Access Fix Everything?

- “Open access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.” - Peter Suber, 2019 in *What is Open Access*

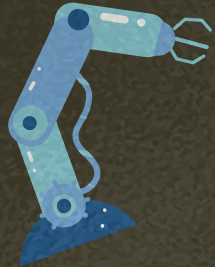
But it is not perfect... Open Access is

- *Complex*
- *New*
- *Not always appropriate for certain materials*
- *Being co-opted by corporations through Article Processing Charges (APCs)*
- *Quality Control*
- *Not radical enough*

Shadow libraries

- Copyright-infringing online collection of published works, ranging from scholarly texts to general-interest books; also referred to as “pirate libraries”
- “Willful copyright infringement in the research and education sector is seen as an act of civil disobedience, resisting the business models in academic publishing that have faced substantial criticism in recent years for unsustainable prices and outstanding profit margins”
 - Bodo, Antal, Puha in *Can scholarly pirate libraries bridge the knowledge access gap? An empirical study on the structural conditions of book piracy in global and European academia*
- “Their message is one of resistance: against a publishing oligopoly and for the free dissemination of information and knowledge to those in need, beyond paywalls”
 - Kjellström, *Gamifying piracy: functions and users of the Z-library*

Shadow libraries

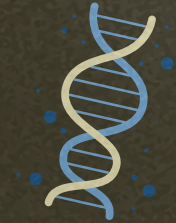


Sci-Hub

- 88M+ files; initially relied on LibGen's scimag repository to store articles
- Founded by Alexandra Elbakyan, referred to as a "spiritual heir" to Aaron Swartz's legacy
- Sued by Elsevier for \$15M

Library Genesis (LibGen)

2M+ scholarly publications,
monographs and textbooks



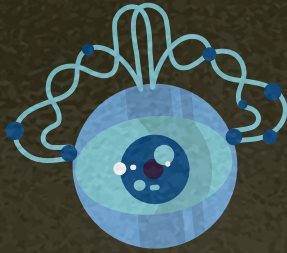
Z-Library

- ~8M+ ebooks and 84M+ articles; originally a mirror of Libgen and relies on user uploads
- Domains seized by the US Government in November 2022
- Anton Napolsky and Valeriia Ermakova arrested and charged with copyright infringement, wire fraud and money laundering

Z-Library Takedown

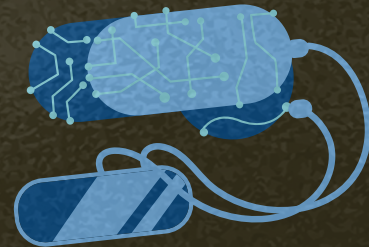
- The Author's Guild, a non-profit promoting the interests of independent authors, worked with the US Government to show examples of harm that Z-Library's activities were causing working authors
- "Gained particular notoriety after trending on TikTok as a source for free ebooks"
- "Not unsympathetic" to college students, but argue that the "exorbitant cost of education should not be borne by authors and publishers but by universities"
- Arguments on BookTok centered around negative economic effects for independent authors, cost-prohibitive textbooks, inaccessibility of books at university or public libraries, and censorship / book bans around the world





Case #2: Dungeons & Dragons

Lawful evil, or just Chaotic Neutral?



What is Dungeons & Dragons?



Tabletop Role-Playing Game

Written rules to help structure semi-improvised adventures

Popularity

Wizards of the Coast (WotC) 2022 revenue: \$1.3 billion

A Dungeons & Dragons Revival



D&D Controversy: Wizards of the Coast's Quest for Treasure

1997

Wizards of the Coast (WoTC)
purchases D&D publisher
TSR, Inc.



1999

Wizards of the Coast (WotC)
is bought by Hasbro,
implements the Open
Gaming License (OGL 1.0a)

December 2022

OGL 1.1 is leaked,
forewarning the tightening
of copyright control over
D&D content



January 2023

WotC responds to backlash
by playtesting and revising
OGL 1.1 into OGL 1.2



D&D Under OGL 1.0a

- Consists of 15 provisions that explain the intellectual property restrictions
- What stuff is open access?
 - 5E Systems Reference Document (5E SRD) - a version of D&D rules anyone can use
 - Open Game Content (OGC) - a "body of work" that many creators have contributed to over time that is open-source and free to use as long as you credit and cite the publisher
- What stuff is restricted?
 - WotC's trademarks (i.e. "Dungeons and Dragons," "Dungeon Master," etc.)
 - Any content that is not explicitly marked open-source is copyrighted and owned by the creator, including proper names, custom monsters, storylines, trade dress (i.e. the look and feel of WotC published work), logos, certain words or phrases. **Not very extensive**

D&D Under OGL 1.0a

- Many would argue D&D's revival is due in large part to its "open gaming license" (OGL)
- OGL: described by its progenitor and former VP of D&D as "a copyleft license modeled on successful open source software licenses" (Dancey, 2023)
 - "The OGL is a contract. In exchange for gaining the legal right to use, modify and distribute Open Game Content (which includes the entire game system and content that uses [the] system of Dungeons & Dragons, in addition to thousands of other sources freely contributed to the community by many publishers), users of the license agree not to use Product Identity in their works unless otherwise authorized." - Ryan S. Dancey

How is D&D “open?”

- Absent D&D-specific trademarks, OGL allows for:
 - Ability to play the game without buying D&D’s printed rules guides
 - Massive “homebrew” community sharing content and playable stories in virtual spaces
 - Creation of similar TTRPGs based heavily on D&D’s rules
 - Extremely popular streams of live gameplay
 - Critical Role’s leaked revenue from Twitch 2019-21 subscriptions: \$9.6 million
 - Other ways to monetize
 - Publishing campaigns (story frameworks) that use D&D’s rules
 - Creating software programs to support this type of gameplay
 - Extensive dice industry

Changes Under OGL 1.1

- A 25% royalty on revenue from any OGL creator earning above \$750,000 per year in sales
- **The right for WotC to use any content created under the license for any purpose**
- An apparent ban on the virtual tabletop simulators that helped kindle a tabletop gaming boom during pandemic lockdowns (ex. Roll20.net) in favor of proprietary platform *D&D Beyond*
- **The de-authorization of anything made using to the previous OGL**

According to Wizards of the Coast, this was done to:

- Shut down “hateful and discriminatory products”
- Disallow third-party NFTs
- Prevent large businesses from exploiting their intellectual property

Impact beyond D&D, as many other games have been created by legal revision of D&D’s core rule set under OGL 1.0a

Public backlash: "A critical failure"



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@lincodega · Follow



Yesterday, I received the full text of the OGL 1.1 from a reputable source. The updated Open Gaming License is incredibly restrictive, demands community surveillance and, most importantly, renders the previous WotC OGL an unauthorized agreement.



gizmodo.com

Dungeons & Dragons' New License Tightens Its Grip on Compet...
An exclusive look at Wizards of the Coast's new open gaming license shows efforts to curtail competitors and and tighten ...

10:26 AM · Jan 5, 2023



DnD_Shots
@DnD_Shots



Huge leak from an insider @Wizards

It's what we feared: the higher ups despise us, the D&D community, and see us only as an "obstacle to their money".

Subs on D&D Beyond are all WotC care about, so I've cancelled mine. Let your voice be heard #opendnd #StopTheSub



11:39 AM · Jan 12, 2023 · 3.2M Views

12K Retweets 1,777 Quotes 27.2K Likes 619 Bookmarks

OGL 1.2 (revisions), and back again to OGL 1.0a

- OGL 1.2:
 - Removed the 25% royalty...
 - Promised that creators would retain exclusive ownership of their work...
 - But maintained and defended all other aspects of OGL 1.1
- After a month of negative press, negative survey results about OGL 1.2, and thousands of lost subscriptions to the D&D Beyond platform...
- WoTC promised to leave the OGL 1.0a in place and also released the same material under a creative commons license



**WE ARE LEAVING OGL
1.0A IN PLACE, AS IS.
UNTOUCHED.**

**WE ARE ALSO MAKING
THE ENTIRE SRD 5.1
AVAILABLE UNDER A
CREATIVE COMMONS
LICENSE.**

**YOU CHOOSE WHICH YOU
PREFER TO USE.**

AIT

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®





Closing thoughts

- Control of information is ethically fraught
- In late capitalism, monetary interests dictate openness with little regard for the common good
- How do we approach Swartz's "unjust laws?"
- Legitimate concerns about privacy must be addressed by the radical open movement
- As open as possible, as closed as necessary



THANKS!

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