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# Rules of the House: Strategy, Tactic, and Violence in One World By Night, World of Darkness, Live-Action Role-Play Games

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# RULES OF THE HOUSE

STRATEGY, TACTIC, AND VIOLENCE IN ONE WORLD BY NIGHT, WORLD  
OF DARKNESS, LIVE-ACTION ROLE-PLAY GAMES

by

Laya Liebeseller

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in Anthropology

at

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May 2017

## ABSTRACT

### RULES OF THE HOUSE: STRATEGY, TACTIC, AND VIOLENCE IN ONE WORLD BY NIGHT, WORLD OF DARKNESS, LIVE-ACTION ROLE-PLAY GAMES

by

Laya Liebeseller

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017  
Under the Supervision of Professor Thomas Malaby

The following thesis focuses on governance of institutionalized play in three World of Darkness live-action role-play (larp) games (ethnographic field work conducted between May and August of 2016), whose players have willingly allowed the international organization of One World by Night – an organization made up of their peers – to unify them in such a way as to create connection, community, and shared story across the world. I analyze four locii within these games (the book, the organization, the storyteller, and the player) using Michel de Certeau's, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall, specifically focusing on the roles of the tactician and the strategist, to illustrate how the varying levels of power within these games work with, and pull against, each other. As the field work was originally conducted to investigate violence within these physical role-play games, the heart of this thesis, and one of the threads that connects each chapter, is a discussion of violence, used to confirm the serious attitude these games can sometimes engender. Though Michele de Certeau may not be a name generally associated with the discussion of gaming, it is my hope to show that gaming communities can be analyzed using the same theories anthropologists might use to examine any other community or society, as gaming communities are not separate from the rest of the world, but an integral part of the system.

I dedicate this thesis to the gamers of the world, each and every one.

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## LIST OF NOMENCLATURE

(When a term is presented for the first time the definition will also be offered in a footnote or within the text.)

**Background** – The life story of the character up until they enter play.

**Boffer** - foam weapons or weapons with some kind of padding, used during live-combat.

**Boffer larp** – larp that use boffers while acting out combat.

**Campaign style larps** – Are those larps with an ongoing story over multiple sessions.

**Camarilla Fan Club** – the original name of Mind’s Eye Society, founded and sponsored by White Wolf.

**Canon** - a term used to denote all of the material that has been written for the world of the game. To “stay within canon” then is to keep a character’s background within what is considered proper in the world of the game.

**Chop** – A game of rock-paper-scissors which occurs when players enter combat, use skills or powers, or enter into a competition of some kind during the game.

**Clan** - The clans mentioned directly in the chapters to come will have their own footnote and section in the glossary.

**Coordinator (cord)** – A position held within organizations, a designation across all organizations presented here. There are several levels of coordinator positions – local, regional, and national – all with different administrative jobs within the organization. Within One World by Night these jobs are unpaid.

**Domain** - Each game is in-charge of single Domain. Vampires break up various cities and territories into Domains. There is a Prince of that Domain that essentially rules the area, creates law, and upholds the masquerade. The Prince, usually a player character, has various vassals beneath them, the Harpy (a records keeper), the Sheriff (who upholds the law), the Whip (who enacts the punishment of the Prince) along with several others, usually all played by player characters.

**Elysium (also called Gather)** – is an in-character space created for peace between vampires where no weapons are allowed and use of powers is limited. See also: Gather

**Entering Play** - is a term players use. It means literally that the character is entering a play space, is now being played in the game. In this context, it is usually referring to a new character. Less often it is used to describe a previous scene in the past tense. “Just as she entered play a

bomb went off.” Sherry describing her character’s death scene. Or “Just before I entered play all hell broke loose.” A player talking about himself. Either a player or character can “enter play.”

**Event games** – are special yearly or biyearly games hosted and facilitated by local games. These will often be held in hotels or special spaces such as old mansions. These are usually two day or weekend long games that garner regional and sometimes national or international attendance.

**Fantasy or Fantasy World** – There are many types of fantasy worlds, which can be similar or completely unlike the physical world. The fantasy world (or imagined world and game world as it is called variably) is the world of the game in-play, that is the world created by the writers of the system and the players as they play the game. This thesis delineates between the fantasy and the physical worlds, as to analyze the events a distinction must be made. However, this thesis does not propose an impermeable boundary between said fantasy and physical worlds. See also: imagined world and physical world.

**Game systems** – in reference to larp games are a compilation of game rules and description of the fantasy world in which the game is played, usually bound in a single or series of books.

**Ghouled** – Any living creature, including humans, can be ghouled. When a living creature is fed a vampire’s blood they become bonded both physically and psychologically to that vampire. More, they do not age and gain access to some of the powers of a vampire. So long as the creature continues to drink the blood they can remain in this state forever, never aging.

**High Fantasy** – fantasy worlds that include standard mythical creatures and sentient beings (elves, dwarves, wizards, hobbits etc.) and set in a middle-ages-like context, akin the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

**House Rules** - are rules created by a storyteller(s) that change or modify the rules found in the book. These are only applicable to their particular game.

**Imagined World** - There are many types of imagined worlds, which can be similar or completely unlike the physical world. The imagined world (or fantasy world and game world as it is called variably) is the world of the game in-play, that is the world created by the writers of the system and the players as they play the game. This thesis delineates between the imagined and the physical worlds, as to analyze the events a distinction must be made. However, this thesis does not propose an impermeable boundary between said imagined and physical worlds. See also: fantasy world and physical world.

**In-character** – a player designation, indicating that an individual is currently acting as their character during the game.

**Newbie or Newb** – are terms used both negatively and endearingly within the games I studied to identify people who are new to the game. It is only used negatively when a player who is new attempts to act as if they know what they are doing while, at the same time, committing recognized faux pas.



**Non-player character (NPC)** – characters of the world which are created and played by storytellers and narrators.

**Larp** – Live Action Role Play

**Local Game** – a term referring to a single game in a particular place, run by a storyteller or set of storytellers. This is important when speaking about storyteller autonomy. The only storytellers who have autonomy exist at this local level. Those who create story on a regional and national level have more rules they are required to follow by the organization.

**Longtime Player** – A player who has been playing the game for a minimum of 5 years.

**Mind's Eye Society** – A larp organization.

**New World of Darkness (New World or New WoD)** – the new system created in 2004 by White Wolf. See also *Vampire: The Requiem*.

**Organization (the org)** – An organization, in this context, is a body of individuals who administer several individual (local) games. They are coalitions of varying games who have come together to share an imagined world. By connecting games, players are able to travel to other games, using the same characters. Further, it allows for the creation of world plots, or storylines that affect multiple games in similar ways, and gives the games a global context.

**Old World of Darkness (Old World, Old WoD, Classic World of Darkness)** – The original World of Darkness system made up of all material published before 2004. This was revised in 1999. See also *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.

**One-Off** – A game that is played only once, or a game that occurs multiple times with no consistent story-linking sessions.

**One World by Night (OWbN)** – a larp organization.

**Out-of-character (OOC)** – is a term used during the play of the game, signaling that a player or group of players are not currently in character.

**Packets** – are small booklets of material written and printed by an organization, correcting or expounding upon White Wolf World of Darkness material.

**Physical World** – The physical world is the one lived in by the player. Players never leave the physical world, however, they can in some respects live in two worlds simultaneously when they take on the alternate persona of their character. The character lives in the fantasy, and the player can act in that imagined/fantasy world when in-character. This thesis delineates between the imagined and the physical worlds, as to analyze the events a distinction must be made. However, this thesis does not propose an impermeable boundary between the imagined and the physical.

**Player characters (PCs)** – characters created and played by players.

**Plot** - Plot here is the literary term. Plot refers to various events or strings of events that are connected to create the story, which storytellers plan and enact within the game.

**Pulls** – like a chop but with a deck of cards. See: Chop

**Real time** - If a game is played in “real time;” time in the fantasy and the physical worlds work the same and mirror each other, so that four hours in the fantasy world is four hours in the physical world.

**Scene** – A scene in larp is like a scene in a movie, a short or long snippet of time in which a single event is focused on. There are combat scenes, which continue until a foe is defeated, or investigation scenes, in which a character or group of characters investigates some type of happening, or death scenes, in which a character dies, or feeding scenes in which a character finds blood to drink.

**Sect** - Vampires have their own societies. There are five major sects of vampires, the Camarilla – one of the largest with a strict governmental structure, the Anarchs – a group of vampires who work together with loose governmental structure, and the Independents – who hold no allegiances but may still help each other if asked. The fourth is the Sabbat. Like the Alliance vs the Horde of World of Warcraft, or Sauron vs the rest of Middle Earth, or the Wizards against the Death Eaters of Harry Potter, the Camarilla and Anarchs are against the Sabbat. If the terms are taken very loosely, the Camarilla are the “good guys” while the Sabbat are the “bad guys.” The Sabbat are bad guys only in that they are perceived to do worse things to mortals as a matter of course or rule of thumb than the Cam and the Anarchs. The final of the five is the Giovanni, though some might argue their treatment of mortals is on par with the Sabbat, they are useful and willing to work with the other sects. They are the deal brokers, the money launderers, the loan sharks, the vampire mob.

**Side-Scene** – Any scene that takes place off Elysium (Gather) or between a sub-set of characters not including the main group. (Any time characters leave the main meeting site, or meetings – clan meetings, meetings with the Prince, Domain officers meetings etc.)

**Storyteller (ST)** – There are two general roles within the larp games I studied, the player and the storyteller. The storyteller is the organizer of the game in a very administrative sense, but they also facilitate the playing of the game for the players by portraying and playing the world. There are three different kinds of storytellers. There is the Head Storyteller – of which there is only one – who makes all final decisions within the game, the ultimate authority in the local games. There are also Assistant Storytellers who help the Head Storyteller facilitate the game, as well as narrators who are able to facilitate the small uncomplicated matters of the game.

**Tabletop games** - are like larp, but less physically intensive. The game is played sitting at a table, characters are created and role-played, but no movement or costuming is required, it is an entirely verbal world.

**(The) game** – is a term used in several different ways. The game can be a descriptor used analytically, but it is also used by the players to describe the system, the material the storytellers

create before and during actual play, the events in which players play on a bi-weekly basis, or a reference to the group of storytellers and players that make up a single larp group. “I play in the Werewolf game.” “During the game last week...” or “During game last week...”

***Vampire: The Requiem*** – A part of the New World of Darkness game systems and written in 2004. This is the system used by Max’s group and the organization Mind’s Eye Society.

***Vampire: The Masquerade*** – A part of the Old World of Darkness game systems, originally written in 1993 and revised in 1999. Both the IC and Crow County games use this system, as well as the organization One World by Night.

***Werewolf: The Apocalypse*** – A part of the Old World of Darkness game systems, originally written in 1994 and revised in 2000. The Werewolf game in this thesis plays with this system as well as the organization One World by Night.

**World Plot** - is the same as plot created by storytellers except that it is created by the org and, instead of affecting a single game, it affects all games (or a sub-set of games).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As is the usual course of things, I would like begin by thanking my advisor, Dr. Thomas Malaby, whose undying patience, counseling, and ability to cut right to the heart of things continues to be appreciated. Further, I would like to acknowledge the other members of my committee: Dr. Stuart Moulthrop, who was an invaluable resource, helping me to connect my ideas to sources and theories that have reshaped the way I understand the study of role-play, and Dr. Paul Brodwin, who allowed me to process this thesis with fresh eyes, expand my understanding, and carefully examine the relevance and importance of my work, which has been vital to my writing.

I would like to give thanks to the cohort and friends who have surrounded me these last two years, who have been my support, and, likely without knowing it, have helped me to work through some extreme times. Coley Barnette, Stephan Hassam, Tia Stenson, and Heather Brinkman, thank you from the bottom of my heart, this would not be done without you.

In my last semester of undergraduate, now several years ago, as I was floundering for a focus, my cohort at the time directed me to a study of live-action role-play, supposed to be a one-time deal, a study for fun of it, which became a passion for ethnographic field work amongst the geeks, nerds, and self-proclaimed weirdos. And so, I would like to thank Dr. Anne Woodrick, whose support allowed me to begin my first study of play, which sent me down this long and winding rabbit-hole.

My love and gratitude is also imparted to my mom, Kellie Patterson-Liebeseller whose undying support, 2 am availability, and patience has not been taken for granted, you are my rock, to my dad, Volker Liebeseller for being a large part of the inspiration to continue my education

and pursue my dreams, and to my good friend Spencer Ericson, who has sat through many too long conversations.

Thank you to Taylor Pedersen, who has done me the unrepayable favor of editing this thesis, a feat I would not wish on anybody.

Above all, I would like to sincerely thank my participants, those many kindred spirits who permitted me to obtrusively observe in the background, and blunder my way through role-play, who allowed me to sleep on their couches and in their spare rooms, who sat through hours of interviews, who patiently answered every question, allowing me to practice my passion. Thank you for being willing to share your stories and your lives with me. It has been an honor for which I will be eternally grateful.

“With words, a massive physical presence is fashioned into a meaningful human Universe.”

-Keith Basso *Wisdom Sits in Places*

## Introduction

“They came to me, Beverly<sup>1</sup> and Chris, and *asked* me to do the rape scene. They wanted the scene to go forward. I went through it with them several times, you know, what would happen. I asked her [Beverly] at every step, if she was ok and wanted to go ahead. Every time I asked, she said yes. Her boyfriend was there, and at the end of the scene everything seemed fine. I thought everything was fine.”

– A Storyteller explaining a part of the reason he went ahead with the live-action role-play rape scene he now believes to be the beginning of the end for the *New World of Darkness*<sup>2</sup> *Vampire: The Requiem*<sup>3</sup> game he began.

I will begin my introduction of live-action role-play known as larp, the setting for the event above which I will come back to shortly, by laying out a different *scene*,<sup>4</sup> explaining how it could be imagined in the fantasy or imagined world,<sup>5</sup> and then how it is seen in the physical world<sup>6</sup> by the players. The following is a snippet of a game of live-action role-play in the World of Darkness system, the topic of discussion of the following thesis. It is loosely based on an actual scene described to me by one of my informants. None of the scenes in the following thesis can be described entirely as they happened, as the fantasy world is imagined differently by each

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<sup>1</sup> All names throughout this thesis have been changed for anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> New World of Darkness (New World or New WoD) – the new system created in 2004 by White Wolf.

<sup>3</sup> *Vampire: The Requiem* – A part of the New World of Darkness game systems and written in 2004. This is the system used by Max’s group and the organization Mind’s Eye Society.

<sup>4</sup> A scene in larp is like a scene in a movie, a short or long snippet of time in which a single event is focused on. There are combat scenes, which continue until a foe is defeated, or investigation scenes, in which a character or group of characters investigates some type of happening, or death scenes, in which a character dies, a feeding scenes in which a character finds blood to drink.

<sup>5</sup> There are many types of fantasy worlds, which can be similar or completely unlike the physical world. The fantasy world (or imagined world and game world as it is called variably) is the world of the game in-play, that is the world created by the writers of the system and the players as they play the game. This thesis delineates between the fantasy and the physical worlds, as to analyze the events a distinction must be made. However, this thesis does not propose an impermeable boundary between said fantasy and physical worlds. See also: imagined world and physical world.

<sup>6</sup> Physical World – The physical world is the one lived in by the player. Players never leave the physical world, however, they can in some respects live in two worlds simultaneously when they take on the alternate persona of their character. The character lives in the fantasy and the player can act in that imagined/fantasy world when in-character. This thesis delineates between the imagined and the physical worlds, as to analyze the events a distinction must be made. However, this thesis does not propose an impermeable boundary between the imagined and the physical.

player and storyteller individually.<sup>7</sup> This scene, in particular, is only based on actual events, and is shortened and altered considerably for comprehensibility. It is meant to act as an introduction to live-action role-play for those who have no knowledge of, or experience with, larp games.

\*\*\*

A man sits in a straight-backed, mahogany chair in the corner of the foyer, the color of which almost matches the paint on the walls. He is dressed in a long black duster, black button-down shirt, roughed-up jeans, and a worn large bill fedora. He sits forward, almost on the edge of the seat, looking unsure, endlessly shifting the placement of his hands, as he continues an intense conversation with a young woman in bloodied t-shirt and jeans.

Pale servants sharply dressed in black silk and velvet move about the house, serving the rest of the guests currently in attendance. The cohort here tonight is an odd mix of individuals; men dressed in three-piece suits and women in fine black dresses, mix pleasantly with the ragged-looking homeless man, the biker in his cutoff jean jacket, and an individual in the full black tactical gear of some sort of soldier. They look curiously, though discretely, at the young woman.

A look of supreme discomfort is on the young woman's face as she moves, attempting not to get blood on the leather of the chair, in this grand house she was drawn to, after she killed the man that had done nothing but walk by her at the wrong time. Cornelius is explaining to her

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<sup>7</sup> Some scenes are also a part of ongoing storylines currently being used within the game and so content has been redacted or changed so that the games from which these scenes are pulled are not negatively impacted. These types of scenes will be marked as such.



calmly what she has become, a vampire, a creature of the night, a blood-thirsty predator, a damned daughter of the biblical Caine.<sup>8</sup>

“Oh look,” says Dan as he busts through the doors of the kitchen, costume bag under one arm, “Bobby is wearing his Indiana Jones hat again, must be a Cornelius night!” From one moment to the next the seat under the young woman changes from leather to a rather uncomfortable plastic, as the fantasy world is interrupted by the entrance of the newcomer.

Bobby shouts, “Daaaaaannnn!” as he scrambles out of the chair, taking off his fedora and embracing the man – who had not been to game in some time – in a bear hug. A chorus from the rest of the house sounds in welcoming, “DAAAANNN,” followed by the sound of several heavy feet pounding up the basement stairs. Bobby introduces Shelly, who shakes Dan’s hand nervously. “Diggin’ the fake blood by the way. Wish I’d been so cool as a *newbie*,<sup>9</sup>” Dan says with a wink. Shelly smiles back, happy that she has done something right for all her actual nervousness. This was the first larp game she had ever attended.

Shelly (the young woman) and Bobby (Cornelius) were actually sitting in two plastic chairs – brought in from the deck and scattered aimlessly across the house – against the wall of the dimly lit kitchen, far enough away from the snack bar to be able to hear one another over the bustle of *the game*,<sup>10</sup> but still visible by those *in-character*.<sup>11</sup> Some of the individuals, like the

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<sup>8</sup> Spelling of Caine found in the World of Darkness texts is different from that of the biblical “Cain.”

<sup>9</sup> “Newbie” or “Newb” are terms used both negatively and endearingly to identify people who are new to the game. It is only used negatively when a player who is new attempts to act as if they know what they are doing.

<sup>10</sup> (The) game – is a term used in several different ways. The game can be a descriptor used analytically, but it is also used by the players to describe the system, the material the storytellers create before and during actual play, the events in which players play on a bi-weekly basis, or a reference to the group of storytellers and players that make up a single larp group. “I play in the Werewolf game.” “During the game last week...” or “During game last week...”

<sup>11</sup> In-character and out-of-character are player designations. In-character means that the individual is currently acting as their character in the game, and is sometimes referred to as “in-play.” Out-of-character refers to an individual at the game who is acting only as themselves and not as their character.

homeless man and the man in full tactical gear whose intricate costumes allow them remain, in appearance, even now, as the game paused, true to the fantasy. Others simply have tags on their shirts alerting other players to the fact that their characters look, or dress, differently than the player appears in the physical world.

\*\*\*

Perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand live-action role-play if you have never heard of it, is to liken it to Historical Reenactments and Renaissance Fairs.<sup>12</sup> Historical reenactments are the physical reenactment of historical moments in history, often focused on historical battles throughout time. Participants act out the battles as they happened, with precise detail. They act as specific soldiers, and nurses, members of the cavalry, or particular historical figures like General Robert E. Lee or General Henry Arnold. Often this hobby requires extensive and authentic costuming, historical knowledge, and strict adherence to character.

Renaissance Fairs, on the other end of the spectrum, are very loosely based on Renaissance Europe. The fair is set up with shops that sell “renaissance clothing,” old style lemonade, root beer, and turkey legs. There is jousting, sword fighting and archery. However, there are often fantasy figures included like fairies or mermaids. Costuming for the patrons is optional. Shopkeepers, volunteers, and performers create their own personas, and a strict adherence to character is not (usually) required.

Larp is somewhere in between these examples. To an extent it is like the acting out of an unwritten book or short story. Like Historical Reenactments, which can be set in 1940’s Germany or 1860’s Virginia but might be played-out in Texas in 2016, live-action role-play

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<sup>12</sup> Though some might claim that both are types of role-playing or types of larp, this is not a debate I am attempting to enter.

takes place physically in one space with the understanding that the characters actually exist in an entirely different fantasy world, similar to, or completely unlike, our own. Some larps, like Renaissance fairs, will morph a field/camp/or hotel to look like the fantasy world, others, like the games detailed in this thesis, imagine the fantasy world around them; that is the fantasy world is overlaid the physical space in the mind of the players. The world is described verbally as the world is engaged physically by the players in-play.

Larp might be (and certainly is if you take larpers word for it) the nerdiest nerd hobby amongst nerd hobbies. As one player said, “Larp is as nerd as nerd can go.” The following quotes are definitions from players I have gathered over the course of the studies I have conducted.

Ben, a programmer says, “Larp is... larp is ... man this is harder than it should be, larp is, it’s in-the-moment storytelling.”

Sharla, an undergraduate student at the local university says, “[Larp is] improvisational theatre with more structure. Adult dress-up, but outside the bedroom, and Halloween.”

Markus, variably a horse rancher, Starbucks barista, and bartender says, “It’s community, it’s fun, it isn’t my 9-5 or a night out at the bar, where you get hammered, hit on some chick, make a fool of yourself and pass out on the kitchen floor, though sometimes it feels that way the next day [laughs].”

Charlotte, a graduate student in economics says, “It’s a way to experience new things, things you will never get to experience for real. It’s a way to get out of this life and to see things you will never see in reality. Like dreaming with a bunch of people together.”

How larp might be defined from an academic standpoint is not clear. Waade and Sadvik (2007) give one of the few direct definitions of larp, “Live-action role-playing (as well as other role-playing formats) represents a type of narrative that is dynamic and open to influence from its recipients: the players. This does not imply that the creation of fiction is handed over to the players altogether. There is still a need for an effective framework as well as efficient rules to guide the player’s interaction with and within the interactive and play-centric fiction and secure some kind of progression” (p. 7). Though I agree with the definition in terms of the idea of necessary framework for larp to function, - an idea also supported by Fine (1983), though he was writing on tabletop role-play – this definition also highlights narrative. While narrative is very important to the larps discussed in this thesis, many players argue against the idea that larp is all about story. They argue that there are other major components of larp left out when the narrative aspect is highlighted too strongly.

David Simkins (2015), in his book “The Arts of Larp,” describes role-play as the adult version of children’s role-play games like “cops and robbers” or “blind man’s bluff.” “The themes become more adult, the settings more elaborately defined, and the constraints on play more rigid. A role playing game can reproduce an entire make-believe world in which the players consistently portray members of the world’s environment” (p. 40). Like many definitions, this defines role-play in a general sense, a problem taken up shortly in a further discussion of role-play definitions. Further, this limits role-play to actions that take place in a make-believe world and do not include types of pervasive games or the idea that we can role-play within the world around us.

Within this context larp is a game. Each larp is based on a “*game system*,” which is written down in a single or set of books, contains the rules, an explanation of the game, and

details of the world, showing the players how to play the game.<sup>13</sup> The definition of what makes a game is long and fraught in anthropology, and in game studies as a whole. To follow that rabbit hole would not be productive for this thesis. So, a game is here defined as, “a semibounded and socially legitimate domain of contrived contingency that generates interpretable outcomes” (Malaby, 2007, 96).

Larp is, necessarily, live-action – it is played physically with a group of people, together, in the same general physical space.<sup>14</sup> Larps can be played just about anywhere, indoors and outdoors, in church basements, on boardwalks, on trains, in parks – anywhere the players feel fit to play it.

Larp is a role-playing game. However, defining a role-playing game (or even role-play for that matter) is no easy task. As Hitchens and Drachen (2009) point out, definitions of role play in the discussion of games has produced definitions often either too narrow or too broad. If the definition is too narrow some role-play games are left out. Definitions that are too broad ultimately do not define games, but role-play alone, making it hard to use the definitions to distinguish role-play games and role-play that occurs in a myriad of other domains.

“Any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment” (Lortz, p. 36). The definition seems to fit at first glance, however, takes out the possibility that a person

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<sup>13</sup> The game systems used here are all a part of the larger world of World of Darkness: Laws of the Night: Revised Rules for Vampire: The Masquerade, Laws of the Wild: Revised Rules for Werewolf: The Apocalypse, and Vampire: The Requiem.

<sup>14</sup> As will be noted later in this thesis, though not fully explored, there are online portions to the games studied, utilized in-between the biweekly games.

could play themselves in an imaginary world or play an imaginary character in the physical world around them (two types of role play that do exist).

Williams, Kennedy, and Moore (2011) state that a role-playing game, “is one in which players must interact with the world from the perspective of a ‘character,’ which they control and which has certain numerical attributes and functional abilities” (p. 173). Though this article is speaking directly about digital video games and not live action role play, the definition may be useful here. However, the first portion of the definition is accurate to a majority of role-playing games in that a player must play a character (even if that character is modeled after or identical to the player’s standard self) and must interact with some type of world (whether that be fanciful or physical, imagined or the world with which players normally interact). It is a limited definition in that not all role play requires a numerical component, as the games studied for this thesis do. Again, it does not entirely fit, as it leaves out criterion that I find to be necessary when speaking about larp and role-play in general.

In lieu of creating an entirely new definition of larp, then perhaps it would be wise to simply list the criteria necessary for the games at hand. Larp games, in this context, are (1) played physically with multiple individuals over a long period of time, (2) there is story – some sort of narrative, often dramatic, (3) the game is created by the system – contained in a book(s) – a storyteller – an organizer who facilitates play – (these two components give the game a frame) and the players – who take on alternate personas during the game to bring the game to life, (4) the alternate personas, or characters, are personally made by the players and have two fundamental parts before entering play – the character sheet and backstory – (5) by taking on the character persona players interact with the world in which the game is played from both a first and third person perspective.

A further aspect of live-action role-play necessary to mention is the word *play* within the name. Games and play are often linked within the literature. Conversations of how games fit into play and vice versa are ongoing. Rather than attempt to engage the debates of what constitutes play, whether play needs to be fun, or any other long-winded portion of the previous (as well as current) debate here; I will instead pull from Thomas Malaby's article, *Anthropology and Play: The Contours of Playful Experience* (2009), to say that the larp games discussed here "engender an attitude of playfulness, that is, they 'prompt a playful disposition'" (p. 212).<sup>15</sup>

The game is played from both first person and third person perspectives depending on the type of situation being engaged. Players take on, that is act like, the created alternate persona of the character. Everything they say their character says, everything they do their character does. Many players costume – like the players who wore the costumes of the homeless man and the soldier from the above scene – though the extent to which the costume reflects the character varies by player. They move around the play space freely. When an action cannot be made physically, players code-switch, moving from a first person perspective to a third person perspective. In the third person perspective they dictate their characters actions, that is they talk about what their character is doing, rather than doing what their character is doing.

The world of larp must also be played to allow players to play within it, that is it must be portrayed and described during the game. The fantasy world of the World of Darkness system is a living thing and its actions are detailed by the *storyteller*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A further discussion of anthropology and play can be found in the section "History and Literature – A Review."

<sup>16</sup> There are two general roles within the larp games I studied, the player and the storyteller. The storyteller is the organizer of the game in a very administrative sense but they also facilitate the playing of the game for the players by portraying and playing the world.

There are several types of larp. The most iconic and well known is “boffer” larp, so named for its use of boffers – foam weapons or weapons with some kind of padding to make them less dangerous.<sup>17</sup> These larps are most often *high fantasy* (elves, wizards, dwarves, hobbits etc.). However, in recent years dystopian larps based on video games like “Fallout,” or movies like “A Clockwork Orange,” have become popular. Boffer larps are played in woods or parks as they require space. These larps are often known for their epic battles. The players will physically fight either each other, or work together to defeat monsters and other enemies. Here the “live-action” is the focus over “role-play” (though this is not always the case). As many of these games require extensive costuming and set preparation, some games will be held only once or twice a year over a long weekend, or even a full week, garnering attendance from all over the world. These games are sometimes supplemented with practice sessions put on by smaller regional or local groups on a more regular basis.

Parlor larp, the type of larp game this thesis will focus on, is so named because they could be played “in a parlor” (though they are not always played inside). This type of larp is much less active as compared to boffer larp. The players still dress and act as their characters, but no combat is acted out. Combat still occurs in many parlor larp games but is played out through verbal description and an extensive rules system. Here the role-play is the focus. The depth, breadth, and growth of the character through role-play is emphasized over the physical action of the game. Parlor larps often require a less extensive set up, and so often have a higher frequency of play, most are played on a bimonthly basis. There are some only played twice or three times a year, holding large events and pulling in national and international, rather than local

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<sup>17</sup> This is not always the case. Sometimes real weapons (either dulled or actually sharpened) are used.



attendance. Some groups that meet regularly will also host *event games*<sup>18</sup> in which extensive change to the physical world, or creation of the fantasy in the physical, does sometimes occur.

The parlor larp discussed here is the World of Darkness.

## **Introducing the World of Darkness**

The World of Darkness is a fantasy world of horror, described through a series of connected *game systems*<sup>19</sup> written by White Wolf Publishing Inc. “The creators of *Vampire: The Masquerade* subtitle their [role-playing game] ‘A Storytelling Game of Personal Horror.’ The horror genre, though fantastic in nature, as it often deals with the supernatural, taps into the darker aspects of our own unconscious. Horror forces us to encounter the symbolic content of nightmares made manifest, such as vampires, werewolves wraiths, zombies, etc” (Bowman, 2010, p. 22). Here the imagined world is much like the 21<sup>st</sup> century; in fact, it mirrors the physical world in many ways. “On the surface, the World of Darkness is not too much different than our own. People are born, grow up, work and die every day. Plants grow, as do skyscrapers. The same newspapers are sold on the street corner, and television is the same vast wasteland” (Carl, Heinig, Woodworth, p. 15).

The games used in this thesis take place today in 2017, the physical world acts as a kind of ongoing background for the game – what happens in the physical world is mirrored in the imagined world.<sup>20</sup> In the World of Darkness of the games studied, Betty White survived the

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<sup>18</sup> Event games are special yearly or biyearly games hosted and facilitated by local games. These will often be held in hotels or special spaces such as old mansions. These are usually two day or weekend long games that garner regional and sometimes national or international attendance.

<sup>19</sup> Game systems, in reference to larp and tabletop games are a compilation of game rules and description of the fantasy world in which the game is played.

<sup>20</sup> The mirror from reality to fantasy is not exact. Storytellers can shift events in reality to fit the world they wish to create within games under the purview of One World by Night.

“slaughter of celebrities of 2016,” Scott Walker is still the governor of Wisconsin, and Trump is the President of the United States.

However, the World of Darkness does include several major changes to physical world. It is a world that incorporates the supernatural, many historical myths and legends are real. Vampires, werewolves, witches, and wicked fae roam the darkened streets of Earth within this World of Darkness. These denizens of the dark are the main actors within the worlds of the games. The characters played within the game are almost exclusively made as one of these supernatural creature types. Within games that use *Vampire: The Masquerade*,<sup>21</sup> players play vampires; within *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*<sup>22</sup> the players play werewolves.

The World of Darkness does not only hold supernatural creatures, but is also considered to be darker in a generalized sense. “Despair is a common theme... Crime is more prevalent and more violent. Speech is coarser, fashions are bolder, art seeks only to shock, and technology ensures that everyone gets it at the push of a button” (Carl, Heinig, Woodworth, p. 15). The World of Darkness is not a friendly place. More suffering, corruption, murder and mayhem occur, perpetrated by both supernatural creatures and humans alike. This perpetuating darkness is often used in the games – rape, gruesome deaths, murders, and torture are often described in detail by storytellers or perpetrated by player characters.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Vampire: The Masquerade – A part of the Old World of Darkness game systems, originally written in 1993 and revised in 1999. Both the IC and Crow County games use this system, as well as the organization One World by Night.

<sup>22</sup> Werewolf: The Apocalypse – A part of the Old World of Darkness game systems, originally written in 1994 and revised in 2000. The Werewolf game in this thesis plays with this system as well as the organization One World by Night.

<sup>23</sup> A player character is a character created and played by a player.

Now that larp and the World of Darkness have been minimally presented,<sup>24</sup> I will bring the conversation back to the quote that began this introduction from a storyteller named Max and the rape scene introduced.

### **Game Death and Dark Styles**

I would like to state now, up front, that the story told throughout this introduction is told through the lens of *one perspective*. To the others involved, the Mind's Eyes Society council, and any other larpers that may read the following words, I am not attempting to portray you or your hobby in a negative way, to discredit you, or to dismiss your feelings or your experiences. I was not able to obtain the perspectives of the opposing sides or gather data from all parties involved. It will be presented in the way in which it was conveyed to me. It will be used as a preliminary case to introduce the interplay between the various levels of power within the three larp games studied in the summer of 2016.

Max, a truck driver and avid gamer, now in his late thirties, has been playing World of Darkness live-action role-play since the late 1990's and has been an avid tabletop player since his late teens. He requested I come speak with him, and some of his previous players, when he heard of the study I was doing. He invited me to his home for a dinner and board game night. Several of the former players of the live-action role-play game – for which Max was the storyteller – like Anna who was the former coordinator<sup>25</sup> of the game, were in town and willing to speak with me. Max wanted to tell me how his own game ultimately imploded, and why he is no longer a member of Mind's Eye Society, an organization which had his membership for well

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter One for further details.

<sup>25</sup> There are two types of power within Mind's Eye Society organization, the storytellers and the coordinators. Though there are many levels of coordinators within MES, this is specifically in reference to the local game coordinator who acts as a liaison between the game and the organization.

over fifteen years.<sup>26</sup> It was the rape scene that he ran<sup>27</sup> that he believes was the first step to the game's, and his own, demise.

Max moved to his current location several years ago, and found it difficult to get involved in the small tight-knit gaming community around him. He started his own game of Mind's Eye Theater *Vampire: The Requiem game*, in the larp organization of Mind's Eye Society (MES).

Max is an experienced storyteller. He has run games in several cities and this was not the first time he started a game in a new area. He admits avidly that he has a certain style of play. "I like a dark game. World of Darkness is a dark place, it's not a nice place [laughs], it's messed up and terrible and I want to tell that story, you know. We're vampires for god's sake. When I'm a storyteller my VSS<sup>28</sup> always states that 'everything goes.' I will run any scene my players want me to run. I have no problem with that, but sometimes I think that people get in over their heads, they don't know what they're walking into, or how they will feel about it later. And I think that's what happened with Beverly."

The game began in June of 2014 and lasted a year and half until January of 2016 when it finally folded after a slow death. It has been revived as a game, independent of any organizational influences.

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<sup>26</sup> In the following thesis, organizations will be particularly important, as they are analyzed here as one of the governing structures of the games. A larp organization is an institution that governs over a series of games, connecting those games in a single world story. The organizations discussed in this thesis are: One World by Night (OWbN) and Mind's Eye Society (MES). Both are discussed later in Chapter Two.

<sup>27</sup> A storyteller "runs" a game or a scene, this means they are in charge of that scene.

<sup>28</sup> A VSS is a Venue Style Sheet that is required to be filled out by every storyteller in the MES. It details what kind of game the storyteller would like to run, what kinds of scenes might be found in the games, their attitude on the rules, etc.

When the game began, Max was voted<sup>29</sup> in as the Head Storyteller<sup>30</sup> and Anna as the coordinator. “There was no experience. One woman, a 60-year-old lady, had played some Old World tabletop<sup>31</sup> and that was it. I was the only one with any experience with larp. I like bringing new players. Not everyone wanted me to be the storyteller though.” Later he said, “You have two choices when you don’t like your storyteller, either wait out the year, and then run yourself *or* file the paperwork with the coordinator to get them gone.”

Anna said, “The players came in waves. I think we had 10 or so players to begin with and then more showed up. Beverly and Chris came as a part of the second wave and weren’t happy with Max’s play style. Chris thought that Max didn’t follow the rules closely enough.”

Max, “The rules are just a guide.”

Max, and the five others<sup>32</sup> who attended this board game night, and the following summary reflects their judgements and points of view. As per their own admission these dates are relative guestimates. June of 2014 marked game start. It was sometime around August that Beverly requested the rape scene. It should be noted that there was no physical contact during the scene. The scene was in-person and attended by both Beverly and her boyfriend Chris. Anna heard from Chris, several days later, that Beverly had some issues with the scene. Beverly told Chris that she felt uncomfortable and violated by Max because of the scene. Instead of speaking with Anna or Max – where Max believes the complaint should have started – Beverly went to

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<sup>29</sup> A vote is taken by all current players and a new vote is taken yearly.

<sup>30</sup> There are three different kinds of storytellers, the Head Storyteller – of which there is only one – who makes all final decisions within the game, the ultimate authority in the local games. There are also Assistant Storytellers who help the Head Storyteller facilitate the game and narrators who are able to facilitate the small uncomplicated scenes when the other storytellers are busy – these are usually only found in larger games of more than 25 players.

<sup>31</sup> Tabletop games are like larp, but less physically intensive. The game is played sitting at a table, characters are created and role-played but no movement or costuming is required, it is an entirely verbal world, existing through the powers of the mind

<sup>32</sup> Only supporters of Max were at this discussion.

Regional,<sup>33</sup> the next step up from a game coordinator. According to Max, he was eventually informed that the situation was resolved and Beverly continued to play.

After this scene Beverly and several of her friends formed “a faction,” as described by Max. This faction was unhappy with the way Max was running the game and, according to the group I was speaking with, began working against Max. The unhappy faction entertained meetings with other players, outside of the game, attempting to convince them that Max was not only a bad storyteller, but abusive and negligent.

Anna moved back to school at the end of August of 2014 and stepped down as coordinator of the game; John took her position. John and Max were friends. John was also in a romantic relationship with a woman within the faction. According to Max, John was being “two-faced,” telling Max that everything was OK, that they would deal with issues brought up by players together, and then would send false emails to the Regional coordinators stating that Max was “out of control” and abusing his power as storyteller. Eventually Max was asked to step down by the game and he acquiesced. Chris took over as storyteller between December 2014 and March of 2015. In March, Max was asked by the game to come back as Storyteller, and he accepted, under the assumption that all previous grievances were resolved.

It was then that Max made what he believes to be his only “real mistake.” During game, an *out-of-character*<sup>34</sup> conversation took place, of which he was a part. In his own words,

“I didn’t do what I should have done. I was the highest ranking storyteller officer in the region at the time, and I didn’t do what I was supposed to do. These girls as sitting here

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<sup>33</sup> MES has two branches of power, the storytellers and the coordinators who are both run by the Executive Board. Anna was the coordinator for the game, who had a superior coordinator in a regional position, who reports directly to the Executive Board.

<sup>34</sup> Out-of-character is a term used during the play of the game signaling that a player or group of players are not currently in character. An out-of-character conversation is then a conversation that occurred during the game but the players were speaking as themselves and not as their characters.

telling these jokes. They're having this "we are going to be the unconquered ladies" [discussion]. We are going to take over men, do this to men, control men, rape men, enslave men in-game and in-character."

Anna interjects and says, "And that conversation should have probably been stopped right there."

Max goes on, "And what I should have done, as Anna just said, was to stop the conversation right there, and say there is a zero tolerance policy in the MES we shouldn't be talking about this."<sup>35</sup> What I did do was, I sat there for thirty minutes in a comradery situation listening to it. We were waiting on another scene, everybody was laughing and joking and having a good time. Nobody was acting offended or hurt or butt-sore. You know it seemed... the subject was iffy at best but then I made the comment 'well if y'all are going to do this I am going to have an NPC<sup>36</sup> that is going to conquer you all and rape you all.' It was a hypothetical; I never would have actually done it but I said it because after 30 minutes of sitting there listening to it I was under the impression that it was ok to step into the same waters as the people I was conversing with. All these people were ladies, I was the only guy and it was like a white guy saying nigger in a room full of black people after hearing them do it. It was inappropriate for me to say that.

So two days later I get a call from John asking me if I had actually done this. John had heard the information, not from the people involved, but from two others who had been told about it. Again it never came to me. It was all this person, who talked to this person, who talked to this person, said this. I asked if I could apologize to these people, I would like to talk to these ladies, apologize, resolve the issue as an adult, face-to-face, which is my right, but John said no, that he would take care of it, to consider this him talking to me and not to do it again. He wanted to have it done and over with. Thinking back according to the Code of Conduct I had a right to talk to these girls."

He never did speak to them.

In October of 2015 Max received an official letter of warning from MES telling him that complaints were made, but no official investigation<sup>37</sup> had been started. In November of 2015 he received the official notice that he was being investigated. The two occurrences above (the rape scene and the out-of-character conversation) along with three grievances – Max says were blatantly false – were cited as evidence for the investigation. In February 2016 the official

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<sup>35</sup> Though MES recognizes that the games under their purview play characters that are murderous monsters, out-of-character conversations during the game are subject to a code of conduct that does not allow for harassment of any kind, Max is referencing that this conversation could have fallen under this code of conduct as inappropriate.

<sup>36</sup> An NPC is a non-player character. There are two types of inhabitants within the World of Darkness, those created and played by players called player characters, and those played by storytellers or narrators called non-player characters. Non-player characters are any character not played or created by a player.

<sup>37</sup> The MES can and does investigate players, storytellers, and whole games for misconduct. Investigations are usually begun when they are prompted by a player or group of players, as seen in this case.

sentence was given, he was found guilty, was banned from holding any position in the MES for two years and his ranking<sup>38</sup> was slashed to that of a beginner player, a sentence that he, and those in the room, stated was excessive. This led Max to leave the MES, and that same month the game folded. The players decided to continue playing as a troupe game – that is a game not a part of an organization. They had their first troupe game in March 2016 with a new storyteller.

In June of 2016, the MES instituted an organizational wide ban on rape. The weight of this directive should come clear as this thesis unfolds. They banned all rape from being in any part of the game, from rape scenes, to story, to character creation. Rape, besides the few exceptions of character backgrounds grandfathered in, no longer exists in the World of Darkness of the MES. Whether Max's experience was a part of the MES's decision to ban rape is unclear.

One might wonder why anyone would be against this directive, or why anyone would want to play a character with a history of rape as victim or perpetrator, or would want to play through a rape scene in the first place. I asked Max this question, why he cared to run the scenes at all. He noted that rape was very much a part of the imagined world, but also, as a rape victim himself, he said that it helped him “process his past and move on.” He was able to process his own victimhood through the playing of a character or running that type of scene. This was echoed in several player responses to the MES ban on rape in the game, as some victims found it helpful to processing their own experiences. Other victims of sexual assault said that it was insulting and even triggering to watch other players, who were not victims, attempt to play through a trauma they had never experienced.

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<sup>38</sup> Players garner a special type of player point which is given to players for attending games, bringing food to games, doing community service, or providing services to the organization as a whole. These points allow a player to gain ranks within the MES which gives them access to certain character abilities and items, as well as other player perks.



On the whole, many players hailed this directive as a great step forward for their organization. However, not everyone was happy about it. According to several players, rape is a common theme found in most long running World of Darkness larp games, inside and outside of MES. According to the players, the reasons MES gave for the ban were ultimately vague. They stated, “we believe that WoD is dark enough without subjecting our members to this type of role play” (MES Ban Document).<sup>39</sup> Here are some of the reactions.

“I think its empowering that MES is taking this stance. It makes their position on being anti-rape really clear.”

“Though they say they did not make the decision lightly; they also did not offer any substitute for game rules or the world. They offered no packet<sup>40</sup> or anything to justify the massive change in the world. Did everyone also just forget the rape ever existed at all? The sheer amount of crime that simply no longer exists would leave a massive hole in the world and we can’t even explore it because any discussion of rape in-game at all has been banned.”

Another says, “Where does this end then? What makes rape or sexual assault any worse than child murder or torture? What’s more if there are really people being “subjected” to this sort of play, as in they are somehow forced to engage in the play, then we have a way bigger problem on our hands then just scenes to do with rape. Might as well pack up our bags entirely if we can’t even trust each other enough to be able to say “hey wait, I’m uncomfortable this needs to stop.” It’s just not an issue I think we really have but that is what they are insinuating with this. We are adults here, we should be able to dictate what kind of story we want. But then I guess there are always other games, and other orgs.”

The investigation of Max and the rape ban passed by the MES shows the power the organization has over its games and the players within it. This power will be further explored in Chapter Two and throughout the thesis.

I would like to take a moment here, because I believe it is important, to detail the way in which this thesis could have gone, the way it was originally planned, because rape and violence within gaming is such an important topic, has been such a prevalent subject in the last few years,

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<sup>39</sup> You can find the full write-up of the directive in Appendix A.

<sup>40</sup> Packets are literally booklets of information that organizations disseminate to their players when they change or supplement the game system.

in the gaming community at large, and because it will help readers further understand the way in which larp affects life, and the way that larp is a part of life, as all gaming is part of life.

## **The Other Road**

The original purpose of my thesis was to study gaming and conflict. I wanted to know what kinds of conflict ensued both within and outside of the game, and within the game what was considered legitimate and illegitimate violence and why. I found that these questions were almost inseparable, as the legitimacy of violence within the game was often dependent on the status of out-of-game relationships. Conflicts within the interpersonal relationships, between players outside of game were often, partially or wholly, caused by in-game conflict and violence. These lines of questioning led me to an interrogation of why violence was so central to the games that I studied, particularly if the games can have such a profound effect on the players who play them.

In 1998, Julian Dibbell wrote “My Tiny Life,” and within this book demonstrated how imagined worlds can have a profound effect on those who exist within them.

They say he raped them that night. They say he did it with a cunning little doll, fashioned in their image and imbued with the power to make them do whatever he desired. They say that by manipulating the doll he forced them to have sex with him, and with each other, and to do horrible, brutal things to their own bodies. And though I wasn’t there that night, I think I can assure you that what they say is true, because it all happened right in the living room – right there amid the well-stocked bookcases and the sofas and the fireplace – of a house I came later to think of as my second home (p.11).

In this book, Dibbell details the world and culture of those who were a part of LambdaMOO, a multiuser dimension in cyberspace. He portrays the culture of this world, as well as his own experiences. LambdaMOO, is a world created entirely by text, the details of its space represented by the words which describe the place in which the characters, created by its

users, exist. Here the users can create alternate personas transforming themselves into men or women or seahorses or merfolk or a person non-descript. Here within the house, which is the main setting for the world, they are given “rooms” – bedrooms, garden spaces, libraries – to create places through description and code.

In the first portion of the book he focuses on the story of Mr. Bungle, who was the perpetrator of the rape detailed above. The rape perpetrated by Mr. Bungle was committed through hacking. The user of the name Mr. Bungle hacked LambdaMOO and took over the character names (handles or tags) of other users. This handle, along with a short description which they write themselves, is the only way in which they as characters are represented within this text-based world; there are no pictures to define the avatars. Their names are the representation of the personas they create. Mr. Bungle used these text-based names, creating descriptions, detailing how they had sex with him, with each other, or used other instruments such as kitchen utensils both sexually and violently. He forced them to commit these acts against their will. The players watched themselves move and act but could do nothing to stop themselves.

With Dibbell’s admission that he, himself experienced the world of LambdaMOO as real, not just a mere mirage of “reality,” but concretely real, as much a part of his life as the physical actions he took, he asks us to believe the users when they say that Mr. Bungle raped them, raped them like a person might rape another in “real-life.” He asks us to believe that this “rape in cyberspace” really did occur, not in the sense that the text could be found proving its existence, but to believe that the words were experienced and embodied, that the users were traumatized, that the puppeteering of the cyber body effected the physical body and the physical mind.

This example communicates the power of fantasy worlds, showing the effects they can make on the individual and community. Then, the question of why anyone would *want* to enter into a rape scene or a murder scene or a scene of any type of violence becomes more poignant.

Violence as entertainment has a long and varied history. From the Roman Colosseum, to the original Grimm Fairytales, to the French guillotine, to the horror movies and combat video games of today, violent entertainment has been consumed avidly by a great many people throughout time and space.

Within games such as *Vampire: The Masquerade* or *Vampire: The Requiem*, a part of the expected play is the combat and violence. In imagined worlds, like LambdaMOO, violence is not expected or anticipated, it is not a part of their world. Not only were the particular members violated, but the space itself was tainted by a violence that had never existed there before. However, that is not to say that violent experiences within larp cannot affect the player, either positively or negatively or in unforeseen ways, even when it is expected, as can be seen in the rape scene run by Max. From Max's account Beverly felt violated by the scene and by Max himself. Despite the fact that she requested the scene, her feelings later were more visceral than Max believes she expected. It is important to note that not all players of larp want to be a part of a rape scene. Each player has their own level of comfortability with the violence within their game, and participate in violent scenes to varying degrees. For instance, there is a character named *Greg*. *Greg* has been played in *One World by Night*, in various games, by the same player, for 10 years. In that time he has participated in combat only three times.

Markus Montola (2014) wrote an article called, *The Positive Negative Experience in Extreme Role-Play*, in which he explores games that incorporate or are entirely based on rape. One of the players he interviewed said, "I wanted people to feel a little bit dirty, like have a bad

feeling in their stomachs. I wanted people to be baffled over what came out of their mouths. And I wanted the potential for some really raw, really rough, really scary role-playing which could essentially take you anywhere. [...] Not all games should be fun. [...] What I'm looking for is strong emotions, and whether they are negative or positive is of less importance (Wrigstad, interview)" (p. 159-160).

Another player said, "I want to get better at being with people. And I think a part of that is sort of also experiencing yourself better. In terms of like discovering your limitations and where you can't go. And I also want to push myself" (Montola, 2014, p. 162). These quotes point to what my subjects have said about why they engage in larp. They want to experience what they normally cannot, they want to work through their own issues, they want to understand different parts of themselves. Themes for play in my studies were: finding yourself, escapism, the forming of a community, and the exploring of experience through both positive and negative role-play within the game. Sarah Lynn Bowman states "Horror allows people to confront the monstrous both internally and externally," (Bowman, 2010, p. 23).

Violence, a theme I will return to several times throughout the following thesis, is a topic discussed often within player groups and not just within play, as can be seen in the ban on rape, which put further parameters around what types of violence the MES understands to be legitimate.

There has been a large cultural debate outside of gaming on the effects of violence on player psyche. The question: Do violent games make you more violent? has a fraught history. Gamers must navigate the discussions and debates among themselves, and with the larger world carefully. By necessity, that is to remain a part of the in-group, gamers must vehemently oppose all statements that allude to the idea that violence in games creates violent people. At the same

time, the gamer community has, for several years now, been loudly requesting that the larger society take their hobbies and communities seriously, as “real” spaces that have real effects upon the players. Though this thesis will not explore the former question of what violence might do to the player mind, it will attempt to further the discussion that games affect life as a part of life, by showing that the actors within the games can be analyzed using the same theories anthropologists use to analyze other communities.

### **Michele de Certeau – Strategist and Tactician**

The following thesis will use Michel de Certeau’s work *Practice in Everyday Life* (1984) to interpret the way four main loci of power (book, organization, storyteller, player) play together to form the game community, and to further understand how the worlds of larp are created both in the words written, the words spoken, and the movement of play itself.

There are two primary pieces to de Certeau’s theory that must be explained before I go further, *strategy* and *tactic*. These terms are the basis of *Practice in Everyday Life*, setting up society as a continuous, dichotomous struggle between the users of strategy and the users of tactic.

I call a ‘strategy’ the calculus of force-relationships, which become possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an ‘environment.’ A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, ‘clienteles,’ ‘targets,’ or ‘objects’ of research) ... I call a tactic on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a boarder-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentary, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance, (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix).

This struggle is between the *proper* and the *other*, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the owner and the worker, the rules and the action, the intended and the actual, the *makers* and *users*. He brings to the foreground the strategist as person, strategy as power.

However, his work is an ode to the tactician. On a more concrete level de Certeau uses the city (strategy) and the passersby (tactician) – the walker, the populace, the people on the street – to explain his theory. The city streets are a very literal realization of strategy. The strategist creates the city, which structures the world through the semi-permanent edifices – roads, skyscrapers, sidewalks, alleyways; the paths *meant* to be taken are clear, with flashing lights, sidewalks, and signs, the things which orient people, guide them in *appropriate* action.

Like Levi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, the tactician's, "universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make due with 'whatever is at hand,'" (Levi-Strauss 1966, p. 17). The tacticians are the passersby, the users of the city, the doers, the actors, continuously finding new ways to use the various structures of the city properly or improperly to get where they want to go, to create the spaces in which they live or wish to live. Though the red hand of the LED street signs might tell a pedestrian to stop, the tactician is apt to simply cross the road when the street is quiet, or j-walk a half block up, because that is where the restaurant happens to be. Bikers use the trees to lock up their bikes, mopeds park on the sidewalk, motorcycles slip between cars, fitting in where *possible*. Tacticians are the champions of possible use, where strategy is the champion of proper use. Tacticians are ever perceptive, using the opportunities presented around them to change or subvert what is *proper*, to use the things around them *improperly*.

The example of the city shows the stringency of strategy, and the flexibility of tactic. To change a sidewalk or road, to replace a skyscraper, to change the flow of traffic, to create parking

where there was none before, are all time and energy-consuming projects. Not only must the way be cleared literally for such projects, which may take months, there are miles of “red tape” to cut through, bureaucracy to deal with, business owners, home owners, councils, and non-profit organizations to consult. Architects, city planners, urban specialists, governors, mayors, all must have a say. Then not only does the construction take months, but the planning can take years. No matter if twelve major structures are being built, remodeled, or demolished at any one time, there are 100 more projects sitting, waiting to be finalized and discussed. The power of the strategist is immense, but slow to act. Tactic, for all its flexibility and quick movement, is still limited by strategy.

The users of tactic are limited in the city by the physical structures, but also by the law, by social norms, by themselves, but they are, nonetheless, also supremely flexible. Sally Falk-Moore (1978) clarifies this point, “In many circumstances the people involved exploit the rules and indeterminacies as it suits their immediate purposes, sometimes using one resource, sometimes the other within a single situation, emphasizing the adjustments, reinterpretations, and redefinitions for another,” (p. 41). Tacticians can use creativity in the moment to change *now*. They can walk through the rose bushes instead of taking the sidewalk. They can parkour over rooftops. They can drive their moped on the sidewalk, like some movie car chase scene, which is a hyperbolic but apt example. A large group can protest, shutting down whole cities. Bus drivers can strike. Users of tactic can knowingly or unwittingly subvert some of the strategists’ best work. Though the implication of de Certeau’s writing is that the line between a strategist and a tactician is clear – that strategy cannot use tactical maneuvers and that tactician cannot create strategic framework – the following thesis will show how muddy the waters truly are. Who is a strategist, and who is a tactician cannot be so eloquently defined when it is overlaid the physical



to explain the communities and sub-communities of the world. Like Levi-Strausses, cooked and raw dichotomies (1975) and Turners, structure and communitas (1995), de Certeau's strategist and tactician are not purely separate entities or practices, but intertwined, used in multiple ways, in multiple loci.

### **Larp Governance – A Summary**

Within a discussion of larp games a portion de Certeau's theory must be flipped. He speaks of beginning at the street level, in the labyrinth of the everyday and then being elevated above, looking out over the city, which becomes "readable" from the changed perspective. Here he insinuates, necessarily, that life begins in the doing of things, in the experience, on the sidewalk. People begin as the passerby. A walker can garner a different perspective than the one he is born into by elevating himself, literally changing his place, to change his frame of reference, to understand the strategy the physical city employs with its concrete maze. By necessity, reality begins in the labyrinth where the game begins: with the eyes of the god (de Certeau, 1984).

A larp game is first imagined by its creators, those writers who produce the book, which contains the game system, in which the players play. For the creators of the system, the process of creation leaves them with a broad perspective on the World of Darkness: "To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp... His elevation transfigures him to a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god" (de Certeau, 92). They understand the breadth of the system, but cannot know how it will be played, how it will come to life in the player's hands.

Remembering the quote from Max who explains the rules only as "a guide," players will use the

text in varying ways. How it is used may change drastically from game to game. Once printed the book is shipped away; the creators then lose control over how it is used, one of their few recourses is to print more material, correct, extrapolate, or annex, the original in total recreation. Consalvo (2009) speaks to games and echoes de Certeau's ideas when he says, "Yet, even as he might wish for such spaces, such worlds, must inevitably leave the hands of their creators and are then taken up (and altered, bent, modified, extended) by players or users – indicating that the inviolability of the game space is a fiction..." (p. 411). However, it is important to recognize that the text is durable, once written and printed it remains on the page.

Julian Orr (1996) wrote, *Talking with Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. In it he details his observations at Xerox, and the technicians who serviced the copier machines that he followed into the field. He watched their work to understand the way in which they interacted with the costumer, and the machine itself. He discusses the way in which the machine, the corporation, the technician, and the customer all work in the same system, each working with and pulling against each other. These can be loosely tied to loci focused on in this thesis – the book, the organization, the storyteller, and the player. Here the book of larp is Orr's machine. "Machines represent the intent of the designers, and so are an extension of human interaction with humans" (Orr, 1996, pg. 105). This explanation considers the system as a representation of that creator, so that when a player uses the book, they are in a sense, interacting with the creator, and therefore with another human being, not just an inanimate object. For all the discussion of "the book" to come in the chapters that follow, it is important to keep in mind the humanness that created the object in the first place – the creators who write the proper, which the players read and enact.

In de Certeau's terms the book, the system, is the epitome strategy, that which "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). Like the structures of de Certeau's New York City, the book is the foundation from which everything else is based. The book begins the building of the city, giving the game its basic parameters. Unlike de Certeau's city, however, the World of Darkness begins in the text *and* is realized within the imagination.

The storyteller is "simultaneously the machinery and the hero of modernity" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 95). Though de Certeau uses this line in reference to the city, it also works well as a descriptor here. The storyteller is both the strategist and the tactician, working in both categories at the same time.

The purpose of the storyteller is as a facilitator of the game. They work as administrator, storyteller – in the colloquial sense – and in some respects as a player of the game, as they take on a role prescribed by the rules. The book introduces the world and produces the rules of the game, however, it is the storyteller that brings the world to life. The storyteller uses the book to create the world in which the players play. Though the world of the game in question is always the World of Darkness, storytellers create and describe the actual place (the building in which the characters meet, the back alley where a character feeds, the field in which a character dies). The book, though broadly comprehensive, does not provide the basic, in-game, detail such as the Victorian house in which the vampires have gathered for the night. It does not describe the silk drapery, the china in which the tea is served, or the severed head of the last Prince which sits still, bloody, on the mantel. This description is left up to the storyteller.

More, they are the creators of the *House Rules*, rules which are written by storytellers for the game, which fix the rules of the book when the rules of the book prove to be too vague, over

powered, under powered, create unfair loopholes, or simply do not give with the game being played. In this way, they are Julian Orr's (1996) technicians. "[Technicians] must diagnose and repair problems of the machines, as well as maintain and adjust them" (p. 104). It is the storyteller's job to have done the research, know when it is broken, and decide how to fix it. This is done through previous research before game start, or in the moment, during the game, when a new situation occurs in which the systems are found to be faulty.

The storyteller can never truly anticipate all roads a character may choose when presented with a scenario or nugget of information, it is the storyteller's duty to "roll with the punches" as they say. Players are notoriously unpredictable. Storytellers must *tactically* use the rule system while *strategically* maintaining their authority, by keeping the players to the world they have created.

Players are supremely the users of tactic, the walkers of de Certeau. "Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave spaces together (de Certeau, 1984, 97). Players create characters based on the book, and in tandem with any stipulations or qualifications the storyteller might impose. Within the World of Darkness games, players generally create non-human characters, vampires, werewolves, witches, and any number of other sentient fantastical creatures. Like de Certeau's pedestrians, those passersby, they perform all actions in response to the world with which they are presented. However, they do not always make the choices the storytellers or the book expects. They tactically act.

In some respects, the player is like Orr's (1996) customer. They are the player of the game, the user of the machine, each with varying knowledge of the rules and world being used. When something is wrong with the book, if the book is broken they consult the storyteller, like a customer with the technician. However, as will be seen in the following chapters, storytellers

change frequently. Storytellers move to become players, and players to storytellers. Here then, some players – those who have been storytellers or those who are known to have extensive knowledge – might help in the process of fixing the book, perhaps like a rather knowledgeable customer.

There is one more layer to consider when discussing these particular games, which I have discussed previously, the *organization* – otherwise known as “the org.”<sup>41</sup> For many larp games, called troupe games, these ruling bodies consist only of the storytellers and the book. The rules filter first through the storytellers of a game, and if the game is played in the style of a campaign,<sup>42</sup> they are filtered again and again, tactically changed as various needs of both storyteller and player arise from an ever-evolving world. Within the games to be discussed there is a third ruling body, the *strategic* bureaucratic institution of “the org.” An organization presides over a large number of games, allowing for the creation of a world story shared amongst games across the physical world.

The purpose of the orgs was originally to allow for players from across the country to take their characters and play in other games, interacting with players in multiple games, and creating a larger national community. There are now several orgs which use World of Darkness systems, each with varying levels of power. Some, like One World by Night (OWbN), the main org to be discussed in this thesis, began as a tactical entity, various games joining together to garner the power to dictate their own world, and grew to encompass games across the world,

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<sup>41</sup> **Organization (the org)** – An organization, in this context, is a body of individuals who administer several individual (local) games. They are coalitions of varying games who have come together to share an imagined world. By connecting games, players are able to travel to other games, using the same characters. Further, it allows for the creation of world plots, or storylines that affect multiple games in similar ways and gives the games a global context.

<sup>42</sup> Larp games can be “one-offs,” that is they can be played once, the players play through one particular story and stop. These will be played in one session or over the course of a weekend. “Campaign” style larps have multiple sessions and the content in each session builds off the last session. Each game discussed here is a campaign style larp.

becoming a strategist. Mind's Eye Society – the organization who presided over Max's case – began as an organization sponsored by the White Wolf – the company that wrote the World of Darkness system<sup>43</sup> – and therefore was a strategist from the start. This history will be further explored in Chapter Two. Here, I will not make the connection between Orr's corporation and the organization, as I do not feel it fits well enough to use as a comparison.

## **History and Literature – A Review**

Though Gary Allen Fine is a sociologist, the first words in his preface to *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (1983), are, “Sociologists who study leisure typically find themselves attacked on two fronts. First, they are accused of not being sufficiently serious about their scholarly pursuits. Second, they are accused of alchemically transforming that which is inherently fascinating into something as dull as survey research computer tapes” (p. vi). This defense of his work speaks to the way the study of play and leisure and games has been seen in the social science throughout history. It harkens back to the idea that games and play are not sufficiently serious enough to be pursued academically. This section will attempt to combat this perception, as those previously have done.

Within studies of role-play games, Fine's work is often noted as one of the first to delve into the growing phenomenon, and to explain fantasy games as a deeply social endeavor. He completed an ethnographic study of tabletop gamers playing several of the foundational games for the now wide genre, including *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Empire of the Petal Throne*. The book itself was in many respects very anthropological, acting as the first ethnography of the

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<sup>43</sup> The World of Darkness system is both a single system and made up of multiple systems. There is, in fact, a base book, that does not detail one type of supernatural creature or another, but discusses the World of Darkness as a whole, making it a single system. However, there are also multiple systems within the World of Darkness, like Vampire: The Masquerade and Werewolf: The Apocalypse. This will be discussed further in Chapter One.

tabletop communities he studied, and one of the first to show players of physical games as communities unto themselves. However, neither the study of play or of games began with this ground breaking work.

It has been noted several times throughout anthropological study that the study of play has been neglected. Edward Norbeck (1974) noted that several anthropologists throughout time including Julian Steward, George Mudock, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson all showed at least minimal interest in play, and that many ethnographies note play in other cultures as a matter of course. “It is reasonable, however, to conclude that play as a generic subject and the interpretation of its significance in human life have been neglected by anthropology. This neglect appears to be in considerable part a reflection, manifestation, of Western attitude toward play as being a frivolous and even sinful activity, unworthy of serious attention unless the goals of its study are somehow practical or remedial,” (Norbeck, 1974, p. 3). It is a common theme to bring up the seemingly Marxist ideals and Weberian analysis of work to understand why anthropology and, indeed other social sciences, in the West have neglected the topic so thoroughly up until the most recent decades.

Malaby (2009) notes that time spent in play was (is) thought of as inherently unproductive and strictly “without stakes,” and that is fundamentally safe in its separateness. In this thought process, play and work are dichotomous. Time is money and therefore we must spend time in productive pursuits. Without productivity, time is wasted. Further, any non-productive activity has no relevance to anything outside of that activity. That is play time cannot and does not impact the productive time. He writes on anthropology’s Marxist bent through a good chunk of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and links this as the cause of anthropology’s ignorance of the importance of play.

As anthropology moved along, Marxism and structuralism waned, giving rise to an understanding of culture in relation to meaning making. Here Malaby (2009) notes anthropological ideas of play were transformed by Clifford Geertz (2000) and his piece *Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight*. Geertz explains the cocks as *representations* of the men who own them, and as metaphors of their own phallus. The cock fight, which is a game, is not some frivolous venture, but has significant *meaning* culturally, communally, and individually. Ornter (1997) explains Geertz's deep play as follows in her discussion of why individuals engage in the extreme sport of mountaineering on Mt. Everest despite death being a likely outcome, "For the sahsbs, climbing was clearly a form of 'deep play.' Geertz had borrowed the idea of deep play from Jeremy Bentham, who used it to think about the games in which the stakes are so high that it does not appear to be worthwhile to play the game – yet people play anyway. Geertz's point that people engage in certain forms of deep play all the time, not because they fail to recognize the poor odds or the nonutility of the game, but because such play pays off in terms of the productions of meaning, of insight into important dimensions of life and experience" (p. 139). However, within his article, Geertz falls into a pit-trap still set for those discussing gaming today, that despite the games importance, it has no consequences outside of the game time (Malaby 2009).

Malaby (2009) argues further that as play has come to be a subject further discussed within anthropology, and as anthropology has changed, there has been another shift in the understanding of play from representation to practice. How play is practiced, how meaning in play is engaged through performance, how play can be thought of as a disposition. If play is thought of as an attitude, rather than strictly as an activity, we can understand further how all



parts of life include play, which brings me to one of the major debates within game theory, that of the game boundary.

Even within this beginning section of this review the understanding of game boundary has been discretely mentioned. Do games have a boundary that separates them from other activities? With this work/play dichotomy we think about play and games as occurring within a separate space, offset from the rest of life. Golf happens on a golf course, games played on a bounded board, chalk outlines for foursquare, distinct boundaries of the “playground,” a virtual world for the virtual game. However, with the understanding that business is often conducted on the golf course, the half-truth/half-comedy of the joke that friends are lost over monopoly, the understanding that the friends you make on the playground in school often make-up your social world on and off the playground, that virtual games often have consequences both positive and negative in the physical world (identity, relationships and addiction potentially realized within them), we can understand that play space is not offset from “reality,” but simply another portion of it.

This debate within game studies begins with Johan Huizinga (1949), and his ground breaking work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. For the purposes of this project his most notable contribution to this debate was the term “the magic circle.” Though he only utilizes this term six times in his work, and never formally defines it, it is the center of the debate of game boundary. He says, “All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course” (Huizinga, 1949, pg. 10).

The idea that play space (and therefore game space) is always marked as such, continued to be a given in definitions of games and play through time. Norbeck (1974) states “play is a

voluntary, somehow pleasurable, distinct temporally from other behavior, and distinct in having a make-believe or transcendental quality,” (p. 1). Here play is assumed to be other, distinct from all other human behavior.

In 2004, Salen and Zimmerman recycled “the magic circle” in their book, *Rules of Play*, effectively adding it to the vocabulary of game theory. The *magic circle of game play* as defined by Salen and Zimmerman (2004) is “the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game” (p. 95). It is the physical or metaphorical barrier between reality and fantasy. It serves to set up a space where normalcy is suspended (Salen and Zimmerman 2004).

“The conceptualization of the magic circle has faced strong criticism, mostly because many scholars feel that the division between play and ordinary life is ultimately invalid” (Stenros, 2012, p. 3). Salen and Zimmerman (2004) described the magic circle as a chalk line drawn on the ground. This closed circle has been interpreted by other theorists to represent a hard line, closing off game space from “real-life.” The circle separates the world the players understand as reality from the fantasy world, which players understand as pretend, and within each different rules apply. “When a sumo wrestler enters the ‘magic circle’ of the dohyō or the professional boxer enters the space and time of the bout, the rules of what social behaviors are desirable and forbidden are suddenly radically changed. Violent and powerful physical attacks against another person, which are normally forbidden by law and social norms, become the obligatory mode of conduct,” (Lastowka, 2007, p. 8).

Consalvo (2009) states, “the concept of the magic circle seems static and overly formalist. Structures may be necessary to begin gameplay, but we cannot stop at structures as a way of understanding the gameplay experience. Because of that, we cannot say that games are magic circles, where the ordinary rules of life do not apply. Of course they apply, but in addition

to, in competition with, other rules and in relation to multiple contexts, across varying cultures, and into different groups” (p. 408). Here Consalvo is referencing the notion that it is impossible for games to be completely separated from life. Though games most often have rules, those rules exist in tandem with the societal rules that surround the game and the players. Players do not somehow shed all notions and assumptions as they step into the game space, playing then *only* by the rules of the game. As anthropologists, we understand that humans simply do not have the ability to step completely out of the cultures that forged us.

Copier (2005) argues that the magic circle is imbued through the words with an idea of other worldliness. Here she criticizes the assumption that play space is some kind of utopia, an idea inherent to previous thought processes about play space. When othered, off-set from reality, imbued with an understanding of safety, fantasy, and magic, the seriousness and importance of play is lost.

On that same bent Fairfield (2008) argues against the magic circle, because games and life often occupy the same space. He does this partially by noting the intrusion and integration of “real” economy into virtual game space. Consalvo (2009) and Malaby (2009) also comment on the way real world economy interrupts the game space and becomes a part of it as people play the game for actual money. Gold farming in World of Warcraft and the selling of high level avatars in many MMOPRGs both mix the physical and fantasy worlds.

Despite the criticisms, there are a few stubborn outliers such as Jesper Juul (2008), who argues that the term could still be saved. He criticizes other theorists for making the assumption that the magic circle is a defined space and argues that, “For Huizinga, the space of game-playing is but one type of space governed by special rules, and as with other types of space, the

space of game-playing is social in origin,” (p. 57). He believes the magic circle is an “imperfect separation that players negotiate and uphold,” (Juul, 2008, p. 62).

Others have attempted to replace the term with alternatives. Lammes (2006) coined the term *magic node* in hopes of broadening the magic circle. Juul (2008) believed that *puzzle piece* was a better phrase because it conveyed that the realm of play was just another piece of the puzzle of life. Edward Castronova (2005) suggested the term *membrane* to show that information does pass through the barrier between play and reality. None of these terms have become prevalent.

I think what Lammes, Juul, and Castronova, when endeavoring to coin new terms, are attempting to recognize is the boundary that they see in their studies of games. Jesper Juul says, “To deny the magic circle is to deny that players negotiate this boundary,” (Juul, 62). You would be hard pressed to find a definition of a game that does not recognize some sort of boundary. Even the definition used here recognizes “domains of contrived contingency” (Malaby, 2009). It seems to me that, beyond the criticisms already detailed, the term itself engenders, or harkens back to, a definition or understanding of games being unhelpful to the work currently being done. Game theorists have worked very hard, and continue to do so, to legitimate the study of games and play within various fields of hard science, social science, and the humanities. The idea that games are some kind of safe space, existing some place out in the ether that neither uses the rules of society nor effects the people who exist and practice within them, is counter to and counterproductive for all work in games moving forward.

However, in my own work I am hard pressed to write a document that does not, at some point, recognize the boundaries my own participants set in the games being played. My previous work on larp was focused on these boundaries and the flow that occurs between “life” and

“game,” and so, I cannot say that boundaries do not exist. No matter how permeable they may be, they are there, and are an important component when discussing larp of any kind (Montola, 2005). Despite the importance of the discussion of boundary work within games— as space and use of space has always been a consistent focus within anthropology – the study of play and games in anthropology is no different than any other study we conduct in any other culture, society, world, or realm.

So, the questions remain, why do the previous six pages matter to this thesis and why does this thesis matter? First, this review shows some of the history of the discussion of games and play within anthropology, which is my own discipline, and situates the information within this thesis as another leg of the argument that games (whether computer mediated or physically played) are no more separate from life than any other space or practice. The spaces of work, home, school, church, and playground are each, simply, a part of the larger system.

My goal is to use Michele de Certeau’s work to analyze the games studied. He was chosen because the games in which I did my research are each a part of a larger set of institutionalized games, governed by organizations. I want to show how each of the loci within these institutions (book, org, storyteller, player) use strategy and tactic to work with, and against each other, to understand their roles within the games being played. It is my hope that by using de Certeau – a theory produced to understand the modern human within the city – that I might add another layer to the argument for unity between games and the rest of life.

More, throughout the thesis I bring in other theorists such as Sally Falk-Moore (1978) who studied law and indeterminacy, Julian Orr (1996) who studied the practice of work within the world of Xerox technicians, Keith Basso (1996) who studied how narrative helped to produce self in Apache villages, and Julian Dibbel (1998) who studied the impact of the virtual world of

LambdaMOO. I bring in these theorists within the analysis to show how the study of games can be connected to all of the worlds around us, in unity.

Further, the study of play is vitally important to understanding the thing that anthropologists claim to study, humans and the societies which they create. Edward Norbeck (1974) writes,

The preceding list of subjects concerning play constitutes only a sample of the potential range. Among other topics, some of which are familiar and many of which relate to subjects previously mentioned, are: *play and ecstasy*, *game theory*, *play and politics*, *play and law*, *play and aggression*, *the didactic and socializing value of play among children and adults*, *play and art*, and *play and creativity or cultural innovation*. It has long been noted, for example, that devices intended for play such as various adaptations of the principle of the wheel have led or have been altered to inventions of great technological importance. Johann Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*) has even extravagantly held that play is the wellspring of culture and civilization (p. 7-8).

What might be lacking from this review is any understanding of the literature on larp. Within anthropology, larp, and indeed physical role-play games in general, have been studied even less than games on a more general level. Those that study games have a tendency to focus on computer mediated mediums of play and this is consistent throughout most disciplines. Information studies in Sweden, Finland, and Norway have produced a copious amount of research, however, their style of play is much different than the role-play found in the United States.

Throughout this thesis I use the work of Gary Allan Fine (1983), Sarah Lynn Bowman (2012), David Simkins (2015), T. L. Taylor (2009), and Lizzie Stark (2012), none of whom are strictly anthropologists, but all completed ethnographic studies on larp, physical role-playing games, or physical aspects of computer mediated games. Sarah Lynn Bowman's (2012) *The*

*Functions of Role-Playing Games*, David Simkins' (2015) *The Art of Larp*, and Lizzie Stark's (2012) *Leaving Mundania* come closest to my own work.

Sarah Lynn Bowman (2012) and David Simkins (2015) are the only two larp theorists in the United States that I have been able to find in my own research. Both have completed several years of participant observation with various larp groups, and Bowman has done extensive work with multiple types of role-playing games both physical and computer mediated. Bowman's book speaks to the historical rise of role play and the various genres, which Simkins also touches on. Though much of Bowman's work outside of this book was not directly helpful to this thesis, she has been making inroads into bridging the Atlantic divide between European and US larp theory. Of the work done on larp hers is the most cited within this thesis.

Simkins' book speaks as an all-purpose ethnography of larp games, with a small but detailed section on World of Darkness Werewolf: The Apocalypse. Lizzie Stark (2012), a journalist, participated in a boffer larp, and parlor larp for three years, going so far as to plan and execute her own single weekend larp, which allowed her to detail explicitly how a larp is planned. Though neither is cited extensively here, both were integral to my understanding of larp during the planning stages of my research and through my analysis.

There is a growing amount of academic work on larp, with a small number focusing on parlor larp, and an even smaller subsection dedicated to the World of Darkness, despite its past and current prominence. This thesis will also be situated as one of the few theses dedicated to World of Darkness larp games.

## Chapter 1: The Book – The Strategist

“To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the cities grasp. One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. **It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.**” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 92)

De Certeau links the city to text in the above quote. By use of the wings of Icarus – or in this case the elevator – a new perspective is taken, one in which the city becomes readable, the world *becomes* words. De Certeau steps away from of the blinding thicket of the streets in which life begins to see the strategy and tactic around him.

By necessity we begin life in the thick of things. We learn how to be human by *experiencing* the world. Little half-baked potatoes dropping mom’s keys on the floor for the twentieth time today, endlessly captivated by gravity. Tears welling over a burnt finger on a hot stove. The taste of dirt, an interminable fascination. Even as we age the world maintains an excitement in moments of new experience. It is here we learn how to walk de Certeau’s streets, to be the tactician. We learn the movement of the world, to weave the spaces in which we live in the labyrinth of Daedalus, from the perspective of the city sidewalk.

Conversely, larp begins, for players, as text, and from text it is experienced, flipping the experience of the physical world, and the theory of de Certeau. De Certeau speaks of the perspective of seeing the city from the World Trade Center, stopping movement to look out the window, to take in the sight of the city and watch the streets turn into text. Larpers turn text into the city through movement; their first perspective sitting in some comfy chair, taking in the text



of the book, which presents and represents, the world. They then experience that world, only after they begin to move. The character created on the page is given life through the donning of the costume and the play of the game. Here the player, aware of the fantasy of the world, seeks an elusive immersion, where de Certeau seeks, what seems to be, an elusive consciousness.

The book defines the reality of the game in its world building. It shows the player and the storytellers the spaces they are to inhabit, what roles they must take, framing the goals of the character's lives, and the storyteller's plots. It tells the players how to use the characters they have created.

### **“Laws of the Night”**

“World of Darkness is your nightmares come to life to eat you.”

-Bart, a player

The book *Laws of the Night Revised Rules for Play of Vampire: The Masquerade*, is the basic book used for play in both vampire games<sup>44</sup> that I studied. In it, the player encounters the introduction: What is role play? What is larp? What are vampires? What is the Masquerade? This orients the player, grounds them, it teaches them what actions are expected of them.

Chapter One details how reality will interact with fantasy. First, reality will only *represent* the fantasy, not become it. Real weapons will not be used. Stunts will be verbalized, not acted out. The player is reminded this is *only a game*, not reality, urging the player to keep space, a distance, between self and character, the physical and imagined. Here the player is meant to realize that this parlor larp is one in which the physical action of the player is limited.

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<sup>44</sup> The games studied are detailed in Chapter 1.5. Chapter One allows for a full understanding of the game being discussed, for this reason the methodology section and explanations of the games studied were imputed after Chapter One for coherency.

Chapter One is also the world building chapter in which the World of Darkness is first introduced. This is the erection of the boundaries of de Certeau's city, if not the buildings themselves; it puts parameters around the fantasy world. It is here the player will begin to imagine the world itself. As Gary Alan Fine (1983) states, "Fantasy is constrained by the social expectations of the players and of their world. The game fantasy then, is an integration of twentieth-century American reality, and the player's understanding of the medieval or futuristic setting in which the characters are placed" (p. 3). Here the player will imagine this world of horror by using a mix of the knowledge they already have of vampires from popular culture and history, as well as the book itself. Even now, with the knowledge you, as the reader, have about vampires, and the limited description of the World of Darkness given so far, have erected in your own mind an expectation of what is to come. The book reorients the reader, shifting their cultural knowledge, to create the world the creators wrote within the player's mind.

John, a storyteller from out of state and a stay at home dad says,

Pardon the um, the French but I guess the world here is designed to fuck you, consistently, constantly. You wouldn't know it by the way the org runs most of the time but it's true. This world is a dark and scary place, if you'll pardon the um cliché. People, regular people, wander around totally unaware of this supernatural underbelly of mayhem just beyond their perception controlling their lives. Vampires, werewolves, warlocks, freakin' fairies, and Frankenstein's Monster, and demons and all the dark creepy crap from the Grimm fairy tales to the Bible, they all exist in this game world. And in a world full of monsters, few want to be the rinky-dink humans, so we play the monsters instead. I play *Vampire: The Masquerade*.

Vampires are immortal beings, much like the myths and legends spun in the last few hundred years. They are the powerful and terrifying undead. Humans are turned (or "made") into vampires through death, and the consumption of a vampire's blood. To maintain vitality and power within the immortality vampires then must drink blood to maintain their energy and

magical powers, using the blood<sup>45</sup> within them to change into a bat, run faster than a car, or become invisible. They are immortal in the sense that they do not age. However, they can be killed by dismembering, beheading, fire, and sunlight. Most vampires have a reflection, are not afraid of garlic or the cross, and staking them (that is putting a piece of wood through their heart) does not kill them, but does put them into a deep slumber. Here the common lore of vampires is restated within the book, so that players understand what type of vampires they are supposed to be, orienting the player with common knowledge.

The World of Darkness is a place filled with myth come to life. Within the lore of *Vampire: The Masquerade*, for instance, most vampires believe they are descendants of Caine from the Bible's Caine and Able. For birthing murder into the world by killing his brother, Caine and all his children are damned by the Judeo-Christian God, cursed with a twisted immortality. They are the undead, existing in a space between death and life, where they must consume the blood Caine dared to spill. Here you see the way in which the creators shifted the cultural lore of vampires to include a biblical history, reorienting the player with new, but familiar, knowledge.

Humans are oblivious to the vampires' existence because vampires maintain "The Masquerade," going so far as to wipe human minds of the memory or outright kill them, when they come into contact. "The Masquerade" is a law maintained by all vampires no matter their *sect*<sup>46</sup> or clan.

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<sup>45</sup> Literally "spending" the blood, as vampires use their powers they use-up the blood within them, it is the blood which gives them power and they must drink more to maintain that power.

<sup>46</sup> Vampires have their own societies. There are five major sects of vampires, the Camarilla— one of the largest with a strict governmental structure, the Anarchs — a group of vampires who work together with loose governmental structure, and the Independents — who hold no allegiances but may still help each other if asked. The fourth is the Sabbat. Like the Alliance vs the Horde of World of Warcraft or Sauron vs the rest of Middle Earth or the Wizards against the Death Eaters of Harry Potter, the Camarilla and Anarchs are against the Sabbat. If the terms are taken very loosely the Camarilla are the "good guys" while the Sabbat are the "bad guys." The Sabbat are bad guys only in that they are perceived to do worse things to mortals as a matter of course or rule of thumb than the Cam and the

Chapter Two details the *clans*.<sup>47</sup> This section divulges exactly who populates the world in which the player characters will play. It begins the discussion of who the players can create, who they will be in the fantasy world. There are thirteen classic vampire types within the book called clans, and each are loosely based on the legends of vampires from around the world. Each clan has different powers and skills in which they are proficient or deficient.<sup>48</sup>

There are vampire clans based on the legends of Dracula, the vampire movies of the 1980's, Anne Rice's aristocrats, and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. There are the Gangrel, who embody the idea of vampire as natural predator; the Giovanni, who are an extreme version of the mob; the Ventrue, who possess the blood of the monarchy, built to rule; the Followers of Set, whose powers are believed to come from the Egyptian gods themselves. Again the creators use colloquial knowledge, history, and information new to the player to explain to the player who they *can* be, who they *can* create, putting parameters around possibilities.

Chapters Three and Four are devoted to character creation. Character creation comes in two main parts before the character enters play,<sup>49</sup> character sheet<sup>50</sup> and background creation.<sup>51</sup> The character sheet is used in game particularly during combat, when characters use supernatural powers, or when players are using the skills they have given their character. *Vampire: The*

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Anarchs. The final of the five is the Giovanni, though some might argue their treatment of mortals is on par with the Sabbat, they are useful and willing to work with the other sects. They are the deal brokers, the money launderers, the loan sharks, the vampire mob.

<sup>47</sup> Clans iterate the vampire types a character can choose from. They can be like Dracula or Nosferatu, among many others.

<sup>48</sup> The clans mentioned directly in the chapters to come will have their own footnote and section in the glossary.

<sup>49</sup> "Entering play" is a term players use. It means literally that the character is entering a play space, is now being played in game. In this context it is usually referring to a new character. Less often it is used to describe a previous scene in the past tense. "Just as she entered play a bomb went off." Sherry describing her character's death scene. Or "Just before I entered play all hell broke loose." A player talking about himself. Either a player or character can "enter play."

<sup>50</sup> Examples of character sheets and backgrounds can be found in Appendix B, which includes an example of a vampire character with names redacted and my own werewolf character which I made during the thesis study.

<sup>51</sup> A background is the written history and personality of the character.

*Masquerade* is a point based system, that is each character can be summed-up by the use of a number system detailed on a piece of paper called a character sheet. Each new character is created with a, more or less, uniform number of points (30-60 in the case of the games studied). As will be discussed more later, this point based system reduces the whole person – the background, hours played, character development – created by the player into numbers on a page. The character – their strength, stamina, and beauty – becoming mere numbers which represent them – the character sheet a representation of a representation, and a way to distance character and self, fantasy and physical.

Though these chapters detail how characters *should* be made, character creation rarely happens this way, as will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four. Players are directed by the book to begin the process by choosing an archetype, a word that describes the heart or base of the character.<sup>52</sup>

Players are then to choose attributes, Physical, Social, and Mental traits, basically how strong/agile, persuasive/attractive, and intelligent/disciplined the character is at the beginning of play. The player will choose skills (driving, larceny, firearms), things they acquired throughout their life/unlife (houses, contacts, mentors, money), merits and flaws – things that they were naturally born with or acquired over time (ambidexterity, huge size, deaf, amnesia). They will choose special powers such as the ability to become stronger, faster, invisible, or raise the dead. The character sheet determines how powerful the character is in the game. Points are given over the life of the character as the character is played, which are added to the character sheet. As a result, the characters become more powerful overtime.

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<sup>52</sup> “**Leader** – You have drive, energy, and ideas. You want to be in command. **Monster** – Causing horror through wickedness, cruelty, or vicious acts brings you delight. **Con Artist** – You’re a swindler, a liar, and a cheat. Sometimes, it’s a living — and sometimes, it’s an art,” (Carl, Henig, Woodworth, 1999, p. 73-74).

Though the points are limited, the player also creates a backstory and personality for the character and, so long as the backstory stays within the canon<sup>53</sup> of the world, players have complete autonomy over the backstory. Backstories are detailed character histories, and these can be anywhere from some notes jotted on a napkin to a literal book of 300 pages or more. There are no steps for the writing of a background, leaving space for a lot of player tactic to be employed; this is limited and ordered by both org and storyteller as well.<sup>54</sup>

Fantasy worlds, and role-play games in general, are often about the use of creativity, requiring in many instances that large swaths of space be open to multiple ways of imagining or use. However, there are still parameters given by the rules, in this case the book, that remain fixed, where the proper takes precedence over creativity.

John: “I can make anything work, which is why when I help a person make a character, I want to know what they want to play.”

Interviewer: So anything goes?

John: “HA! Ok maybe not *anything*. I mean you can’t play like... I dunno... Godzilla or like uh you can’t actually be Dracula... or maybe what’s a good one I’ve seen, you can’t be freaking like... *be* Harry Potter. But you can be a scaly, monster. You *might* be able to be like very super distantly related to Dracula or model your character off him and you can use magic. Soooo... like I mean anything within reason, right.”

In this quote both the possibilities of character, and the limitations are highlighted. John shares how a player can create the character they want to play, but also solidifies the strategic power of the book (and the org) by discussing the limitations.

Chapter Five is dedicated to game mechanics/the mechanical rules of the game, particularly how combat works. Here the player learns how stunts, combat, and the use of skills are handled since they cannot be physically acted out by the player. First and foremost, the character can

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<sup>53</sup> Canon is a term used to denote all of the material that has been written for the world of game. To “stay within cannon” then is to keep a character’s background within what is considered proper in the world of the game.

<sup>54</sup> The concept of the tactician’s improper use of proper space will be explored further in Chapter 4.

have the highest rating possible within the game and still fail. Life is full of contingency and there is always the possibility of failure even when a task should be easy or the opportunity for success against the greatest of odds. Sally Falk-Moore (1978) highlights this with her theory of indeterminacy. So, a probability generator, “contingency generator” as called by David Simkins (2015, p. 47) is used to show this randomization. In the games a hand game of rock-paper-scissors, which they call “chops,” is used<sup>55</sup> to replicate life’s contingency.

As a very basic example: Two players, Marty and Doug, have characters who are currently in a fist fight. The storyteller is there to mediate.

Marty: I am strong enough to punch you in the face.

Doug: I am quick enough to dodge your blow.

Each player “throws a chop” – they play a game of rock-paper-scissors. Marty throws paper, Doug rock. Marty wins and his character punches Doug’s character in the face. OR Marty throws scissors, Doug paper. Marty wins and his character dodges the blow. OR both throw paper and they tie. Here the character sheets are consulted. Marty has more physical points than Doug, Marty wins and his character lands the blow.

In these instances, both the character sheet and the hand game matter, as both help to create the contingency in this scenario. Interestingly you see in the rules surrounding the creation of contingency, an attempt to structurally input “areas of indeterminacy or ambiguity, of uncertainty, and manipulability ... [t]o emphasize the potentialities within situations that depend on how the players play them out,” (Falk-Moore, 1978, 39-40). Doing so attempts to create a

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<sup>55</sup> Rock-Paper-Scissors is a basic hand game. At the same time the players will make a fist and move their forearm up and down creasing at the elbow three times in unison. As the arm comes down for the third time the players’ hands will either stay the same (rock) or will change to make the hand gestures for either paper or scissors. Rock is made with a fist, scissors by holding out the pointer and middle fingers to create the image of scissors, and paper a flat hand. Rock beats scissors, scissors beats paper, paper beats rock. So if Player 1 has a fist (rock) and Player 2 a flat hand (paper), Player 2 will win.

feeling of legitimacy within the created world, to replicate the physical world as much as possible, while also creating distance between the physical and imagined worlds for the player, effectively pausing any sort of seamless experience of the alternate persona.

The rules dictate the way the game is played. The rules of the game listed and defined in the book detail how the player can act within the physical space in which the game is played. Their function is to allow the impossible to become possible, meaning players cannot actually become invisible, and so the game provides rule mechanics for representing invisibility.

The game rules also dictate that much of the physical action (driving a car, picking a lock, participating in a footrace) including all violent action taken by a character (combat, torture, rape), must be represented, that is these instances are played out in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, narrated, talked-through – rather than acted out. The hand game and the character sheet lubricate violent and non-violent conflict and competition. It creates a quick way to resolve combat and any other number of situations – car races, sports games, or uses of character skills that require a physical component (Simkins, 2015). However, these physical representations of violence and competition have the possibility of distancing the player from the fantasy world, limiting the fantasy space, removing the player from the game world, at least partially, as the game of rock-paper-scissors ensues. The action of the player and the action of the character are incongruent, meaning the immersion of the player is interrupted.

One player, Jessica, a business woman in her early thirties says, “I don’t like combat much, or chopping<sup>56</sup> because it takes me out the game. I hate looking at my sheet. I’d rather be in

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<sup>56</sup> Chopping is the player’s term for the game of Rock-Paper-Scissors.



my character's mind. Saying what the character would say. Not focused or bogged down by the mechanics."

Where Bart, a tech consultant in his early forties says, "Combat and chopping, depending on the game, doesn't have to be all about the sheet. You can stay in-character while chopping. It's not easy but it's about knowing what's on your sheet, not needing to take time to look at the piece of paper in your hand, but to know it off the top of your head. That just takes experience and time playing."

Here, although, the rules for maintaining a distance are shown to be effective in Jessica's quote, successfully detailing proper game conduct, this distancing can be mitigated tactically, as can be seen in Bart's experience of immersion even within combat.<sup>57</sup> This will be explored further in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five details the politics of the game. Like the show "House of Cards" or "Game of Thrones," the game is designed for back stabbing, scheming, and plotting. Player characters constantly jockey for power, and in many cases the Prince, the highest ranking in-game position,<sup>58</sup> changes quite often. This politicking is more prominent in some games than it is in others.

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<sup>57</sup> In Chapter 4's case study this idea will be further explored.

<sup>58</sup> Each game is in-charge of a single Domain. Vampires break up various cities and territories into Domains. There is a Prince of that Domain that essentially rules the area, creates law, upholds the masquerade. The Prince, usually a player character, has various vassals beneath them, the Harpy (a records keeper), the Sheriff (who upholds the law), the Whip (who enacts the punishment of the Prince) along with several others, usually all played by player characters.

The last chapters, Six and Seven, were made for storytellers. They describe how to make plot<sup>59</sup> for a game, how to create rumors<sup>60</sup> and spread information about plots and subplots, tips on story creation, how to handle the various personalities in the game, possible friends and foes to create (otherwise called non-player characters), and general information on how a particular game is created. This is left extremely vague, almost to the point of giving no formal directions on the act of storytelling at all. This allows the storyteller a great deal of freedom to use tactic, but also act strategically in the creation of the world in which the players play.

All in all, the book runs about 200 pages, but it is not the only book. There are dozens of others devoted to lore on the various clans, certain powerful enemies or places, other magical and supernatural beings, and the history of World of Darkness. Books dedicated to providing information to further the player's and storyteller's knowledge of the world in which they are playing.

### **The Creators and History: Larp and the World of Darkness System**

Live-action role-play games, depending on what sources are consulted, began thirty years ago, fifty years ago, a hundred years ago, or several hundred years ago. This measure of time is largely determined by how live-action role-play is defined. Lizzie Stark (2012), a journalist, traces larp back to King Henry the VIII of England who would often dress up with his fellow nobles pretending to be Turks or Russians or any number of characters. He even hired an acting troupe to play the parts of Robin Hood and his Merry Men who met the King, and his retinue, in

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<sup>59</sup> Plot here is the literary term. Plot refers to various events or strings of events that are connected to create the story which storytellers plan and enact within the game.

<sup>60</sup> An example of rumors can be found in Appendix A as a part of the first character sheet. Rumors are bits of information about things going on around the game site, usually around the city in which the game is set and are linked with those areas/people a character has influence over (police, church, criminals). These help guide the players in the plot, showing them what things may be important to investigate or look into.

the forest, “led them to their forest hideout and fed nearly 200 people a banquet of venison and wine” (p. 32). David Simkins (2012) traces larp back to 16<sup>th</sup> century improvisational comedy, Commedia dell’Arte, which had its own system much like the games of today (Simkins, 49). Though each of these might be considered on the fringe of what could be considered live-action role-play, it does give a sense that these types of games are not at all a new phenomenon. Further, role-play when defined as a general term outside of games goes back much further in time, “Role-playing-like activities have existed at different times throughout European cultural history. As its predecessors, we may mention the Cult of Dionysus in ancient Greece, the Medieval Passion play, masques, and carnivals” (Waade and Sandvik, 2007, p. 3).

Much more recently larp, as it is conceived today, can be traced to 1966 with the founding of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), by a group of Berkley students. SCA is a group based on medieval times and is largely focused on combat and physical technique, the classic boffer larp. This was not the only group to spring up. In the late 1960s and early 1970’s “the rebellion from the rigidity of the fifties ideological structures inspired people to reinvent themselves in a variety of ways” (Bowman, 17). 1965 marked a rise in popularity of J.R.R Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* series, and the fantasy genre in general. Fantasy’s new found popularity “collided with the tactical simulation games” (Bowman, 18). Tactical simulation games, otherwise known as “war games,” that had been popular among gamers for several decades prior, and were produced from military war games that can be traced as far back as third

millennium BCE (Fine, 1983, p. 8). This collision created the first tabletop role-play game,<sup>61</sup> *Dungeons and Dragons*, written by E. Gary Gygax.<sup>62</sup>

This explosion of interest in fantasy and role-play gaming created a plethora of games to play and evolved overtime. High-fantasy, with its elves and dwarves and dragons, was not the only type of fiction to gain popularity. Fiction surrounding Conan the Barbarian added to the popularity of the hero arc in role-playing games in the 80's (Pearce, 2011, p. 9). Science Fiction had also been gaining ground since the 1940's with books like *1984* by George Orwell. In the 1970's the popularity of TV shows like Dr. Who and Star Trek went on the rise, and in the 1980's science fiction based tabletop and larp games began to make an appearance, evolving into genres like Cyberpunk<sup>63</sup> and Steampunk<sup>64</sup> (Bowman, 2012, p. 19-20). "Science fiction and fantasy genres emphasize the thrill of adventure and exploration, situations that afford the characters a chance to act in heroic or at least extraordinary ways" (Bowman, 2012, p. 20). However, Bowman also notes a third category of game that was first seen in the late 1980's, gaining real popularity in the 1990's: Horror games (Bowman, 2012, p. 21). *Vampire: The Masquerade* and indeed all White Wolf games fall into this category.

Bowman (2012) writes,

"Gen Xers were painfully aware of their own participation in the negative development of the modern world, such as the exploitation and oppression of marginalized social groups. The guild inspired by such awareness found outlets in popular culture, as Gen Xers felt compelled to expose their deeper issues in a confessional manner... Role-playing games such as White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1991) surged in popularity during the nineties and in the early part of the twenty-first century, thematically exploring this sense of hyperawareness and critique of power, consumption and greed. *Vampire*, along with the other games in the World of Darkness, presented a fight against the overwhelming sense

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<sup>61</sup> Tabletop games are like larp, but less physically intensive. The game is played sitting at a table, characters are created and role-played but no movement or costuming is required, it is an entirely verbal world, existing through the powers of the mind.

<sup>62</sup> Who was a Wisconsin gamer, by the way.

<sup>63</sup> Cyberpunk is a genre that mixes the style of punk of the 80s with futuristic technologies.

<sup>64</sup> Steampunk is a genre that mixes the style of punk of the 80s with the historic steam engine type technology.

of ‘evil’ and self-interest that have become prevalent in the modern world. However, these qualities are not simply embodied in an external ‘dragon’ to be slain, but are specifically present within the self...Thus, *Vampire* represents a more introspective form of role-playing when compared to previous RPG [role-playing game] offerings... [It] presents a narrative of personal horror.” (p. 19-20).

The World of Darkness universe was originally a tabletop system published in 1991 by White Wolf Publishing, written and created by Steven and Steward Wieck, Mark Rein-Hagen, and Lion Rampant. According to the White Wolf official website, in 1986 Steve and Steward Wieck published “Arcanum Magazine” which was shortly changed to “White Wolf.” About the same time, Mark Rein-Hagen and Lion Rampant were attempting to create a game system based on wizards, which was never published. In the late 1980’s these two groups joined to create the World of Darkness universe.

The first larp system within the World of Darkness universe, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, was written in 1993. Within the World of Darkness universe, the various types of supernatural creatures rarely mix, and so the larp rule systems within World of Darkness are separated by supernatural creature type. This also creates a less chaotic system for storytellers and players, though some games do mix systems together. Over the course of the next decade, White Wolf created four other larp systems, “Werewolf: The Apocalypse,” “Mage: The Ascension,” “Wraith: The Oblivion,” and “Changeling: The Dreaming.” All larp systems were revised and reprinted starting in 1999 with “Laws of the Night, Revised Rules for Vampire: The Masquerade.”

According to the White Wolf website, 2004 brought the biggest change that White Wolf had attempted since their creation. They ended the original World of Darkness universe, which they then re-classified as Classic World of Darkness (then dubbed Old World of Darkness, Old WoD, or Old World by players). They created a New World of Darkness universe (called

variously New World and New WoD by players) and stopped publishing new editions of the old systems. This New World of Darkness larp game system included: Vampire: The Requiem, Werewolf: The Forsaken, Mage: The Awakening, and Changeling: The Lost.

Julian Orr's (1996) work, introduced in the Introduction of this thesis, focuses on the way in which machines are repaired by technicians who are employed by the corporation, but also interact and work with the customers who called the technician in the first place. As a part of his work, he discussed a change that occurred shortly before he entered his fieldwork. Xerox had recently created an extensive document for technicians to use that was supposed to help them fix any and every problem they might encounter. However, as life can be seen to have many Falk-Moorian indeterminacies, this new document could not predict every set of circumstances, whether social or technical, that arose during service calls – it did not take into account context of the circumstance (Orr, 1996, p. 106-113). “In summary, then, the technicians use the documentation routinely, but rarely with the blind faith intended,” (Orr, 1996, p. 113).

Though the new system fixed some things from the Old World system, it was not perfect. As new games arose, and Mind's Eye Society took on the New World system, new House Rules were created to again fix the system, the storytellers, as technicians creating “habitable” space – to weave in de Certeau – within the new framework.

Many games still use the Classic World of Darkness systems, including those games studied within this thesis.<sup>65</sup> Until 2004 players, storytellers, and organizations had been using the rules of the original World of Darkness to create their own places, their own histories, their own stories, which slowly but surely began to branch away from the writings produced by the

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<sup>65</sup> Barring Max's game, which was played using New World of Darkness rules.

creators.<sup>66</sup> From 1993 through 2004 White Wolf had been publishing new material – that is books for the clans, new histories, and rule supplements for the original universe. Though the creation of the New World of Darkness system was meant, at least partially, to fix an outdated system, doing so also changed the history of the World of Darkness. When White Wolf halted this production, and created the New World of Darkness, they created new lore, new history, new names, sometimes re-appropriating names from the Classic World of Darkness system, reclassifying and depersonalizing what players had come to know. “Every explicit attempt to fix social relationships or social symbols is by implication a recognition that they are mutable. Yet at the same time such an attempt directly struggles against mutability, attempts to fix the moving thing, to make it hold” (Falk-Moore, 1978, p. 40).

Naming is quite significant for both the strategist and the tactician. The strategist uses names to promote their own authority. Names “are replaced by numbers: on the telephone, one no longer dials *Opera*, but 073. The same is true of the stories and legends that haunt urban spaces like superfluous or additional inhabitants. They are the object of a witch-hunt, by the very logic of the techno-structure” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 106). Strategy subverts the tactician’s attempts to create their own place within strategy’s space by classifying, depersonalizing spaces with numbers and superfluous re-categorization.

As de Certeau points out, names can be a dangerous tool for a strategist to employ. On the one hand, proper names given to streets in which the walkers move can be plucked out of their context, turned into “trajectories,” used to give mechanical directions, to create impersonal maps, to order the city strategically. On the other hand, even streets named with monotonous

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<sup>66</sup> This history will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

numbers (1<sup>st</sup> St. 2<sup>nd</sup> St. 3<sup>rd</sup> St.) can be given meaning. “A whole series of comparison would be necessary to account for the magical powers proper names enjoy. They seem to be carried as emblems by the travelers they direct and simultaneously decorate” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 104).

Here, de Certeau discusses the use of names by the tacticians. Strategy cannot use names for extended periods. It can codify for a time, that is it can number streets in logical order to try and keep power over spaces, but ultimately names for things will always be taken by the tactician and personalized, places will be made out of space names. For instance, when a pet is named it turns from an “it” to “Fluffy.” The naming of the thing gives the thing significance. Even though 4<sup>th</sup> street is a rather innocuous name, I lived there when I was young, and though just a number, placed sequentially in order between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> street, it is still *my* street, where my own memoirs linger. In fact, no matter what city I happen to be in, when I come across a 4<sup>th</sup> street, recollections of childhood play in my mind.

Names are taken over by the tactician, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes consciously given meaning through events and the even the monotony of use (de Certeau, 1984, p. 104-105). Birmingham suddenly becomes more than a city name, but evokes the memory of the Civil Rights Movement. “Memories tie us to that place... It’s personal, not interesting to anyone else, but after all that’s what gives a neighborhood its character. There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can ‘invoke’ or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in...” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 108).

Keith Basso’s (1996) work, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, is a description of some detail on Apache place names. “Apache constructions of place reach deeply into other cultural spheres, including conceptions of wisdom, notions of conventional ways of imagining and interpreting the Apache tribal past” (p. xv). Apache name their places for the happenings that occurred in



them; the names represent the story. They create place through the use of the names not only to indicate that story but to tie it to the whatever is happening within the moment that the name is invoked. These stories are often lessons, to invoke the name is to invoke the lesson. To “shoot an arrow,” is a descriptor for using a story to remind someone to live well, that is to remind an individual of how to live a good life, a moral life – to weave in de Certeau, you might even say a “proper” life.

There is a story which Basso (1996) tells here of a young woman who had entered ceremonial ground with curls in her hair, where the custom was to let the hair down, free flowing. Two weeks later at a birthday celebration,

“then – quietly, deftly, and quite without warning – her grandmother narrated a version of the historical tale about the forgetful Apache policeman who behaved too much like a whiteman. Shortly after the story was finished the young woman stood up, turned away wordlessly, and walked off in the direction of her home. Uncertain of what had happened, I asked her grandmother why she had departed. Had the young woman suddenly become ill? ‘No,’ her grandmother replied. ‘I shot her with an arrow’” (p. 56)

It is explained that to be shot with an arrow is to have one of these stories used against you to remind of how to be good, and that you have gone in a bad way. The young woman said,

“I think maybe my grandmother was getting after me, but then I think maybe she’s working on somebody else. Then I think back to the dance and I know it’s for me for sure. I sure don’t like how she’s talking about me, so I quit looking like that. I threw those curlers away.” Basso and the girl were walking together and he pointed out the place Men Stand Above Here and There, the place in which the story of the Apache who acted too much like whiteman was from. “She said nothing for several moments. Then she smiled and spoke softly in her own language: “I know that place. It stalks me every day” (Basso, 1996, p. 56-57).

The names of these places, the stories of these places, are enculturation tools; they orient the Apache in their modes of thinking; they tie the Apache to the land; they make meaning from space, they help to maintain the proper within the community. “... Western Apache, conceptions

of the land work in specific ways to influence Apaches' conceptions of themselves and vice versa, and that the two together work to influence patters of social action" (Basso, 1996, p. 67).

White Wolf created a new history, and a new rule set, which players then had to learn anew. Long running game histories were halted, and reset, as the old history was then made defunct. The closer a game adheres to the proper world created in the books, the more strategic power the creators have. However, as one player pointed out, "Requiem, New WoD as a whole, had its own set of issues. They fixed some things and ruined others, or made new rules that didn't make any more logical sense than the old ones, which baffled me. So I stayed with the Classic."

They also changed the contingency generator. They moved from the use of "chops" (rock-paper-scissors) to "pulls" where a portion of a deck of cards is used, storytellers randomly pull a card from the deck, the number on the card told a character if they won or lost. This not only literally changed the previous chops into numbers, but took out the minimal, physical action involved in combat or use of a skill, changing the movement of the game, and creating further distance between the character and player during these scenes. While the character makes action, the player stands or sits in inaction, less involved.

Here, White Wolf changed the way the game was played, while also redirecting the physical orientation of conflict and competition. It moved direction of the competition, where chops pit player against player or player against storyteller, pulls pit player(s) against inanimate object, in all situations. For some players this created a fairer combat system, for others it depersonalized combat even further. "Now combat isn't even really a game, it's just waiting for the storyteller to tell you your number."

By *attempting* to correct some of the mistakes of the Old World system they were trying to leave less room for interpretation, and the need for “*House Rules*,”<sup>67</sup> ultimately attempting to re-solidify ideas of proper use, and leaving less room for the tactician to move.

In 2012 White Wolf went bankrupt and stopped writing new material all together. In 2013 a group of gamers leased the rights to the World of Darkness system and started publishing again with a new rule system and new lore. World of Darkness was changed to be called Chronicle of Darkness to signify a break from Old World and New World Systems. Just this past year (2016) Paradox Interactive bought out White Wolf. There are rumors abound of a new reboot within the next year of all World of Darkness systems, and possibly a massive-multi-player online role-playing game based in the World of Darkness universe, which could mean a broader base of material for future research.

Words create the worlds of larp first in the books written. It is the creators of the larp that are most prominently the users of the strategy of de Certeau’s theory. It is here in the rule books which define the system that the proper is first determined and disseminated consciously.

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<sup>67</sup> House Rules will be fully explained in Chapter Three. However, they are rules created by a storyteller(s) that change or modify the rules found in the book that are only applicable to their particular game.

## Chapter 1.5 Methodology

I completed 140 hours of participant observation over the course of fourteen game sessions, one character creation session, and one full weekend Werewolf event game,<sup>68</sup> from May 28, 2016 until August 13, 2016. This participant observation time was spent unevenly in between three different Iowa games, called here the Crow County game, the IC game, and the Werewolf game. I participated fully in the Werewolf game as a player. In the Crow County game and IC game it was considered a conflict of interest to have the information of a researcher (watching side scenes and conducting interviews with the storytellers) while also playing in the games, and so I opted to be an out-of-character observer only. I used a voice recorder to record each observed game session and all interviews.

I conducted twenty formal interviews, ten informal interviews, and three formal focus groups with the participants in the Iowa games. I also conducted six formal online interviews and six informal online interviews with current players and previous players from various other games. I participated in one board game night with Max's group, which was both participant observation and an informal focus group, which lasted for twelve hours from the time I arrived until the end of the game night. Over the course of the Summer of 2016 I also stayed in the homes of five different participants in Iowa.

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<sup>68</sup> **Event games** – are special yearly or biyearly games hosted and facilitated by local games. These will often be held in hotels or special spaces such as old mansions. These are usually two day or weekend long games that garner regional and sometimes national or international attendance.

## Iowa: The Odd Man Out

Regionally, games have different playstyles. Iowa is considered by those outside and within the state to have a very different style from the rest of the region. The storytellers of the Crow County game, Blake, Jane, and Alex, characterize it with the following discussion.

Jane: Iowa is like the red-headed step-child of the Midwest.

Blake: I like it though.

Jane: Oh yeah, it's awesome.

Blake: I'd say 80 to 90 percent of our characters are very low powered and then we have a few outliers.

Interviewer: Why?

Alex: Its mostly, honestly it's mostly the playstyle of the state.

Blake: We aren't really power gamers<sup>69</sup> like the rest of the Midwest tends to be.

Jane: Yeah like Ohio, Jesus Ohio is power gamer central.

Blake: That and we crack down on magical items<sup>70</sup> and things of that nature. We don't really participate in the "arms race" that tends to happen outside of Iowa. We don't need the next biggest, baddest thing to stay cool.

Jane: And we just say no to a hell of a lot of things.

Another player speaks about the "cheese curtain:"

"So the cheese curtain starts at the Mississippi River where Iowa meets Wisconsin. Aptly named because you know Wisconsin cheese but also game cheese. Cheese is... cheese is like when you have way more power than you are supposed to. Like a six-month old character should not have out of clan blood magic but there they are running all over Ohio and Wisconsin and Illinois, aka Chicago. So like maybe that's an exaggeration but you get the drift and the crazy part is they need all that cheese. They need it like a Wisconsinite craves cheese when they are in Alabama or West Virginia or some place without good cheese. They need it, because without they would get stomped dead."

Another player in Iowa says,

"First the cheese curtain doesn't really exist anymore but, that is just my opinion. But the Iowa games, I guess are more investigative. We have more plot that doesn't revolve around

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<sup>69</sup> To be a power gamer is to find and use the rules that allows your character to be as powerful in their point based form as possible.

<sup>70</sup> Items, which might include guns, tanks, magical items or bags of money, are represented by item cards. Examples of item cards can be found in Appendix F.

combat. You can find things out using your brain and your wits or wiles or your nose for that matter. Which can actually really disrupt other games when we show up. We might not have all the powers in the book but we think about things before we go smash it with our fists. Because we are lower powered we have to take a step back, play carefully, and come at the problem in an... unexpected? way I guess.”

For instance, there is a story that I have heard told several times about a game at a convention<sup>71</sup> in Wisconsin, which was attended by some of the Iowa players. One of the players, though low in points, was a particularly investigative fellow, and made an acquaintance who happened to hold many of the plot secrets. Not knowing for sure what to do, the character followed this acquaintance around, quietly in the background, so quietly that he went unnoticed both in and out-of-character and overheard a conversation, which led him to an investigation, which solved the plot on the first night, of what was supposed to be a three-night game, creating quite the stir. This story is one of the go to stories players, both inside and outside Iowa, tell to characterize how Iowa is different from other games in the area.

Though I am unsure if this is standard for other regions, at least fifty percent of the players have been friends, and playing together for five to ten years, sometimes upwards of fifteen or twenty years, and many of them participate together in all three of the games I studied and other games in Iowa (of which there are two).

### **Crow County Vampire: The Masquerade**

The Crow County Vampire: The Masquerade game has three storytellers, two male (Alex and Blake) and one female (Jane). Alex is the Head Storyteller, with Jane and Blake as the Assistant Storytellers. Marty is relatively new to storytelling, and due to his work schedule and new born child he attends game less often, but still plays an important role.

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<sup>71</sup> Larp conventions are weekend long gatherings dedicated to all things larp, from play to selling of various products, to talks about the games academically and colloquially.

The game began when Jacob, a long-time and well-known larper throughout One World by Night, walked into a university gamers club in 2007 “dressed in all black with a cowboy hat and started speaking to us, this group of nerds, in-character, inviting us to join him.” Another player in the same cohort who helped begin the game said, “At first we were like ‘no.’ It took some persuading by Jake to make us show-up. We all looked at each other like kind of sideways not sure we were ready for that kind of level of nerd. We were all tabletop gamers and video gamers but larp? Dress-up?! But we did it and we had fun and it just took off from there.”

Since their creation they have been meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays from 7pm to midnight. They began meeting at the founder’s home and over a series of moves ended up in the basement of a Catholic church in 2011, where they still play today.

The church basement has four rooms, two large rooms and two small rooms, a hallway, and a little nook by the elevators that are used for game. The small rooms, hallway, and elevator nook, are used for side scenes<sup>72</sup> with individuals or small groups. One of them is a very small rectangular room with whitewashed walls and a mirror that hangs on the far end. The room comfortably seats four or five people. The other is a larger office with a round table. The hallway and elevator nook are cut off by doors, making them ideal places for secret conversations and side scenes.

One large room is used as an out-of-character area, where some larger side scenes are run and where players can go to talk to the storytellers or generally be out-of-character. The room

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<sup>72</sup> **Side-Scene** – Any scene that takes place off Elysium (Gather) or between a sub-set of character not including the main group. (Any time characters leave the main meeting site, or meetings – clan meetings, meetings with the Prince, Domain officers meetings etc).

has three main parts. A small kitchen, open to the rest of the room, is used by the storytellers. The counter of the kitchen is used for check-in.

There is a large swath of open space with a floor level with the kitchen, where the snack table resides, and a portion of the room which is raised, accessed by a small set of two shallow stairs. This raised portion is an inlet of sorts, where the rest of the building is all corners, the wall in this space is slightly rounded. The space is filled with twenty or so small chairs, and the acoustics of the space allow sound to bounce off the walls so that if one person is whispering on one side of the space, it can be heard clearly from the other side. The second large room is the in-character area where players are expected to be in-character most of the time. It is a large open space where players set up tables to sit and converse. A smoker's area outside the church on the sidewalk is also sometimes used for in-character conversation.

Though the in-character and out-of-character boundaries are not firm, they are maintained. All out-of-character spaces can be used for in-character purposes. However, in-character space here is used only for in-character play. When out-of-character in the in-character space – when walking through to go to the bathrooms, when a player has a question on rules, and anytime that an out-of-character conversation is happening in an in-character space, it is a general rule to cross your middle and pointer finger and display your hand prominently. Usually the palm faces in-wards, and a player will hold their hand up, rest it on the table, or rest it on their chest. This signifies that they are speaking out-of-character.

Players who speak out-of-character in the in-character space (that is without a legitimate reason like a clarification or rules question) are often ignored. Illegitimate out-of-character speak in the in-character space includes any long conversation that does not pertain directly to the game. If they do it often enough, and without using the hand signal, particularly regular and



longtime players of the game will begin to assume everything they say is in-character. This can become problematic for a player, and for the character they are supposed to be portraying. If they say the wrong thing (disrespect an elder by speaking too informally, mention a piece of knowledge their character should not know, talk about subjects their character would be unfamiliar with), the character could be punished for the player's incorrect use of the in-character space.

Alternatively, people can also be enculturated without punishment, but with a little bit of fun. I observed a player (new to the game) in the in-character space speaking out-of-character about Facebook. Fed-up with the conversation another player began to act very confused, (their character, an old vampire who does not understand current technology fully) and spoke as if they had no idea what Facebook was. The player knowingly spoke in-character to the other, out-of-character player. Slowly others began to join in, coming over, fascinated by this thing called "Facebook" on "this tiny screen, phone gadget." It took the new player twenty minutes to realize that they were the only one speaking out-of-character.

One player says, "It's important to have these rules. I can't keep focus when other players are talking OOC [out-of-character] all the time. It's hard enough to keep up the character when everyone is participating the way they should. It also helps with my mental, I dunno, like it helps me keep me and Beth separate in my head."

In my earlier description of parlor larp I stated that the imagined world is overlaid the physical one, often with no extensive changes made to the physical world. For the Crow County game the physical world and fantasy world exist in the same city, but not the exact same location. The physical game takes place in a small college town, boasting 30,000 people only when the 15,000 college students are in residence. The town is surrounded on three sides by corn

fields and the small towns with populations that might drop into the double digits when Old Man Wilkens finally bites it. However, they are also placed next to a small city, with one of the highest crime rates per capita in the country. It is then a rather perfect little nook for vampires to inhabit within the fantasy world, a small town full of transient twenty-year-olds placed next to a city full of drug lords and too many forgotten souls, surrounded by acres of places to dig ditches 6' by 6' by 3' without anyone being the wiser.

Though the game takes place in the basement of a large Catholic Church as already explained, Elysium<sup>73</sup> takes place at the “Farm House,”<sup>74</sup> a large structure a little ways outside of town, built only a few years ago by a very insistent member. It houses the offices of the Prince and her officers<sup>75</sup> and serves as a safe place to meet, with very few human eyes watching. And so, in this instance, the place where they physically meet is not the place in which they meet in the imaginary world.

At its height of the game, Crow County had an average of twenty to thirty players per game session. When I began my study it was in one of its lulls with only five to eight regular players, only two of which were actually based out of the game.<sup>76</sup> At one time the game consisted of college students closely tied to the local university’s gamer club, however, as the

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<sup>73</sup> Elysium, an in-character space created for peace between vampires where no weapons are allowed and use of powers is limited.

<sup>74</sup> The write-up for describing the Farm House can be found in Appendix C.

<sup>75</sup> Though I do not discuss it here, there is an entire officer system which supports the Prince and the Domain, each office with varying types and levels of power. These officers are usually played by player characters.

<sup>76</sup> To have a character “based out of” a particular game means that the character was made for that game in particular and its character sheet is controlled by the storyteller(s) of that game. As players can play in multiple games with a single character, players differentiate with the terms “home” and “visitor.” My character is visiting the game in Iowa, or the Crow County game is my character’s “home game,” or my character is “based out of” the Crow County game.

years went by, students moved away, and participation dwindled until it was characterized by long time players from around the state.

It was in July that a large influx of players began. “The great migration” was started unwittingly by myself and cascaded into its own typhoon with the eventual joining of fourteen new players. The game was dying. It was expressed to me by several players that they wished they could do something to garner interest as they wanted the game to continue, but did not know what to do. In an act that was very much a blunder in anthropological terms, in that I, admittedly, became too involved with my subjects, I sparked interest within several of my old contacts and friends, who ended up joining the game.

I sent a text to three of my old contacts from when I had previously done research who had moved away, who were a part of the game previously, or who I thought might be interested. The text stated that the Crow County game had low participation and I was wondering if anyone had any contacts near the city that might be interested in joining. It was my expectation that every single person contacted would say “no sorry I live too far away,” or “I don’t know anyone” or “I don’t have time.” Instead all three said yes and brought friends, five of which lived two hours away. Eight of nine that joined due to this message were friends of mine to varying degrees, which put me in a semi-awkward position of being both an insider and an outsider to the game for the last few weeks of my study. Five other players joined the game before I left, and this mass immigration attracted visitors from other games who were interested in “the new blood.” By the end of the study the game had a regular attendance of fifteen to twenty players.

Although my study became one that included some of my friends, making me at least in part an insider researcher, I was also able to watch, in detail, how characters are made by new players and how players become a part of the community, an observation I would not have been

able to make had I not made such a blunder. Still, this text will remain infamous for me for some time to come; a story that I will probably tell my students in any ethnographically oriented class that I teach.

### **IC Vampire: The Masquerade**

The IC Vampire: The Masquerade game is one of the longest running Vampire games in One World by Night, the main organization discussed in the coming chapter, hitting their 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary during my study. At the time of my study they had two storytellers, David, the Head Storyteller, and Michael, the Assistant Storyteller. They are both longtime players<sup>77</sup> and have each been storytellers on and off throughout their participation in the hobby. David is also the Assistant Storyteller of the Werewolf game.

The game began in 1997. It has been played in various places throughout the city from players' homes to public spaces. The game is now settled in a building owned by the city's Free Mason chapter and plays 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays from 7pm until midnight.

Within the play space there are four rooms, a main hall, a sitting area, a kitchen, and a serving area. Activity occasionally occurs in the hallway leading to the main room and in the smoking area outside. The main hall is both an in and out-of-character space. It is a large room filled with round tables and chairs. Side-scenes often occur in this area. The sitting room is considered an in-character space and the site of the *Gather* (otherwise known as Elysium).<sup>78</sup> The sitting room is medium sized, floors made of stained wood, and designed for conversation and

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<sup>77</sup> Longtime players here indicates players who have been playing in World of Darkness larp games for at least five years.

<sup>78</sup> I found that in the Crow County game players generally used the term "Elysium," while in the IC game players tended to use the word "Gather." Interestingly even those individuals who played in both games switched their vocabulary depending on the game. However, both words were used and recognized as appropriate in both games.

contemplation. Comfy chairs and tables just big enough for a small board game or a laptop are scattered throughout the room, and it is lined with long comfortable benches. The room is generally several degrees warmer, as compared to the other spaces in the building. These two rooms are separated partially by a wall, with a large arched opening.

The kitchen is used for side scenes, in-character meetings, and private meetings with the storytellers. It is cut off from the rest of the spaces by a large wooden swinging door. The serving space, though partially cut off from the rest of the space, has a large opening with a serving counter, which opens-up to the main room and is used for check-in.

Here again, there is a boundary created between the in-character spaces and the out-of-character spaces. The main hall is space in which in-character and out-of-character conversation mix. Nosie echoes off the walls and it is generally a very loud space. The sitting-room is an in-character area. Beyond the occasional out-of-character question, always delineated with the appropriate hand signal, I never witnessed an out-of-character conversation in this space, and did not observe anyone being reprimanded for such action. This could be a byproduct of the membership of the game. The IC game membership is largely made up of long time players who have played in this specific game for many years, where the Crow County game is now largely made up of new players still learning the spoken and unspoken rules of the community.

Interestingly the kitchen also has relatively strict rules. The kitchen is rather large with a small dining area filled by a long wooden table and ten chairs. I never witnessed a conversation within this room that was not in-character or directly related to an in-character topic such as scenes that happened over email or a discussion on character action. Perhaps because the game has only one private space, and consistently has a queue waiting to use it, conversation is restricted to what is necessarily secret.

In the physical world the game takes place in a large college town, boasting approximately 90,000 people before the invasion of 30,000 college students each August. The city itself is surrounded by small suburbs and then corn fields as is the case for most places in Iowa. The building in which they physically play is a medium sized brick building in the heart of the small downtown. The fantasy world exists in the same city but not in the same exact location.

The fantasy space is a several story bar a few blocks away from the physical play space in the open-air pedestrian mall. Gather occurs on the top floor of the structure. One player says, “You know it’s been so long since I’ve heard the place described that I just picture the sitting room when I think of the bar.” Here he is referring to the sitting room I mentioned previously, which is medium sized room with wooden floors, several tables, comfortable chairs, and benches that line the walls.

They boast a regular attendance of 20-25, with active regular players, made up of mostly longtime players who generally have older characters, though three new characters and players joined the game, and two others left, during my fieldwork.

### **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**

The third group I studied was a Werewolf: The Apocalypse game, known in this thesis only as Werewolf. I have not and will not explain much about Werewolf in this thesis. As it happened many of the case studies most useful to the points of each chapter came from vampire games. Further, the Vampire and Werewolf games, despite both being in the World of Darkness, do use entirely different rule systems. Though some of the base rules like “chops” and combat remain the same, the lore is completely different. I decided attempting to fully explain two larp

systems would bog down the thesis in unnecessary detail. However, Werewolf deserves some time spent on it and so the following is a very simplified, “quick and dirty,” description.

Where Vampire is largely an individualistic, loyalty lacking, political game full of backstabbing, intrigue, and sabotage, Werewolf is a community-based, pack-minded, loyalty unto death game, full of tree-hugging eco-warriors who literally commune with Mother Earth. First, Werewolves, in this system are not the typical creatures portrayed in Hollywood movies, like “I was a Teenage Werewolf,” though some of the popular myths are included (allergic to silver and can turn into half-man/half-wolf).

In this system, werewolves are not made (that is a bite does not turn human to werewolf), they are born. When a werewolf breeds with a human or wolf there is chance that child will become a werewolf. Unlike the human killing machines depicted in pop culture, World of Darkness werewolves are warriors of Gaia, alternately known as Mother Earth. Literally both the planet Earth and a spirit with a consciousness. She birthed all earthly beings into the world and she is dying.

Werewolves, eons ago, were humans gifted with the ability to change into wolves by Luna, the spirit of the moon. She gifted them with the ability to shape change but also with various powers to commune with spirits and work as packs to protect the earth and all her children. And now they fight a losing battle to save Gaia. They are Gaia’s warriors, and though they understand the Apocalypse is coming, and they know they will lose; they will continue to fight until there is not a single Werewolf left standing.

Based on the information given by the storyteller, this group began meeting in early 2002. The game was founded by three male gamers all of whom have since moved away. They

have two male storytellers Terry and David, and a regular attendance of ten to fifteen players. They meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Fridays of each month, again 7pm to midnight.

Werewolf is the only game in my study in which the physical city of the game and the place of the fantasy are two entirely different locations. In the physical world they meet in a home owned by a married couple who play in the game, and utilize both the main floor and the basement of the home. Though they have no firm game rules dictating use of space, check-in occurs in a little nook to the left of the front door and the kitchen is an out-of-character area. I never witnessed an in-character discussion in this space. The basement is generally an in-character space, though many out-of-character discussions are engaged there. The rest of the home is used for both in-character and out-of-character discussion. The use of the hand signal found in the other two games, was limited to non-existent in this game.

In the fantasy world, the game takes place forty-fifty miles away, near a lake in the backwoods of a reserve in Iowa. The focal point of this game is “The Lodge,” which is the main hub of play. This is a large wooden lodge in which many of the characters live. Just like Vampire, however, they often go on adventures outside of the Lodge or off the reserve to take care of evil spirits or supernatural creatures, and to investigate odd occurrences or check on current projects.

The player base has been largely consistent for most of the years the game has been in play and has a singular overarching plot, that of Des Moines. Des Moines is a charged place for both players and characters of the Werewolf game. It has been their only major enemy for over a decade, and has been a central focus for most of the characters and players of the game since they were created, giving the players both a deep understanding of the situation and an emotional connection.



Other smaller plots are executed, however, they are generally tied back to the game's main goal, the destruction of their enemies in Des Moines. This has been an on-going plot for as long as Terry has been the storyteller, giving it a long and deep history with all of the current players. It is one of the sole focuses of the players, along with the protection of their own territory. David most often plays NPCs and runs a few of his own plots.

## **Game Night**

Game night, in the games which I studied, began at 7pm and lasted until 12pm. Pre-game<sup>79</sup> lasted from 7pm to 8pm. This is when players arrived, got into costume, checked-in<sup>80</sup> to the game, and generally said hello. Each player was required to check-in. During check-in they physically sign into the game, they speak with the storytellers as needed, and they are given their blood and willpower tickets, which they will spend throughout the night to use their powers or defend against foes. They also receive their character sheet. Each player receives a new character sheet each game. Here they will find notes, called rumors, which will direct them to things happening around town to help guide them in what the storytellers have planned for the evening.

Game begins, that is players can enter into the fantasy world, when the storyteller calls “game on,” – that is they physically say or sometimes shout “game on.” This occurs around 8pm.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Pre-game is a time before game start, usually lasting for an hour before the game begins. However, this term is also used to define any formal time in which the players gather before the game. The Crow County game has monthly pre-game mini-parties that usually last from 4-6pm. Players gather, out of character, to eat dinner, and generally exist together.

<sup>80</sup> Players physically check-in by signing their name on the sign-in sheet (often just a sheet of notebook paper) and paying their dues (1-3 dollars per game played).

<sup>81</sup> This is not a hard-and-fast rule. Some players will enter character before the game officially begins.

During the game the player will engage in general role-play, that is sitting and chatting, catching up on news, brokering deals, playing board games, etc. Characters will also go “off-site” that is they will travel outside the gathering site to go investigate various things around town or visit friends. When character travel “off-site,” players enter into side-scenes, which require a storyteller.

The night is a long stream of conversations, punctuated by various actions or interesting in-game occurrences. Players will move in-between the in-character and out-of-character spaces, generally taking breaks at various times to shed their character personas.

The game ends at midnight. All players gather in one of the main rooms to give “noms” that is to nominate various players for their awesome actions and role-play. The storytellers will say, “OK who has noms?” and players will raise their hands. Each is called on in turn and they say things like, “Richie was really on tonight, that conversation we had about politics was really fun.” Or “Yeah Shelly definitely deserves a nom, because her costume killed it and that accent was flawless.” This will continue until all players have had their turn, and the storytellers give their nominations. Announcements might be given at this time as well. Game is then officially over.

Some games do pre-game or after-game, where players will just hang-out as themselves, eat food, chat about the game or life, solidifying the community outside of game. Players state that these community oriented meetings are important. They allow players to interact as people, rather than just as characters.

## Downtime

There is one other portion of the game yet discussed that does not occur during the game time, but instead in-between the games. Each of the games in the study is on-going. Time does not stop between games. Time in the physical moves concurrently with time in the fantasy. 1 week in the physical world is 1 week in the fantasy. This means that the two or three weeks between game sessions occur both in the physical world and in the fantasy world. The games are set up as bimonthly meetings of the characters who live in the domain. Because time continues in the fantasy world between games, players have the opportunity to role-play outside of the game time.

Players will sometimes meet in-person. Here they may discuss things through in-character discussion or discuss plans out-of-character. They will do in-character scenes via email or some type of chat interface. Most players also submit downtimes, for which they receive points. Downtimes are emails to the storytellers of the game discussing what the characters are doing between the games, taking care of business, meeting with player or non-player characters, committing murder, etc.<sup>82</sup>

Each game has a Facebook group, as do each of the organizations. The Werewolf game has an online forum which they use to discuss in and out-of-character matters. Further, because these games are a part of a larger world system run by One World by Night, there are international email lists, where players communicate in and out-of-character. Large email scenes are sometimes run through these lists. It is another way in which the players can be a part of the larger world community.

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<sup>82</sup> A downtime guide can be found in Appendix G.

## Chapter 2 – A Strategist in Training

Larp organizations, or “orgs” as the players call them, are systems of government which have some modicum of power<sup>83</sup> over multiple larp games on a local, state, national, or global scale. Though several of my interviews were conducted with players from all over the USA and participants in many organizations, the majority of my research focused on players and games within One World by Night (OWbN), followed by a modicum of in person research<sup>84</sup> with Mind’s Eye Society (MES), as well as reading on their histories and interviews with players and storytellers. Both the OWbN and the MES are World of Darkness larp organizations. In this chapter, organizations and their place within the governance of larp and as strategist will be detailed. However, the purpose of this chapter will also be to delve into the history of the two organizations listed above and to show how the OWbN began as a tool of the tactician and grew to become strategists in their own right.

The history of the OWbN and the MES is one hard to parcel out. The question as to which organization came first cannot be answered as the information seems lost to the ether. No written source or personal discussion could garner an answer. The OWbN was founded in the mid-1990’s at the annual Concentric Convention. A few years after White Wolf published the first World of Darkness larp rules, three games, one from Virginia, one from Chicago, and another from Layfette, Illinois, met to discuss creating a loose coalition and shared story between them to allow players to travel between the games. This coalition grew rapidly and was dubbed

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<sup>83</sup> The amount of power held by an organization varies greatly.

<sup>84</sup> The game night with Max.

One World by Night. This group has no official affiliation with White Wolf beyond the rule system they use.<sup>85</sup>

Within the OWbN, World of Darkness the games run “campaign style” larps, that is each session builds on every previous session, meaning their histories are ongoing through time. Further, their histories are shared, that is all games recognize that they share a world with other games, so that a game in Minnesota recognizes that what happened in the Brazil game last week happened within their world as well. This means that when a storyteller in Iowa accidentally proves the existence of God by having an actual biblical angel show up during the game, as happened in the Crow County game some time ago – it affects other games through the shared and ongoing story.

At its outset, OWbN had (and still has) a commitment to storyteller autonomy. Though they require that each storyteller respect the shared world of the organization, their original goal was to place as few restrictions on the storytellers as possible. As the organization has grown, the number of limiting factors placed on both storyteller and player have increased, but storyteller autonomy remains a focus. This allows storytellers a certain amount of freedom to create the world they wish to see. As this thesis unfolds, I will continue to show how this also creates incongruences within their shared world, particularly in the case study in Chapter Three.

Here the OWbN organization can be seen, at least partially, as a tactician in their creation. They were attempting to create more spaces for players to play in a broader community, to open up spaces for games to exist, to make a full world “habitable,” to use de Certeau’s term. The tactician’s ability to see and take the opportunities presented to them, to use the tools around

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<sup>85</sup> This information was gathered from conversations with players in and out of formal interviews.

them improperly to achieve their goal, allows them to use, but also create, spaces, as well as create meaning in those spaces. They make spaces tolerable, livable, habitable. As de Certeau seems to imply, to live as human beings we need the meaning we create. Here, the original members of the OWbN saw an opportunity to share space with the broader community by creating a shared world.

After the revised editions of the various larp games were published in 1999 and 2000, the OWbN switched to the use of this edition, but did not take on the New World of Darkness rules in 2004. The following is a statement they made to this effect which comes from a 2008<sup>86</sup> packet:

OWbN made many efforts to keep to the published resources made available by the White Wolf [WW] Publishers, but in 2004, WW decided to revamp their World of Darkness (WoD) and stopped publishing source material for their classic setting. By that time, though, it was clear that OWbN had diverged significantly from some of the source material – some of our games had established themselves, only to have WW publish a book about their city and have their histories be completely incongruent. OWbN supported the game's developed history and the rift between WW and OWbN grew. In the face of no new published material and a wide-open field, One World by Night has cut a new path. Our coordinators continue to watch the actions of PCs and gauge the changes in genre, as well as correct deviations from genre packets and established WW genre. As stated before, there are times when OWbN's genre conflicts with WW genre, and in that case, OWbN genre always takes precedence.

*Packets* are small booklets of material written and printed by the OWbN, correcting or expounding upon White Wolf World of Darkness material. When the OWbN began consciously deviating from White Wolf they began to evolve into a strategist. When they wrote their first packet they began the work of the creator, as described in Chapter One.

White Wolf did not just allow the OWbN to change their world. Unfortunately, I was not able to substantiate or develop upon this claim made by the players, that legal action was taken

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<sup>86</sup> I am not sure when the first packet was written.

multiple times against the OWbN by White Wolf in an effort to quash the packet creation. Copy right that is legal ownership of the material is one of the powers the creators maintain, after the books are sent out into the world.

One World by Night now hosts 150 games across North and South America. At other times in their history they have had games in Israel, New Zealand, and the occasional game in places throughout Europe. Currently they have over 3,000 members on their Facebook page. As the size of the OWbN grew, so did their power over the games under their purview. They began to make rules dictating what types of characters could be created and how many could exist, putting certain types of characters on the “Rare and Unique” list which require varying sets of permissions to play. The number of coordinators grew.

An “Executive Team” was created with Head and Assistant Coordinators (Cord), who make final decisions in disputes. Other National Coordinator positions were created such as the Administrative Cord, the Media Cord, and the Membership Cord. There are now genre coordinators who are in charge of various systems in the World of Darkness universe, like the Demon Cord and the Changing Breed<sup>87</sup> Cord. Each new cord, or type of cord, was created originally to spread out the work load. Coordinators do not get paid, and to be a coordinator with National and Global responsibility takes both time and effort that is volunteered. The larger the OWbN became, the more work there was, the more coordinator positions needed to be created, the more voices there were, the more bureaucratic the org became.

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<sup>87</sup> Though Werewolves are the main changing breed to exist within the World of Darkness universe there are other types of were-creatures, like werebears and were-vultures. These were-animals are under the purview of the Changing Breed Cord.

Each game has a coordinator who works as the liaison between the game and the org along with the storyteller. Each of these coordinators, as well as the Head Storyteller of each game, make up “the Council,” which is the main governing body. It is a majority rules, democratic institution. All changes within the org, disciplinary hearings, and other bureaucratic decisions are “put to the Council” for a decision, which means the larger the org the more time it takes for decisions to be made, the slower and less flexible it is, the more strategic it must (and has) become.

Originally OWbN created their own World of Darkness, acting as the tactician to open up space. Over time they evolved and took control of that space. The more time passed, the larger the org became, the more limitations they created, the more structures they erected, the more strategy they employed, and ultimately they moved from the position of tactician to the position of the strategist.

Around the same time that the OWbN was forming, White Wolf sponsored the official White Wolf organization of the Camarilla Fan Club, which moved to become Mind’s Eye Society in the early 2000’s. They used the original larp rules, moved over to the revised rules in 2000, and then changed systems again in 2004 to use the New World of Darkness system. As they were officially sponsored by White Wolf, they paid dues directly to White Wolf. Though I was hoping to have more history on the Mind’s Eye Society, I could not find further information. From player accounts the information does exist, but it will take more dedicated time.

## **Discipline and Difference<sup>88</sup>**

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<sup>88</sup> A copy of the OWbN’s Code of Conduct can be found in Appendix D.



Strategy, for de Certeau, is slow. Like the very large man in a fight, his fist hits hard, but is easily dodged with the right use of tactic. However, strategy is not only the big man, it is also the ring itself, the banded barriers, the floor that gives just a little, the referee, the gong of the bell, the rules of the game. Tactics are the “stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 96). The tactician is the small (perhaps imagined as a man outside of his weight-class) but agile opponent to strategy, always avoiding the big man, but never breaking the rules; using the sound of the bell, the lights, the referee as distraction or leverage when the opportunity presents itself. In this dance, neither wins, and neither really loses, ground is lost or gained, perhaps, depending on the historian taking the notes, but the dance is continuous. De Certeau uses the example of the Native Americas under Spanish colonialism. “Indian’s never the less often *made of* the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix).

Fairness, as I was told by a long time MES player, is one of the main differences between the MES and the OWbN.

I’ve been a part of both orgs over the years, lots of different games. MES is more “PC” [politically correct], they care more about safe spaces and trigger warnings and fair play, which is not an insult by the way. OWbN... used to be a kind of the ‘Old Boy’s Club.’ They were, and arguably are, more likely to have the ultra-powerful douchebag, ‘Imgunna squash your brand new character like a bug because F-you’ types than MES. But I think you are more likely to get closer to an ‘authentic Old World’ game because they are more willing to go as dark as dark goes in O-dub [OWbN].

From what the players have told me, MES has consciously and consistently worked on maintaining a homogeneous game culture of fair play within their organization by upholding a stricter level of control over its players and its storytellers when compared to the OWbN. This control can be seen obviously in the rape ban discussed in the Introduction, but also more covertly in Max's discussion about the Code of Conduct, which states what the org considers to be appropriate out-of-character discussion and behavior. Here Max mentions that he should have stopped the conversation happening around him, because the Code of Conduct does not *allow* for such discussion to occur while out-of-character. Instead he joined in, which he believes to be his real mistake. This Code of Conduct is enforced by storytellers, but also by the threat of investigation and sanctions by the org itself, of which Max's story is an example. These consequences for disobedience can be levied against both storytellers, players, and whole games. Though the OWbN has a similar process for levying consequences against its constituents, as one player stated, "They leave most of that [disciplinary] stuff to individual games to take care of instead of getting involved."

### **Showing-up Strategy through Tactic**

These varying types of control can show how strategies employed by the strategist do not always work or can be used against them. In Max's case, if Max was correct in saying that 3 of the 5 complaints listed in his investigation were "blatantly false" it *could* be an example of the dangers of being too involved with individual games, as the players have the ability to use false claims to use the power of the org against members unjustly. "Thus Charlie Chaplin multiplies the possibilities of his cane: he does other things with the same thing and he goes beyond the limits that the determinants of the object set on its utilization" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 98). A

defining characteristic of the tactician is the ability to use the tools set before them in many ways, properly and improperly. Here the players, as the tacticians, may have used the power of org “improperly.”

However, having too little control also has its pitfalls. For instance, up until the last few years, the OWbN was notorious for having players and games that dominated the org and made entering the org as a new player almost impossible. “It [OWbN] was just a toxic environment.”

During research I was able to talk to Joyce, an OWbN player, who said,

Not so long ago, less than year in fact, Kenosha was dubbed “Kill’em in Kenosha” because there were so many character deaths there. You couldn’t visit the game because they killed basically any new or visiting character. That is what happened in the old OWbN. People were just douchebags, didn’t let players in, didn’t let new players do anything. OWbN has really turned itself around, I think because people realized they needed new blood and the way things were going the org was going to die... Some games have been more willing than others, some players more willing to open up the org, put away the really old powerful characters, or just work on being open.

In this quote the power of singular games in the OWbN comes to light. In my research I heard stories of groups of old players who would regulate org game behavior by visiting other games, that is physically going to another game, spending real money, with the intention of killing as many characters as possible during their visit. Here, players used the power they had to create the world they wanted to see, instead of respecting the idea of shared world iterated by the OWbN.

Bob says, “That is why the storyteller in my game regulates visitors so heavily, so they can’t just come in and destroy the game. Storytellers had to get real careful about who they let in, though that was more a problem ten years ago.” As can be seen in Joyce’s and Bob’s quotes, the culture of the game has been in the midst of change.

As one of the storytellers I interviewed said, “All of the orgs have their issues. OWbN has been around a long time. We have our own way. You just have to decide what problems you can live with, or what problems you can’t.”

## **Org Plot**

It is true, as the previous chapter has shown, that once the creators create the world, and hand it out to the players, they have limited power over their system. What is written, is for the players, only the beginning. The organizations are strategists, one step down from the original creators. Even when they write their own material (packets and world story) it remains within the basic confines of the world written. However, they create what is “proper” within their organization, within the games under their purview. The organizations have determined for instance that the games under their purview occur in the present day. Further, the physical location of the game will determine the location of the fantasy, that certain character types either do not exist or are so rare as to constitute regulation, that characters can only obtain a certain level of power before they become unplayable by the player, or that player characters are not allowed to some of the highest positions within the vampire society.

As has already been shown, organizations can also regulate player conduct, as well as storyteller flexibility. If a storyteller wishes to do anything that might directly affect other games or regions beyond their own, they are required to speak to the other games or have a Council vote depending on the action. These actions might be using objects, locations, or people detailed in the written history, traveling from one domain to another, doing something that might affect the region, or kill someone famous in the real world (as this would mean they would be dead in all OWbN games). This limits the ability of individual storytellers and increases the power of the

org institutionally. It strategically places red tape, boxing the games under its purview into a specific type of mold. The following case study is a show of one of their functions, the creation of *World Plot*. World Plot is the same as plot created by storytellers except that it is created by the org and, instead of affecting a single game, it affects all games (or a sub-set of games).

During my study, in early June 2016, the OWbN initiated one such World Plot. It was geared specifically for vampire games,<sup>89</sup> though other types of games could participate. The org chose a weekend in which the plot would begin. Those games that played that same weekend dealt with the effects of the plot directly, where those that played in the weeks following would interact with the after effects. The plot was meant to last through the end of 2016, and is still ongoing now in March of 2017. This was dubbed “The Smoke Monster” plot by players.

On the weekend it began I happened to be doing a participant observation session with the Crow County Game whose storytellers decided to use the plot. The game began with the rain. The storytellers were playing sounds of a large storm at the beginning of the game, I think on one of their cell phones. Alex, the Head Storyteller, began the game very simply with little to no explanation. He stood with the players around him and said, “Huge storm blowing in um it is already pretty much pitch black outside, raining hard currently and they are expecting it to get worse.” By “hard rain,” Alex meant that Noah might need to be risen from his grave to build a new boat. During the first hour of the game as players were frantically attempting to find out more information about the massive storm hitting the town they realized that storms were popping up everywhere, that is, they could be found over most major cities across the globe.

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<sup>89</sup> Storytellers in all games, vampire and others alike had the option to use the plot, but it was not required of them.

It was after the first hour that strange things began to happen. The long quotation to follow is a journal entry written by a player in-character of what happened that night.

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“Do you remember Mt. St. Helens? The ash covering the sky of the west coast for days after the volcano erupted? No? That night was much the same, the haze was the same at least. Meteors fell first, destroyed in the atmosphere, human news seemed unconcerned. There is no ash in the air really, if I took breath I dare say, my lungs would not have been filled as they did in 1980 while I was fleeing Washington State. The air did not smell any different and yet our city was covered with that blanket of gray. Not even the rain cleared it from the air, it simply hung there. Beyond the thick grey smog, I could hear clouds gathering, could just make out their shapes, beyond the haze. Lightning crackled. The rain began to fall. As if great hands were tearing a hole in the barrier between the earth and the heavens, it began a small pitter-patter, and slowly became torrential. A down-pour greater than any other in living memory, flooding the city.

And just as the chaos began, as the power shut off, as the buildings began to flood, as the looting started, *they* came. Monsters of smoke and ash. “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” is this what the bible meant when it spoke, not of death but of God’s wrath in the end times. Is this the end of days? I had been at Gather when rain began. I went home to check on my servants to make sure they had the house in order, shoring up for the inevitable flood. It was then they attacked me, those creatures.

My door was ajar. My home was destroyed. I knew my servants, those souls who had been with me now decades, were no longer mine. I knew when I saw them. They came at me

then, all together. Attacking, clawing, biting, hitting, bullets flew. I had not thought we undead could feel remorse, could feel heartache. Perhaps it is my humanity, which remains in-tact still despite the darkness, that allows these feelings to rise up within me. To kill those servants who had been with me weighs heavily on me even now, as the weeks have passed and I have again picked up my life. As I slew them, as my hands squeezed out the life left in them, the smoke came up from their bodies, their eyes glowing in the darkness, through the rain. We have no recourse now. What are these new terrors? What is this new darkness within our world?"

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Though this quote did not come from players in the Iowa games, it mirrors what happened during the Crow County game I observed. Once the city began to flood, characters started to realize they were having trouble reaching some of their peers out in the city; several individuals left to investigate and check-on prominent members of the area. Like the story above, they found homes broken into, vampires killed or maimed, and others who had to kill every servant in their household, as they had been possessed by these smoke monsters. There was some type of craze affecting humans, they were murdering *en masse*, even those not possessed were killing people, looting stores, and generally acting very violent.

Information on the Smoke Monsters was sparse both in-character and out-of-character. It took months for anyone (character or player) to figure out the creatures could be killed with fire, and at the end of my study the characters still had no idea what they were. Over the course of my interviews I learned that the creatures came from a New World of Darkness book, not technically a part of Old World rules. Here the planners of the plot decided to try something different, by pitting the players against an enemy they likely knew nothing about.

Some players had a very negative response to this, hating the mix and match of rules and systems. However, others liked the idea. As one player put it, “You know some of us, the org is over 20 years old now, some of us know every rule, out of every book. Sometimes, now that is *sometimes* mind you, it is nice to be surprised. National plot can be hard to put together; it always has its kinks, but this is new and that is nice.”

As this player mentioned many of the players in the games have completed extensive readings of much of the material. Players collect knowledge as they play different characters, take on the role of storyteller, or even just play the game. They find books at thrift stores, speak extensively to each other about the rules and the world, and generally gather game information. Some players actually go out of their way to learn as much as possible about the game. This amounts to players knowing almost everything there is to know.

Changing the rules changes the world of the player. By using rules and creatures from the New World rules the org again solidified their power to create a new proper. They can use, change, or make-up any rules they want, and this proves it. Further, the players have to deal with it. Or do they?

### **Game Involvement with the OWbN**

Out of the three games studied, Crow County is the most involved with the org, boasting several players who keep track of and are heavily involved with the org on a national level, and storytellers who excitedly implement org plot as can be seen in the above discussion. Alex, a storyteller in the Crow County game and a player in the IC game, responded to the question of why he implemented the org plot in his game (and why he became involved with his own character, *Baldwin*, as will be seen later), “why not. It looked interesting.” When asked why she



decided to use the national org plot of smoke monsters, Jane, another storyteller in the Crow County game, said, “It’s free plot why not use it!”

A player of Crow County game said, “If we are going to be um be a part of the org, we should participate with the org, otherwise why bother to pay dues or you know do the paperwork or like follow their rules?” Another seconded this notion, “You know I like being a part of the org. If we are going to, if I am going to be in a game, I want to travel, I want to meet people. I think being in the org, it makes the game fun, and I think maybe that being a part of, the larger, the larger world where bigger things like these new smoke monsters happen, when my character is a part of a larger world, it’s easier to feel like what you do, it means something.” However, not all players like being a part of org plot as seen with the IC Vampire: The Masquerade game.

David, the Head Storyteller in the IC game, has a very nonchalant attitude about the org. When he wishes to engage his game in org plot he does, but also has no problem dismissing their authority, as can be seen in the case of *Baldwin* in Chapter 3. He decided to run the national smoke monster plot because he read the synopsis and found it to be interesting, unfortunately he says, “the players just didn’t want to engage with it.”

David’s admission that he believed that his players did not engage with the plot was not congruent with my own observation. When the players were presented with the smoke monsters they did not shy from it. It is true that they did not avidly pursue them, as they might with other plots, but they did not ignore them either. The Prince and his vassals both looked into the smoke monsters extensively, attempting to figure out what was plaguing their city. Throughout all the games I witnessed they kept up the search for new information. When the smoke monsters caused problems, for instance, setting fires to buildings and generally creating havoc, most players were willing to engage with the scenes.

However, in my interviews, I found the players in the IC game did have a relatively negative view of org plot, believing it would kill them outright. Further, there was a sense that they would never be able to find out what was actually going on “so why bother.” “I just don’t get involved. Stay out of org plot, it will kill you. Can’t with this cuz it’s happening in the game but ignoring it unless I have to deal with it, is how I deal with it.”

Noting first that the plot was geared toward vampire games, the Werewolf game stayed out of the national plot entirely. One werewolf player said, “We have our own problems here, dealing with our own long running and important plots. We don’t deal with the org except when we have to, we have our own stuff.”

On a more general level the werewolf game has had many discussions of leaving the org. In my conversations with players I was told that the game has little to no interaction with the org, which has led them to question why they remain in the org. Becoming a troupe game would allow for greater authority over their game. This sense among the players their interaction with the org was limited struck me as odd, because it was not congruent with my observation. Within the game there are at least five of the main fifteen players who interact heavily with the org on the regular basis either through general travel (with one player driving from Minnesota on a bi-weekly basis) or engaging in the national discussions both in and out of character. Several of the players are now in, or have run for, national coordinator positions, and most of the players are longtime players in multiple games.

Further, the game had the most out-of-state visitors of any game I studied, because of their major plot line, that of Des Moines. The Des Moines plot is one which several games engage with. Even though it belongs, in a sense, to the Iowa werewolf game; it has affected and is affecting several games across the Midwest. Characters actively pursue support from others

out-of-state and from around the country. When they have the final battle with Des Moines, they are planning a game of at least 40 players from all across the US.

The players often speak both in and out-of-character of their apprehension of new comers and visitors, citing bad experiences of the past. Several times they have had visitors join them and attempt to “deal with Des Moines on their own.” The players see this plot as “their baby,” the plot they have been “cultivating for over 10 years” and they “want to be the ones to make the final blow.” They also see themselves as different from the rest of the org. They have cultivated a low powered game, where many of the werewolf games outside of Iowa are high-powered games<sup>90</sup> with single characters that could easily wipe out most of the main characters, which, I believe heightens the anxiety about visitors. Their language on the whole is very insular, while their actions, actually, make them very involved with the org, both as a game and as individual players.

Players are only subject to the org plot if the storyteller chooses to implement it, and then they have a choice as to how much they are willing to engage with that plot in the game. Some players engage with the org and the plot avidly, others do so only when necessary. However, even in games where the org plot was not directly a part of the story, players were still minimally affected by it. In the werewolf game, the strange occurrences out in the rest of the world were noted in-character when visitors arrived. This signals the power of the org, their decisions affect all games and most, if not all, players.

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<sup>90</sup> High-powered games are games in which many of the players have very high abilities and access to incredibly high level powers and/or items.

## **An Aside – The “Real” World**

The organization’s power, unlike the de Certeau’s city builders, is only over one of the two major worlds in which larp resides. It dictates what games can do with the fantasy, but has no control over the space in which that fantasy is overlaid. Does the game take place in a house, in a church, in the back room of a bar, in a gaming club? Storytellers and players have control over *where* they play, even if *what* they play is limited by the governing body of the org.

The physical place in which players must play changes drastically with every game. It is dictated not only by the storytellers and the players but by the possibilities within the cities or towns in which the physical games reside. The games are limited, to an extent, by the possibilities that surround them. Does a player happen to have a house suited for gaming or do they have to play out in the community? What sorts of establishments will allow them access? And, so, while the fantasy world is governed in large part by the org, the physical world is governed by the game itself, and also by the society and circumstances in which they reside.

The organization itself is governed by the laws of the society in which it and the games they rule over exist, and they recognize their lack of control over that physical space, relinquishing it to avoid liability. The following is from the OWbN official website.

### **Legal Position**

- A. OWBN will not be held legally responsible for the activities of its individual members.
- B. OWBN will not become involved in any case that is brought before a court of law in any country, other than as a witness to an alleged crime. In such a case, the

Head Coordinator may allow release, as specifically requested by the courts, of any evidence that may be held by OWBN (such as archived e-mails).

- C. OWBN will make available such disciplinary measures as are required to deal with individual complaints, either to direct them to the appropriate solution (which may include directing them back to a chronicle) or dealing with the issue itself if deemed necessary.
- D. OWBN will not become embroiled in personal disputes unrelated to OWBN, nor should OWBN be used as a vehicle for such disputes. (OWbN Main Documents)

In these games there is possibility of emotional distress as seen in the introduction. There is real risk, just like in life, in these games for harm to come to the players physically or emotionally, and it is the physically real world in which these instances are dealt with, meaning the game is under two types of governance, that of the game, and that of physical world, the latter of the two is, by their own admission, out of the org's purview.

The rules dictated by the org continue the boxing in of players and games to fit the org's version of what the World of Darkness should be, what they consider to be proper. Though the OWbN was originally created as a tactical maneuver to allow for more space to play, their current role in the creation of the proper puts them in the strategist's corner. They are the big man in the ring. As organizations and the idea of the organization has evolved, they become more and more the strategist.

The organizations discussed here are (or have become) bureaucracy, acting only when quorum can be called and votes are brought in, rarely able to make vast, stable, and legitimate *quick* decisions. A vote often takes a minimum of two weeks, and that does not include the many

hours of preparation those who call the vote put into the disciplinary investigation, writing the packet or creating the character, or thinking up believable criterion and justification for whatever action they wish to take. It is a limitation of the strategists that they must always uphold the image of the proper for they define it. Again, however the strategists hold much of the power, whether they are the big man in the ring, or the skyscraper with perceived permanence, they orient the world through space, law, and logic. Their power is felt in every game, by every player.

### Chapter 3 – The Storyteller: A Strategic Tactician

On a basic level, storytellers organize the game. They keep track of membership, attendance, dues, and space fees. They send reports to the org and keep track of character sheets. They are a large part of what keeps the game running administratively.<sup>91</sup> However, that is not their only role. The title of storyteller itself is indicative of the role they play within the game. No matter what definition of larp each player might adhere to, they can agree that larp is, at least in part, the telling of a story. The storyteller's role is to facilitate and guide the story the game creates.

I have used the phrase “playing the world” several times, but have not entirely explained its meaning. The world around us presents itself strategically, whether a forest of trees created by nature or a maze of skyscrapers created by a conglomerate of powerful individuals, the world dictates, to an extent, the conditions for action. Thinking back to the two wrestlers in the ring from the previous chapter, the ring, the bell, the rubber bands that act as the barrier, the referee, and the rules of the game were all a part of the strategy, because they put in place what is proper, they dictate how game is played, as much as any strategy can. In the physical world, the physical structures orient action. However, in an imagined space, physical laws that are thought to bind reality may not be the same.

When compared to the physical world, imagined places can play by slightly or immensely different rules. Imagined places are largely limited only by the constraints the imaginer puts upon them. It is the creator of the game who first imagines the larp world, putting parameters around the fantasy spaces of play that the storytellers will use to create the story, and

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<sup>91</sup> Their administrative role is not the same in each org.

the players will use to play the game. Though all culturally determined spaces have arbitrary, often undiscussed, arguably imagined rules, game rules are made apparent in the text which explains them.<sup>92</sup> As the player reads the text the imaginary world is created within their minds, conjured by a mix of their previous experiences in life, knowledge of the myths being portrayed in the World of Darkness, and the text which they read (Fine, 3). However, reading the world and playing within it are two different types of experiences. It is here the storyteller's role becomes necessary; they make the system usable by the player, by playing the world.

Despite the details given on character creation and rules of physical action, the book itself gives only a general sense of the larger world, rarely detailing *actual* places or people that might inhabit that world, leaving it open for the storyteller, setting the storyteller up to become a strategist. It is here the storyteller uses the book as a baseboard to spring from, including their own ideas and imagination in the creation of the actual game world, that is the city or place in which the game (that is the imagined world) occurs, and in which the player characters live. Despite being required to use the book as a first set of parameters, storytellers create a second set of parameters, which the players then must abide by. In setting these new parameters, they create what is proper within *their* imagined world; for the players of their game, they become the strategic tactician.

In order to play in a World of Darkness larp game, multiple people must have a collective experience. In order to have this collective experience, they must all be imagining, if not the same world – as no two minds will conjure exactly the same image – very similar worlds as the players and characters move through the game together. Where the book structures the game for

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<sup>92</sup> That is not to say that game spaces do not have unwritten rules enacted by those who play them. As play space is no different from the rest of life, rules dictated by society and culture still apply.



the players before the start of the game, the storyteller creates the shared imagined world during the game. However, as I stated earlier, the book does not detail very many specific places or people, it is up to the storyteller to create both.

### **Building the World – Storyteller as Strategist**

The storyteller builds the world. It is within the building of the world that they take on the role of the strategist. The book, despite its large part within the game, does not make the game what it is. Storytellers produce the world through creation of plot, which is facilitated by the use of rumors and non-player characters, which continue the world building.

Plots begin the world building. Game plots, like the plots of a novel, are the events that happen within the story of larp – the puzzle the players are trying to solve, the crime the players are investigating, the clues that lead to the demon’s lair. Plots are conceived of and written by the storytellers before the start of play. Plots can be big or small, that is they can lead to a demon being resurrected in the heart of downtown (big), or an investigation of the mob boss that set up shop down the street (small). Many small plots can lead to larger plots – like the solving of a series of petty crimes that ultimately leads a character to uncover a group of hunters<sup>93</sup> with a plan to destroy the city – or plots may have their own ending – like the destruction of a pedophile ring or the capture of an enemy that stop at their conclusion and do not lead elsewhere. Plots can be based on the history of the game, be pulled out of news stories or events, or be entirely imagined.

A storyteller from out of state says “My favorite thing to pull from is ‘Florida Man.’ Have you ever seen the news and seen the headline *Florida man does blank totally crazy thing?*

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<sup>93</sup> There are humans who know about the supernatural and choose to hunt the supernatural creatures in their world, they are aptly called hunters.

Like Florida man kills wasp with alligator or Florida man commits multiple homicide, with beebie gun or any number of other crazy things. It's now a running joke, kind of allover that 'Florida Man' exists and it's all the same guy. I use crazy Florida Man stories all the time in my plots."

Plots characterize the game and the storyteller. Does the storyteller create plots that mix in several different types of supernatural, or do they only have vampires? Does a storyteller often run plots with magic? Does a storyteller often create plots with extremely powerful enemies making planning and intrigue supremely important? Each storyteller has their own style and can be known for certain types of play, like Max, who characterized himself as a storyteller willing to run any scene requested of him, with a tendency toward dark subject matters. The storyteller's own style of plot creation gives character to the world, but can also help players determine what type of game they will be playing in.

Rumors – bits of information given to players on their character sheets at the start of game – are given to players who have influence in different areas of the world and are written by the storytellers. These rumors offer the players pieces of information that will lead them off of Elysium to investigate murders, maulings, vandalism, or other crimes, odd occurrences around the city, or to note important happenings, such as an important non-player character entering the city. These rumors are often connected to current plots or they begin new plots that become a part of the story of the game. They help guide players in the right direction and help storytellers pace plots. If a plot is solved either too fast or too slow, it loses its feeling of legitimacy.

There are several techniques like rumors that storytellers use to create a defined, whole world. Non-player characters give the world a populace. Storytellers create the non-player characters (NPCs), or the people with which players might interact (enemies, mentors, business

owners, politicians, police chiefs, priests, bartenders, bystanders). Most NPCs are fleeting, that is they come and they go, never to be spoken to again, however, some are more permanent. Often these more permanent characters are enemies, mentors of player characters, very powerful or old vampires in the area,<sup>94</sup> or humans they interact with on a regular basis. More, storytellers act as those NPCs, that is, like the players, they take on these alternate personas when these characters are needed within the game, giving the world more life, providing the world with an interactive populace that can disseminate the information players need to know.

Plots and NPCs both give the game a history. One storyteller said, “I have a whole history of the plots I’ve ran and I go back through it to make sure I’m not, you know, repeating myself. But sometimes it’s nice to see what old [plots] might come back too to haunt the players.”

Though storytellers can change frequently, non-player characters and plot histories are often handed down from one storyteller to another. I did not see any kind of uniform way in which the passing of the gavel occurs; however, each game has an email address to which downtimes are sent, and email scenes are cataloged, allowing for a long running history of player character action and interaction during the interim, which storytellers often use. This history is a part of the strategy of long running games, that is it orients both player and storytellers. Though each storyteller has their own style, they are expected to keep some of the aspects of the history of the game in mind.

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<sup>94</sup> In order to keep some kind of balance between player characters, vampires that are thousands of years old or are very powerful cannot be played by players. Players can lose characters if they become too powerful, in which case they become unplayable and sometimes become NPCs.

It is up to the storyteller to create a full world. One storyteller says, “You get to kind of know each of the characters through the downtimes. I like the downtimes for that. I know what characters will go after which plots like rabid dogs and how to mess with them.” Storytellers often attempt to make plots or decisions that might be personal to certain characters as can be seen in the case study later in this chapter. Through the histories of the player characters and the game, the storytellers can make stories that impact their characters as well as their players, giving the players new experiences, helping players to create the stories with them.

Plots, rumors, and non-player characters are strategic tools. Through creation they show the proper within the storyteller’s game. The way each tool is used builds a slightly different world. No two storytellers have the same idea of what the proper should be, and for this reason each game constitutes a whole different World of Darkness, even if they are played under the same banner of a single organization. As seen in the last chapter, organizations can attempt to mitigate these differences.

Plots and rumors are written between games, for this reason, they fall into the same category as the books written by the creators. However, like the world described in the book, the plots, the rumors, the NPCs come to life only in the playing of the game. The history of the game is not its history only because someone wrote it down, but also because it happened, in the game, during play. As discussed, storytellers play an important role during play, and it is in the play that the proper is realized.

### **The Strategic Tactician**

The imagined world is actually envisioned in the mind of the player and interacted with when game begins. It is the storyteller who describes it. One of the key roles of the storyteller is

the physical act of storytelling. Storytellers weave the story with their own words. Though these words do not hold the permanence of the written text of the book, they create the picture of the world in the mind's eye of the player. They describe the scene, how a person acts, what a building looks like, how the world itself reacts to the action of the player, giving context. Storytellers use the book to bring the world imagined in the text to life, and in this use they are tacticians. By playing the world the book creates, by envisioning, and then verbally detailing the imagined space during game, they allow for the creation of shared imagined places, of “habitable” spaces within the text-based imagined world, setting them seemingly in the tactician's category. Because the book itself leaves so much room for the storyteller to act as strategist, this description also creates the proper for their game. In this storytelling they build the skyscrapers, the sidewalks, the barriers, the world in which the characters reside and the players imagine. It is here, in the game, in the moment, that the proper is realized.

“[Discourse] opens up clearings; it ‘allows’ a certain play within the system of defined places. It ‘authorizes’ the production of an area of free play (*Spielraum*) on a checkerboard that analyses and classifies identities. It makes places habitable. On these grounds, I call such discourse ‘local authority’” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 106). For de Certeau, those entities or persons that constitute a “local authority” will always be tacticians; they create “cracks in the system” set up by the strategists. On the surface the storyteller would be one such “local authority.” The book, as seen in Chapter 2, spends a great deal of time “analyzing and classifying” the possible identities which players might play, detailing clans, powers, sects, even the characters' very natures in the choice of the archetypes it presents. Going further, it sets the rules of combat, the appropriate actions both player and character can make, though more complex, still very much like the rules of the checkerboard. The storyteller literally uses discourse, detailing verbally what

the world looks like, what the player characters can sense, taste, see, hear etc. Storytellers use the words of the book to create meaning within both the physical and fanciful game space, like another local authority might paint a local child on a barren city wall and change that space into a symbolic place for the community.

Storytellers exist in the in-between as both strategist and tactician. They are the “the broker,” bringing the book, the org, and the player together, holding a position that de Certeau does not fully recognize. Ulf Hannerz (1992) defines the “old-fashioned cultural broker” as “someone who had a fairly well-defined functional connection to the world outside the locality; this connection was well known to others in the locality, and there were not many people of this kind” (p. 48). Despite the fact that Hannerz (1992) is defining a category he no longer believes exists in a globalized world, in which individuals have globalized networks and “transnational orientations,” as opposed to strictly local and national orientations, the term “broker” fits well in this context, as the storyteller is the connection between the players of local game,<sup>95</sup> the book(s) and the organization, and the game’s “connection to the world outside” (Hannerz, 1992, p. 48).

Many of the actions storytellers make are both quick and flexible, key characteristics of the tactician. Within the game, like the passersby who might J-Walk, create shortcuts, or change the use of city to fit their needs, the storyteller will change the rules of the book in the moment, when a situation simply does not fit what the creators envisioned. For instance, there are enemies in the game, some of them *prefab*, that is created by the creators for in-game use and found in the text. If a storyteller decides to use one of these enemies, and in the midst of combat realizes that

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<sup>95</sup> **Local Game** – a term referring to a single game in a particular place, run by a storyteller or set of storytellers. This is important when speaking about storyteller autonomy. The only storytellers who have autonomy exist at this local level. Those who create story on a regional and national level have more rules they are required to follow by the organization.

the enemy is too powerful for the group the storyteller can change the enemy's strength, their number of life points, or limit their special powers. This is done in the midst of play quickly, and shows the storyteller's ability to be flexible during the game itself. Again, they are marked as a tactician.

“The technicians, however, use the documents in pursuit of their own goals, and these are only somewhat the same as those of the designers of the documentation. A technician's primary goal is to keep the customer happy, and this includes but is not limited to fixing the machine as necessary” (Orr, 1996, p. 108). In this quote the storyteller is the technician, the documents are the larp system, and the customers the players of the game. It is up to the storyteller to keep the game running smoothly, to fix what needs to be fixed, in a way that shows their competency, to keep the players' faith in their ability to run the game. In this way they hold and maintain authority, by changing the proper – the way the game is played – to suit the needs of the situation.

Though changes made during the game are in the moment, and fast acting, just as the actions of a tactician, storytellers use their words during game to erect the world around the players, these rule changes in the midst of game also change the world as written, they create a new proper, making them also an act of a strategist. Many storytellers speak of consistency, stating that storytellers must remain consistent. Keeping notes of previous rules they have changed is important; at least one player will remember anything the storyteller ever does and will inevitably mention it if the storyteller does not remain consistent. This means that a new proper is created in these moments and recognized by the inhabitants of the world.

The “House Rules,”<sup>96</sup> in which storytellers create rules for the game, could be described as a tactic. House Rules clarify those rules within the book that are considered ambiguous, overpowered, underpowered, or broken in some way. Games, like the ones studied here, are local, situated in a single space in both the physical and fantasy, even called “local games” by the players. Storytellers are the authority which presides over these local spaces, meaning they are a “local authority” in a very literal sense, and House Rules are one of the ways they use their local authority, changing the rules in the book to make the game playable, the imagined world habitable. In this way they seem to fit the role of the tactician very nicely.

The House Rules, though not actually created during the game, often come from changes to the rules in the game. When presented with a situation in which the players find the rules to be lacking, that is they do not cover a certain circumstance, or a rule normally used simply does not work for the situation at hand, a storyteller will change the rules during the game to create a playable space. If a rule is found to be faulty several times, a permanent House Rule might be written to correct it.

Like the rules changed while the game is happening, the House Rules are created by the storyteller, a local authority, and created habitable space, as I described earlier. However, they also help to create what is proper within the game. In larp games, although the imagined world is paramount to the game itself, the actual rules also delineate what is possible, in that they dictate character creation and player action, by changing what is possible, the world itself is changed.

House Rules are most often corrections to the rules in the book meant to “level the playing field,” so to speak. Games in Iowa consider themselves to be “weaker,” in some respects,

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<sup>96</sup> A copy of the Crow County Game House Rules can be found in the Appendix E.



than other players. One storyteller says, “We have characters that are well-rounded. Even most of our older characters are not overly-powerful because most of our players don’t play the power game. You know our players they put points in cooking because that is what their characters are learning, instead of making their sheets have every cool power in existence.” Though the vampire games did not have many visitors from out of state, the werewolf game had one night in particular in which several players from a large city nearby attended.

The night in question is noteworthy because six players came to the game, noting again that Werewolf has a regular attendance of ten to fifteen players. As the visitors walked in the storytellers sat with each of them for several minutes, going through their character sheets in detail and redlining many of their powers, that is they physically taking a red marker and crossing out the powers that could not be used in the game, lowering character statistics, and sorting through item cards.

“Usually players are ok with everything when we do that [redline]. We do it because then players can’t just come in and destroy the whole game and kill everyone or show up and destroy all the current plots with their crazy powers that our players just really don’t have.” If the plots in the game are designed for the regular players who interact with them, other players may be under-equipped or over-equipped to handle them. House rules provide a precedence for this type of redlining, though storytellers can make judgment calls on powers or items that are not covered in the House Rules. The visiting players, at least outward, acceptance of this strategic action shows not only that within the org it is proper for storytellers to make this action, but they also accepted the new proper conduct laid down by the storyteller.

Here, House Rules can be seen as being the perfect in-between. They are allowed to exist within the org and are still affected by both the book and org rulings, but subvert both in their

existence as well. They change the way the game is played, how the world is understood, and define the proper, in this way they are strategy. However, they still work within the system, never breaking the rules of the book or the org, they create habitable spaces, and they work as a local authority, in these ways they are tactic. Their very existence supports the understanding of the storyteller as the broker, the person who functions in the in-between space.

However, it should also be noted that House Rules, like the rules in the book, are used and reused, interpreted and reinterpreted, and they can create as many loopholes as they fix. As Sally Falk-Moore (1978) states, “Yet, despite all the attempts to crystallize the rules, there invariably remains a certain range of maneuver, of openness, of choice, of interpretation, of alteration, of tampering, of revising, of transforming” (p. 41). The player as the tactician can still use these House Rules, properly or improperly, and to their advantage.

### **The Storyteller and the Power of the Org**

Storytellers who run games as a part of an org have two sets of parameters they must abide by, first the book as has been discussed, and then the rules and regulations determined by the org in which their game resides. Though the power of the OWbN is immense in their ability to create rules, such as those that limit the types of characters that can be created or requiring permission for use of certain NPCs or places, the OWbN also recognizes game autonomy.

This autonomy is highlighted by the storyteller’s right to negotiate and/or change the way the coordinators have chosen to handle various situations. The following scene is an example of this negotiation.

I spoke to the storytellers and the players involved in the scene and will attempt to show all sides. The following, like other case studies in this thesis, is not a full explanation, as this

scene is a part of an ongoing plot, the full details of which cannot be disclosed here. What is important to note is that this scene is directly related to the national plot discussed in Chapter 2.

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*Baldwin*, played by Alex in Iowa, is a very large fellow, and by large I mean he is “Huge Size,” which allows the character to be quite abnormally large, 7ft tall, Andre the Giant, large. He wears a bandana, black jeans, a cut-off blue denim biker vest, and an assortment of jewelry. Baldwin is a mean looking fellow with a nature to match. His shining accomplishment? His ghould<sup>97</sup> grizzly bears which he keeps in some dark hovel until they become useful. By Alex’s own admission *Baldwin* was never supposed to survive, and yet he continues on and not because of his own doing either, saved many times by other characters, perhaps a perk of being a Nosferatu<sup>98</sup> and holding the loyalty of the other clansman by default. Perhaps dumb luck. Perhaps it is *Baldwin*’s own brand of redneck creativity that wins points with the storytellers. For such a big brute, he had wormed his way out of more than one strange and self-made situation. As one player put it, “We need vampires like *Baldwin*. You never know when you might need that kind of brute. Lord knows most of us don’t have those kinds of points.”<sup>99</sup> Though Alex is a storyteller in the Crow County Game, he makes a point to play *Baldwin* in other games as often

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<sup>97</sup> Any living creature, including humans, can be ghoulded. When a living creature is fed a vampire’s blood they become bonded both physically and psychologically to that vampire. More, they do not age and gain access to some of the powers of a vampire. So long as the creature continues to drink the blood they can remain in this state forever, never aging.

<sup>98</sup> A Nosferatu is a specific clan of vampire. Like the movie *Nosferatu*, they each have some kind of strange and all-encompassing deformity. For this reason, they live outside of human society, usually in old sewers or catacombs. They are also known for their loyalty within their clan and their knowledge. Nosferatu have networks connecting many within the clan at large and they are continuously sharing information.

<sup>99</sup> Here referring to points on the character sheet.

as he can manage the haul to other cities in Iowa, making his one of the larger sheets<sup>100</sup> in the state.

*Greg*, played by Davis in Wisconsin, is also a Nosferatu, but of a very different sort. He wears clothes vaguely like those you might find on any average person, outside of the long grey jacket, the hood of which is often up to hide is deformed face, and the long white feather boa – a story unto itself which makes him stand out. *Greg* prides himself on his humanity.<sup>101</sup> He is known as one of the few “good” vampires within the world. He is an upright citizen, of sorts, with a humanity score of five, hard to reach even for humans, let alone the denizens of the dark. He is known for his patience and his loyalty, particularly to his own clan, and rarely turns down a request for assistance. Due to his age as a character (that is the length of time he has been played regularly in the org), now 10 years, *Greg* is very powerful by any measure – points, items, and favors accumulated. His aid was requested by *Baldwin*, and in known *Greg* fashion, he agreed.

The scene was put on by two Demon Coordinators of the OWbN. Demon is another rule system of World of Darkness, which focuses on demons.<sup>102</sup> It does not have larp rules, but the rules are often adapted to use within larp games, particularly as enemies. Though I cannot detail the scene itself, I can say that *Baldwin* and *Greg* failed the quest they attempted, falling into a trap, and cursed with humanity loss. *Baldwin*, whose humanity was already very low, was almost pushed to wassail<sup>103</sup> on the spot. *Greg*, though he was not in danger of immediate character

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<sup>100</sup> To have a large sheet is to have a large number of points on that sheet. Large sheets usually have many different kinds of powers and skills that make them tough to beat.

<sup>101</sup> Every creature in the Old World of Darkness has a humanity score that rates the goodness of an individual. The scale ranges from 1 (murderous fiend who lies, cheats, steals, maims, or kills when necessary or just for fun) to 5 (literally saintly like Jesus and the Buddha). Most humans sit at 3 on the humanity scale. A vampire’s nature makes it very difficult for them to maintain their humanity. They have, what they call, “the beast” inside of them. This beast is their lust for blood and their penchant for immorality which calls them down a dangerous path. When your character hits 0 they become unplayable.

<sup>102</sup> That is demons in the biblical sense.

<sup>103</sup> If a character wassails they become unplayable. To wassail is to fall to humanity 0, to succumb to the beast.

nullification, was hit with one of the few things that could deeply affect the character, as his identity is largely based upon his ability to maintain his humanity. As it was detailed to me by Alex (Baldwin) and Davis (Greg), the problem they subsequently had with their failure, and which makes this case study useful here, was not the failure itself, but the way in which the curse was enacted.

First, they pointed out how the ending to the scene was narrated, that is the entire ending was emailed to them in written form, which meant they had no recourse to stop the curse, even though both of them may have had powers or tricks that could have prevented it in the first place. They were told what happened to them instead of being able to engage with the scene. Second, the players told me that the curse itself, and parts of the scene, had no larp rules. It was taken out of the tabletop books “wholesale,” that is with no reconsideration as to how it might work in a larp world, making it, from the players’ point of view, at best unfair, and at worst an abuse of power by the coordinator.

Had the storytellers of each character not intervened it would have made both characters unplayable for a minimum of two years, with the possibility of a permanent unplayable status.

The storytellers were contacted by the coordinators after the scene was emailed to the players, to let them know what was happening, and the consequences of the scene in which Alex and Davis took part. Both storytellers reported similar reservations and claims to their own authority to alter the outcome. Alex’s storyteller said, “I disagree with it being done that way. It was my decision that he didn’t have to lose traits because I thought it was dumb to punish a PC like that.” While Davis’s storyteller said, “I had them [the coordinators] explain to me what’s going on, nature of what’s going to happen to *Greg*, and was pretty much told, well he failed and so he’s pretty much going to be either unplayable for 2 years or GNC ‘dead, generate new

character.’ I as an ST<sup>104</sup> went wait no, that’s stupid and I don’t want this to happen. I then proceeded to come up with an agreeable solution between myself and the coordinators.”

Though the storytellers and players involved agreed generally that the consequences were very disagreeable, each storyteller handled the problem differently. The game in which *Baldwin* is located has a non-player character with True Faith – a trait that bestows certain powers upon an individual for the devotion to a particular belief. The exact way in which this rule works is largely unknown, both in and out-of-character (a rule that is notoriously vague and often house ruled<sup>105</sup>). Is it the faith itself or is there a channel created to the divine? No one knows. However it might function, the storyteller used this non-player character to cure *Baldwin* of his curse, returning him to his previous state with no penalties.

*Greg*’s storyteller had a different take on the situation. His storyteller worked with the coordinators to find a different but still deeply painful solution in hopes of facilitating good role-play. “My staff of the game and myself do not believe in just washing away issues when players get their foot stuck in crap, but instead we try and play their most personal horror against themselves to make it a player vs himself/herself situation that becomes one of the most challenging battles of them all... We felt that the player needed to learn that diving face first into every plot that comes to his plate needed to be weighed more heavily on. We also felt that a instant killing of a character from something that couldn't be resisted was unfair.” And so, “instead of an instant loss of humanity from 5 to 0... [*Greg*] will instead have to roleplay the loss of humanity from a “I’m Mother Theresa” level at 5, to criminal that would murder/kill/rob with little thought at level 1. Each month *Greg* would need to perform a sin of the humanity tree.” The

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<sup>104</sup> Storyteller.

<sup>105</sup> House ruled can be used a verb to indicate that the rule has been changed and that it can be found in the House Rules.

loss of the humanity is “phantom loss” from 5 to 1, that is not truly a loss, however, the character will feel as if it is a real loss, and the fact it is not real will not be known to him, effectively forcing this “paragon of good” to live through their own personal horror of losing their humanity and being forced to commit acts that he will 1.) on some level want to commit, 2.) not care or enjoy committing these acts, and 3.) not understand why he was feeling this way. He has been given a recourse to correct the curse, and regain his “lost” humanity. As Bowman (2012) notes, “Horror allows people to confront the monstrous, both internally and externally” (p. 23).

Davis does not feel this added anything to his play, but instead sees it as a pointless exercise, hoops he, as a player must endure, rather than a character endurance. “It was a bit lame because it was just a long slow thing that had no real solution other than waiting... It was just unreasonable and seemed to be a punishment for the crime of participating in national plot that I got dragged into.” Instead of feeling like he jumped into the plot “willy nilly,” he believed it would go against his character’s nature to say no just because it might be dangerous.

In these two varying reactions the tactics employed by the storytellers in terms of the OWbN come to light. On the one hand you have Alex’s storyteller, who, because he did not agree with the Demon Coordinator’s actions, simply went against the consequences dictated by the cord, and cured his player of what he deemed to be an unfair punishment. While on the other hand, you have the Davis’s storyteller. He decided to work with the Demon Coordinator to find, what he considered to be, a better solution than the original punishment, which he, like the first storyteller, deemed to be an unfairly harsh punishment. From what other players tell me, these are two different, but both acceptable ways to handle the above situation.

By subverting the org decision they show what they will and will not accept, how players will be treated, and exercise their powers of autonomy. Is this a tactical move or a strategic one?

It can be seen as both. In both cases, the storyteller is literally making the space habitable, that is changing the original decision to allow the character to *live*, an action of a tactician. They were producing the proper within their game and subverting the org's decree of a shared, consistent world. IC is not a game that participates in the org on a regular basis, a place where the majority of the players do not involve themselves in the org, and storytellers who are willing to simply wave in-character punishments decided by org officials because they will not run their game in this fashion. This creates and sustains the proper level of non-org-involvement. On the one hand they subvert a system, and on another sustain the system.

Here you see the storyteller as the tactical strategist. They decide and produce what is proper, what plots they want to run, what stories they want to tell, how they will change the book, and the parameters set by the org, to fit their own ideas of the world in which the characters reside. They create the world. However, they also use the book and org material to build this world and must subvert the org to use their autonomy, making them in many respects a tactician. It is here that the dichotomous nature of the strategist and the tactician begins to lose its potency and a more complex picture is built.

De Certeau's tactician and strategist categories seem to suggest that all things are either one or the other, there is no middle ground between them. However, I argue here that storytellers occupy this middle place, as broker of the world played.



## Chapter 4 – Player as Tactician

A comparison with the speech act will allow us to go further and not limit ourselves to the critique of graphic representation alone, looking from the shores of legibility toward an inaccessible beyond. The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple ‘enunciative’ function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is the spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of the language); and it implies *relations* among different positions, that is, among pragmatic ‘contracts’ in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an ‘allocution,’ ‘posits another opposite’ the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action). It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 97)

De Certeau describes the tactician as a walker on the street, creating poetry with their steps. The introduction of the readable city by de Certeau, which I have mentioned several times in my discussion of the strategist, is merely the beginning of the ultimate analogy of action as speech. He turns J. L. Austin’s (1975) idea that “words are action,” into “action is rhetoric,” space produced through the enunciation of the step. In walking this enunciation spatializes the areas in which the walkers roam, seeking, creating, and uncovering the places of the city with the soft click of the walker’s heel on the concrete.

Movement is tactic, subverting the totalization and the strategy of the city, creating places which strategy seeks to eliminate. Like de Certeau’s pedestrians, players perform all actions in response to the world with which they are presented, while also helping to create that world in their spatializing movement. However, where de Certeau focuses on the spatialization of the world through the movement of the pedestrian, an analysis of the imagined world of larp must focus equally on speech, on the words that detail this imagined place. The imagined world of the World of Darkness is lived and created as much through the vocal telling of the story as it is through the movement of the players.

Larp is characterized differently than other role-play games because of its movement. In the larp games players move about the play space physically, these movements mirrored in the fantasy world by their characters. Though Williams, Kennedy, and Moore (2011) are speaking to MMO's, their quote on role-play is useful here, "Akin to drama and performance, role players become actors of a persona they create not for a single performance, but (and often multiple characters) they maintain, nurture, and develop indefinitely" (p. 191). Though characters in this context are rarely "indefinite," it is not unusual for a player to play in multiple games of same or different types. Players initially create a character on paper, but during the game, dress, act, and speak as their character. Some go so far as to change their bodily appearance with extensive makeup, prosthetics, and other costuming. Players of the game create player characters – supernatural creatures – which inhabit the supernatural imagined world created by the book, the org, the storytellers, and themselves – that are collectively imagined during the game.

However, within the World of Darkness larp, players do not portray their characters only through costume and movement, but also through speech. Side scenes, for instance, – when the characters leave the main play space to investigate a murder or speak to a contact, going "off-site," – players dictate their character's actions verbally, instead of acting them out physically, while the storyteller plays the world, describing the surroundings and taking on the alternate personas of the non-player characters. In side scenes players sit or stand in a circle and, rarely, physically act out characters' movements. Here the imagined spaces are created through speech, through a combination of the storyteller's production of the world through description and the players' third person speech creating character action and reaction.

The tactician, in this context the player, is the small but agile fighter in the wrestling ring from Chapter Two, like MacGyver, quick and resourceful, willing to use any and all advantages

in their immediate vicinity in any way possible – using a moment of confusion brought by bright lights to make their move or using the spring of the floor to put the opponent off balance. Like de Certeau’s tacticians, players do not always make the choices the storytellers expect, using the rules of the book, the org, or the house rules, interpreting a specific scene, or using an item differently than intended, “improperly.” “The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them” (de Certeau, 1984, p.101). Despite using the rules differently, players rarely break them. As de Certeau states, neither foreign nor in conformity, movement creating spaces with unintended use, as Charlie Chaplain with his cane.

As one storyteller told me, “So we have 20 players or so in our game, every one of them completely different. Some of them... I can predict some of them... well it’s like this. You get up in the morning generally you know, you choose what socks to wear, what shirt, what-have-you. There are some players that will decide that day they are going to walk on their hands, choose to leave the house naked, choose to wear their blanket as a toga. You never know what to expect.” The imagined world is created to be flexible, it is meant to bend farther than life, to create spaces that are wild, and players use this to their advantage. With character that have strange and often powerful abilities, players often go out of their way to make choices, to move in ways different from the routine in the everyday, and yet are still true to their place as tacticians, rarely straying outside the lines set for them, while subverting the proper created for them. In this subversion, they also help to create the world.

## Character Creation Revised

One of the major ways in which players subvert the systems that govern them is through character creation. In Chapter One I explained how the book dictates character creation in a rather regimented step-by-step format. However, the actual act of making a character is (usually) rather different than the creators might have imagined, particularly when a first time player makes their first character.

During my observations I was able to witness the character creation of nine new vampires and created one werewolf for my own participation.<sup>106</sup> The new players came in all types, and you will be introduced to two of them in the case study to come. Four of the new characters were created in one mass character creation session. Angela and Terry, a married couple who play in all three games I studied, and who I stayed with for several weeks of my fieldwork, hosted a character creation session which was attended by four of the new players (Beth, Zane, Cathy, and Jean) who joined the Crow Country game. Six long time players extremely knowledgeable about the game also attended, Angela, Terry, Matt, Megan, Steve, and Jason. The storytellers of the game were not in attendance.

Terry, Matt, Steve, Angela, and Jason are all longtime, knowledgeable players. Matt has created an extensive pile of documents created for the sole purpose of helping (particularly new) players create characters such as guides to fill out and cheat-sheets for powers, backgrounds, and skills. Matt, Terry, Megan and Jason have all been storytellers. Megan, though a larper for less time than the others, has been a storyteller in the IC game and has an extensive amount of

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<sup>106</sup> The character sheet and background for the character I created have been included in Appendix B.

playtime as a frequent traveler, giving her a rounded knowledge of different play styles, varying character types, and rule uses.

This session was held with the purpose of minimizing the number of players entering game without a character. Generally, new characters of new players are created during a game. The player attends the game and one of the storytellers or players helps them create their character. The game ultimately had an influx of fifteen new characters, many of which were made by first time players or players who had limited larp experience, meaning many of the players needed hands-on help. This session allowed some of the new players to get help outside of game, so that the storytellers would be less overwhelmed during the game in which the new players entered play for the first time. Angela planned the night to gather old players with the new players to help them create characters, in lieu of the normal, at game character creation.

This session helped my research by showing me how social character creation can be. The book itself sets up character creation to be a rather solo process, where the reality is that individual players rarely make characters in isolation.

Throughout the night of character creation there was far less consulting of the text than I thought there would be. Angela made dinner, the game and characters were discussed over food in a community setting. The world was explained and then they began to split up into groups of two or three. Some of the new players began by reading some of the introductory material, others started with a more in-depth discussion of what the game actually entailed, how to play, costume ideas, and, in both instances, the purpose was to get a sense of what was possible. The character creation took most of the night, the session lasting from six pm until just before midnight. None of the new players went home with a fully fleshed out character, but by the end each had a sense of who they wanted create.

Matt:

“One of the biggest things I try and do with new players is try and find out what they are excited about or comfortable with. Because there are a lot of times when people try to push new players into an archetype they think that player would be good at and sometimes they’re right and sometimes they’re not, you know. Particularly in Vampire I start out with clans and I say you know start with a person here are the clans if something’s jumping out at you let me know, you know what are you thinking. And then from there we can work out the details, even if the concept isn’t you know perfect but we can work with it, we can tweak it from there. Not stifling them is the important part, because that is how people get disappointed and leave.”

Alex, though not a participant that night said

“I think it um, it really depends on the person. You should never let them do it all alone, but sometimes you know um they [a new player] need space, or um need you to be hands on or um they want you to explain what vampires are, they want to um I guess talk through the information. Others just want the book, right now, want to read it and then come to you with questions and talk through who they want to be. Others totally have an idea coming in of what they want to make and are like “here, this, how do I make this crazy thing” and that’s always fun I think.”

I only witnessed one character made “by the book” – that is following the directions of the book exactly. One of the new players who did not attend the character creation session, and who had never played larp before spent several weeks reading the book, and then creating the character as the book described, starting with an archetype, moving through traits and skills and fleshing out the backstory in the end. They say, “I wanted to do it the right way the first time.” However, even this player made a character with a connection to a friend of his who was coming into the game at the same time.

Longtime players who have had multiple characters and know the system well might create characters on their own. However, they often attempt to tie their new character to a character already in play, making the creation of the character still community oriented, as the character creator must consult, extensively, with the player of the current character. This idea of

creating characters with ties to other characters in the game allows for players to play together, cementing relationships between community members in and outside of game. One player says, “I came in all alone and that was hard. I didn’t know anybody out-of-character or in-character. It took me almost a year to become a part of the community because they didn’t know me.”

During the character creations session there was a distinct lack of strategic presence. There were no storytellers and the org was cited only briefly. OWbN was briefly explained to the new players by Megan, who is also a national coordinator, who mentioned that players could travel throughout the state, noting the other games. The only rule of the org that was actually explained in full was 60-point cap on new characters, because there are several ways to accidentally go over 60. The org was not mentioned again. Meaning the rest of the org rules were left to be learned by the players on their own or through saturation (or enculturation), during the game. “Newbies just don’t need to know that stuff yet.” Though storytellers were not involved heavily in the character creation process of these players, they did have to approve the sheets and were integral to the character creation of other players who entered the game later. The players who filtered over the course of the study and not a part of the character creation night made characters with other players or with the storytellers directly during the game.

In Julian Orr’s (1996) discussion of the customer he writes about the technician’s duty to socialize the customer, so that the customer could explain the problem in a way that made sense and understand the problem when it was explained by the technician. Without analysis, I would have said that the player learns the rules of the book through the reading of the book and other supplementary material, that players learn the rules of the organization by reading the One World by Night or Mind’s Eye Theater websites. However, after my observation of character creation during the character creation night, and again during several game sessions and interviews, I

realized that a large portion of the information gained by new players comes from the local game in which they play. It is the storytellers and the players who orient the new members, who socialize them in the playing of the game, within their particular community, as much as, if not more than, the book or the organization documentation. The proper for new players is found in the game.

This means that for new players the organization holds little sway over what is considered proper, at least in the beginning. As one player said, “It’s all in how you are trained you know. Here in Iowa we are investigators you know but that is because we were trained that way.” This idea was mentioned to me several times. How a player plays is created by the games in which they learn to play. The regional differences between games which I discussed in the Methodology chapter speaks to this as well. A lot of what is considered “proper” is made in the game, by the storytellers, through the practices of the players, and the teachings handed down from one generation of gamer to the next, subverting the words written on the page and the decrees given from the institution of the organization. Game play is determined as much by the community in which it is played as by the org and the book.<sup>107</sup>

As a short aside, Matt’s creation of cheat-sheets, documents which help to create a shortcut in the character creation process, to streamline the understanding of a complex system, shows one of the powers players have within the game. As I discussed much earlier in this thesis, players become storytellers, and when storytellers step down they often go back to player status.

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<sup>107</sup> Though it will not be explored fully in this thesis, as it is on the periphery of the discussion at hand, I wanted to make sure to note that games are also affected by the culture in which they play. The larger community, of which each of this sub-group is a part, affects the way the game is played, adding further constraints upon the player.



This helps to create a category not fully recognized by the games I studied, that which I call the game gurus.

Like Orr's (1996) "team technical expert" who "prepared a guide to the shortcut process, listing certain common procedures whose relevance could easily be seen without performing all of the official preliminary procedures," Matt's cheat-sheets did the same for character creation (Orr, 1996, p. 111). These sheets place him in the spot of "technical specialist," but at the time of my study, he was not a storyteller, and therefore not obviously linked to the "technician" category discussed. Game gurus are those players who are recognized as individuals with a vast knowledge of the system. These are often previous storytellers, though some do make it to this status without ever taking on the role of the storyteller. They are often consulted when a rule is ambiguous, when storytellers need a second opinion, and are go-to individuals for character creation. Though they do not create the proper, making them still in the tactician's category, they can help to support a new proper decreed by a storyteller, or subvert it.

### **Combat Violence, Bleed, and Distance**

Combat is different from other game play. Here the game dictates a code-switch from first person play to third person play. The players will first move to side space. A storyteller is always present, and guides the players through the combat. The question then is why the code-switch in combat? There are many answers to this question. It is easier to play when combat is not acted out. It is easier to find the space and more people are able to play when it is less physical. The chance of someone getting hurt during game goes up tremendously when combat is enacted, which complicates the game. Who is liable if a player gets seriously injured?

Another reason for this code-switch is the distance it creates between the physical world and imagined world. One of the things discussed quite often in game studies and larp studies is immersion. These games have participants acting in two separate worlds and maintaining distance is a way to maintain the boundary between self and character. The character exists in the fantasy world, while the player exists in physical, the game is about bridging the gap, existing simultaneously in both places. “[P]laying, back and forth, across the boundaries of the game and the game world, the ‘real’ or the nonliteral game space. It is about the moves we make between the corporeal and the ‘virtual,’” (Taylor, 2009, p. 17). In discussing this phenomenon, players are careful to mention the caveat that they realize they never become the character, that is the self is ever-present, existing in tandem with the alternate person, the physical world in tandem with the fantasy.

Within the community there is a respect given to those who play their character well, who maintain consistency, who can react quickly, who maintain in-character dialog without slipping into out-of-character dialog. However, there is also a fear of becoming too in-character, of substituting reality for the game world or self for character persona. Only one player could tell me of an actual time another player had a psychotic break during a game, and believed the game world to be real. All others, when asked, gave vague stories of individuals who took game too seriously in the extreme, playing too much, allowing in game happenings to negatively impact their “real lives” to the point of friend loss, job loss, and divorce, each of these stories seemed to revolve around the concept of bleed, bleed in the sense that one thing bleeds into another.

Bleed occurs when things happening in the physical world affect the imagined world and vice versa. If player 1 is mad at player 2 and the character of player 1 attacks the character of player 2 unprovoked, this could be bleed. If two characters enter into a romantic relationship and

then the two players begin dating outside of the game, this could be considered bleed. If one character kills another and the player becomes angry this could be considered bleed. Things that happen in game can affect relationships outside of the game. Scenes within the game can bring people together. Intense character experiences shared between various players can act as a catalyst for the beginning or a deepening of a friendship. Romantic relationships are often formed between players in physical world after they play together in the imagined one. Even several marriages are the result of moving in this community together. However, bleed is not always positive.

Friendships have been ended, true visceral rivalries spawned, and hatred birthed from in-character action. This negative bleed from game into real life occurs most often during scenes of conflict, even more so with violent conflict. This adherence to strict rules within combat, the presence of storyteller, the third person play may all be a way to help mitigate this negative bleed. It distances the play from the fantasy world, grounding firmly in reality while at the same time inserting an authority figure, and producing an adherence to well-known rules.

This persistence of distance can be found at every level of the game from the book to the House Rules. The fourth rule in the Introduction of the book states, “It’s only a game. If a character dies, if a plot falls apart, if a rival gets the upper hand, it’s just a game. You and the rest of the players are doing this for fun. Taking things too seriously, or taking character issues into real life, will only spoil everyone’s enjoyment, including yours” (Carl, Heinig, Woodworth, 14).

Within the rules of OWbN, and within most House Rules I have read, stipulated the need to be careful of “the line”, game is game, reality is reality and bleed should not occur. The first rule within the Code of Conduct and Ethics document of the OWbN is on this very issue. “We understand our chronicles are works of fantasy. If the line ever starts to blur, we must be

responsible members of our community and stop and speak with appropriate chronicle staff or an Executive Team member, and take whatever time off from the org events is necessary to put things back in proper perspective” (Org Rules, 2015). The House Rules of the Crow County game note this issue again by saying, “Try your best to keep your out-of-character emotions and in-character emotions separate” (House Rules, 24). At every level a reminder of distance is present.

Max, the storyteller in the introduction, recounted to me a story of a man who was playing the game and became so emotional in a scene, in-character, that he almost physically punched Max. He told Max about it afterward and ultimately decided to leave the game because he was becoming too involved. Max said, “Stepping out of game like that was the most responsible thing he could have done as a player. This game isn’t for everyone.” This shows that both storyteller and players are very cognizant of “the line,” and in agreement with the proper dictated to them.

This idea of distance brings this thesis back around to violence. Distance is partially maintained through the lack of physical combat, which is iterated within the book rules. The first rule of “The Rules You Shalt Never Break” found in the book, says “No touching. No stunts. This means none whatsoever. It’s far too easy for things to get out of hand in the heat of the moment. Save the stunts for your imagination. If you can imagine you’re a centuries-old vampire, then you can sure imagine you’re swinging on a chandelier or leaping across rooftop” (Carl, Heinig, Woodworth, 1999, p. 14). The games studied adhered to this rule very closely.

So, what does this pause of action say? Instead of realizing the fictional world through the physical embodiment of character, acting both in reality and in the fantasy world, physical action is paused, and the doing of things is taken up through speech alone. The space is changed

by the non-action, and is created solely through acts of speech and description of action. Where the in-character room is thought to be negatively impacted by out-of-character speech, here out-of-character space acts as a stabilizer; fantasy action brought into reality, changing the space through lack of physical action, and third person play.

“As soon as one inspects real situations supposedly governed by culturally determined rules, one discovers that even within such ‘regulated’ situations there are invariably elements and levels of indeterminacy,” (Falk-Moore, 1978, p. 48). Players do not always adhere to these rules, an example of which can be found in the following case study observed in the Crow County game.

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Vampires are often political beings within their World of Darkness. One purpose for the playing a vampire is to play the political game. They use humans like pawns to see their will enacted, and use each other just as readily. Most have no qualms with murder and carnage. Few have permanent loyalties. However, they are still tied to the Prince of the area, still often rely on each other to see their plans fulfilled. For the purpose of peaceful meetings once every two weeks the vampires of area gather on Elysium, a safe space in which no violence is permitted. Powers are limited and no weapons are tolerated. Crow County vampires are fortunate enough to have a standing place in which Elysium is held. A large farm house outside the city built by previous leadership. On the night of July 9<sup>th</sup> several new vampires came to Elysium. Though none of them were fresh made, they were new to the area.

A few hours into gather news came over the police scanner. A body was reported in a graveyard not far from Elysium. A group of teenagers had been partying when a large man

struck one of their comrades with a claymore, cleaved him from the left side of the head through the right side of the chest. The body was exsanguinated. Though violence in the city is common, sword fights are rare. Two parties decided to investigate. The larger of the two was split into two teams, one to distract (*Avery/Mike*, *Marcus/Aurelius*) and the other to investigate. The other group was made up of two men curious as to what had happened.

Most arrived on the scene at the same time. The investigation team (six players) started across the graveyard, were magically made invisible away from prying eyes, and made their way over to the body. The smaller of the two groups – two men not a part of the distraction team or the investigation team – was the first to arrive and decided to stand “unassuming” off to the side, as unassuming as two men in fitted suits standing next to a purple Lamborghini, in the middle of the night, in a graveyard that is also an active crime scene, can be anyhow.

Already there were four cops, one civilian, and the body. The civilian, a teenage girl, was obviously upset and being questioned by several police officers. *Mike* and *Aurelius* are the distraction team. *Aurelius*, a middle-aged man in jeans, biker jacket, and bandana, pulled up on his motorcycle, parked and acted as if he is there for a purpose, when another motorcycle pulled up, the man (*Mike*) steps off and approaches *Aurelius*.

*Aurelius*: I thought I told you not step foot in my town.

*Mike*: Well I guess I am not very good at following directions now am I.

*Aurelius* punches *Mike*. One of the police officers approaches the men as they are scuffling. When he gets close, the two bikers turn on him, punching the cop in the jaw. The three other officers pull their firearms as the two bikers run for their vehicles in an attempt to escape.

They head in opposite directions, with the plan to meet back at Elysium. Three of the four cops, take the two cop cars and chase the bikers, leaving the last of them to keep the crime scene safe.

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This small bit lasted just about a half hour of real time. The scene continues-on from here, the body is investigated, the teen is questioned, and the officer is placated. The rest of the scene continues for almost two more hours.

Earlier on the evening the news about the body was distributed. As the storytellers were extremely busy running between scenes it was some time before the group could investigate. This time lapse resulted in more players becoming involved with the scene and ultimately there were ten participants. Ben, Jed, Dave, and Ann are all longtime players of a minimum of nine years game time. Each is currently or was at one point was a storyteller. They spent the bulk of the scene either helping new players with chops and rule calls or keeping the other players engaged Alex, Aden, Ashley, and Avery (*Mike*), each played in this same game several years ago, but had not been involved with larp extensively since then. All are experienced role players in other mediums including tabletop games, video games, and MMORPGs. Marcus (*Aurelius*), though also highly experienced in other mediums of roleplay had never played in any larp game previously.

Marcus (*Aurelius*) and Avery (*Mike*) have known each other for several years. They have played together in multiple tabletop role-play games in the past. Each has run several of their own role-play games and played various characters in multiple tabletop game systems. Both are

avid video/computer game players and each have participated in single player and MMORPG<sup>108</sup> style gaming.

*Mike* (Avery) and *Aurelius* (Marcus) are Brujah. Brujah are hot heads, based partially off of the 1980's vampires like "Lost Boys." They usually start with a high strength, perhaps lower intelligence (though not always), like fights, enjoy getting dirty, and going off on often not so well planned adventures. These two characters were both young for vampires, "made" approximately thirty or forty years ago. Avery's character *Mike* is a Vietnam veteran, looking for some peace and quiet in the country, away from the noise and the violence of the city. Marcus' character *Aurelius* is a biker on the run, his gang destroyed, he is looking for somewhere safe to lay low and called up his friend *Mike* to see where the old man had gone off to.

Both Avery and Marcus stood on a set of small stairs on the left, which led down to the main floor, of the main out-of-character room during the scene. The other players are arranged across the half circle sitting on chairs in the elevated portion of the room. The discussion of who would be in the distraction and investigation teams was partially in and partially out-of-character before the scene began. The general plan was divulged to the storyteller as players filtered in from the main room.

Ben, the storyteller, began with the distraction team. Marcus (*Aurelius*) took the lead in the explanation of their plan, basically to ride in, "start some ruckus and douc." They wanted to distract as many police officers and bystanders as possible so that the investigation team could get as much information as possible before being interrupted by the authorities.

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<sup>108</sup> Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game - MMORPG



As discussed earlier within this game stunts and physical contact is extremely limited. In in-character space almost no touching occurs. Out-of-character players will hug hello or goodbye, those in relationships will stand together, all manner of day to day touch goes on as normal. However, in-character very little, if any touch occurs beyond the occasional handshake upon introduction. Stunts are generally not allowed, except under the express permission of a storyteller.

In-character interaction is generally limited to verbal communication. Rarely is the physical acting out of violence within combat scenes expected, usually used for planned moments of shock and awe, death scenes, or the usurpation of the seat of the Prince, making the following scene peculiar.

Marcus (*Aurelius*): I thought I told you not step foot in my town.

Avery (*Mike*): Well I guess I'm not very good at following directions now am I.

Marcus swung at Avery in a realistic fake punch. There was no physical contact between the players, but the whole group made a collective gasp, including me. One player called out, "holy shit!" several voiced "Jesus!" while another said "don't kill anyone now." In the moment one or two took a step back, while Ben moved forward as if to stop the action, or catch Avery in case of a fall. I had heard only the occasional story of stunts or physical acts of aggression being enacted, and had never seen it done. Without much pause, Ben then announced they had entered rounds, that is entered combat, chunks. They stayed in combat until after both characters had successfully evaded the police, which took another fifteen minutes in physical time.

After discussion with Avery (*Mike*) I discovered the maneuver had indeed been planned. Though not cleared with the storytellers, the two players had discussed it together and agreed it

would be fun addition to the scene. It was certainly discussed in later sessions when speaking about the new players out-of-character. There was an air of surprise and respect for the stunt. As one player said, “It was like, SURPRISE! Bam! I thought the kid had been hit for real ya know. It. Was. Flawless. Stunts can be tricky business, but sometimes thematically they can make a scene. Newbies definitely made an impression.” However, not everyone was thrilled about it, an older player said, “You *have* to be careful with stunts. They shouldn’t just be done. Clear it with the [storytellers]. It worked out well this time. I appreciate the enthusiasm right but it’s... well we have rules for a reason.”

In Chapter One I used quotes from two players, Bart and Ashley, who discussed how combat can have a distancing effect upon the game play, because of the rules dictating use of the numbers on the sheet, which can produce a force stop of the role-play aspect of the game. Avery and Marcus used the freedom of planning the distraction they were given tactically, enacting a moment which ultimately heightened the emotion of the scene. This emotion brought players back into the scene creating more in-game play, allowing players to stay in-character more of the time, closing the distance that third person play creates. “What this walking exile produces is precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one’s own vicinity; it is a fiction, which moreover has a double characteristic, like dreams or pedestrian rhetoric... one can measure the importance of these signifying practices... as practices that invent spaces” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 107). As discussed previously, combat requires a code-switch, a change from first person play to third person play, effectively distancing the players and the scene from the fantasy. What this fake right-hook did was bring the scene closer to the fantasy, subverting the readymade system’s decree that it should be otherwise. It changed the space, it produced interest.

Often, particularly in large group scenes, there is quite a lot of sitting around, waiting for your turn. As everything happens simultaneously in combat, only one or two players can be focused on at any given time. For instance, in the above scene there are three separate groups running all at the same time. Only Avery and Marcus were focused on above, while everyone else waited. In these periods of waiting in combat, players generally drop out-of-character, attention on the game is lost as players slip out-of-character, out of the fantasy world. The attention was brought back to the game with the fake punch as the fantasy space was realized physically.

Despite the fact it was against the rules, they were not reprimanded for their actions. The storytellers did not mention it to them. New players are often given leeway, assumed to be unaware of many of the rules under which the game runs. No one was hurt. As far as I have been told, no one lodged a complaint against them. However, the fact that no one spoke with them after the fact, so that they could learn the rules laid out for them in the book, and by the org, made me question how strict the rules against stunting actually are.

When asked about physical stunts in general, players respond with, “No way. Stunts are too physical. I mean people already get pissy when you hurt their character, can’t imagine what would happen if I accidentally hurt them for real!” and “We don’t do that here.” The same player who expressed positive feedback about the stunt, above said earlier in the same interview, “Naw those boffer nerds can have their physical stuff. Once you add the physical stuff you lose the character complexity. People get focused on the IRL[in-real-life] physicality and then poof, dialog goes out the window, character backgrounds don’t matter, and no one really cares about the character anymore. The whole point of vampire is the character and the politics and the intrigue.”

The rest of the scene took almost two hours to complete all together. I will not detail here the entirety of the scene as that could itself be a small novel. Instead I want to mention one other portion of the scene, experienced later in the game as the excitement of the stunt faded and waiting continued. In most long run combat I have witnessed players, while waiting, will simply chat out-of-character, catching up on life, or commenting on the game. This period of waiting was decidedly different. Three players took it upon themselves to keep the conversation in-character.

There was a short break, while the storyteller and a player went off for moment to determine what the player might know about the dead man. Two players were talking quietly in-character while the others began to devolve, so one of the players says rather loudly, “Does he have cash? Can I take it?” [speaking about the corpse on the ground], which automatically brought the attention back to the scene. Several commented on looting bodies while a cop stands 10 feet away. While another says, “Do too much physical activity and you might break your obfuscate [a power that creates basic invisibility].” Essentially, each person in turn reprimands her, in-character, or dissuades her from committing the act of looting a corpse, bringing the players back into the game. In fact, the whole group continues in-character for the remainder of the scene, almost a full hour, because these players acted to keep players engaged, and minimize the distance combat tends to engender.

These actions, these tactics, continue to fight against combat’s othering of the character. They keep individuals engaged in the happening of the game from a first person perspective rather than the third person combat usually forces, effectively holding up the fantasy space, keeping people involved in the world of the fantasy, rather than out-of-character speak.

Here is an example, like that of character creation, in which we see the players creating the proper, changing the rules as written to create their own ideas about how the game should be played, and how they should act within it. The players follow the lead of those who stayed in-character.

## Conclusion and Future Research

In real life, they drive your trucks and make your copies. They teach your children, and repair your computers, and when you have a heart attack, they're the first on the scene. They fight your wars and stock your stores and build your roads. They research new vaccines and obscure old deities. They care for your mentally ill. They train your FBI agents and catch child molesters. They are students, EMT's, lawyers, detectives, computer gurus, security guards, professional sideshow freaks, filmmakers, chefs, insurance administrators, scientists, and businessmen.

On the weekends, they are elves, magicians, cowgirls, vampires, zombies, arcane priests, samurai, druids, Jedis, zeppelin pilots, and chain-mailed warriors of unreasonable strength. They save the world. A lot. **They are larpers...** (Stark, 2012, p.1)

This thesis has focused on the governance of the institutionalized play of org run World of Darkness games – games whose players have willingly allowed an organization made up of their peers to organize them in such a way as to create connection and community across the world. It discusses how the varying levels of this organization work together and against one another to create the game play. I analyze these varying locii (the book, the org, the storyteller, and the player) using Michel de Certeau's, "The Practice of Everyday Life," translated by Steven Rendall.

I used fieldwork conducted in the Summer of 2016 in three different larp games all under the purview of the organization One World by Night. I observed two Vampire: The Masquerade games, and conducted participant observation in one Werewolf: The Apocalypse game. I also conducted interviews with members of a now defunct game under the organization Mind's Eye Society, and several other players who are a part of various games from around the United States. Throughout my research I conducted interviews with players and storytellers.

"The Practice of Everyday Life" focuses on strategy and tactic, two forces of modern society which pull against each other to create the world of which all people are a part. This

work is in part a continuation of previous discussion of process and person, attempting to understand the process of the creation of the structures that limit society. However, instead of focusing on structure, de Certeau proposes focus on the tactician, who subverts the strategist at every turn. His work is a look into how memory, naming, and movement, fall into this system that de Certeau has setup.

This thesis proposes that the book, which contains the system – the rules and the world of the game – is the strategist, the first to dictate the “proper” for the game at hand. The organization, which organizes the games, supplements the material, and holds the history of the global story for which it is responsible, also falls into the category of strategist, redefining some of the proper with the power they hold over the games under their purview. They cannot act tactically as they are in essence a bureaucracy. The storyteller is the individual in the middle, the broker, having the ability to act tactically and strategically in their roles as the literal storyteller and administrator of the game. Though theirs is power limited by both the book and the org, it is still immense. It is the player who is the tactician, subverting here and there, the book, the org, and the storyteller to create the imagined spaces they wish to experience. I use de Certeau’s theory to show how strategy and tactic, though they present as dichotomous, can mix together, how various levels of power can act as one or the other.

Strategy orients the tactician; it is both the sidewalk, and the city planner. De Certeau discusses how the formation of the city created the need for the human strategist, who orients his fellows. Here he sees the strategist as sitting above looking down, who cannot see the individuals below, or hear the poetry of their movement, seeing only the lines drawn on the map, only the routes taken, flattening the world into a piece of paper, practices lost, “transformed into texturology,” names, mere labels without meaning.

Strategy becomes more than the unconscious forest, rivers, and deserts of a previous time, but also a tool used by those in power to maintain that power. However, despite the added weight of the modern strategist, the tactician's position as the wanderer, whose movement disseminates meaning into spaces, to create habitable places, continues on, now using the sidewalks of the city, and the tools of modernity.

De Certeau's overall work has a feeling of deep melancholy for some imagined place, or space, or time, when the tactician ruled the world, not plagued by the continuous metallic clang signifying technology's ever-consistent movement forward. This is an imagined world in which strategy is wholly unconscious – made up of the plants and forest and rivers and lakes, instead of the, possibly, conscious men in power, who create the modern city.

His work has much in common with *World of Darkness* and the feelings of those who play it. The *World of Darkness* is plagued by modernity, the people out on the streets crushed by those above them. The middle class no longer exists. The people who populate the world have an overall darker attitude. Bad things are bound to happen, and that is reality. Hope dwindles. There is a bleakness in the everyday. The apocalypse is literally happening, right now, the end of the world has begun.

In any event, on the scale of contemporary history, it also seems that the generalization and expansion of technocratic rationality have created, between the links of the system, a fragmentation and explosive growth of these practices which were formerly regulated by stable local units. Tactics are more and more frequently going off their tracks. Cut loose from the traditional communities that circumscribed their functioning, they have begun to wander everywhere in a space which is becoming at once more homogeneous and more extensive. Consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they move about is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too constraining for them ever to be able to escape from it and go into exile elsewhere. There is no longer an elsewhere. Because of this, the "strategic" model is also transformed, as if defeated by its own success: it was by definition based on the definition of a "proper" distinct from everything else; but now that "proper" has become the whole. It could be that, little by little, it will exhaust its



capacity to transform itself and constitute only the space (just as totalitarian as the cosmos of ancient times) in which a cybernetic society will arise, the scene of the Brownian movements of invisible and innumerable tactics. One would thus have a proliferation of aleatory and indeterminable manipulations within an immense framework of socioeconomic constraints and securities: myriads of almost invisible movements, playing on the more and more refined texture of a place that is even, continuous, and constitutes a proper place for all people. Is this already the present or the future of the great city? (de Certeau, 1984, p. 40-41).

The World of Darkness is one in which de Certeau's city has been totalized, taken over, inhabited by modernity, a melancholy which matches his own writing. However, it is also a place in which players play myth, they become legend, in the creation of their supernatural, alternate personas. The stories of the monsters, mythical creatures, and magic are inputted into this world as a reality, existing, living (or un-living) things. In de Certeau's world, myth has been stolen by modernity.

The voice that today we consider altered or extinguished is above all that great cosmological Spoken Word that we notice no longer reaches us: it does not cross the centuries separating us from it. There is a disappearance of the places established by a spoken word, a loss of the identities that people believed they received from a spoken word. A work of mourning. Henceforth, identity depends on the production, on the endless moving on (or detachment and cutting loose) that this loss makes necessary. Being measured by doing (de Certeau, 1984, p. 40).

Have we lost something in the losing of our oral histories? Does the creation of space or place or world still occur within the word? De Certeau (1984) seems to think so sometimes.

We no longer believe, as Grundtvig (or Michelet) did, that, behind the doors of our cities, in the nearby distance of the countryside, there are vast poetic and "pagan" pastures where one can still hear the songs, myths, and the spreading murmur of the *folkenlighed* (a Danish word that cannot be translated: it means "what belongs to the people"). These voices can no longer be heard except within the interior of the scriptural systems where they recur. They move about, like dancers, passing lightly through the field of the other (p. 131).

De Certeau uses J. L. Austin's (1975) theory that a word spoken is an action, and flips its meaning to say that action creates rhetoric, and together they create spaces and meaning. His world begins first with the experience, the walker, the unknowing tactician, who weaves in and

out of the barriers set by the unaware strategist, creating place through their movement. The city becomes text through the change of perspective, and loses the life and the meaning made on the ground. The imagined world discussed in this thesis is, instead, one that begins as text; a book begins the creation of an imaginary world. It is the storyteller and player who, in the experience of play, and largely through *oration*, bring the imaginary world life, giving the bones of the book flesh. Myth and legend, imaginary spaces, and created places are made through bodily experience of action *or word*.

If the place of the other is the place of the tactician as de Certeau says, “The place of the tactic belongs to the other,” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix) then it is up to the tactician to replace the depersonalized spaces with personalized places, through the whispers of the voices de Certeau believes lost, using whatever means they have at their disposal, whether that be through voice, pen, keyboard, or the tap, tap, tap of the shoe on the sidewalk.

As the World of Darkness book states, “We can’t know when humans first started telling stories, or why. But it’s a safe bet that the first tale tellers used their craft to explain the mysteries going on around them. Indeed, some of the most ancient stories that are still told today grapple with the biggest mysteries of all – life, death, creation, redemption and the ongoing struggle versus evil. We call the game you hold in your hands a Storytelling game, because it’s an opportunity for you to participate in the deeply human endeavor of telling stories,” (Bridges, Chillot, Cliffe, Lee, 2000, p. 17).

I would argue that these lost spaces, de Certeau believes, taken from the humanity by modernity’s dislike of all things it considers “primitive,” oral stories included, can be found in the crevices unexplored. These spaces in which imagined worlds are brought to life, which is one of the purposes of oral stories and oral histories anyhow, to bring to life the characters within

them. As anthropologists we have made it a habit to explore the unexplored places. Now with globalization we turn to new ways of understanding the communities we study, to understand how life is now, how different cultures mix and mingle in a world saturated with various forms of communication, which create vast networks that reach far beyond the local, the “bounded” cultures we once believed existed.

Virtual and physical play spaces which allow for the creation of these imagined worlds, the new crevices, and yet unexplored places, which can show us and teach us about the humanity we proudly claim to study through the very name of our discipline, anthropology, the study of humankind.

As Thomas Malaby stated only a few years ago:

I suggest, however, that it is surprising that this questioning of our ideas about games and play has taken so long and especially surprising that my own field, sociocultural anthropology, did not lead the way many years ago. That field’s hallmark has always been a willingness to move past Western preconceptions. It is characterized by an unflinching interrogation of inherited, seemingly foundational concepts leading to anthropology’s greatest contributions to the academy over the course of the twentieth century. But with a few important exceptions, play was, for the most part, left out of this critical project as anthropology on this issue stayed firmly within the modern tradition.

Perhaps it is as Gary Allan Fine said in 1983, that the study of games and play are simply not serious enough to constitute legitimacy within academia, delegated to the side lines – though his work works to disprove this notion. Like him, I disagree with this statement. It fascinates me to no end that games and play are still considered to lack of seriousness. It was one of my hopes through this thesis, in my discussion of violence, that I show again, as others like Julian Dibbell (1998) and Clifford Geertz (2000) did before me, that games can be quite serious. Further, that communities of gamers can be analyzed with some of the same tools that we analyze the rest of life, to show that games are another realm of life, and that those realms can say something about

the human condition. The way we play, who we play, how we play, says something about us. More, what happens in these game spaces affects us just as deeply as any other experiences we have in life and are just as “real.”

Many authors in and out of gaming, particularly when discussing role-play games, discuss how games lack consequences, at least within games like larp. Though this line of inquiry cannot be fully fleshed out here, it is tied to the discussion at hand. It is my hope to add to the discussion on role play games by saying that larp has consequences. It is likely true that players are allowed a freedom to experiment with identity within their characters in the game, a freedom that they would not have outside of the game, and so in this way the role-play lacks some of the same kinds of consequences of the world beyond outside of game night (Bowman, 2010, Simkins, 2015, Fine, 1983). As one player stated, “I mean, I mean I really am there playing with people but, Nickoli isn’t me and world of darkness isn’t here, and what Nickoli does, how I am as him, doesn’t have much... much impact on how people see me. I can be anything, and that’s ok, there, in that room, everything is ok, accepted.” This quote may speak to the ways in which game space creates a place of flexibility, but I would not say lack of consequence.

Thomas Malaby (2010), in his work *Gambling Life: Dealing in Contingency in a Greek City* shows “how risk in Greece and elsewhere, rather than tamed and quantified, is engaged and performed” (p. 21). Within this book he writes about games of gambling in Chania, Greece. This particular quote lends helpful insight into the discussion of consequence within games. The flexible, fanciful space is bleached of the risk of life outside. I would argue that risk found in life is “engaged and performed” in those game spaces. Those things players fear in the social

situations of life are often practiced within game space. What this means for the game space itself cannot be answered here.

Further, as can be seen in the discussion of the rape scene in larp, and the rape in cyberspace as described by Dibbell (1998), as well as the discussion of the concept of bleed, role-play is not without consequences. The rape scene was the spark that lit the fire and the end result, the eventual *consequence*, was Max's loss of community. He left a community he had been a part of for more than fifteen years. In the case of rape in cyberspace the event had physical and psychological effects on the players involved, and changed the way they understood their community space. This may indicate that while some of the rules of the world outside of game time may be partially suspended or changed within the game space, like any consistent social group, the gaming community has social rules of its own. When broken, the consequences are similar.

Role-play is not without consequences. A future project would endeavor to expand and understand this meaning within games, to analyze the consequences of games more fully. Games do not escape human meaning-making. They do not get a free pass to simply sit on the sidelines unobserved. Games have meaning, they have value. In America, we downplay that value culturally, but that does not exempt anthropologists from looking beyond the Western Weberian work ethic to understand play and games as an essential part of our life, and the system in which we live (Norbeck, 1974 & Malaby, 2009).

Despite the idea of consequence being left for a later time, it can be used to wrap up the discussion of violence begun in the Introduction and discussed throughout the thesis. The world in which the players play is violent, though the book attempts to mitigate that violence, players choose to create alternate personas, persons who perpetrate massive amounts of violence

throughout their lives. They murder, maim, and torture. They live in a world in which death, grief, and pain are all around them. Why choose to play in this world?

When I asked a player, who engaged in several extremely violent scenes throughout her time of play, “Do you think that playing violent roles has changed you negatively in anyway?”

The player responded, “No. [she paused for almost a full minute] I think that it has forced me to analyze my own thoughts and feelings very closely. I [another long pause] you know I’m an anthropologist too, and I think, like, that we talk a lot about violence and human nature and chimpanzee males killing each other and then we caveat all of that by saying “here is what we can do to stop humans from hurting one another” and maybe I’d get this in psych class but we never really explore, in my classes anyway, like we never explore that violence, except when we like read Geertz or whatever, we only talk about it when we are being “culturally relative” but we never really explore our own violence except like when we are condemning it, you know. We never allow ourselves to explore that violence that... we like talk about it as being human nature and if its human nature then it has to be inside of us right? Like all over the TV, all over the movies, everywhere you can see other people’s violence outside of yourself but larp, larp allows you to understand these, like, hidden depths of yourself. Allows you to go places you can’t go ever! I know myself better now, better than... I think I ever would have otherwise.”

In the rest of the interview she continues to speak about the way in which we must accept our violence, both inside and around us, that we should work towards peace, but also that we cannot do so until we critically examine the violence within ourselves and “own that violence, to step away from it.”

Perhaps larpers are after the experience of the emotion of the game as Montola (2014) discusses. Perhaps this playing out of violence comes from the growing idea, birthed in the last thirty years, that the self is the last frontier to conquer. Perhaps, it is as Bowman says, “Horror allows people to confront the monstrous, both internally and externally” (Bowman, 2012, p. 23). Perhaps it is as Ortner (1997) says, as she writes on the extreme sport of mountain climbing,

“In the quite voluminous firsthand mountaineering literature, mountaineers often discourse in fascinating ways on the kinds of meaning and insight they derive from the sport: about the moral fiber of the inner self, about the nature of bonding and friendship, about the peace and calm of high cold places against the noise and bustle of modern society. All of this

makes the risk of accident and death worthwhile: indeed it seems precisely the risk of serious or fatal accident that produces the payoff of meaning” (p. 140).

These games are unabashedly unafraid of confronting the horrors that occur in the real world, from slavery to murder. They confront death. They can force a confrontation of internal beliefs and values. They explore and engage and enlighten the darkest parts of the human soul. And yet, there is the distance, which I have explored minimally in this thesis. A distance that attempts to lubricate conflict. The question is why? Unfortunately, that question cannot be explored here, but is an area for future research.

More, there is so much that could be said about the stakes, the risks, of larp which have only been touched on here. Character death and its effects on the players, friendships and marriages forming and dissolving because of the game, literal mental breakdowns occurring in part because of the play of the alternate persona, violence against the character internalized as violence against the self, the intense bonds that are formed and broken within the game are all wrapped up in the discussion of violence, again, largely put aside for another project.

Despite his belief that the city is crumbling around him, de Certeau’s work is sprinkled with little bits of hope here and there showing the tactician’s true power to create the world in which they live. In some of his first chapters he berates both Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault for focusing too much on the strategist, not giving enough credit to the tactician, whose power is quite immense.

As a quick aside, you might wonder, then, as you come into this conclusion, after having taken in the player’s perspective, why I chose to end with the player. Outside of de Certeau, it is the player that anthropologist would be most likely to focus on, as the doer and actor within the world. I oriented my thesis in this way, because I wanted to show the weight of the powers that

oriented the player and their stubborn and consistent subversion of it. I wrote it this way because I knew that even as I discussed strategy almost ad nauseam, within each layer I was able to bring the player to light, weaving the layers together into a single whole, a single system. More, the storyteller holds a special position, they sit in a strange place, playing within the game and administering it. Despite this in-between space of the broker, which storytellers inhabit, their importance as player needs to be highlighted, and so although it may seem that I focused on strategy more than de Certeau may have appreciated, in reality much of this thesis was focused on the playing of the game, on the actors within the world, the focus of the anthropologist.

Further, because the audience for which this was written has very little experience with larp, and I knew that if I began with the experience of the player, the thesis itself would not be cogent to those reading it. Like the players, the readers needed to be oriented with an understanding of the world and the community in which the players moved. We cannot understand the importance of the walker unless we understand the city in which walker walks.

I agree with Sally Falk-Moore (1978) when she writes that persons “are not merely automatons passing through mandatory role shifts,” (p. 46). However, even if the tactician is “as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms” (de Certeau, 1984 p. 96) to the power they hold, it does not diminish the fact that tacticians’ “spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life” (de Certeau, 1984 p. 96). As Sally Falk-Moore (1978) stated, “What is also clear is that strategies used in situational adjustment – adopted, to be sure, in the context of immediate needs – if repeated sufficiently often, by sufficient numbers of people, may become a part of the processes of regularization,” (p. 51). The walker makes possibilities, “exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial



elements” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 98) In selecting possibilities, the tactician “condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance and composes with other spatial ‘turns of phrase’ that are ‘rare,’ ‘accidental’ or illegitimate” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 99). By walking, by moving, by practicing spatializing practices, the tactician can reinforce but also change and create the proper.

Despite the fact that strategy orients the walker, limiting the possibilities does not diminish their power to create space, to reorient the world, to change the landscape before them by alternative use. The strategist and the tactician are in a consistent and persistent dance with one another. The strategist uses a rigid three-step waltz, while the tactician occasionally and covertly – consciously and unconsciously – inputs a step of the tango. As the dance continues the strategist might correct for small changes they happen to see. However, there is always the possibility that, over time, the strategist will find that their strict lock-step waltz has changed to a tango. The strategist, in their focus on maintaining the system they created, missed when the matte black dress of their partner changed to one with a sleek sparkle. In this realization, the strategist might halt the dance, starting over with the strict three-step waltz or change it to something like the Foxtrot – an analogy perfect for the shifting rule systems of White Wolf in Chapter 2 – the tactician is then forced again to begin their covert operation of shifting the dance into something that better fits their own needs.

In this analogy, the power and the weaknesses of the tactician and the strategist are highlighted. Though the tactician may not always act consciously, they are aware of all possibilities around them, exercising their power in the cracks in the system, changing the world around them subtly but continuously. Because the strategist is removed from the city sidewalk, looking down with the eye of God, they miss the subtle changes in the landscape below, oblivious until they are aware. Upon awareness the strategist acts, sometimes with deafening

strike. They rename systems, tear down historical landmarks, whitewash graffiti. Maintaining their system to maintain their perceived power. But who is better off, Daedalus in his labyrinth or Icarus with his wings? Neither has a very happy ending. Perhaps, and this is only a hypothesis, the tactician uses the strategist to orient themselves so that they might have the ability to act upon the ground, while the strategist of the city uses the tactician to maintain their power. Without one neither exists.

Without the book, the rules, the system, the lore, there is no game; like Monopoly without the board. Without the org there is a lack of larger community and connection, without the storyteller there is no organization, no one to make the world itself come alive, but without the players the game is never experienced, the spaces never created, the imagined world written is never lived.

It was my hope with this thesis to continue a discussion on the connection that can be made between imagined, physical, and virtual realities, understanding games as just another part of life, governed in large part by the same rules which govern the rest of life, showing that though it may be more flexible as a space it is not impermeable, it is not separate, nor is it wholly other.

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## Appendix A

# In Character Sexual Assault Ban

Effective July 15, 2016

**In order to promote a safer and more comfortable environment for all of our members, rape/sexual assault as a role playing concept is banned from this point forward.**

This is effective in all venues.

- **New characters being created can not have/be a rapist or be a victim of this heinous act.**
- If you are currently playing a character that has this as part of their background, the character is 'grandfathered' and may remain in play.
- **Moving forward, no new rape/sexual assault scenes will be permitted or run** , even for those characters who are "grandfathered".
- Sexual assault includes any scene in which a character would be required to participate in a sexual act against their own will -- whether through force, coercion, or use of a power or ability. A character cannot be caused to participate in a sexual act they would not choose of their own volition.
- Sexual assault scenes include sexual assault, and any discussion or description of sexual assault. Both are banned from play.
- If your current concept becomes unplayable due to this rule, please work with your ST to re-work this aspect of your character, or make a new one.
- **ST's cannot use rape/sexual assault as a plot device.**
- This rule applies to both PCs and NPCs.
- **Breaches of this policy are cheating, and may be considered a breach of the MES harassment policy.**

This is not a decision we make lightly, much discussion was had, member input was considered and legal was consulted. As a BoD we believe that the WoD is dark enough without subjecting our members to this type of role play.

This is effective immediately. Updates to the MH will be added in the next updates to reflect this change.

We are aware that this does not address all the issues the club faces today. We are actively engaged in looking for solutions for some of our other social issues. However, for this one issue, change begins today.

## Appendix B

### Example Vampire Character Sheet

(Rumors would normally go in a notes section at the end.)

#### Nyx

**Vampire**

**Player**

**Character ID:**

**Status:** Active

**Experience Unspent:** 17

**Total Experience Earned:** 17

**Narrator:**

**Date Printed:** August 22

**Last Modified:** August 22

**Starting Date:** April 13

**Clan:** Followers of Set

**Sect:** Camarilla

**Coterie/Pack:**

**Generation:** 13

**Title:**

**Sire:**

**Nature:** Masochist

**Demeanor:** Survivor

**Blood:** 10 0000000000

**Willpower:** 4 0000

**Morality Path:** Humanity

**Morality Traits:** 3 000

**Conscience/Conviction:** 3 000

**Aura:** +0

**Self-Control/Instinct:** 4 0000

**Courage:** 3 000

#### 3 Physical Traits:

- O Dexterous
- O Steady
- O Tenacious

#### 9 Social Traits:

- OO Charming x2
- OO Diplomatic x2
- OO Eloquent x2
- OOO Persuasive x3

#### 5 Mental Traits:

- OO Intuitive x2
- O Patient
- OO Vigilant x2

#### 0 Negative Physical Traits:

#### 1 Negative Social Traits:

Untrustworthy

#### 0 Negative Mental Traits:

#### 20 Abilities:

- O Commerce
- OO Crafts: ? x2
- O History
- OOO Investigation x3 (Spec: Appraisal)
- O Language: Ancient Egyptian
- O Language: Arabic
- O Language: Demotic
- O Language: Latin
- O Language: Mandarin
- O Linguistics
- O Lore: Camarilla (1 Free)
- OO Lore: Clan: Followers of Set x2 (1 Free)
- O Lore: Kindred (1 Free)
- OO Occult x2
- O Scrounge

#### Disciplines:

- Auspex: Heightened Senses (basic)
- Presence: Awe (basic)
- Presence: Dread Gaze (basic)

#### 1 Status:

- O Acknowledged

#### Rituals:

#### 6 Backgrounds:

- OO Contacts x2
- OOO Resources x3
- O Retainers

#### 3 Influences:

- Occult (1 Free)
- Underworld
- University

#### Miscellaneous Traits:

#### Derangements:

Masochism

#### Blood Bonds/Vinculum:

#### Boons:

#### Merits:

- Acute Sense (1, Touch)
- Acute Sense (1, Hearing)
- Common Sense (0, Free)
- Eidetic Memory (2)

#### Flaws:

Blind (6)

#### Equipment:

#### Health Levels:

- OO Healthy x2
- OOO Bruised x3
- OO Wounded x2

O Incapacitated  
O Torpor

## Nyx

### Background

I am writing this background from the perspective of her sire as he is writing a letter to his own maker about Nyx.

My Dearest Sir,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health and all of your former glory. I hear rumors that you rightly disposed of an assembly of the Bastards of Light. I am awed by your abilities. Set will give you high praise when He walks amongst us again.

I was surprised to hear from you. I had not realized the impression my little Nyx would have upon your other children but I am certainly glad to gaze upon your words once more. It has been far too long since our last correspondence.

To address Nyx, you asked after her upbringing and I do so hope you will be pleased. You mentioned her blindness as a concern. I assure you this has not and will not impede her usefulness. Her devotion to our Dark Lord matches my own and in some respects exceeds it. She has at every turn exceeded expectations.

As per your instructions I gathered a herd. I set myself up just outside of Portland, Oregon. The weather seems to suit my temperament. I built a small community in which my herd lives. All of my children have been bred from this crop, which I handpicked. After the children of fourth generation began breeding I examined their children, picking those best suited for the Darkness, to be tested. Of every generation only one has ever made it through to the end of my instruction. Nyx is of the fifth generation and the second child I have made. Her birth name was Olive. I renamed her shortly after she completed her first Revelation after the Greek goddess of the night, a name she took to quite effortlessly.

The girl was born blind. Her mother, Claris, was appalled by her disability, abhorred the child for existing. She refused to feed the little Olive who almost died. Her father fed her from a bottle, once he found his wife was starving her. I talked with the woman, told her each child is to be given the chance of survival. This did not change her attitude.

Despite these beginnings little Olive grew up healthy, though physically weaker than most. She was kept locked away from the other children. She was seen only by her father and two elder brothers. A surprising girl from the beginning, at the age of four, she asked me with no hesitation what I was. Even with my use of blood so that I might appear human, she understood I was different and was not afraid.

She formed her own opinions about the world very early on. Deciding she disliked her mother came as early as four years old. I have never seen so much loathing in a child. She had a keen mind. Her father taught her to read brail when she was four.



I chose five children out of the fifth generation and took each of them for their four year training. She was the youngest of the set, at age five. I desired her as a student because of her acceptance of the darkness which consumed her. She accepted her blindness, her mother's hate, and her siblings torment, using it to her advantage. Her mother's hate bred her father's willingness to do all that she asked no matter what it was. Her siblings torment gave her strength. She often played pranks on them, bleach in their milk, nails in their shoes, etcetera. Surprisingly she never once mentioned wanting any of them dead. She was well spoken and intelligent, though in body she was relatively frail.

During the four year stay in my house she inhaled knowledge as if it was food and retained almost every single word she read or heard. It took her only one year to read through my entire collection of brail books which I had accumulated specifically for her. I will admit much of the material was not all together sophisticated, however she was only five.

My ghouls and I tutored them each in many different languages, philosophies, and histories. Like you once expected of me, each child brought me a piece of knowledge and the end of everyday which they believed to be interesting. If said piece was also interesting to me they were allowed to eat, if not they went to bed hungry, and if they did not have an answer they were beaten. Olive never went a day without food.

Once through my collection of brail she surprised me. Over that year she had been quietly collecting boons from the other children, which was repaid by the others through reading allowed to her from the books she did not have access to her because of her disability.

By the end of the second year two of the five had failed in their testing and were discarded. By this time little Olive had convinced an older boy, Davis, to be her protector. No matter what I tried to give him or what I told him he remained loyal to my little Olive. He too was smart, strong physically and mentally. I'm not sure what she did for him that made him so vehemently loyal but he was. At the end of the second year the physical testing had begun and she was still frail. Davis would sacrifice his own success for hers and with his help she passed every trial I set before her. She had become stronger. However, even now I would call her fragile.

Over the next two years she continued to impress me. Only Davis and Olive made it to the end and I decided to keep both of them. It was then I started planning their first Revelations. I chose the Revelation of Despair for Olive. I told her I was taking her home so that the family might say goodbye. Before she left the car she had a soda, in which had placed a home brewed drug. I believe you gave me that particular recipe in fact. She was angry when she left the car. Told me she did not wish to go home, that she hated these people, and that she had no need to see them.

The drug worked perfectly. She lost consciousness shortly after she was put to bed and the others turned out the lights. I killed her family. I left her in the living room next to her father's corpse covered in blood and holding a knife. Now I truly believed it was going to take some convincing on my part to force her to believe that she had in fact murdered her family. Instead of doing what I expected and breaking down, she walked calmly from room to room feeling for life in any of the beds. Not finding any she walked, barefoot, knife in hand, still in her bloody night gown to

my home, three miles from her house. She snuck in, showered, found clothes, and “found” me in my study. “I killed them didn’t I?” she asked. I said “Yes.”

Tears streamed down her face. “I am a monster aren’t I?” which was a rhetorical question, “I didn’t know I wanted them to die. I promise I didn’t know.”

After a few hours of tears and dismay, I baptized her in rose water, as you did for me, and began her teachings. I renamed her Nyx. She came to believe on her own that Set would be the only God who would take her now that she was tainted by Patricide and Matricide. I trained her in the ways of the priests and priestesses of Set, as you did for me.

After a few years, I sent her and Davis to receive a quality Oxford education. Both completed their doctorates in history, which Nyx finished at the age of 25 and Davis at 29. They had fallen very much in love by the end of the stint in England.

As I am in the antiques business and they both love history I decided to train them to run their own business. During their time in school Nyx had proven the most capable of the pair. She is the master of manipulation and though she understood the material and was very capable of doing her own work, she had a knack and love of getting those around her to do things for her. I am not entirely sure that she even wrote her own dissertation.

After a year of business training I sent them both to China to procure a set of items for me. I followed them. I paid a mutual friend to mug them in the street in Beijing. In the struggle Davis took an extremely bad beating, which was my intention. He was taken to the hospital and no matter what they did he remained in excruciating pain. She could not get in touch with me. Her credit cards were blocked and she was left on her own. They kicked them out of the hospital when they learned the pair couldn’t pay. In this time she watched him waste away until he begged her to kill him. She obliged this wish as she could see no other option. She ran from the body after she smothered him. In this moment she went through the Revelation of Despair.

I turned Davis after she had gone. He will be useful one day. I sent him away to be trained by another who lives deep in the Himalayas. He believes she died in Beijing, raped, murdered and buried in a watery grave.

After his “death” she stopped any attempts to contact me. I planted clues for her and again she surprised me. I had planned for her to find a different man to kill, a man much like her mugger that I needed dead. However she followed her own line of logic, setting up her own influences in the area and within side of year she found, tortured, and killed our mutual friend, successfully going through her Revelation of Wrath. During that year she kept up on her own education, learning all she could about murder, torture, and politics. She did the deed well. The police in the area never even suspected that he had died. She made it seem as if he had moved away. Not even his family suspected he was dead, but that he was simply a dead beat dad who would never come home. The girl is truly spectacular when it comes to manipulation.

She made it home, intent on killing me as well, despite her knowledge that I was a Vampire. She nearly succeeded. I explained to her that the entire year was a test. That she had passed and that she was ready. That Set demanded these sacrifices by the strongest of his flock and that it was he

who gave her the strength to do what needed done. This was no lie. The extreme devotion she has for Set compelled her to follow my line of thought and come to the conclusion that Davis had simply not been strong enough.

I turned her then, baptizing her again, this time in a pool of blood mixed with rose water. Like me she joined the Camrilla after she was turned. She took to the darkness like a fish takes to water. I taught her all I know.

After several decades with me I sent her on her way to Iowa, where the Setites seem to taking a hold. I have given her no direction. I believe her ready for leaving the nest. I understand that your other Children, whom she visited, noted that she seemed meek. She plays the bruised wall flower very well. Do not be fooled by this guise. Set is great in her and through her, his will, will be achieved. She will ready this world for him so that he may walk upon this earth again assured that his children have not forgotten him. Praise be to our Dark Lord.

Always Faithful,

Delith, Priest of Set

## My own Character Raegan

### Raegan "Chases the Tale"

#### Werewolf

**Player:** Laya Liebeseller

**Character ID:**

**Status:** Inactive

**Experience Unspent:** 12

**Total Experience Earned:** 79

**Narrator:**

**Date Printed:** February 28, 2017

**Last Modified:** September 9, 2016

**Starting Date:** June 10, 2016

**Tribe:** Fianna

**Auspice:** Galliard

**Breed:** Lupus

**Rank:** Cliath

**Pack:**

**Totem:**

**Camp:**

**Nature:** Confidant

**Demeanor:** Confidant

**Position:**

**Spirit Notoriety:** 0

**Rage:** 5 00000

**Glory:** 3.0

**Gnosis:** 5 00000

**Wisdom:** 1.3

**Willpower:** 5 00000

**Honor:** 0.3

#### 10 Physical Traits:

OO Dexterous x2  
OOO Resilient x3  
OOO Steady x3  
OO Wiry x2

#### 10 Social Traits:

OOO Diplomatic x3  
OO Eloquent x2  
OO Magnetic x2  
OOO Persuasive x3

#### 6 Mental Traits:

O Clever  
OO Disciplined x2  
OOO Insightful x3

#### 0 Negative Physical Traits:

#### 0 Negative Social Traits:

#### 0 Negative Mental Traits:

#### 8 Crinos Traits:

OO Brawny x2  
O Ferocious  
O Quick  
O Rugged  
O Tough  
OO Tireless x2

#### 4 Glabro Traits:

O Brawny  
O Robust  
O Tough  
O Tireless

#### 8 Hispo Traits:

O Brawny  
O Enduring  
O Ferocious  
O Quick  
O Rugged  
O Lithe  
O Tough  
O Tireless

#### 5 Lupus Traits:

O Lithe  
O Rugged  
O Quick  
O Tough  
O Tireless

#### 6 Negative Traits:

Bestial x2  
Feral x2  
Repugnant x2

#### 3 Negative Traits:

Bestial  
Feral  
Repugnant

#### 3 Negative Traits:

Bestial x2  
Feral

#### 4 Negative Traits:

Bestial x2  
Feral x2

#### 40 Abilities:

OO Awareness x2  
OOO Brawl x3  
OOO Dodge x3  
OO Empathy x2  
OOO Expression x3  
OOO Investigation x3  
O Leadership  
OOO Lore: Garou x3  
OOO Lore: Tribe: Fianna x3  
O Lore: Weaver  
O Lore: Wyrn  
O Melee  
O Occult  
OO Performance: Oral Stories x2  
OOOOO Performance: Song x5  
OOO Rituals x3  
OO Stealth x2  
O Subterfuge

#### 13 Backgrounds:

O Ancestors  
O Kinfolk  
OOOOO Pure Breed x5  
OOO Resources x3  
OOO Rites x3

#### Gifts:

Lupus: Sense the Unnatural (basic)  
Galliard: Distractions (basic)  
Galliard: Mindspeak (basic)  
Galliard: Perfect Recall (basic)  
Fianna: Persuasion (basic)

#### Rites:

Accord: Rite of Cleansing (basic)  
Accord: Rite of Contrition (basic)  
Mystic: Rite of Binding (basic)  
Mystic: Ritual of the Questing Stone (basic)  
Mystic: Rite of Summoning (basic)  
Mystic: Rite of Talisman Dedication (basic)

Punishment: Rite of Ostracism (basic)  
Punishment: Satire Rite (int.)

**0 Influences:**

**Other Features:**

**Merits:**

Luck (6)

**Flaws:**

Dark Fate (5)

Strict Carnivore (1)

**Equipment:**

**Health Levels:**

OO	Healthy x2
OOO	Bruised x3
OO	Wounded x2
O	Incapacitated
O	Mortally Wounded

**Notes:**

**Raegan's Backstory**

My name is Raegan, so given by the Den Mother Arthenae when I would not choose, as names then held little meaning. Born lupus under the waning Gibbous, I am a Galliard of the Fianna Tribe, in a place the humans call England. This is my first story. I have thought for several moons on how to tell it, if it should be spoken or sung. I prefer singing, tone has more meaning than words, but I am told a Galliard must be as good with the spoken word as she is with her songs as some nights are good for singing and others for speaking stories. I am also told I must learn to write them, so begrudgingly (a word I learned today) my story will be written here on these pages in what my teacher calls chicken scratch, a strange saying but the meaning is clear.

To tell of the time in wolf before my changing is hard. So much of the wolf is felt, smelled, tasted. I remember the trees rushing by, cold water and warm blood on my tongue, the pride of the first kill mine a rabbit in my first fall. The smell of earth and air much different with a nose. People like to hear of good things and so I began with the good memories but if truth be told within this story what I remember most was fear. The wolf pack lived on a land with people. Mostly they left us alone until too many pups were born and then they'd come and take the pups, but only if they were small enough, otherwise the pack was culled with bullets. In my own pack I was the lowest rank always. The Alpha, she didn't like me much, alpha because she was the one to survive the longest in the woods. She didn't like it much when I did anything at all. When I was wee pup I would wander from the den because I heard something or saw something or smelled something and she'd give me little bites every time, the small scars on my back and arms are barely visible now. When I was older I was a good tracker and tried to show the pack where the deer would be for that I received a hard bat across the face. When I smelled the smell of the humans and tried to warn the pack before she sensed the danger I received another bat. So I stopped trying and sat with the pups when they came and took the food I was given and remained quiet.

Until one day the humans came to take the pups again. When the humans came the others hid from them in the woods, tales between their legs. I stalked towards the men and challenged them with a howl. She growled her low growl for me to stay in line and when I did not she attacked

me instead of them. It is where I received this scar on my thigh from where she raked me with her claws.

Some days later the others came with her to the empty den and tried to chase me away. The others had never attacked me before but this time they did and that is when I changed, in beginning of my third winter. I changed and remember nothing but running after that, running and running and running as the trees tried to grab me and the lights of the people blurred by. I woke somewhere far from where I came from dried blood in my teeth and in my coat.

For many days after I walked north. Where I was there were too many people, people everywhere. I stayed in the shadows until I came upon a bawn, where I happened upon a man who changed into a wolf. I was so frightened I backed away quickly and hid in the forest that surrounded the Sept. For many days I watched unnoticed. Looking back it is likely that they noticed both me and my skittish nature and let me watch them cautiously. It was a man-wolf, a metis that approached me finally when I had dared to come to the edge of a large clearing and sit in the sun. He needed no words to speak with me. He came and he sat and he told me, "I am like you and you are like me and you have come to the right place". All this he said with no words. It is what lies beyond words that hold meaning. His name was Toben.

This second part of my tale comes much later than the first written only after enough time has passed that writing it doesn't hurt so much. It has now been many years since I first became Garu. Once I believed tales ought to make people happy, begin with happiness, innocence, decency and end with hope or love or contentment. This story is none of those things. It begins with jealousy and corruption and ends with loss through a love and dance both forbidden.

The story could be told from the perspective of the cub Rupert, Arune Fianna, newly made pack alpha by his four Arune pack mates. Or told from the hearts Elivia and Marcus who pined for each other. It could be told from the eyes Ragabash Den Father Benjen who rationalized his closed ears and act of small revenge with the lie that his actions would hurt no one but might teach an Alpha Arune a lesson. Perhaps even it could be told from the blackened soul of that Alpha Arune, whose name I will not say, who had before lost all hope in Gaia.

Some days I wish I had been any of those others, instead of myself, who was only the observer, watching the story unfold to its bitter end, acting only after my actions were useless and yet it is from this perspective the story must be told.

Upon the day of the summer solstice a new pack was formed. Five Arune Fianna cubs joined together under Stag. Rupert a fearsome young homid cub who hunted as if he had been wolf all his life, loud and boisterous and head strong, which was offset by Branden. Branden was a homid known for both his patience and his rage. Where Rupert ran headlong into the fray, Branden stayed back awhile hunting his prey silently in the night under a new moon. Once angered, however, his battle cry would rattle the heart of any enemy and he would not stop until every last one lay dead upon the ground. Jane was odd girl out, often found skulking in the corner after having been punished for this or that misdeed, always gripping of being treated unfairly, yowling like a kitten. Elivia and Marcus both lupus were a strange pair. They had come from the same pack but not of the same parents, had grown up side by side and changed on the

same day. Neither spoke of their first change, their eyes often glazing over when the topic was mentioned.

It was upon the Autumnal Equinox when they informed the Den parents and the Alpha of the Sept that they were leaving on their Coming of Age quest and cliath challenge which was given to them by the Alpha Arune. They would not say what the quest was, only that they were leaving at first light. That evening Benjen came to me.

“It has been four long years since you joined us,” he said to me, “and in all that time you have never taken on a challenge for rank to rise above cub. I have a challenge for you.”

I remember looking at him skeptically as his eyes gleamed in the dying sun.

“I want you to find me a story. The pack of Arune is leaving tonight for their rank challenge. I wish to know what they have been sent to do. Follow them, unseen for as long as you can, join them out in the open if you wish but do not come back or speak to anyone of your quest until their story is ended.”

“Why unseen?”

“Because, the Arune Alpha has them doing a secret mission. I get the impression he does not want anyone to know what he has them doing.”

“And you don’t like him.”

Benjen balked at me, “You think I would allow my feelings to get in the way young pup? I am Ragabash, your elder and I have issued you a challenge. Do you, or do you not accept?”

Benjen is not a big wolf. Born a homid, a Ragabash Fianna, he was The Fool through and through and played it well at every moot. He goaded and prodded and spoke the shames of anyone, everyone but was rarely mean. The Alpha Arune was a stern old lupus and cared little for what he thought of as childish games and useless nonsense. He saw no need for the Ragabash, he was a strange fellow with many scars. It was some years ago, before I arrived, that Benjen had found out a secret of the Arune and aired his secret at a moot. In all my years here, no one ever spoke the secret, a shame hidden deep in his past is all they would tell me. The Arune lashed out in rage having frenzied a frenzy that could not be calmed and swiped Benjen hard across the face which left scars marring a once perfect jawline. They fought upon the floor of the lodge and Benjen lost, badly. There was no honor or glory in his defeat for either side. Benjen had been looking, searching tirelessly to find a way to demote the Arune, to find a way to fight back.

I thought for a long minute. *What harm could come from following a few cubs around a few days?* I thought to myself. *There is no way upon Gaia’s green face that an Alpha Arune would ask a pack of cubs to do anything to outrageous anyhow.*

And so I accepted. Had I known then, that a few days meant a few weeks or that Benjen was so determined to find dirt that he told all the others on the sept not to answer my calls until I returned because I was not allowed to speak to anyone or return home until the story was done,

perhaps I would have answered differently. Although I was a cub I was older, by more than a couple of years than all of those small teenagers sent off to their doom, once there I could not leave them and no one was to come my aid.

So I followed them to a Kinfolk ramshackle town just outside a city near the border of Scotland, a few days run north of the Caren. It stunk of wyrm, but I had been told that anywhere near a city stunk. They didn't seem Fianna kinfolk, but they were kinfolk, I overheard the five speaking of it as they camped on the road. And besides the Arune wasn't Fianna, he was Get of Fenris, perhaps it's his own kin. I could not get close enough to figure out what was really going on. At first they began collecting things for them. Pieces of tree bark or sap, herbs or game. I saw the Alpha Arune only once. He seemed pale, unwell. Perhaps the kinfolk were trying to heal a sickness. This went on for weeks. I followed Elivia and Marcus a ways from the small town onto some privately owned land where they gathered berries. I listened closely to their conversation. "I don't like this place Elivia. Those kinfolk, their... their not right."

"Pathetic," she answered. She sounded on edge as if she didn't really mean what she was saying. Her eyes shifted one way and another as if she were looking for watchers in the woods. "Both Rupert and our Alpha Arune have given us our orders. Follow them." This was not like her. She was normally to the point but not harsh. I heard him sigh and they began their walk back in silence, when they stopped a moment and he kissed her, not a friendly kiss, a lover's kiss if I ever saw one. That was the first time I called home, Benjen, our Den Mother, Toben, but no body answered. I dared not call the Alpha, not yet. Not before I was sure.

I should have thought to check the umbra, but I only went where they went and it did not cross my mind. As the weeks passed the pack seemed more and more on edge roaming farther and farther from the small kinfolk enclave to gather their ingredients which made no sense to me what so ever. Berries from a bush that only grows in the foothills of Scotland. An entire tree of tree bark from a blackthorn tree, rain water from a bowl naturally made of rock. What could they possibly need these ingredients for? I did not understand but still I followed. When they stayed with the kinfolk I often heard shouting with displeased tones. The longer they stayed the higher the tension built. And then one day Elivia and Marcus were gone. Their pack mates couldn't find them, couldn't hear them, couldn't feel them. When they went out searching I checked their small camp they had made for themselves and found a note the other's had missed tucked into a tree near where their bedrolls had been.

This will be the only time I use the Alpha Arunes name, for it insights in me so much rage I wish I could call upon the Gaia herself to release her fury upon him. "Balton has found us a place where we can be happy together. We cannot go home. You know that. We know that. Balton has said so, on many occasions. We cannot go home. You will see us someday soon we know it."

I slipped the note back into its place with shaking hands.

I tried again, to call home, all seven numbers I knew, but no one answered. The others returned to camp as they had lost the tracks and found the note.



It was then that The Arune stepped from the shadows, out of breath, holding a piece of paper in hand.

“You received one too?” He was so pale, so sickly thin and the taint of the wyrm followed him. The others seemed not to notice his stench.

“Yes,” answered Bradon, “she said you...”

“Have you found a trail?” the Arune interrupted.

Rupert nodded, “Yes but we lost it two miles north.”

“Perhaps I can help,” he said and he ran sniffing the air as if his human nose could pick up the scent. Two miles later as the remaining pack huffed and puffed behind him and I did my best to keep up and remain unseen through my fear he stopped. Something was wrong I knew it.

“The tracks they diverge here, perhaps one set is ruse. You go west I will go north.” Rupert nodded changed form into a wolf and sniffed the ground, finding the scent he began to run again and the others followed. I almost followed them. I should have followed them, but instead my instinct told me to stay. *He* watched them go and smiled. Another stepped sideways and into the real world. “Better run little Galliard,” the Black Spiral Dancer said to me, “Or you will miss your friends dance. Granted it won’t be scripted as they didn’t know they would be performing today. Perhaps you will join them.”

Never in my life had such a creature been in my presence. Never in my life had a felt so dirty. And so I ran after them, I ran as fast as I could I ran, full tilt and when I saw them ahead of me I howled the howl of danger. I did not care if the whole world knew my position.

It was upon my howl that I realized they had found Elivia and Marcus ahead of me. I ran to them and almost fell backward as I approached. I could smell the corruption of the wyrm it was everywhere. Rupert and Jane and Branden all went down simultaneously, little barbs sticking from their necks. Had mine missed I couldn’t tell. Elivia and Marcus each grabbed one, apparently assuming I would be taken care of shortly. In my panicked mind I could think of nothing but to run. I could feel the enemy closing in but could not see them. I changed to crinos, took Branden by the legs and swung him over my shoulder as I stepped sideways and hoped that whatever was on other side was better than what was on this one and I ran. I ran as fast I could looking nowhere but forward. I ran through the umbra blind terror, until the taint of wyrm began to fade. I stepped sideways again back into the real world, hoping we were closer instead of farther from home. (((it is my understanding of the umbra that it can be a rather strange place that it mimics the real world but if you don’t know where you are going you could end up somewhere entirely different than you intended. If I need to change this let me know.))))

Changing to human I checked over Branden for injuries there were none but still he did not wake. I made a shelter and hid it in the woods and began to walk, hoping to find a sign as to where we were. We were not far from the little town of Chessex, still a day or two walk from home.

Branden woke the next morning. He was silent. He, born homid and quite the hoodlum I had heard, found a car for us. We did not speak. We drove home. And still he did not speak. We came up to the stairs of the lodge and he fell upon his knees and he wept. I stood at the stairs just staring. First came the Den Mother who said something but I did not hear it. Then came Toben, Benjen, the sept Alpha, others came. I remember my tongue felt heavy, I did not look at Toben who was then shaking me. “Why didn’t you answer?”

“What?” his eyes widened in surprise.

“Why didn’t you answer your phone?”

“Benjen... Benjen said you were on your Cliath Challenge that you weren’t allowed to speak to us until you came home.”

I looked up and there he was, in front of me, Benjen, who at my glare paled but it was not me that frenzied. I would have, if the boy beside me hadn’t erupted first startling me from myself. He turned so quickly no one had time to react he shifted as lunged raking Benjen’s front from chest to groin and my face was splattered with blood. It took seven of those there to push Branden back, to knock him down, and knock him senseless.

“Where are they Raegan? Where are the others?” I don’t remember who asked.

And when I told my story through, those who attended sat mouths gaping. Our Alpha was the first to respond, sending two out to begin planning a rescue mission. Though the sept tried valiantly more than once none were recovered.

The Alpha Arune was captured, and upon him was performed the rite of Gaia’s Vengeful Teeth. I was there as witness. After his death all evidence of BSD presence disappeared and we could not find them again.

Benjen requested that he be able to call my challenge done and gift me the deed name of “Chases the Tale.” He was allowed this and I became Cliath, though I am uncertain I will ever feel I deserved the rank.

The Alpha Philodox asked me to help him perform the Satire Rite which he taught me and was used against Benjen.

Branden requested that I learn and perform the Rite of Ostracism upon him for one year and a day. The Elders though not in favor of this request acquiesced as he insisted.

I left after several the trail of BSDs went cold and sept turned in on itself. The blaming began and I was its center. The Alpha called Shamus and I left and it feels like I’m running.

## Appendix C

### **The Farm House – Maddie’s Elysium<sup>109</sup>**

The Farm House was originally built by a character named Maddie. The player who plays Maddie wrote the following.

#### Lower Level

##### **Gym (complete with weights/cardio/punching bags/a one-on-one ring)**

Contains cardio machines, punching bags, free weights, and a small one-on-one boxing ring. The gym is big enough to support 5-8 people at a time, depending on if they are using the boxing ring or not. There are mirrors along one wall, and two televisions mounted on the walls above them. There is also two small locker rooms, each containing one shower.

##### **The Prince’s office**

a room about the size of the back side-room at the site, the one with the blue chairs. Maddie would have left it empty except for a large oak desk, several shelves on the wall and a several chairs to seat the prince and visitors in his office. The room is soundproofed.

##### **Seneschal's Office**

A little smaller than the Prince’s office, it was left empty like the Prince’s. Now that Maddie is Seneschal, it is full of shelves with books and other random “office” belongings, including a computer and an electric cello which she keeps tucked away in a corner. The room is also soundproofed, and about once a month (we’ll say on the first of every month) Maddie sweeps her office for bugs.

##### **Gather place 1**

This is a large, open room filled with comfortable furniture. It’s tastefully decorated, but isn’t necessarily ‘cozy’ looking. It very much looks like a photo out of a home magazine.

##### **Gather place 2**

A bit smaller than the first room, again filled with comfortable furniture. This room also contains a large television as well as a bookshelf full of movies - a wide range of topics and genres.

##### **Kitchen**

A small kitchen is nestled in the back of the house. It has a stove, fridge/freezer, microwave and a few counters and cupboards. Mostly, this is here for the convenience of any ghouls/mortals/security members.

##### **Security room**

There is a security room in the front of the house that has room to fit 2-3 security people comfortably, and has several monitors with the security tapes rolling from every room (except the officers ...offices). The cameras do not record unless someone in the office records them. The Keeper’s remote/pda, which Maddie gave also has the ability to begin recording the cameras.

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<sup>109</sup> Beyond a change of names were necessary for anonymity this document has not been changed from the original.

**Foyer by the front door**

There's a small foyer by the front door with a large closet for people to hang their coats and take off their shoes.

**Small gallery/Library**

There is a very small gallery/library. The library has a small mini fridge and a few shelves with a few different types of liquor - most importantly whiskey (the library was basically designed to be a Luni kit). The only "art" in the gallery section is the memorial to Ambrose and Vanessa.

**Sheriff's office**

Conveniently located next to the garage, the Sheriff's office is the same size as the Seneschal's and was also empty except for the desk, and is also soundproofed. The only difference from the other offices is that the door has a nameplate which reads "Mac."

**4 car garage**

Maddie's intention was to never actually let anyone park in the garage. It has the sewer entrance and otherwise is basically a very large, concrete space...for if anyone needs to be investigated/etc. This was essentially her solution to staked bodies being taken into Elysium.

**Keeper's office**

Same size as the Sheriff's/Seneschal's office, the same large oak desk. The only difference is that this office also includes monitors to watch the security cameras. This office also had bookshelves built into it.

**Brujah Room**

There's a small room off to the side that has several pieces of old and worn furniture as well old dishes. By this time the walls already have a few scuffs because I'm pretty sure one or two people have used it by now? Anyway, it's clearly a room to go smash things in, if you need it.

**UPPER LEVEL**

The upper level contains five large bedrooms, each with two full beds - and otherwise set up like a REALLY nice dorm room, each with their own personal bathroom. Basically, Maddie was planning to use this area as rooms for security to use. However, they are positioned in such a way to also be good vantage points if they ever needed to shoot out the windows.

**BASEMENT**

Maddie did \*not\* tell anyone else about the basement - mostly because she's interested in seeing who goes sneaky around to find it. The basement door is around the corner from the kitchen at the very back of the house. It is light tight and empty, except for some nice carpeting. As you go down the stairs to the basement there are several signs that say "Now leaving Elysium" that are heavily bolted into place.

## Appendix D

### **Code of Ethics<sup>110</sup>**

One World by Night (OWbN) is a diverse community existing within an open and safe environment free of bias and harassment, strengthening our environment of trust and integrity.

Our goal is to create a healthy, safe environment for enjoying the classic World of Darkness.

We want to foster a positive community that respects its participants. Our participants come from a variety of backgrounds and countries where different types and tones of speech may be acceptable. OWbN seeks to find the balance between promoting sportsmanship and cultivating a community that encourages honest and civil conversations that are relevant to our group.

### **Code of Conduct**

Our Code of Ethics (COE) and Conduct (CoC) defines the foundation of our organization and what we stand for and against. It is a means to grow and prosper as a community and guide us in times when faced with difficult challenges and hardship. The guidelines here are intended mostly for Out of Character (OOC) purposes unless specifically stated against In Character (IC) purposes.

Disciplinary proposals and action made in regards to our COE and CoC against a member of One World by Night are subject to the Executive Team. The Executive Team will arbitrate what is and is not a violation and present occurrences to Council for disciplinary action if and when necessary. It is not advised that games make proposals for disciplinary action based of this Code of Conduct without first communicating with the Executive Team.

Violations can and do happen from time to time unfortunately. Sometimes they are accidents and other times they are intentional. For the lesser actions on this list, mediation with the offended party and the offender may take place. Should there ever be questions on this it is strongly advised you seek out the Executive Team for assistance.

### **#1 Personal Life Comes First**

Our personal responsibilities always take precedence over One World by Night (AKA OWbN) matters. We understand our chronicles are works of fantasy. If the line ever starts to blur, we must be responsible members of our community and stop and speak with appropriate chronicle staff or an Executive Team member, and take whatever time off from OWbN events is necessary to put things back in proper perspective.

### **#2 Obey the Law**

We are safe during all OWbN activities. For safety reasons, stunting, actually drinking blood, and other activities a presiding Storyteller/ Chronicle staff finds likely to cause physical harm or breaks local, state or federal laws are specifically not allowed at events. All physical contact must be consensual. Local chronicles may extrapolate further, specific restrictions for their local community as necessary.

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<sup>110</sup> This document has not been edited from the original.

### **#3 Be Inclusive**

Whenever possible, try to find ways to include others (especially newer players and characters) in your character's plans. Barter with them to use their character's influences to further your character's goals. Encourage them to gather information for you. Be a mentor to new arrivals. As with many things, there is a learning curve to LARP¼ be available to help newer players with questions about the setting or mechanics. Be mindful of difficult situations such as combat, death, or political defeat that may be hard for newer players to process.

### **#4 Speak Up**

Regardless of what others say and do, you are always in control of your emotions and your reactions. If you feel upset, harassed, or threatened by another participant's actions, we encourage you to politely tell them to stop. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to them directly, ask an administrative volunteer (appropriate chronicle staff or an Executive Team member) to assist in mediating the situation. If you have questions, ask.

### **#5 Personality Clashes**

While we play in a dark setting where our characters may backstab each other or be mean towards one another, we always treat our fellow players with respect. Checking in with players after a really intense or emotional scene is greatly encouraged. If you feel that you are getting overwhelmed or emotional and may lash out, take time to calm yourself and then reestablish your character's persona. Disagreements can and will happen; they are a natural occurrence and can turn into learning experiences. When two people cannot see eye to eye, they should simply agree to disagree and choose not to exist in each other's spaces except when required. If there are any specific issues, address them to the appropriate chronicle staff or the Executive Team.

### **#6 Unacceptable Behavior**

One World by Night is committed to providing members with a social environment free from harassment that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive atmosphere out of character. Engaging in any kind of harassment out of character is prohibited. The following is a list of examples for behaviors we do not support in One World by Night and are grounds for potential disciplinary action. This list represents expectations when One World by Night (OWbN) participants are dealing with other OWbN participants Out of Character. This list is not meant to be all-encompassing, but as the most basic set of guidelines.

**A. Abusive Language and Disruptive Behavior:** In Character is In Character and Out of Character is Out of Character. Keep them separate. When you are OOC, be respectful to our volunteers, our players, any event staff and event space. When you are IC, remember the section regarding Personality Clashes.

**B. Bashing and Slandorous Comments:** We do not permit the bashing of individuals (including One World by Night volunteers), groups, or other companies on our communication forums or at club events.

**C. Misinformation:** We do not tolerate the deliberate and malicious spreading of false rumors or conspiracy theories about One World by Night, its games, or its volunteers. This does not include honest mistakes¼ rather, this rule pertains to those who go out of their way to spread harmful or malicious rumors about One World by Night, its volunteers, and its community members.

**E. Demands and Threats:** We encourage you to share feedback, suggestions, and requests with us, but we expect all of our community members to refrain from

## Appendix E

### House Rules Document for Crow County By Night<sup>111</sup> (9/5/16)

Welcome to the house rules document for CCBN. The ST staff appreciates you taking the time to familiarize yourself with our rules before attending our game. That said, it is important to remember that this is a living document and that the sheer amount of source material created by White Wolf cannot be properly covered in this document. Please keep this in mind should your storyteller make a rules call that is not reflected in this document.

For core rules on basic material, please refer to the Laws of the Night book. For rules on weapons and influences, please refer to the Dark Epics book. For any other rules not mentioned in this document, rulings made in binding genre packets will take precedent, followed by the original source material.

Please note that these house rules only include rulings on powers within the vampire genre. Given the expanse of White Wolf materials available, the storytelling staff will adhere to the spirit of the house rules regarding powers with purposes and descriptions similar to those within the vampire genre. Other questionable powers will be discussed by the staff prior to the game when they are used.

Any visitors possessing blood magic, combo disciplines, custom disciplines or rituals, or rare disciplines should verify them with the ST staff before visiting. This way we can familiarize ourselves with your powers and make any necessary rules calls before you arrive. Powers not verified this way may be removed from your sheet.

Calls made by the STs during a scene are final. Discussion about ST calls is welcome and ST calls that are made during game will be recorded for consistency and added to this packet.

#### Abilities

##### Alertness

This ability can be used to cancel retests called due to surprise. This does not apply to darkness retests or the ‘guns are cool’ retest.

##### Area Knowledge

This ability can be used to find mundane locations and reduce travel time. Area Knowledge can be applicable to the area of a specific chronicle and must be specified.

##### Athletics

This ability is used for swimming, climbing, jumping, etc. It is not an effective retest in combat situations. (Brawl is used for grappling/wrestling, Throwing is used for throwing.)

##### Awareness

To use this ability you may make a static mental challenge (difficulty 4 for powers with a visible effect, difficult 8 for powers with no visible effect) after any supernatural ability that requires an activation cost or opposed challenge is used to know that there was a supernatural occurrence.

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<sup>111</sup> Beyond the changing of names where necessary this document has not been edited from the original.



Sustained effects are only detectable when first activated. Obfuscate and other powers that grant invisibility are not subject to this rule.

### Blindfighting

This ability can be used to cancel a darkness retest. (If you are not able to see, you are down two traits on all challenges. If you are in an opposed challenge with a target who can see, they may call an additional retest against you for darkness.)

### Crafts

Time required for the creation of a craft will be determined by the ST on the basis of scope, intricacy, and time dedicated each downtime by the character. Crafts can be made to the level of ability possessed by the character with a chop made for each level at an increasing difficulty as listed below:

Crafts 1 - Difficulty 5 traits

Crafts 2 - Difficulty 7 traits

Crafts 3 - Difficulty 9 traits

Crafts 4 - Difficulty 11 traits

Crafts 5 - Difficulty 13 traits

At Crafts 3, one adjustment can be made from the Dark Epics statistics, giving a bonus trait to a weapon or removing a negative trait. At Crafts 4, the crafter can instead add a special ability, change the concealability of the item by one step, and work with rare materials such as silver or cold iron. At Crafts 5, the crafter can make two different adjustments, including adding one damage with a negative trait to a weapon, or one health level to an armor. All adjustments are subject to ST discretion based on the item in question and must be sensible. Items brought in from other game will be required to abide by these crafting rules within this game. "Mastercraft" abilities are not allowed to further modify combat statistics in this game.

**\*\*A note on creativity:** the ST's welcome players to try to be creative with crafts to create specialized items and equipment. However, all item creation and modifications are subject to ST approval. Item bonuses do not stack.

### Drive

You may drive an automatic transmission vehicle without having any ranks in drive. Any vehicle that does not have an automatic transmission requires at least one rank in drive to operate.

### Expression

This ability uses the same difficulty progression for quality as the Crafts rules.

### Hunting

You may retest your initial blood chop with hunting and take the most favorable of the two chops. In addition, you may expend a dot of hunting at check-in to gain one trait of blood without endangering yourself in any way. Finally, this ability allows you retest a 'world-hates-you' chop at the beginning of any feeding scene.

### Linguistics/Languages

To learn a new language, you must study it for 6 months. The Linguistics ability will reduce the time it takes to learn a language by 1 month for each dot. The Natural Linguist ability reduces the final time in half. You can only study one language at a time. Linguistics represents the study of languages and will allow you to work with languages with which you are not yet familiar or even create your own. This ability will take time to use and cannot be used during a game session.

#### Meditation

Each dot of Meditation can be used once per downtime period to recover one Willpower. Each dot requires a mental test, difficulty 5 to recover Willpower. These tests can be run at check in to represent meditation during the downtime period. Alternatively, you can attempt to recover Willpower during game. This requires 30 minutes of concentration, during which time you will be out of play.

#### Rending

This ability is not allowed in our game.

#### Throwing

This ability is used for any thrown attacks. Levels of Potence can be used to increase distance and to throw heavier objects. See Potence for more Details.

#### Disciplines

##### General Rules

Black Hawk by Night limits the number of advanced out of clan disciplines that any single character can possess to three. If visiting characters are beyond this cap at check in, they may choose which powers will be removed from their sheet for the evening. Blood magic is not subject to this rule.

#### Animalism

Feral Whispers - In addition to speaking with animals, this allows you to communicate with creatures using Subsume the Beast or Shape of the Beast. This power still requires eye contact and a verbal component, so you cannot overhear a conversation held by Feral Whispers. Feral whispers is not a language in and of itself, and is only used to communicate with animals or animal-like creatures.

Beckoning - At the beginning of the night, social traits can be used as herd.

Quell the Beast - The negative effects of this power only last for a scene or hour. When using Quell to bring a vampire out of frenzy, they do not suffer negative traits, as written.

Subsume the Beast - Spending 4 Social Traits allows the use of Obfuscate while possessing an animal. Normal expenditures for use of this power still apply. You are not aware of what is happening to your body while in Subsume unless you are put into torpor or staked, at which point you snap back.

#### Auspex

When contesting Obfuscate with Auspex, you are considered up one trait for each level of Auspex you possess.

**Telepathy** - Telepathy is undetectable to those outside the connection after it is established. If a person in Telepathy is required to enter a challenge for an ability that they do not have, but the other character does, the second character can 'coach' the first, allowing them to make the challenge. This does not allow any ability retest.

**Spirits Touch**- An individual using Spirit's touch no longer has to expend mental traits. Instead, a static chop at difficulty 7 is thrown, subject to the following modifiers

Personal Object: -2

Casually used object: +1

Object tied to sudden emotional burst: +3

A successful use of spirits touch will not impart any negative effects strong enough to have a mechanical effect. On a loss, the information gathered is unclear but mental traits can still be spent to recover information. Sorting through information that way imparts a greater risk and does risk negative side effects. Spirit's Touch retests with investigation as per standard Auspex Rules

**Psychic Projection (general)** - In order to sign into game, your physical body must be present. When travelling in the astral plane, you are in a realm separate from the umbra or the shadowlands. There are still hazards associated from going to some locations in Astral form. Travelling at the speed of thought means that it takes one round to reach any location with which you are familiar. To process what you are seeing while moving in Astral, you must travel at a slower speed. While actively searching, your maximum speed is 24 steps per round or approximately 17 mph. You are not aware of what is happening to your body while in Astral unless you are put into torpor or staked, at which point you snap back.

**Psychic Projection (combat)** - When two beings using Astral Projection enter into combat, they make opposed challenges using Mental traits, retesting with Brawl and Dodge as per normal combat. You cannot use physical disciplines in Astral Combat. No other powers may be used to damage another person's silver cord or astral body.

**Psychic Projection (escape)** - If one astral being is attempting to retreat to their body, they 'zip-line' in a manner that can be followed by another being doing nothing but movement. During this chase, an attempt can be made to lose the pursuer by making a stealth vs. investigation challenge. Your silver cord is only visible for a few feet behind you.

**Psychic Projection (manifesting)** - When you spend a Willpower to manifest, you manifest during the mental action phase, take your action, and return to the Astral plane at the end of the round. During this time, you can be subject to social or mental disciplines, but your Astral body cannot be dealt damage from a physical source. You may not use mental or social powers that require expenditures of blood while in Astral form unless you have a way to forcibly spend the blood, as you do not have control over your body while in Astral form.

**Using Auspex to Break Mask of 1,000 Faces** - If you suspect someone is using Mask of 1,000 Faces, you must win the challenge to break their mask. If you lose the challenge, not only do you not know the opponent's true face, but you also do not know that they are using Mask. (Hence there is no reason to retest unless the opponent does something to make you suspect further and try again.)

### Celerity

Mental or social actions are only allowed during the normal action while using Celerity. Celerity does not let you win ties with guns, but it does let you call the bomb. The basics of Celerity are not considered a breach of the Masquerade.

### Chimerstry

When you create an illusion with the first three levels of Chimerstry, you must make a social challenge against anyone encountering your illusion to have it affect them. All disbelief is subject to situation and ST discretion; it will sometimes allow a static test to break Chimerstry, and sometimes allow the target to completely ignore Chimerstry. Use of Auspex can allow a disbelief chop, but does not grant any additional traits, as tests for Chimerstry are social in nature.

Horrid Reality - This power cannot be used without a storyteller present, and the storyteller will be allowed to determine any mechanical effects of the illusions created with this power. When targeted by Horrid Reality, if you possess Aegis, you can spend 1 temporary willpower to ignore all chimerical damage from Horrid Reality for one round. If you have spent for Aegis in a round to ignore physical damage, you also ignore all chimerical damage from Horrid Reality. Use of Aegis does not grant a disbelief chop against Chimerstry.

### Dominate

Defenders in a Dominate challenge can retest with Intimidation and are not immune to Dominate if the aggressor fails the challenge. You can be dominated into dangerous situations but not suicidal ones (this line is subject to ST discretion). You cannot force someone to teach you any Disciplines with any level of dominate.

Conditioning - To use conditioning, you must make a mental chop against the target once each day until you accumulate a number of successes equal to their permanent Willpower in all cases. In order to use this power, you must have unrestricted access to the victim for the duration of that time. This power may be used to program and deprogram drones, as written, but may also be used to enhance lower level powers of Dominate. For example: Conditioning a target can be used to rewrite large portions of a subject's memory, or to implant up to five mesmerisms in a target victim. These other uses of Dominate allow the subject to maintain their free will, but also does not give them extra defenses against the Dominate of others, or grant you the ability to Dominate them with no challenge or without eye contact.

Possession - In order to sign into game, your physical body must be present. Spending 4 Mental Traits allows the use of Obfuscate while possessing someone. Normal expenditures for use of this power still apply. If you are possessing a body, you must declare when you are leaving a body at the beginning of the round and you do not exit the body until the end of the round. You can still act as normally during the round. Astral projection still leaves one connected to the possessed body and they will still suffer the listed consequences for harm to the possessed body, even while projected from it. You are not aware of what is happening to your body while in Possession unless you are put into torpor or staked, at which point you snap back)

### Fortitude

Permanent Willpower can be expended for Aegis even when the target is Quelled. Aegis lets you win ties when soaking damage with the intermediate levels of fortitude without spending

physical traits. Aegis must be declared before the simple chops for staking are thrown. Using Aegis stops physical carrier attacks for the round in which it is used. Aegis is not a cure all. Massive trauma from a single source may still torpor or kill your character in spite of the Aegis ability.

#### Melpominee

Phantom Speaker- A character using heightened senses hearing can test to overhear Phantom Speaker. Phantom Speaker does trigger awareness.

#### Obfuscate

Obfuscate only works on people that are in your presence. Attacks that target an obfuscated individual by circumstance, when the individual's presence would not be known, still damage them normally (such as explosives). Taking damage breaks basic Obfuscate.

Cloak the Gathering - This power expands the utility of all previous levels in the following ways. First it allows the previous levels of the power to be used on any subject that is not actively resisting by expending a mental trait for each target. Second it allows clothing and other worn articles to be affected by Mask of 1000 Faces.

#### Obtenebration

Activating levels 1-3 take your action for the round. Level 4 happens at the end of the round.

Arms of the Abyss - Summoned arms can use your Brawl, Dodge, and Survival retests in combat. These arms do not act on the round they are summoned. You may only maintain a total number of Arms of the Abyss equal to your permanent Willpower

Shroud of Night- If you have both Heightened Senses and Eyes of the Beast active (or other powers that negate the entire -2 penalty from Shroud of Night) you are able to see well enough to use powers that require line of sight or eye contact with subjects within the shroud. The caster may still apply the darkness retest on these challenges, and powers that require the subject to see you may fail if they are not able to see you.

Shroud of Absence - When using this power, you must make a gen bid with each character you are affecting with it, as it has a Dominate component. Additionally, players will be alerted to the option of entering into a Willpower challenge while in the presence of a sphere rather than having to specifically request said challenge.

#### Potence

Throwing with Potence only allows you to throw larger objects, throw objects farther, or do an additional lethal damage if appropriate. You do not get the ability to call the bomb or win ties when using Potence to throw. If you wish to hit for distance, you can lower the level of unarmed base damage by one to move the victim 10ft back. Simple tests will be given when using Intermediate or higher Potence with a weapon not built to withstand large amounts of force or in an excessive fashion, subject to ST discretion. Failure on these tests will remove a bonus trait from that weapon, when these traits are exhausted the weapon has broken.

#### Presence

Using any level of Presence except Summons requires them to be in your presence.

Awe - This power can be used to gain eye contact in combat; this negates your ability to use awe as a retest in any subsequent actions this round.

Dread Gaze - This power is an obvious breach of the Masquerade, but does not require the target to see your face if you make your vampiric countenance known in some other way.

Summon - If a target is summoned by more than one person, they go to the one with the lowest generation. You can be summoned into hostile situations or by known enemies. In order to ‘tag’ a person with your Presence powers to be summoned later, you must make a social challenge with the target (either from Dead Gaze, Entrancement, or Majesty). In order to ‘tag’ a person to be summoned later without using Presence, you must have taken part in conversation with the subject for at least ten minutes.

When summoned, you are unaware you are being summoned and will do your best to rationalize a graceful exit in order to travel to the location of the individual who summoned you in the form you are in.

Summons lasts a scene or an hour, whichever is shorter or until the individual announces themselves to the person who summoned them.

Majesty - This power affects anyone in your presence that can see or hear you. While attempting to break another person’s majesty, you are considered the defender for the challenge, and can retest with Willpower.

### Protean

While in flight form you are considered to have three physical traits except in defensive challenges and challenges involving natural stealth. In these challenges you are considered to have your base physicals, with three extra bonus traits in challenges of natural stealth (not Obfuscate). Only Gangrel can choose their forms and the appearance of those forms.

Shape of the Beast: Rules are used out of the Gangrel clanbook, not the core book. Non-standard fight forms must be approved by an ST.

### Quietus

When you coat a weapon with Scorpion’s Touch or Baal’s Caress it lasts until that weapon is used, or until the end of the night. These traits are limited by the number of bonus traits the weapon possess. Dagon’s Call is considered one source of damage and the victim may retest with Survival. Taste of Death does two aggravated damage instead of one, and is also corrosive to non-organic materials.

### Thanatosis

To use Withering on someone’s head requires two hard challenges in addition to the physical challenge to make contact, unless they are immobilized. Once someone’s head has been Withered they can only use physical disciplines. You must declare any blood and willpower expenditures before the attack.

### Vicissitude

Any use of this power takes time to perform. Combat maneuvers using Vicissitude are not allowed. Permanent modifications using Vicissitude cost XP and should be verified with your ST before use. Vicissitude mods are obvious unless they are intentionally hidden, which requires additional tests.

Horrid Form - This power is meant for natural combat and any use of weapons will result in a two trait penalty. Transformations always take place at the end of a round.

Blood Form - You cannot attack in any way from Blood Form.

#### Thaumaturgy (general)

There is simply too much blood magic to do a write up for all of it. Please try to have a copy of the MET write up or the original source material available in case there are questions about the wording of your powers. If an ST does not have a write up for your path of blood magic available, they may refuse the use of that power. The house rules below have been made based on the occurrences and rules calls that are common in this game and calls with other paths may be subject to ST discretion.

For all characters where Thaumaturgy is not listed as one of their three disciplines, every path of Thaumaturgy is purchased at out of clan costs. Other characters purchase all Thaumaturgy after the primary path at out of clan costs.

According to pg. 177 of Laws of the Night any use of Thaumaturgy unless otherwise noted requires both verbal and somatic components. When using Thaumaturgy in combat, it is the only action you can take in a given round unless specified in the power. If you spend blood for Celerity, you can still use its bonuses to dodge, but you are unable to take the additional actions it would normally award you. The exception to this is Dual Thought from the Focused Mind path, which allows an additional mental action in a turn (not an additional casting of Thaumaturgy).

Any challenge from a power or that involves a Primary Trait bid against the opponents Virtues (including Willpower and Morality) is instead resolved as a contested challenge against that Trait category. I.E. a Social vs. Willpower challenge is Social vs. Social. This is for balance purposes.

Celerity is applicable in Mental vs Physical challenges to dodge if the individual being affected by the power can make it into cover as part of their dodge action.

#### Elemental Mastery

Elemental Form - When in an altered form you no longer have blood in your system. This means you are immune to certain applications of thaumaturgy but other disciplines may be difficult to use.

#### Focused Mind

One Track Mind - The target is disrupted from their loop if they take damage or if something directly interferes with them completing their task.

Perfect Clarity - This power uses your mental action for the turn, it is not a reflexive action.

#### Spirit Manipulation

Hermetic Sight- This power requires a blood trait to activate.

Voice of Command - This power runs the danger of gaining spirit notoriety whenever a spirit is commanded against its nature.

Entrap Ephemera - See the Misc rules below regarding Fetishes.

### Transmutation

Gaol - When attempting to imprison a person, risk three traits and make a mental v. physical chop. In regards to larger objects risk half the suggested trait expenditure, rounded up.

### Rituals

Thaumaturges can activate a number of rituals or magic items equal to half their Occult rating, rounded up, at check in without having to chop or risk traits for them.

Bureaucratic Condemnation - This ritual can be cast on one subject each downtime.

Expedient Paperwork - This ritual can be cast to benefit one influence action each downtime.

Eyes of the Past – This ritual allows you to act as an observer in the room, but does not allow you to interact with the scene in any way, including using any other disciplines through it.

Pavis of the Foul Presence - This ritual does not reflect Summons or Majesty as listed. Instead it negates Summons and has no effect on Majesty.

Principle Infusion of Vitae - The maximum number of items that may be infused with blood is equal to three times the caster's permanent occult ability. Activating a principle infusion takes a mental action and only one infusion can be activated with each action.

Stone of the True Form - Stone of the True Form only activates when wielded in the hand of the caster. Only one stone can be created at any time.

### Necromancy

Soulsteal- The use of this power does not turn the victim into a wraith and they are not subject to any power which would affect a wraith. The soul cannot use any of its social or mental powers and is helpless while removed from its body.

### Merits/Flaws

No Merit or Flaw may bring a character's traits above their Generational maximum in any area, unless explicitly stated they do so. Any Merit that would normally grant a named trait instead grants a bonus trait for comparing on ties in challenges related to that trait.

When creating a character, only 7 points from flaws can be claimed. When buying merits at character creation, you can spend up to 7 points at normal cost. Any merit that would take you over 7 points costs double, as if you were buying it after character creation.

### Ability Aptitude

You are considered up two traits on challenges involving the chosen ability, but not with powers that use that ability for a retest. This merit only applies to one specialization in the case of abilities that require a specialization such as Crafting and Performance. This merit cannot be taken for abilities that are directly related to combat, such as Archery, Brawl, Dodge, Firearms, Melee, and Throwing.

### Addiction



Addiction is run by the book, you can only feed from people who have partaken in your addiction. Points will be awarded on a sliding scale based on the substance you are addicted to. Accessible drugs such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol are worth 2 points. Illegal drugs such as marijuana and party drugs, and drugs that require a prescription like narcotic painkillers and antidepressants are worth 3 points. Hard drugs like heroin, meth, and cocaine are worth 4 points. You suffer the effects of this drug when you feed and for the scene or hour after. Players with addiction on their sheets under previous house rules will be refunded points based on their addiction, or be offered the opportunity to work to buy it off.

#### Ambidexterity

This merit grants an additional trait to applicable challenges. It does not allow for offhand actions. This mechanic is being implemented to help streamline the flow of combat. This is applicable in ranged combat if the character is firing two guns at the same time. However, bonus traits from the weapons do not stack.

#### Catlike Balance

You do not gain additional traits on dodging.

#### Code of Honor

All codes must be fully written up for ST approval.

#### Efficient Digestion

You are considered one blood trait up on a loss or tie during a blood chop in addition to the normal effects.

#### False Reflection

In addition to the normal use of this power, you can instead spend a Willpower to have it effect all cameras for the scene or hour. As per the book, this merit only applies to Mask of 1000 Faces.

#### Flesh of the Corpse

This flaw awards three points.

#### Lucky

There are two versions of the Lucky merit. You may pay 3 points to receive one free retest each game or 7 points to receive 3 free retests each game. These retests may be used for any chop.

#### Natural Leader

This merit costs 2 points.

#### Powerful Ghoul

In an effort to make Powerful Ghoul more dynamic and interesting you can spend your XP to make more clearly defined Ghoul. You can spend your own earned exp. on at a 1 to 2 rate. The experience you can spend on your ghoul is capped at 100 points. So after buying powerful ghoul, you can make a sheet, and spend up to 50 experience points of your own to have 100 points to spend on your own ghoul. Powerful Ghouls will not be able to develop their own influence. Please note that if your ghoul is killed or leave in some other way, your points do not get refunded.

### Weak Willed

This flaw awards 6 points. You lose ties on Dominate challenges instead of automatically failing.

### Miscellaneous Rulings

#### Character Creation

All characters start with one dot in each lore appropriate to their character (typically: Kindred, Clan, and Sect). New players receive Common Sense on their sheet for their first three months of play without cost. All players start knowing one language, which is assumed to be English unless otherwise specified. We want people to be the generation they want to be so we will offer an exp spread for generation.

14th - 30 meta points (plus flaw) 13th - 30 meta points 12th - 25 meta points 11th - 20 meta points 10th - 15 meta points 9th - 10 meta points 8th - 10 meta points PC ghouls - 20 meta points Additionally, all players who submit a complete background that is approved by the ST staff will receive 30 meta points.

#### Cell Phones

Phones take three combat rounds to call or text one sentence. You can speak one sentence each round.

#### Combo Disciplines

Combo disciplines listed in a clan book are only obtainable by members of that clan. Combo disciplines that are player created or listed in other books (such as the Anarch book) require that the player has at least one of the disciplines required for it in clan. All combo disciplines require a documented teacher (or mentor) and the appropriate prerequisites as listed in its MET write up. Development of custom combo disciplines is possible and requires the advanced level of all disciplines being used with a minimum of 6 months development time, further development time to be added based on the level of disciplines being used to create the power, in addition to any other requirements at ST discretion, as well as ST approval. Exceptions to restrictions may be allowed in extenuating circumstances at ST discretion.

#### Death and Dismemberment

When a vampire dies their body turns to dust. Any body part removed from a kindred, unless preserved under thaumaturgical conditions, turns to dust at the end of the scene. To fully kill a kindred a specific coup-de-grace action, either removing the head or dealing aggravated damage, needs to be completed. When a ghoul dies their body rapidly advances to its actual age.

#### Diablerie

Diablerie veins disappear after three months. If you diablerize someone who is three or more generations lower than you, they may attempt a hard chop to become the dominant personality in your body. If you diablerize someone who has more than one derangement, you must make an additional conscience/conviction challenge or receive a permanent derangement of the ST's choice. When you diablerize, you have the option of forgoing the 2 gift exp to instead take one dot of an ability they possess.

#### Expenditures

Blood expenditures must be declared at the beginning of the round, but their purpose need not be declared until the power is activated. Willpower expenditures are made on your initiative before the action is performed. By spending blood to gain physicals, you can exceed your generational max for a single round. Spending blood up to your generational max lasts for the scene or until spent.

#### Falling Damage

Take 1 bashing damage for every 5 feet fallen. After 50 feet all damage is converted to lethal. Make an Athletics chop (difficulty 6) to reduce to reduce the damage taken as if you had fallen 10 feet less.

#### Feeding

To drain blood from a target, you must first have successfully grappled them (opposed physical challenge, retest with Brawl). At this point, you can drink 3 traits each round. This cannot be increased by Celerity.

#### Fetishes

Any item card containing a fetish must note what spirit was used to craft it or it will not be allowed in the game. Fetishes that were made through negotiation with a spirit should note any payment or chimenage owed or paid. Fetishes that were made by werewolves are not usable by vampires unless they specify that they can be activated without gnosis.

Activating a fetish costs one Willpower and requires an activation chop. Fetishes made through negotiation require a simple chop to activate. Fetishes made by force (or that do not specify a chimenage) require a hard chop to activate. Losing an activation chop results in two more simple chops; failing either means the spirit breaks free and is likely to attack the former wielder or crafter. Creating fetishes forcibly can also result in negative spirit notoriety.

#### Frenzy

When a frenzy challenge is called for you may declare a willpower expenditure before the test is thrown. This allows you to stave off the frenzy for ten minutes, but you need to leave the source of the frenzy. While in frenzy you cannot use any mental or social disciplines. You gain a free retest defending against any mental and social powers that alter mood and emotion. To bring someone out of frenzy they need to be beaten in two social challenges from a single target, this challenge retests with empathy, leadership, or intimidation. If an ST does not feel you are acting appropriately for your frenzy your sheet will be confiscated and played as an NPC until the end of frenzy.

#### Healing

Healing does not require an action and is effective at the top of each round when blood is spent. Aggravated damage can be healed by expending 3 blood. Only one aggravated damage can be healed each night under normal circumstances. To heal additional aggravated damage in a single night you must expend a willpower in addition to the 3 blood. You heal one aggravated damage each week over the downtime, unless you expend Willpower to increase this rate.

#### Learning Unique Disciplines

To learn a clan-specific discipline (any discipline not of the cardinal 8), you need to ingest a trait of blood from a member of the clan that possesses that discipline.

## Movement

A walking pace is one step a round. Two to three steps is a jog, and six is running.

Walking incurs no penalties. Jogging at two or three steps incurs a minus one trait penalty on all challenges. Running allows the PC no action other than running. As a reminder, if the PC is using any level of Obfuscate other than Mask, they are limited to one step per round if they do not wish to break Obfuscate.

## Retainer

In an effort to make retainers more dynamic and interesting you can spend your XP to make more clearly defined Retainers. You can have up to 5 different retainers. Each of these retainers can vary in point level from 1 to 5. For each level you have dedicated to any retainer you can spend your own earned exp. on at a 1 to 2 rate. The experience you can spend on each retainer is capped at 10 times the level the retainer is. So if you have a 3 point retainer Jane and a 5 point retainer Joe, you can spend 15 experience on Jane to have 30 points to spend on a sheet for her; or, 25 points on Joe to have 50 points to spend on a sheet for him. Retainers cannot develop their own influence. Please note that if these are killed or leave in some other way your points do not get refunded.

## Shields/ Defending

Shields follow the rules as stated in Dark Epics and are only applicable in defensive challenges.

## Special Abilities on Items

You must have at least one permanent dot of the appropriate ability to utilize the bonus traits or special abilities of a weapon. This includes using mental traits for firearms and archery.

## Specializations

You can only have two specializations in a given ability. Only one of those specializations may be specified for an individual level of a discipline, either while using that discipline offensively, or defending against the use of that discipline. These specializations apply to the ability used to retest in that level of the discipline.

## Surprise

If you have surprise you can make one action with an additional retest for surprise on challenges where the defender must bid a physical trait. You cannot use Vanish as an addition to your surprise action.

## Three Game Rule

As a courtesy if the ST's offer you to buy off a flaw or negative trait or derangement or buy up something there is a 3 game rule on the offer. After the third game the offer is rescinded and you have to try again so plan ahead. As a side note if you are offered to buy off something over the course of role playing it might not cost double exp.

## Torpor

Standard torpor last for seven months minus your path rating. To bring someone out of torpor you must feed blood three generations more potent than their own. If the person belongs to the same clan, they need only be two generations lower. A sire may bring his childe out of torpor.

### Trait Caps

You are only allowed to have 5 traits in each named category (example: 5 Strength, 5 Appearance). You can have as many miscellaneous traits as you would like. Visiting sheets will only be allowed to gain the benefit of having 5 traits in each category. The reason for this ruling is to prevent hyper-focusing to maximize powers like Prowess, and to heighten the benefits of supernaturally heightened traits like a Sidhe's beauty or the Impressive Visage ritual.

### Two Weapon Fighting

There are no off hand actions allowed in this game. Instead the ambidexterity merit grants a single bonus trait. A specialization in two weapon fighting will add an additional bonus trait.

### Willpower Regeneration

You regain one willpower each week. Exemplary roleplaying of your Nature may result in the ST returning one willpower. See Meditation for additional ways to recover Willpower.

### Conduct Rulings

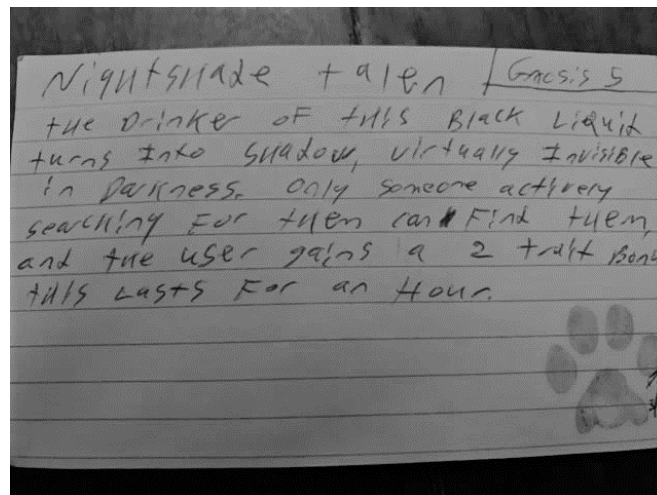
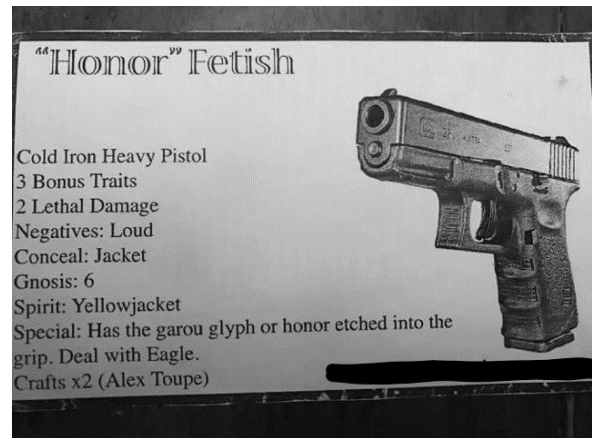
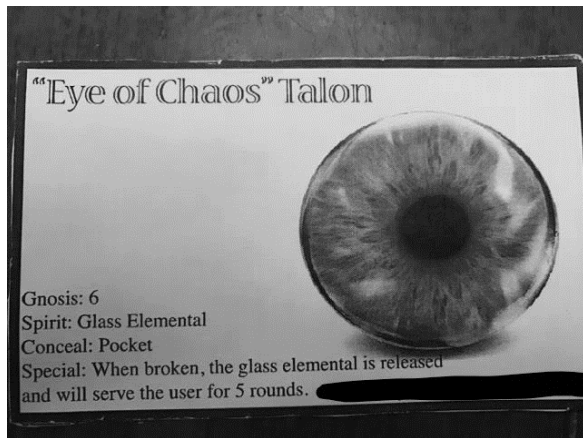
Black Hawk County by Night makes it our goal to preserve a community atmosphere at our games. As such, there are certain expectations about people coming in to that community. Registered Sex Offenders who committed violent crimes or crimes involving children, and others who have committed violent crimes which could cause other players to feel concern for their safety or the safety of their families, are not welcome in this game. Players who have committed crimes that feel they should be exempt to this ruling can make an appeal to the storyteller staff. Players who intentionally mislead the storytellers in this matter will be permanently banned and further disciplinary action may be pursued.

Black Hawk County by Night expects its players to uphold the basic tenants of Mind's Eye Theater. Do not touch other players unless they reciprocate the action, such as shaking hands. Do not attempt stunts that could hurt you or others. Do not carry weapons or facsimiles of weapons on your person. Do not come to game noticeably under the effects of drugs or alcohol, and do not bring either to game. Try your best to keep your out of character emotions and in character emotions separate. When people who are not playing the game are present, be aware of your conversations and actions. And have fun. These tenants should go without saying, but it is always good to have a reminder.

Calls made by the STs during a scene are final. Discussion about ST calls is welcome, so please feel free to e-mail your concerns to the ST list. We will make time to meet with you and discuss your question or issue at that time. ST calls that are made during game will be recorded for consistency and added to this packet.

## Appendix F

These are examples of item cards found within the games. Item cards can travel with characters to other games, when players visit. They can also be used for sums of money, bartered and traded, and are often transferred from player to player. The paw mark seen on picture of the last item card is like a passport stamp, it is way for games to mark that the item has been approved in a particular game. Each game has a particular stamp. Storytellers stamp the card after they have approved it for use within the game. (Player and game information has been redacted.)



## Appendix G

### Our Sample Downtime:

We recently came to the realization that many players aren't aware of what all should be included in a downtime, let alone a structure that can be applied to make the STs' lives easier. If you are interested, we would invite you to take a look at the document below for our template of a perfect downtime (we got a little meticulous, but ours is supposed to be perfect, we don't expect yours to be). If you have your own preferred style or system, feel free to continue using it, or to modify ours as you see fit. This is just a guide so you know what can go into a downtime, and how our brains process it best. We can probably figure it out if you do it a different way, we are smart like that.

Regardless of the format you send your downtimes in, please remember that we usually update the databases on Thursday morning. Try to have any downtimes sent in by Wednesday night, no matter what format they are sent in. Downtimes should be sent to the ST list at: [bhcbn-st@googlegroups.com](mailto:bhcbn-st@googlegroups.com). Finally, please send in your downtimes. We love reading them, we love seeing the depth of your character they show, and that depth is the main way your character grows. It is also a great way for us to provide personal plot for your character.

In Subject:

<Character name> Downtime for <game date>

Body:

**Unspent Experience from Sheet:** This is just pulled from your most current sheet.

**Experience earned:** Ideally in chronological order with dates.

**Experience spent:** Ideally this is in order the purchases appear in Grapevine and in alphabetical order inside each category...but we accept this might be a bit ridiculous for most people. However, for those curious, the order is: Willpower, Physical Attributes, Social Attributes, Mental Attributes, buying off Negative Attributes, Abilities, Ability Specializations, Backgrounds, Influences, Merits, buying off Flaws, Disciplines, Rituals, and then Virtues.

Regardless of the order, please mark the purchase category (ability, attribute, background, etc.)

**Downtime:** Whatever your character did or how he/she grew. We love seeing if your character is scheming, especially against whom and why. If you want to interact with an NPC, or have some specific things that your character really wants to see, now is an excellent time to throw it in. This is much more free flow, and we don't have any particular writing style needs or preferences, but if you tell us in advance a few of the things going on then we can plan for it and probably make it more elaborate and enjoyable.

(Note: Regardless of the method you decide to use, please try and put the mechanical parts of your downtime, like XP earned and spent, at the top. Never include purchases or influence actions as in-line text; it becomes easier to miss that way.)

### Example:

Subject: Drac McVampire Downtime for 1/1/13

**Unspent Experience from Sheet: 3****Earned Experience:**

12/23/12 Attended and Travel Chicago: 2 xp

12/24/12 Attended and Roleplaying Iowa City: 2 xp

12/28/12 This downtime: 1+ xp

**Experience Spends:**

1 Willpower: (-3 xp)

3 Physical Attributes: Agile, Fierce, Tough (-3 xp)

3 Social Attributes: Beguiling, Friendly, Gorgeous (-3 xp)

3 Mental Attributes: Alert, Cunning, Dedicated (-3 xp)

1 Buying off Negative Attribute: Clumsy (-2 xp)

8 Abilities: Animal Ken, Athletics, Brawl, Dodge, Firearms, Hunting, Leadership, Stealth (-8 xp)

1 Ability Specializations: Stealth: Obfuscate (-1 xp)

1 Backgrounds: 1 Herd (-1 xp)

2 Influences: 1 Street (level 1), 1 Health (level 4) (-2 xp)

1 Merit: Ambidexterity (-2 xp; Approved by STs on 12/1/12) (NOTE: Merits cost double after creation unless otherwise stated)

1 Buying off Flaw: Bad Sight (1) (-2 xp; Approved by STs on 12/1/12)

1 Discipline: Presence Majesty (-9 xp; Learning from Joe Blow)

2 Rituals: Calling the Restless Spirit, Scry (-6 xp; Approved by Regent McIlama on 12/1/12)

1 Virtue: 1 Self Control (-3 xp; Approved by STs on 12/1/12)

**Downtime:**

Freak on the Streets-

Drac goes to her police contacts at the station to get information about local gangs in the area, what they are known for and where their turf is. She will then use this information, along with the street contacts she already has to find any holes there might be. She will give the Blackened Unicorns, her gang of choice, the information to help them expand their influence and owe her a favor.

But a Lady in the Sheets-

Drac has realized she needs to work on her ability to hide and sneak into places. She has been attending a boot camp out at the Ventrue country club with several other members of the domain. She has



enjoyed getting more agile and better at sneaking, but Lisa McButtface has been a constant thorn in her side while she was training.

#### Blow the Man Down-

Joe Blow has been teaching Drac majesty, and she has finally got it down. Joe Blow was attempting to slap her and telling her to use her will to make him stand in awe of her. She never liked people standing in awe of her, so this was a challenge for her. But she eventually got it.

#### Public Enemy Numero Uno-

Drac's feud with McEnemyface has grown to deep and unrelenting levels. Two weeks ago Drac discovered that McEnemyface had acquired the land that Drac wanted to claim as her own personal domain. His day of reckoning is coming as Drac's rage grows at an exponential rate. She will attempt to lure him out to Boogymen territory holding Boogymen bait in an attempt to kill him.

#### McMentorface and the Boogymen-

Drac will take some time to meet with Jane McMentorface. Drac is really watching to see if McMentorface says anything pertaining to the Boogymen who have been causing the domain a large fuss. She will offer to assist McMentorface in a particular project.

#### Obvious Plot Rumor-

There was a public rumor about an exsanguinated body, and a pile of ash found next to it. Drac will go and find out everything she can about that. She will be using her Contacts to collect information and she will go to the crime scene to see what is there. To achieve this end she will be using Dominate to move past mortals and Obfuscate to stay hidden while watching evidence collected. She will stay at the crime scene the entire night that she finds out about it.