The Post-Game Foodmob: Labor and Leisure in LARPing

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ABSTRACT
LARPing is a co-creative medium, in which participants collaboratively construct storyworlds, eschewing a traditional producer/consumer dichotomy. (Montola, 2012, Stark 2012) To facilitate co-creation, LARPing communities group participants as GMs or players, dividing up narrative roles (Montola, 2008) The negotiation of this division of narrative power has been extensively researched, mostly in Nordic LARPing communities. (Hammer, 2007, Sternos, 2016) However, there is less work on how divisions of creative control correspond to divisions of labor, and attitudes about what constitutes "work." In this paper, I draw on participant observation and interviews in the MIT Assassins' Guild, an American LARPing group, in order to explore attitudes about narrative control, labor, and power. I argue that, while the Assassins' Guild is a non-commercial organization, where most members regard their participation as leisure, social relationships between players and GMs reflect vestiges of a producer/consumer relationship, which Guild members simultaneously reject and borrow from.

Keywords
LARP, labor, power, serious leisure, co-creativity, producer, consumer, Assassins' Guild

INTRODUCTION
Live Action Roleplaying (LARPing) is broadly acknowledged to be a highly co-creative medium. (Montola 2008, Stark 2012, Sternos and Montola 2011) In LARPs, players collaborate to construct characters, stories, and storyworlds. This deep co-creativity makes the economy of LARPs quite different from that of traditional media. In traditional mediums like film, books, and TV, participants can clearly be separated into producers, and audiences. Producers are generally regarded as those who perform work to create media, and are rewarded for their efforts with financial compensation for the media products that they produce. Audiences, or consumers, are generally regarded as those who engage in a leisure activity, and usually pay money in exchange for the chance to experience the media that producers create. The producer-consumer dichotomy is quite strong in capitalist society, and often extends even to more participatory mediums such as digital games. (Jenkins, 2009) In fact, this producer-consumer dichotomy often holds cultural sway even beyond its domain of accuracy. For instance, numerous game scholars have noted that even when game players perform activities which are clearly labor and produce value, such as creating mods, organizing guilds, or contributing to the game's storyworld, they are still regarded as consumers and do not receive financial compensation. (Taylor, 2006, Banks and Humphreys, 2008, Postigo, 2010, Kow and Nardi, 2010)

However, in LARPing communities, the financial arrangement of the producer-consumer dichotomy begins to dissolve. In many of these communities, money does

Proceedings of DiGRA 2020

not change hands, and it can become very unclear who the owner of an intellectual property is – do the GMs or the players own the story created in a LARP? (Mitchell, 2013) The question I examine in this paper is: Just how much does the producer-consumer dichotomy dissolve in LARPing communities? And even in LARPing communities where no money changes hands, how does the shadow of the producer-consumer dichotomy influence whose contributions are regarded as labor, and other social relations?

In this paper, I examine the MIT Assassins' Guild as a case study in understandings of production, consumption, labor, and leisure in LARPing. The Assassins' Guild is an example of a LARPing group where GMs and players both participate in games for free – the Guild is supported by an annual contribution of dues paid equally by all members, and funding provided by the university that the group is associated with. However, this lack of financial compensation does not mean that Guild members do not think in terms of labor, production, and consumption. In fact, Guild members have rather consistent ideas about the divide between the GM and player roles, and which ones should be thought of as "work." In order to describe and characterize these beliefs, I draw on interviews, a survey, and my own experiences as both a player and GM in the MIT Assassins' Guild to explore the social dynamics of the GM/player roles. I focus especially on Guild member's understandings of how these roles interact with notions of labor and leisure, and creative control. I argue that the GM and player roles in the Guild do not exactly match the traditional producer/consumer roles: they are they are a unique system of allocating labor and creative control. However, at the same time, the GM/player dichotomy within the Guild still bears vestiges of traditional producer/consumer roles. The social conventions around GM and player roles in the Guild, and Guild member's understandings of labor and leisure, speak to the power of the mental model of producers-consumers, and provide a valuable lens into the ways that co-creativity in gaming operates both outside of and within capitalist discourses.

CO-CREATIVITY AND NARRATIVE CONTROL IN LARP

In Live Action Roleplaying games, participants work together to create storyworlds in a manner far more collaborative even than most other gaming mediums. (Sternos and Montola, 2011) Managing this degree of co-creativity often requires LARPing groups to agree on roles and social conventions to determine which players have control of which aspects of the game and the narrative at which times. (Montola, 2008, Hammer, 2007) Montola argues in his dissertation on LARPing that there are a variety of distinct sorts of narrative power at play in LARPs, and that these sorts of power do not necessarily need to be distributed to the same participants in each game. (Montola, 2008) For instance, the *diegetic* power to create new lore about a storyworld is very different from the *endogenous* power to take a mechanically relevant action in game, and both are very different from the *exogenous* power to change the social arrangements around the game, such as inviting a new player into the group. (Hammer et. al, 2018) The "Mixing Desk of LARP" system, proposed by Sternos, Andersen, and Neilsen, provides another system for thinking about how narrative power is distributed in LARPs, in which narrative and social power is classified into 14 faders, spectrums which Sternos et. al. argue that each LARPing group slides differntly. (Sternos, Andersen and Nielsen, 2016) In their chapter on Power and Control in LARPing, Hammer et. al (2018) provide a good overview of the different ways that LARPing groups break up creative control of a game, acknowledging that some LARP groups are more radically co-creative than others, and that a variety of different social conventions exist.

While there are LARPs where all players take a symmetrical narrative role, it is standard in many communities to divide participants into two roles: Game Masters

and players. (Tychsen et al., 2006, and Stenros & Montola, 2011) Traditionally, the Game Master (or GM, sometimes also called the "organizer") role involves creating the setting (and sometimes the rules system for play), and the player role involves representing a single character in the game world. Most games include a small group of GMs and a much larger group of players. The distinctions between the GM role and player role are not necessarily the same in all LARPing communities – for instance, in some styles of LARPing, it is the GM who creates the characters, and in others, it is the players. (Stenros and Montola, 2011) In most LARP communities with a GM role, the GM or GMs are regarded as the participants with the most narrative control and power. (Montola, 2008, Brenne, 2005, Sternos, 2009, Harviainen, 2012) GMs often have the power to make large-scale decisions about the setting which affect the entire world of play, are the go-to authority in case of conflict about the rules or setting, and have the ultimate power to establish the boundaries of what is "realistic" in the world and to reject player actions.

However, many game scholars have also written on the ways that players exert more narrative power over games than they are often acknowledged to. On the most obvious level, players exert endogenous power by using the game mechanics to take actions as their character and influencing the events of the game. (Tychsen, 2006, Hammer et. al,, 2018) Even in a game where the GM creates the initial characters, once the character sheet is handed off and the game is set in motion, it is ultimately up to the players to decide what their characters would do, and to successfully or unsuccessful enact it. (Hammer, 2007) It is up to players to create their characters as fleshed our personalities and physical presences through their interpretation and performance. For instance, players exert diegetic power when they contribute to worldbuilding through costuming, which can establish broad flavor for the world, as well as specific character details. (Bienia, 2015) Torner (2018) and Sternos (2016) have also written on the ways that players have historically claimed exogenous power in LARPing communities by being on the forefront of theorizing game design.

Many writers have explored the breakdown of narrative power between players and GMs, and how these power relations are negotiated on a social and narrative level. However, there is still much room for scholarship on how these narrative roles interact with financial roles that participants take on, and participant labor. Mitchell (2013) has taken a stab at the question in trying to categorize the labor of NPCs (Non-Player Characters) in UK LARP groups. Mitchell argues that the use of the word "volunteer" to describe NPC's role suggests a framework in which NPCs are regarded as performing labor, but players are not. I am interested in further exploring the question: how much does the GM role in LARPing communities resemble the producer role in traditional media, and likewise for the player/consumer role? Because the GM, like the producer, is the role with greater creative control, it naively makes sense to attempt this mapping. But how far can we take it? For instance, do LARP participants regard GM activities as labor, and player activities as leisure? Do they feel that the player is receiving some sort of service from the GM, and that the GM is deserving of compensation? Or is the arrangement more complicated?

SITE AND METHODOLOGY

The MIT Assassin's Guild

In this study, I focus specifically on the MIT Assassins' Guild, one of the longest running LARPing associations in America. (Tan, 2003) The Assassin's Guild initially grew out of a student club for playing Assassin, a circle-of-death style game, and, owing to these origins, it takes a somewhat more competitive and conflict-based approach than many American LARP groups – in the late 1980s, when Harvard established its SIL (Society for Interactive Literature), the Assassins' Guild

responded by branding itself as SIK (The Society for Interactive Killing). (Bateman, 1990) MIT's own often intense and competitive culture as an elite engineering university which highly values technical mastery perhaps also played a role in contributing to this culture. However, the Assassins' Guild has drifted in a significantly more narrative direction since its founding – in fact, a new MIT student group, Live Action Mafia, now exists to fulfill the initial role of the Assassins' Guild as a club for circle-of-death games.

The Assassins' Guild runs a range of games, from 4-hour-long "one night" games, to the occasional weekend long "three day", and the annual "10-day." At the time of this study, the Assassins' Guild was made up of current MIT undergraduate and graduate students, as well as many "cruft," or alumni who continue to participate in the group. There is a strong culture of mentorship, for playing as well as gamewriting, where alumni stick around to train newer Guild members in game design, nerf gun combat, and pass down the cultural norms of the group. While the Guild contains several non-MIT affiliated members, membership is mostly limited to MIT students or alumni, and members tend to hail from a limited number of MIT undergraduate communities. As a result, the Assassins' Guild is a very tight knit community. While the Guild contains many members who only play games, almost all members who participate as GMs also participate as players, and many members alternately assume the player and GM roles.

The MIT Assassins' Guild has been studied extensively by scholars from a variety of angles. Guild members Phillip Tan (2003) and L. M. Bateman (1990) both wrote theses on the Guild, from a game design perspective, and Janet Murray discusses play in the Guild as it relates to VR and MMORPGs in *Hamlet on the Holodeck.* However, I believe that there is still room for more research on the group. First of all, the Assassins' Guild has evolved significantly since the last major piece of research was published on it in 2003, and many of the older characterizations of the group from the previous literature are no longer accurate. For instance, the Assassins' Guild has discontinued the use of many of the hyper-competitive game mechanics described by Tan. (Tan, 2013) Secondly, while some prior research (such as Murray's) has focused on division of co-creative labor in the Guild, there is no existing research on economic arrangements of perceptions of labor and leisure in the Guild. For these reasons, I believe my study presents a novel contribution to the scholarship.

At times in this paper I will offer evidence from the Assassin's Guild in comparison to the existing body of research on labor and leisure in Nordic LARPing communities, and may make comparisons between the co-creative arrangements in American and Nording LARPing groups. However, I want to caution readers against taking the Assassins' Guild as a representative example of American LARPing traditions. Though the MIT Assassin's Guild shares some common traits with other American LARPing groups (a focus on theatrical scene construction, goal oriented plots, and a lesser focus on immersive costuming and settings), the Guild's unique history and styles of play sets it starkly apart from other mainstream American LARPing traditions, such as American Freeform or Theater LARP. (Stark, 2012) For instance, games in the Assassins' Guild tend to be much more competitive between players than the games played at Intercon or in other American university LARPing groups, and the use of nerf guns (rather than boffer swords) is very uncommon in combat-heavy American LARP in general. Since much of the existing scholarship on American LARP, such as Stark's *Leaving Mundania* (2012), tends to focus on the Intercon community and American Theater Style LARP, I hope that my study of the Assassin's Guild will provide an interesting contrast for American and Nordic LARP scholars alike – the Assassin's Guild is peculiar in a variety of ways and would be

perhaps better characterized as a member of its own LARPing tradition, rather than grouped in with American Freeform or American Theater LARP.

Methods

In my analysis, I make use of three methods: participant observation, a survey, and informal interviews. Firstly, I draw on my experiences as a player in many Assassins' Guild LARPs, including *Unpromised Land* (2016), *Triple Blind* (2016) and *The Sun Rises Over Agua Dulce* (2016), and *Genius: The Future of Tomorrow* (2019), as well as a GM of several LARPs, *Safety School* (2015), *Gamma Decay* (2018), and *Philadelphia Scramble* (2019) I also surveyed members of the Assassins' Guild on their impressions of the respective roles of players and GMs in LARPs. This survey contained questions designed to gauge where players believed narrative agency and creative control were located (eg. "How much does the GM/player create the characters?") and which activities they perceived to be leisure and labor (eg. "How much work is GMing/Playing?", "How stressful is GMing/playing?"). The survey was distributed through the MIT mailing lists assassian-social@ (a list for planning social events not directly related to Guild LARPs) and assassian-writers@ (a GM specific list), as well as an IRC-style chatroom still frequented by many members of the Guild. Additionally, I followed up on the survey with interviews, mostly with older members who had both played and GMed games. Interviews were conducted both in person and over IRC chat.

CO-CREATIVITY AND NARRATIVE CONTROL IN THE ASSASSINS' GUILD

Overall, the Assassins' Guild confirms the observations made by previous authors that players and GMs negotiate and co-create the game world, but the GM role has somewhat more narrative power. The breakdown between GM and player roles in the Assassins' Guild is somewhat more strict and well delineated than in many Nordic LARP groups. Generally, the role of a GM in the Assassins' Guild is to "set up the game," creating the world which players will step into, and the role of the players is to populate and interact with that world. A strict hand-off between the GM and players takes place at game start – before the beginning of game, it is the GM's prerogative to determine any detail of the world, but after the start of game, they are expect to take a hands-off approach and allow players to dictate the flow of game. One informant told me that players tend to admire and respect games where the GMs set up a plot like "dominoes" - narrative elements are positioned such that they will drive the plot along without GM intervention once the players get going. (Murray, 1997) This expectation is partially necessitated by the Guild's competitive style – when players compete with other players on their character's plots, they do not want to feel that GM has stepped in and tipped the scales.

To understand the exact breakdown of narrative responsibilities in a Guild game, let us first examine the GM role. In Guild games, GMs typically will write a "scenario", or description of the world and situation, to hand out to the players, as well as writing signs and cards representing locations and items. Many GMs also chose to supplement this worldbuilding by providing props or decorations for scenery and flavor (for example, mood music, party streamers, or foam swords to represent in game weapons), but this is not generally expected in all games.

In addition to the scenario, GMs in the Guild (and most LARPing Communities) are also responsible for writing mechanics by which the characters can interact with the world. In this way, the Assassins' Guild differs from other American LARP styles, such as the *Vampire: The Masquerade* system, in which GMs use a pre-set rulebook created by a game designer. In the Guild, rules are usually combined with details of the setting in the form of a "rules/scenario document" which is distributed to players

before the start of game. GMs also sometimes create specific mechanics for individual locations or items which let players know how they can interact with those objects – for instance, a locked box might be represented by a sign with a pair of dice next to it and instructions that the box can be opened by successfully rolling a seven.

Finally, GMs are responsible for creating the initial concepts for characters, which will later be fleshed out and performed by players. Players are usually given a "character sheet" with a brief description of their character's personality, backstory, and details of any major events that their character has been involved in before game. Character sheets also usually include a specific list of "goals", directing the player towards taking certain actions that their character wants to accomplish in game. Some GMs also include a "name badge description" or "costuming hint" telling players very broadly what their character looks like. As Janet Murray notes in her analysis of the MIT Assassins' Guild in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, writing character sheets allows GMs to set up plots between characters, and a good GM gives players not only an indication of who their character is, but how they should interact with other characters, an expectation that is still held in the Guild today. (Murray, 1997) Thus, by combining these elements of worldbuilding, mechanics writing, and character creation, GMs also influence the plot of the game by setting up conflicts to be resolved, relationships between characters, and secrets which may come to light.

The Assassins' Guild does not tend to participate in the sort of collaborative character-building or world-building practices that are common in Nordic LARP groups – players don't get much input on the game before they are handed their characters sheets. The one exception to this is "pre-apps": in long games, GMs will sometimes give players the option to suggest character concepts before the game is written that they will then attempt to incorporate into game. But this practice is becoming rarer. However, players do have the ability to exert narrative power in other ways.

Firstly, Assassins' Guild players have the exogenous power to control their game experience through a character app. While GMs write the character sheets before game, and players usually do not get input on them, players are not assigned characters randomly. Instead, they fill out an "app" in which they list their preferences: would they like to play a good guy or a bad guy? Are they okay playing a character in a romantic relationship with another character? The app also serves the important role of informing the players of what sort of game a LARP will be, and if it's a game they're likely to enjoy. Though GMs ultimately have the power to assign roles to players based on the information they provide on the app, GMs strongly respect player's preferences, and players expect them to – being cast as a character that goes against your preferences expressed on the app is seen as a major violation by Guild members.

Players in Guild games also have huge endogenous power. Many Guild players feel that it is important that their characters are able to make meaningful, dramatic choices. This is to some degree, a place the Assassins' Guild diverges from most American LARP traditions. A common complaint I have heard from Guild players playing outside the Guild is that they often feel "railroaded" by American Theater LARP games – that is, they felt that their character was not given the option to make truly impactful choices. Guild GMs tend to write in mechanics that allow players to take much more drastic actions in game than many other LARP groups will allow. For instance, a character killing another character – an action that makes a drastic change to the storyworld and other player's experiences – is very common, and often encouraged, in Guild games. In another case, a player might trigger an earthquake, changing the fundamental layout of gamespace, or assassinate a prince, changing the

political structure of a country (*Unpromised Land*, 2015), making even more major and permanent changes to the world of the game. In fact, some drastic changes might even alter which mechanics are in play. Players of Guild games tend to get angry when the game mechanics don't allow them to make drastic changes to the story world. For instance, one player I interviewed complained about a game in which they played a member of a doomsday cult, and were disappointed that completing their occult ritual only brought the world to an end in the epilogue *after* game.

While explicit collaborative worldbuilding is not a part of the Assassins' Guild gamewriting process, moments where players take on diegetic agency to make worldbuilding decisions are widely celebrated. For instance, in the infamous case of *Calypso* (2014), one player facetiously claimed that his character was from "Space Australia", a location that did not previously exist in game, which he had completely invented on the spot. The idea of Space Australia took off, and was eventually accepted by the 50 or so other players in game as a part of the world, even leading to the composition of several Space Australia shanties (which were entered in an in-game shanty singing contest – another player invention). Though most current Guild members did not even play in *Calypso*, the Space Australia shanties were so beloved that they are still sung in the Guild. Another game, *The Sun Rises Over Agua Dulce*, which ran as a three-day game in 2016, was set in post-apocalyptic Texas. Many players were amused by how the entire game linguistically evolved a distinctive post-apocalyptic Texan accent (only minimally resembling an actual Texan accent) – this phenomenon, too, is something you can still hear players reminisce about. Thus, though the Guild does not build in formal ways for players to participate in worldbuilding, players delight in, and are encouraged to, informally contribute.

For the most part, Assassins' Guild members' perceptions of the division between GM and player creative control reflects the existing literature. In my survey, I asked members of the Assassins' Guild to rank how much of the worldbuilding, plot, and characters in a LARP are created by the GM versus by the players. Generally, players believed that narrative creation was split fairly evenly between players and GMs, with an average of the world being created 75% by the GM and 25% by the players, and characters being created 50% by either actor. The answers get even more interesting when it gets to the question of plot: the average respondent believed that players contributed around 50% of the plot and GMs contributed 75%, for a total of 125%. One respondent who was later interviewed wrote "and yes, I realize that my answers add up to something like 'characters are created 80% by the GM and 80% by the players.' That's actually accurate in my experience because there are some funny synergies." Answers were also varied. In fact, there were both Guild Members who responded that GMs created none of the plot and that GMs created the entirety of the plot. Evidently, it is not always even clear to the participants in Guild games where the narrative is coming from.

WORK AND PLAY IN LARP

From the survey and interviews that I conducted, I found that Guild members did tend to think of GM's actives as more labor-like than player's activities – though not 100%. The general perception I garnered from the survey is that GMs contribute more "work" to a game and that the activity of GMing is more like work than playing is. This does reflect my observations of play in the Guild. GM's do spend considerably more time contributing to games than players do. Whereas Guild players reported that they spend 5-12 hours on an average 4-hour game (including game time), GM's often spent between 40 and 100 hours working on even a 4-hour game, and sometimes much more. One GM noted that they had written 400,000 words for one 10-day game, almost the full length of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Respondents also noted that it requires more skill and was considerably more stressful to GM a LARP than to play

in one. However, most players still regarded GMing as a leisure activity, even if it had aspects which resembled work. Most survey respondents classified both writing LARPs and running LARPs and "extremely fun," and most Guild Members I interviewed still described GMing as a leisure activity, something they do in their free time because they enjoy it.

The player role was more universally and uncomplicatedly seen as a "consumer" role – most participants regarded playing as not very difficult, time consuming, or labor intensive. At the same time though, most Guild members did acknowledge that playing was at least somewhat difficult and stressful. Several players told me about putting in hours of time creating costumes or planning out complicated game actions. One player I interviewed informed me that she had spent over 20 hours assembling a costume for a four hour game, and another one reported that she had once stayed up all night in character for a ten-day game tabulating a spreadsheet of in-game coordinates for other players to use. Players often take on similar massively labor intensive "map-making" or "librarian" roles in ten-day games. Guild members also clearly value and celebrate player skill, and appreciate that roleplaying is a trained skill which requires practice – players who make extraordinary shows of roleplaying or who succeed in accomplishing highly difficult character goals are celebrated in the Guild with the "Master Assassin" award. Still, most participants did not apply the word "work" to their activities playing LARPs.

While Guild members do not pay each other directly for games, players and GMs still engage in a variety of casual commercial or economic interactions, and the relationships suggested by these interactions certainly bear vestiges of the sort of commercial relationship between producers and consumers that we see for other mediums. Though they are not paid, GMs are often offered token compensation for their work, often in the form of "thank-yous" and general appreciations. Perhaps the most symbolic and telling detail of the GM's commercial relationship with players is the tradition of players paying for a GM's meals at the post game "foodmob," a gathering where players and GM's go out to eat together at the end of the game. This classic gift of food is halfway between a gift, signaling appreciation and hospitality, and a material payment for the GM's services – similar to how an American might buy a friend a six pack of beer for helping them move a new couch into their apartment. Thus, though GMs are usually not traditional laborers who work for pay, they are compensated and thanked in some minor ways, pointing to the vestiges of a system where they are viewed as producers and players as consumers benefiting from their services.

Similarly, the social organization of Assassins' Guild LARPing shows some remnants or resemblances to traditional social relations between producers and consumers in a commercial relationship. Though GMs are not actually employees performing a service for players, player happiness is expected to be the GM's primary goal. While many GMs find making players happy very rewarding, it is generally seen as bad form for a GM to put their enjoyment before the enjoyment of players – for instance, GMs are not supposed to introduce a plot element that is interesting for the GMs, but not fun for players to interact with. Guild GMs and Non-Player Characters playing enemies of the players in combat-heavy games often expected to not play to the best of their ability and to allow themselves to be beaten by players so the players can experience the joy of winning – a phenomena that's also been described in the UK LARPing tradition. (Mitchell, 2013) GMs are also expected to have more of a responsibility to players than players have to GMs. In my experience with the Guild, once a player is cast as a character, it is rude but generally acceptable for them to quit or cancel if something comes up, whereas GMs are expected to take a more "the show must go on" approach – it would be considered unacceptable for them to cancel the

game, except for in extreme cases. In a recent ten-day, *Genius: The Future of Tomorrow* the GMs team did not have the full game written in time for when it was scheduled to run, but rather than cancel, the GMs stayed awake for multiple sequential nights to make sure that the game got done in time – and most players considered this to be what was expected of them. (*Genius: The Future of Tomorrow*, 2019) One respondent to my survey wrote "GMs are responsible for the work portion of the game, and it is their responsibility to make sure everything is fun for the players, so in a sense the GMs are running this as a service to the player base. The players will often volunteer to do cleanup, be NPCs, etc, but it is ultimately the GM's responsibility if no one volunteers. If a player is having a miserable time, the GM is responsible for fixing it. If the GMs are having a miserable time, too bad." Perhaps some of this culture of GM labor comes from MIT's broader norms of overachieving and putting passion projects ahead of well-being, which is situated in the broader American tech culture of neo-Taylorist hyperproductivity. But this expectation that the GMs should do the emotional labor of keeping players happy at their own expense also seems to stem, as the survey respondent points out, from a vague expectation that the player is acting as a consumer and the GM as a service worker.

However, despite this "customer service" framework, GMs do not entirely play the role of a service worker; there are almost always volunteers who help GMs, for instance, with cleaning up and "sweeping" after game. Though players do not "have to" help, they might be looked down upon for not helping out, in a way that a paying customer wouldn't be for not pitching in. This is reflected in the literature about Nordic LARP too: it is the expectation in many LARP traditions that the GM will provide props and, occasionally, food. (Stenros and Montola, 2011) But, as Stenros and Montola point out, in some long LARPs a player will be cast as the "cook" and provide meals in game. In the Assassins' Guild, there are often players who volunteer to bring in props and extra costuming materials, and for the past many years, a particularly dedicated player has taken it upon herself to supply food for all the players every night of every 10-day. The informal norms of players volunteering and pitching in point to a more complicated relationship than simply GM as employee and player as customer.

CONCLUSION

We can think of the economy of LARPing, at least as it exists in the MIT Assassins' Guild, as somewhere between a commercial economy and a co-creative gift economy. There are some aspects of LARP which look very much like they can be explained through the producer/consumer dichotomy: there is one role, the GM, where a participant creates the storyworld, generally is seen as the author of the work, and the one doing the work, and another role, the player, where a participant interacts with and experiences the world, and is generally seen as participating in a leisure activity. However, there are ways in which the framework certainly does not fit: no money is changing hands, both participants regard their participation to be at least partially a hobbyist activity which they do in their spare time for fun, and both participants enact a large degree of creative control over the work.

Some scholars of game studies have suggested frameworks for thinking about activities which are neither entirely play nor entirely work, which might describe labor and co-creation in the Guild. We might regard GMing work in the Assassins' Guild as a case of Stebbins' "Serious leisure," for instance. (Stebbins, 2014) Scholars of game modding, including Banks and Humphreys (2008), Sotamaa (2007), Postigo (2010), Kücklich (2005), Kow and Nardi (2010) have proposed a variety of frameworks including "produsage," "prosumption," and "playbor." All this work is all primarily interested in production and consumption from the point of view of economic output, financial compensation, and legal control: who is performing

productive work and creating value, who gets money for it, who owns that value, and where do those roles not match up? But, what I find is missing from all of these frameworks is an understanding of how the social arrangements around commercial relationships continue to hold sway even when they no longer follow causally from an economic relationship. These arrangements often describe a situation where all players participation is equally casual (serious leisure), or where the legal rights to the game are held by a mass-market media producer, someone somewhere is making money (in the case of the modding literature). They do not account for a situation where all players participation is casual and hobbyist, yet some might be more hobbyist than others.

The complications of the producer/consumer dynamic that the Assassins' Guild case study illuminates are not so much economic as social. They reveal that the social arrangements around commercial capitalism might run even deeper than the economic necessity of them. Why, for example, does it make sense for GMs to perform a customer service role, putting players needs and desires before their own, if the players are not even paying them? In a "fair" system, we might expect the players to take on emotional labor on behalf of the GM, in exchange for the game-writing labor that GMs perform for them – but this isn't what the observations reflect. Why would an arrangement like this make sense, if not because of a deep-seated intuition, instilled in us by living in a capitalist society, that producing content goes hand in hand with performing customer service? LARPing groups like the Assassins' Guild are valuable sites to study because they are sites of artistic production where the traditional producer/consumer roles fall back, and we can observe what social conventions remain, absent the necessity of capital. The Assassins' Guild reveals the staying cultural power that commercial views of labor and leisure have, even when they cease to be economically relevant.

At the same time though, the Assassins' Guild reveals how these views of labor and leisure become flexible, and can be shifted. It is notable that, despite holding on to vestigial tokens of a commercial system, members of the Assassins' Guild also radically reject other social conventions of capitalism – all players are expected to pitch in and help with certain sorts of labor, the people in the "producer" role are expected to respect the "consumer's" right to own and control the storyworld, and everyone is contributing some sort of work that they don't expect to get paid for. Thus, the Assassins' Guild case reveals that the staying cultural power of capitalism can also be warped or rewritten. When a LARPing community decides to eschew traditional producer/consumer divisions of creative control, in favor of a more egalitarian, co-creative structure, it must negotiate a unique division of narrative power between participants. Perhaps social arrangements stemming from economic arrangements are something that must be similarly re-negotiated after the economic arrangements are thrown out the window. Though members of LARPing groups might take the producer/consumer dichotomy as a starting point (perhaps even a starting point that they are actively trying to unlearn), tweaking and rewriting the arrangement into something that fits their co-creative model is something each group must negotiate for themselves. The MIT Assassin's Guild presents us with an exciting model for a form of gift-like media production which eschews the capitalist producer-consumer dichotomy, but it also stands as a reminder that capitalist social norms have the staying power to affect distributions of labor, even after we have moved past the economic necessity for them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to every member of the Assassins' Guild who talked to me about their experiences, and to every player and GM who contributed to the rich and thrilling storyworlds that I have participated in in Guild games. And a very special thank you

to Ariel Segall for keeping the Guild fed, and for all the organizational labor you have put in, both as a player and as a GM, to making the Guild work. Finally, thanks to T.L. Taylor for supervising this work, for your incredibly kind encouragement, and for never letting me forget the value of articulation work.

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