

A Closer Look at the (Rule-) Books: Framings and Paratexts in Tabletop Role-playing Games

Popular Abstract - As texts which are based on collaborative and interactive narration, tabletop – also known as “pen and paper” – role-playing games (TRPGs) are distinct in their technological simplicity. Indeed, in their traditional form all they require is the physical presence of a group of players – commonly around a table, hence “tabletop” – who collaboratively participate in developing a narrative; and a system of rules which allow resolving the outcome of situations in which different levels of chance may be involved – the need to write down statistic information making them “pen and paper”. Evidently, this apparent lack of sophistication makes role-playing games – as a clearly contemporary cultural phenomenon (cf. Punday, 2005; Nephew, 2004; Harrigan, 2007; Mackay, 2001) – stand out in the context of a world that is becoming ever more dependent on technology. All the more so, considering the persistence of TRPGs in the face of its “descendants” in other more technologically advanced media and despite what has become the popular notion of “the bigger, the faster, the better.” Nevertheless, that which occurs during a role-playing game session – the level of interactivity, player immersion in the narrative, flexibility of the rules, etc. – generally surpasses, even today, what many of its “successors” achieve. How does this occur? How is it possible; through what mechanisms do TRPGs allow such sophistication when relying solely on the “old fashioned” technologies of (hand-) writing and oral narration? Approaching these questions from the general perspective of literary studies, the following paper problematizes what can be called a “naïve view” of communication technology by addressing the complex relationship between the printed texts used for role-playing – such as rule- and sourcebooks – and the narratives created during game-play. To do so, it addresses the fundamental influence that framings, such as rules, character sheets and setting, as well as paratextual elements contained within or at the borders of these texts, such as cover illustrations, prologues and epilogues, just to name a few – have on participants’ interpretation and, most importantly, creation of TRPG narratives.

David Jara

University of Heidelberg

Germany

david.jara@hggs.uni-heidelberg.de

ABSTRACT

Approaching the subject from the general perspective of literary studies, the following paper analyzes the impact that framings (as by Wolf, 1999) and paratexts (as by Genette, 1987)² contained within TRPG rule- and sourcebooks³ have on the construction and negotiation of narratives during game-play. More specifically, the text argues for an unconventional use of such elements due to the fact that they not only affect

the reception of the diegesis (once it has come into existence) but, because they temporally precede its actual creation, heavily influence player expectations and are thus decisive for the subsequent production of text. This way of using fiction to create additional fiction has relevance to forms of readership beyond RPG play (Walton, 1990) and may account for the persistence of the face-to-face game in a technologically mediated age.

1. INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of literary studies, TRPGs present us from the beginning with an intrinsic theoretical dilemma: the fact that a “proper”, fixed, “main text” is unavailable. Indeed, the actual role-playing game narratives only emerge during the game session itself and exist ephemerally within its boundaries. Nevertheless, the session can also be seen as being “tertiary”, largely the product of other texts; those that establish the broad fictional premises and the rules by which the fictional space is to be negotiated (“primary texts”); and those that establish the specific fictional premises that allow for a particular game session to develop (“secondary texts”) (Hammer 2007). But how exactly does this textual “conversion” take place? While there are several accounts on how rules enable and shape diegetic play (Punday, 2005), the function of the rulebooks *qua* books is still greatly under examined. The following paper explores their impact by looking at both the framing (Wolf, 1999) as well as the paratextual elements (Genette, 1987) contained in these texts. Furthermore, I will argue that TRPGs are a special instance of textuality in which the construction of narratives relies heavily on an *unconventional*² use of such elements. Rather than functioning solely as mediators between the reader(s) and the framed text – influencing the perception and interpretation of the latter³ – these ‘genetic’ framing devices are created *prior* to the main text, and serve thus the function of extending (multi-) authorial control over the game by actively shaping the narrations created during play. This is done not only procedurally, but also by shaping the narratives’ “story space”, its genre conventions or ‘interaction codes’ (Fatland, 2006) that players draw upon to create their contributions to play.

2. FRAMINGS AND PARATEXTS

Criticizing what he considers to be a general lack of academic research concerning framing in literary

works, Werner Wolf, has called attention to the “well known fact that literary texts, more than non-literary ones, are usually accompanied by framings referring to the specificity of the text and giving hints as to how to read it.” (1999: 102) Implicitly, therefore, Wolf proposes a specific use of framing devices (or ‘framings’) in literary texts which is to be distinguished from their function in “normal” or stereotyped speech situations. In the latter cases, “frames will be more or less taken for granted, as such situations seem to call for certain frames automatically as default settings.” (Wolf, 2006: 5) With fictional texts however, not only has the frame of reference first to be established (cf. Hruschowski, 1984) but it has to be assigned a meaning as well; In such cases, “special (additional) agreements between ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’ have to be made and signaled.” (ibid. 6) Because of the fact that the most effective framing devices are those that influence the reading of a text from its beginning, focusing on those elements which precede the main text is recommended. According to this approach, (literary) ‘framings’ are to be understood as,

“[...] easily identifiable markers [...] that exist in the immediate context or within a work of fiction *previous* [emphasis in the original] to the reader’s framing activity and indeed serve as its most important basis. These framings are or seem to be located on another level than the framed text, they contribute, for the reader, to the constitution or stabilization of a (real or imaginary) communicative situation in the literary exchange and also help him or her to select frames of interpretation or reference relevant for the work under consideration.” (1999: 103)

In addition, Wolf also points out that there are four “potential ‘agencies’” of such framing, adding to the authorial instance (‘sender’) that of the reader

¹ The references to Genette in the following paper are based on the English translation of *Seuils* (1987)

² For the purpose of this paper, I will be using mainly game material published by White Wolf due to their explicit focus on ‘storytelling’. (All material used under permission from the publisher: White Wolf © 2012 CCP hf. All rights reserved.)

³ At least in relation to their use in “traditional” literary forms.

⁴ Understood in the context of linguistic analysis, the term ‘frame’ (as by Goffman, 1974) may be described as “the sum of various factors that influence and predetermine discursive exchanges, contribute to their coherence and meaningfulness and distinguish specific discursive exchanges from other possible ones.” (Wolf, 1999: 98) As such, frames are generally equated with “a ‘speech situation’ in its broadest sense including the rules and contexts stabilizing the meaning of the discursive exchange.” (ibid.) Moreover, they are to be understood as cognitive meta-concepts that “generally function as preconditions of interpretation.” (Wolf, 2006: 5) Because of

(‘recipient’), the text (‘message’) and its context (2006: 15). Of the four, however, it is primarily the textual and contextual framings that can be directly observed and analyzed since ‘sender’ and ‘recipient’-based ones are mainly internal cognitive processes (ibid.).

Generally speaking, Wolf’s idea of a framing device appears to correspond with what Gerard Genette (1997) has defined as the paratext. The latter encompasses a wide variety of phenomena such as the name of a book’s author, titles, subtitles, footnotes, prefaces, commentaries, and illustrations; all of which, as Genette argues, surround and extend the text in order to make it available, allowing its reception or, as he puts it, to “ensure the text’s presence in the world” (1). Furthermore, because paratexts influence the way in which a text is interpreted, Genette considers them to be defined on the most part “by an authorial intention and assumption of responsibility” (ibid. 3). Accordingly, such textual phenomena may be considered to be an instance of authorial control; a point from which the author can influence the way in which his text is read.

Indeed, this fringe (the paratext), always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone not only of transition, but of *transaction* [emphasis in original]: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies) (ibid. 2)

Thus, the paratext is to be understood as secondary to the main text and as such, as “fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its *raison d’être*.” (ibid. 12)

While useful, Genette’s notion of the paratext proves to be a problematic one as well; a fact which is not difficult to understand when considering that for him, “every context serves [in principle] as a paratext” (9). Thus, the paratext could include even background information about the author concerning such things as, for example, his age, sex, etc. (ibid. 7). Clearly, there is little value in

using a term which could “in principle” apply to almost anything. In order to avoid such recursiveness, Wolf proposes a principle of contiguity to the definition of framing while redefining the term paratext as a framing sub-category:

“[I]n contrast to Genette, for whom ‘paratexts’ comprise both ‘contextual’ and ‘textual’ framings, I would like to restrict ‘paratextual framings’, whether authorized or not, to a variant of ‘textual’ framings, namely to [those] which are parts of individual works and are positioned at their borders, but are discernible not only through their liminal position, but also, and, above all, through their function as introductory, explanatory etc. that forms the ‘threshold’ to the main text of the work in question” (2006, 20)

As Genette, Wolf also indicates that the main function of framing in literature – of which the paratext is, indeed, a prominent form – is to guide and control interpretations within the “abstract cognitive frames” presented by fictional texts (2006: 6).

Not only is Wolf’s re-definition of the term ‘paratext’ necessary, but it is also an important one to notice here, especially considering the fact that the latter has been broadly used in game theory since its introduction to the field by Mia Consalvo in her influential book *Cheating* (2007). In it, Consalvo coins the term “paratextual industries” stating that:

“I believe that the peripheral industries surrounding games function as just such a paratext. Gaming magazines, strategy guides, mod chip makers [etc.] work to shape the gameplay experience in particular ways. Those ways have played a significant role in how gameplay is now understood. [...] The central tendency remains though: the creation of a flourishing paratext has significantly shaped games and gamers in the process of creating new markets.” (9)

While Consalvo’s application of the term has proved enlightening and useful in a general sense,

as it adds an important perspective to the study of games and the seemingly endless production of text that surrounds them, a more detailed approach must acknowledge that in order to determine specific types of paratext and their functions, the particularities of the medium itself must be first put under consideration. Additionally, it is necessary to identify the nature (and location) of the primary/main text. Only then will it be possible to recognize and differentiate relevant paratexts and framings. In the case of TRPGs, such a distinction has special importance due to the complex nature of its text(s) (cf. Padol, 1996; Stenros, 2004). Since my approach to TRPGs is mainly from the perspective of literary studies, I will consider the diegetic level as the primary text of the game session². In a general sense then, TRPG framings can be understood as elements that serve to 'trigger' relevant 'meta-concepts' (i.e. frames) for the interpretation of discourses within the game's diegesis³.

3. FRAMING IN TRPGs

As mentioned previously, the lack of a fixed, "main text" or diegesis is a major difficulty for the study of the TRPG medium. However, as Hammer (2007) has proposed, from the point of view of its construction, the diegesis of the RPG session can actually be seen as being "tertiary", since it emerges greatly as a product of other texts. Where the "primary" text serves to first establish the broad fictional premises (setting) and the rules by which the fictional space is to be negotiated, the "secondary" text provides the specific fictional premises on which a particular game-session is based (plot). Correspondingly, Hammer distinguishes three types of RPG authorship: primary, secondary and tertiary. Because TRPG rulebooks exemplify how "primary authors" extend their influence upon the game, it is through them that we can better understand how the different authorial instances involved in TRPGs negotiate the shared fictional environment during play. Moreover, since both Genette as well as Wolf have stressed the importance of paratexts/ framings as an instance of authorial control over the text, the study of these elements is key to understanding how this negotiation takes place.

Additionally, TRPG rulebooks in themselves also seem to comply with several of the criteria mentioned in Wolf's definition of framings: they exist in the *immediate* context of the diegesis and, since they *precede* the actual game playing, they also exist prior to any reader/player's input or framing activity. At the same time, they are physically separated – and thus appear to be *easily identifiable* – from the diegesis of the game. Clearly, these texts guide the interpretation of in-game events, either by laying out the rules which underlie the outcome of certain actions or by providing a (fictional) context within which character action becomes meaningful.

Because TRPG rulebooks exemplify how "primary authors" extend their influence upon the game, it is through them that we can better understand how the different authorial instances involved in TRPGs negotiate the shared fictional environment during play. (3)

However, because of the fact that the information they contain may be directly adopted in the *interface* (Padol, 1996), becoming an integral part of the diegesis, the nature of such information becomes ambiguous: is it within or without of the diegesis? Or is it perhaps both? While rules are always formally external to the story, their implementation has direct effects on the in-game events; setting and plot material, for their part, are always potentially diegetic. Evidently, far from being a singular text, the rulebook comprises in itself a great amount of heterogeneous information which is relevant for different levels of meaning within the complex system of information that is the TRPG session². At the same time, not all of its components must necessarily be seen as framing devices and, even if they are, do not have the same relevance. Thus, it becomes necessary to further reduce our focus within the rulebook itself. I propose therefore a (very) general distinction of the information contained in these texts which may be roughly classified into: rules, setting information and (meta)framing devices. Because of their explicit focus on 'storytelling', I will be drawing

⁵ This distinction, however, is done mainly for practical purposes: The fact that the TRPG game session is, in itself, a multi-layered text is one that is acknowledged and the necessity of such a reduction will be justified later on.

⁶ This notion ties in closely with Ilieva's (2012) enlightening analysis of the negotiation of cultural codes in LARP discourse. My focus in this paper, however, is more directed towards the specific materiality of these triggering elements and their relationship to the negotiated, diegetic text.

examples for the most part on games based on White Wolf's *World of Darkness* (WoD) TRPG.

in their specific form - by including (or excluding) rules for certain actions instead of others – rules affect player (as well as GM) expectations for the game, thus influencing their input in the narrative. (3)

3.1 Rules

While rules constitute the basis of the textual interface that allows for multiple player interaction during role-playing games (Punday, 2005), we must ask ourselves whether these elements are merely constituents of the 'game frame' or whether they are also a framing (i.e. whether they act as frame 'triggers') of the diegesis. Necessarily, they are the first, since the idea of 'rules' is an essential part of the meta-concept 'game'²; at the same time, however, rules also allow player interpretation of in-game situations, functioning simultaneously as framing devices. In this respect, Will Hindmarch has asserted that "TRPG rules help the players and the Storyteller understand and explain how their characters, as their agents in the game world, affect and respond to the actions that unfold in the story." (51) Furthermore, in their specific form - by including (or *excluding*) rules for certain actions instead of others – rules affect player (as well as GM) expectations for the game, thus influencing their input in the narrative. Thus, the rules not only allow the interpretation of in-game i.e. diegetic situations, but also shape them as they meaningfully delimit the choices available to players from the "outside". Indeed, as Hayot and Wesp (2004) have pointed out, "those elements of the game that lay at the heart of the game's strategic considerations are also a form of representation." (410) This becomes especially evident when considering the issue of character construction (cf. Lankonski, 2004). For example, games such as those published by White Wolf not only have rules to statistically represent "physical" elements and character attributes, but also for representing a number of "inner" attributes such as personality and, most interestingly, moral values (see fig. 2.). In the case of the *World of Darkness* games, characters' personalities are depicted partly

in terms of 'virtues', 'vices' and 'morality', thus triggering the frame 'moral conflict' as a guiding interpretive meta-concept of the potential stories created during game-play. By doing this, not only does the game implicitly encourage players to create characters with psychological depth – thus creating stories which involve the portrayal of inner conflict – but, because of the nature of the attributes it focuses on, it also influences the *type* of inner conflict portrayed.

It is important to point out, however, that quantification is not necessarily the only (although it is probably the most common) mode of representation within a RPG rules system (cf. Hitchens & Drachen, 2008). An example of this is the fact that, while the 'morality' trait is indeed represented numerically, the 'virtue' and 'vice' attributes are expressed solely in qualitative form. As stated in the *WoD* rulebook, "Virtues are not extensions of a character's Morality. Rather, they are *ideals* that inform his actions and provide a framework by which he interacts with society [my emphasis]." (92)

Still, the representation (statistic or otherwise) of inner traits implies an important hermeneutic inversion regarding most other types of fiction; that is, where in conventional fiction readers may deduce and/or interpret a character's inner feelings and struggles by his actions or - itself a classic example of a framing device - internal monologues *within* the text, in TRPGs, the inner characteristics have been (numerically) fixed to guide and help participants in understanding and, therefore, playing their characters.

Fig. 1. *Dungeons and Dragons* Character Sheet (1974)

The image shows the original Dungeons & Dragons Character Record Sheet (1974). It is a form used for tracking a character's progress in the game. The form includes sections for:

- Player's Name** and **Character's Name**
- Class** and **Level**
- Experience** points
- Hit Points** and **THAC0**
- Saving Throws** for Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom, Constitution, and Charisma.
- Equipment Carried**, including Magic Items and Potions.
- Other Notes** for additional information.
- Money and Treasure** section.
- Experience** section with a grid for tracking experience points.
- Background** section.

⁷ For an in depth analysis of role-playing as a system of information, see Harviainen (2012)

⁸ In this respect, Wolf has stated that "a frame is, as a rule, designated by a single term and as such corresponds to one metaconcept but usually governs a plurality of subconcepts and expectations." (2006: 4)

This, as expressed in the *Vampire Players' Guide* represents a “convenient heuristic if a player isn't entirely certain how his character is likely to respond to a certain situation” (21). Thus, players are expected to interpret in-game situations concerning their characters in terms of a quantified/qualitative representation of inner traits. To this extent, stat sheets are clearly framing devices, but such that they not only guide interpretations but also determine to a certain extent that which they frame. It is important to note, however, that the translation of a rating into the game through character action is in itself also a matter of interpretation since not all characters with the same rating necessarily reveal it the same way. Take, for example, the trait of ‘Humanity’ in *Vampire*, a trait that represents “humankind's better, more humane and caring aspect.” (ibid. 22) The players' guide states that:

“[M]oral decay does not affect everyone the same way. Not every mortal with a Humanity of 2 [a very low rating] or less is going to become a Charles Manson, Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin. Moral bankruptcy wears many faces, and not all of them coincide with the more simplistic expressions with which we may be familiar” (ibid.)

Evidently, the way in which a trait is portrayed depends on how it is to be interpreted within the context of a specific game. Nevertheless, in-game events can also modify the statistics that represent them.

Fig. 2. *World of Darkness* Character Sheet (2004)

Thus, a “good” character might reasonably act in a way that is contrary to his “nature” – the trait only determining the *probability* of a character acting in a certain way -, resulting in a change in its statistic representation on the game level. This change, for its part, might then influence future actions of the same character. The following passage of the rulebook makes this clear:

“[M]ortals have a much greater penchant for change and growth than vampires. As living things, they are free to change their courses at any time. Mortals can “turn over a new leaf,” while vampires don't really have that option. To reflect this, mortal characters regain humanity at a different rate than Kindred”⁹ (*Requiem* 23)

This understood, one may describe the role-playing game session as a constant “interpretive loop” between diegetic and game frame⁴. This is made especially evident in the character creation process; more specifically, in the transition from the character as a statistic entity to a narrative one. Indeed, after constructing the framework of a character, all a player has are “some traits and a general sense of who [his] character might be.” (*Players' Guide* 23) However, in order to “flesh it out”, the player must be able to “make the leap from seeing the character as a collection of numbers and begin to view him as a full-fledged living, breathing individual.” (ibid.) This transition is based on a fundamental need for providing inner-diegetic plausibility. In other words, it does not suffice that character stats have been appropriately chosen from a strategic point of view – which would make sense if a TRPG were truly only a game – if they cannot be explained in a logical way from a diegetic one. Therefore, the *Vampire Players' Guide* recommends GMs (‘storytellers’) to “demand a certain degree of realism from the game [so] that players can *suspend their disbelief* and *immerse* themselves in their characters [my emphasis]” (ibid.). Failing to do so, the text warns, will have repercussions on the game as it “will never take on a feel of a shared world and [...] always feel like a bunch of people sitting around a table rolling dice.” (ibid.)

⁹ *Kindred* being the self-designating term used by vampires in White Wolf's *Vampire* setting (cf. *Requiem* 14).

3.2 SETTING INFORMATION

Setting information constitutes what can be seen as the “substance” of the TRPG rulebook; it consists of information pertaining to the fictional world that can be selectively used and introduced into the game interface². Nevertheless, unless disputed or explicitly modified during the game, the setting can be seen as an implicit agreement constituting the diegetic level’s frame of reference, i.e. the “hypothetical primary framework” on which the game is based. Thus, if the discursive interface of the players is to be seen as the artifact of the role-playing game, the setting information can be considered a coding of the frame within which this discourse becomes meaningful. In this respect setting information complies with the general function of “substitut[ing], simulat[ing], modify[ing], add[ing] to, or [...] represent[ing], those frame constituents and framings which in ordinary discursive exchange are implied in the communicative situation or are agreed upon.” (Wolf, 2006: 103)

Additionally, *genre*, *theme* and *mood* indications are among the most important framings for the collaborative construction of narrations during role-playing game sessions. Clearly, the triggering of specific genre frames does not affect the reading of the rulebook – which, in itself, has no literary genre; or rather, whose “genre” is precisely that of being a ‘rulebook’ – as much as it produces expectations as to the story possibilities of the game. As a consequence, players are guided into creating narratives which are conceptually and aesthetically more unified as they follow general literary genre conventions. For example, the *WoD* core-rulebook, which comprises the basic, common setting and rule information for most of the company’s other games, is defined as a “horror game” (*WoD* 22, 23). Thus, by invoking the frame of ‘horror fiction’ the rulebook invites players to include motifs, tropes and *topoi* typical of this genre into their campaigns. The same can be said concerning its mood (“dread”) and theme (“dark mystery”). As for the latter, the rulebook states:

“While each story has its own central theme, the looming theme behind them all explores the dramatic ramifications of a world of supernatural secrets. Storytellers and players alike should be mindful of this theme when they feel the need to return to the roots of the game.” (ibid. 23)

if the discursive interface of the players is to be seen as the artifact of the role-playing game, the setting information can be considered a coding of the frame within which this discourse becomes meaningful. (5)

Evidently frames such as genre and theme serve as guiding meta-concepts within which the TRPG narratives develop. Their central importance is highlighted by the fact that they are explicitly triggered within the main text of the rulebook. In the case of *Vampire: The Requiem*, the genre – “modern gothic storytelling game” – proves to be important not only for the main theme of the game (“morality”), but also for the aesthetic associated with it:

“What you hold in your hands is a Modern Gothic Storytelling game, a roleplaying game that allows you to build chronicles that explore morality through the metaphor of vampirism. In *Vampire*, you “play the monster,” and what you do as that monster both makes for an interesting story and might even teach you a little about your own values and those of your fellows [...] The setting of *Vampire* borrows greatly from gothic literature, not the smallest amount of which comes from the “set dressing” of the movement. Key to the literary gothic tradition are the ideas of barbarism, corruption and medieval imagery.” (14)

¹⁰ Harviainen (2008) has defined this in terms of each player’s “personal hermeneutic circle” (75). Thus, the game can be considered a number of texts where “the gaming process itself can be treated as interpretation done by the participants, and analyzed as such.” (ibid.)

¹¹ Borgstrom (2007) goes even further, arguing that the setting of the actual game is *never* the same as that contained within the published book:

[T]he setting that one group plays in is not the setting that another group plays in. In effect, role-playing games in their static, published form do not describe a specific fictional world or story. They describe a large multidimensional space of fictional worlds and stories organized by unifying data (57).

¹² The following examples are indeed only a very tiny fraction of the framings available in these texts. A thorough identification and analysis of all of such elements would greatly surpass the scope of this article.

3.3 RULEBOOK (META-)FRAMING DEVICES¹²

Among the different elements of the rulebook, it is its own framing devices which present the most interesting features concerning the framing of the diegesis. Indeed, considered as an artifact in its own right, the rulebook, as any other printed text, features a variety of framing elements such as a “front and back cover, which usually displays its title and the names of its designer and publisher” (Nephew, 2004: 21). However, as we will see, these texts not only serve to stabilize the meaning and guide the interpretation of the information contained within *the rulebook itself* but, in most cases, they are directly related to the diegetic level of the game. Thus, they become meta-framings of the potential diegesis, creating expectations concerning the stories that may be told during play. Considering the fact that one of the main functions of framings is to “mark an artifact as such and distinguish it from its surroundings by indicating the special rules (frames) that apply in its reception,” (Wolf, 2006: 26) these framing devices can be said to have a *double function* by marking *two artifacts*: the rulebook proper and the textual interface produced during play.

The most evident examples of framing in rulebooks are those denominated paratexts in the narrower sense, such as titles, prologues, epilogues, illustrations, and so on. More specifically, these elements correspond to what Genette has deemed ‘peritexts’ – texts at the borders of a work – as opposed to ‘epitexts’ – those texts which are materially removed from the work in question. Among these framings, those which exist in initial position tend to have greater relevance in their influence upon reader expectations and interpretation of a text (Wolf, 1999). Evidently, because of their practically invariable position at the beginning of a text, titles are one of the primary mediators between work and reader. As such, they are one of the main instances of influence upon a text’s reception. Moreover, titles of role-playing game rulebooks are interesting cases of initial paratexts, because they do more than just referring to the content of the book that they frame. Indeed, if we consider games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Vampire* or *Paranoia*, it becomes evident that their titles say less about the books as artifacts than about the type of stories than can be told with them. As Wallis (2007) has observed,

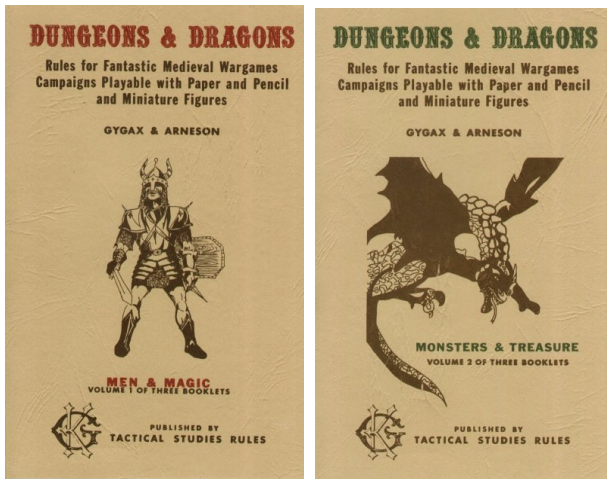
“[s]tory structure can also come from the game’s setting and the assumptions that people take from a game’s components and packaging. If you buy a game called “Kill the Dragon,” you assume that there will be a dragon and to win you must kill it, and that is the direction your play will take.” (77)

Rulebook covers are generally good examples of how different paratextual elements may be combined to create what can be seen as a unified, plurimedial framing device. (6)

This can be described in terms of the *double function* of the text’s framing devices explained previously, as they mark both the artifactuality of the rulebook as well as that of the potential interface/diegesis created by the players.

3.3.1 The cover

Rulebook covers are generally good examples of how different paratextual elements may be combined to create what can be seen as a unified, plurimedial framing device. Thus, although we can generally deconstruct them into a verbal, a typographical and a pictorial component, we must keep in mind that they function as a framing unity. Furthermore, by observing the simplicity of the original cover of the *D&D* game from 1974 (See fig. 3), it becomes evident that the aforementioned “double use” of framing devices was notoriously less prominent in early TRPGs (compare also figs. 1 & 2).

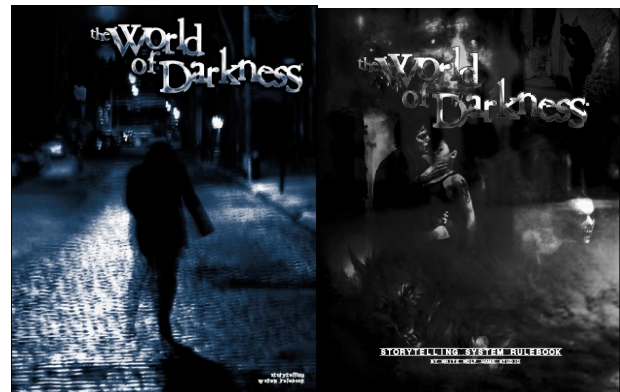
Fig. 3. *Dungeons and Dragons* Covers (1974)

Apart from the rulebook's title and illustration, it is clear that the subtitle refers primarily to the strategic character of the information contained within the text itself rather than its possibilities of constructing an actual story within the fictional world. Thus, these elements trigger the frame 'game' rather than 'narrative' (i.e. 'fiction') as the governing frame of the TRPG session. This may be contrasted with fig. 4, which shows the cover and inlay cover respectively of the *World of Darkness* core-rulebook. Although the title in itself is still relatively generic, it already conveys an ominous feeling, a certain uneasiness that relies heavily on the general association that is made between darkness and the fear of the unknown; of that which may not be seen. Were it on its own, however, the title would still leave enough space open to speculation: What kind of world is meant? What kind of darkness? Indeed, the "world of darkness" of the title could still refer to any number of settings, with "darkness" referring to, for example, evil (i.e. "dark") forces, the "dark ages" of a particular fictional world, or a particular "dark lord." However, the title could also refer to an outer space setting or to a setting where the characters are all blind. Clearly, taken on its own the title is highly indeterminate. In this respect,

although the cover illustration might appear at first glance to be a quite "literal" translation, so to speak, of the title, it is actually an essential complementary element that expands the initial premise established in verbal form. Seen from behind, a solitary human figure is shown walking down a dim lit street at night.

Fig. 4

a) *World of Darkness* Cover (Left) and b) Inlay Cover (right)



The picture is altogether full of dark shadows, with the lighter areas being merely a slight hue of blue or gray. Nevertheless, the image is actually less redundant than it seems. First of all, the "world" of the title is now portrayed as a familiar one, not a valley full of 'orcs' or a spaceship adrift in the vast darkness of the cosmos, but an alleyway that does not appear to differ greatly from those in the real world. Additionally, there seems to be a concretization of the slight uneasiness implicit in the title, now heightened and transformed into definite suspense by the almost topical motif of the lone figure in the dark alleyway. At the same time, there seems to be the implication that this now impending menace is not of a natural kind - not the "junkies" around the corner - but something more mysterious and unknown. This feeling is conveyed by the blurred and "shaky" nature of the image which resembles a badly taken picture. Within it, the objects appear to lack definite borders, giving almost the impression of "seeing double". It is precisely this idea that is further reinforced by the

¹³ A similar framing strategy has been described by Roy Sommer (2006) in the context of film analysis:

Both the design of, and the information conveyed by, the titles and credits themselves make a significant contribution to the framing process. For instance, paratextual devices such as the use of distinctive fonts in the title sequence of *Star Wars: Episode III* create continuity between this episode and the other movies of the saga. (392)

¹⁴ Indeed, later on in the rulebook we find a passage that closely resembles our interpretation of the cover:

Characters in the World of Darkness can blur the line between reality and the occult. Indeed, that's what it's all about. Exploring a world of mystery that tries to keep itself hidden. A world that punishes those who look too deep. But those who refuse to look suffer even worse. They're rocked on seas of conspiracies of which they go unaware. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. There are no easy answers, and knowing is not half the battle. It's only the first shot in a long, grinding war against the shadows. (*WoD* 23)

typographical form of the title itself (fig 5.), whose letters appear to be shifted and slightly displaced. Indeed, what appears at first almost like a printing mistake is yet another indicator of the “otherness” of the “world” presented by the game, giving the idea of an underlying, “hidden” reality. Considering the above mentioned, the inlay cover (fig 4. b) is to be seen as an extension of the front cover, answering but also expanding to a great extent the expectations previously created by it. First of all, by recurring in the same position and form, the title reinforces the idea of unity between the previous illustration and this one³.

Fig. 5. *WoD* Title Graphic



In other words, because it has not been altered, the title calls our attention to the changes in the picture. As we can observe, the slight bluish hue of the previous image has been reduced to black and shades of grey. This fact may be correlated with the absence of any source of light - in contrast to the cover where, despite the darkness, there were still streetlamps in the background. The solitary human figure, for its part, has now been replaced by several explicitly or implicitly non-human ones. Again, boundaries here are not clearly cut and the figures, as well as their background, appear only in parts, as if covered by, or emerging from a surrounding fog. It is only upon closer examination that one may spot the “odd man out” in the upper right corner of the picture (see fig. 6).

Fig. 6. *WoD* Inlay Cover Detail



Contrasting with the rest of the illustration, this image displays a clearly contoured depiction of a person – or rather his shadow – in a solitary alleyway. This image necessarily evokes the figure on the cover page and by doing so produces questions, semantic blanks that may be filled during the game: “Is he afraid? Is this what is awaiting him? Will he become - or is he already - one of ‘them’?” In a way then, the image represents a window between (front and inlay) covers and, therefore, between the “worlds” of the game.

Considering what has been discussed above, these initial framing devices can be said to foreshadow the whole concept of the *World of Darkness* setting in a nutshell⁴. This considered, the cover may be described as an “anticipatory illustration” (Wandhoff, 2006: 210) that has the function of “provid[ing] the narrative text with a moralizing maxim or theme that is encapsulated in a picture and put before the reader’s inner eye before the narrative proper starts.” (ibid. 212) Moreover, the cover triggers important frames of reference, creating expectations as to the type of narrative that can be developed during the game. As a matter of fact, one is under the impression that this framing alone is enough to engender the ideas to construct a story. In fact, as Genette (1997) has already pointed out, “a title hit upon all of a sudden, and sometimes well before the subject of the book is [...] like an instigator: once the title is there, the only thing left to produce is a text that justifies it” (67).

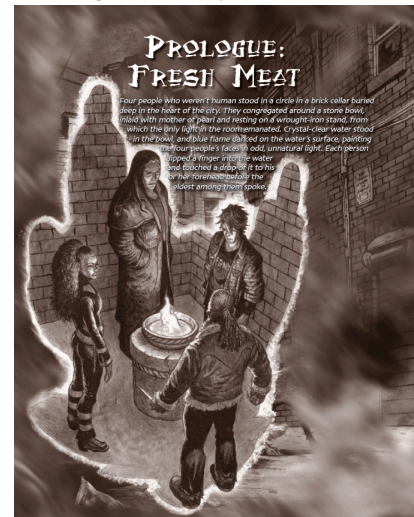
Another element of the cover page(s) which should not go unattended is the caption “Storytelling System Rulebook” which appears in the lower area of both illustrations and serves to trigger two major frames – i.e. meta-concepts – within which both the rulebook as well as the potential diegesis are to be understood: that of ‘game’ and that of ‘fiction.’ Paradoxically, by doing so, it simultaneously creates a space for suspension of disbelief by establishing that the diegetic level is based on “a set of transformation rules that indicates what is to be treated as real and how it is to be treated as real within the make-believe framework.” (Fine, 1983: 183) In other words, the denomination of a text as “role-playing game rulebook” implies the agreement “to ‘bracket’ the world outside the game” (ibid.) during play. Indeed, more than signaling its game character, the indication on a printed text as “role-playing game” may be seen as a more complex version of the original framing

used in child's play (i.e. "let's make believe"). In this last case, suspension of disbelief is easily broken as soon as disagreements between participants are encountered. However, by including more complex, rule-based framings, TRPG rulebooks allow a greater plausibility, a reality, to a certain extent, of the diegetic world. Moreover, the issue of the size of the font – notoriously small in the first cover; slightly larger in the inlay – is to be noted as well since it represents the conscious decision to foreground, in the first place, the atmosphere and tension displayed in the cover while de-emphasizing the ludic/fictional nature of the text. Obviously, this may be seen as a strategy intended to augment the suspense created by the cover, but also a framing that indicates that, while the *World of Darkness* is a game, it is a game to be taken seriously. In fact, the introduction to the players' guide to Vampire begins with the following quote by MC. Escher in its heading – indeed, yet another paratext!: "My work is a game, a very serious game" (qtd. in Vampire Players' Guide 7). At the same time, this subtitle also underscores the focus of the game in producing interesting stories rather than just fun, "escapist" adventures. Again, this is meant to influence the way in which the players create their campaigns and the stories they tell since there is no great difference – at least in principle – between how a "storytelling game" is played and how any other TRPG is.

3.3.2 Prologues, Epilogues and Framing/Embedded Narratives

Because of the explicit, salient nature that makes them clearly discernible from the rest of the text¹⁵, prologues, epilogues and "framing" or "embedded" narratives¹⁶ offer us with further examples of paratexts within the rulebook.

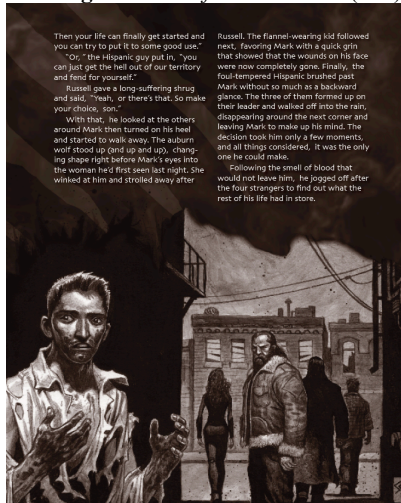
Fig. 7. *Werewolf the Forsaken* (2)



As has been previously mentioned, there is a notorious prominence of such elements in storytelling-based role-playing games. Indeed, if we go back to our analysis of the games and sourcebooks published by White Wolf, we will notice that practically all of them begin with a prologue consisting of a short narrative text that provides an atmospheric introduction into the fictional setting of the specific game. In most cases, such as *Werewolf: The Forsaken* (WF), *Vampire: The Requiem* (VtR) and *Mage: The Awakening* (MtA), the narrative is continued as an epilogue in the last pages of the book. For example, in WF, the reader is presented at the beginning with a character's (Mark) first transformation into a werewolf and the mysterious circumstances that surround it (fig. 7). In the epilogue (fig. 8), after recovering consciousness in an alleyway, Mark is approached by a group of strangers – a "pack" of other werewolves, in fact – who offer to give him answers to his new condition:

¹⁵ This explicitness is given by typographical, stylistic and spatial differences; as well as by the fact that these texts are generally surrounded by, or appear within, accompanying illustrations.

¹⁶ One must distinguish how both "framing" as well as "embedded" are to be understood: Indeed, these texts may be either embedded in, or framing, the rulebook as a text, however, this function may shift concerning the diegesis. In the latter case it is probably more accurate to consider these texts in general as framing narratives rather than embedded ones.

Fig 8. *Werewolf the Forsaken* (313)

A hard, bitter smile creased Russell's face, and he refused to back off. "First, I thought we'd answer some of your questions for you, son. Tell you a little about what you are and what it means."

"What I've become."

"No, what you are," Russell said. "After that, there's people you have to meet and some hard tests you'll have to pass. Then your life can finally get started and you can try to put it to some good use." "Or," the Hispanic guy put in, "you can just get the hell out of our territory and fend for yourself." (312, 313)

Evidently, the use of the framing narrative here creates a bridge between levels of meaning since the player is naturally led to identify with the newborn Werewolf character, Mark. Thus, the framing allows a trespassing to a certain extent of the borders between "worlds" and the invitation to Mark to "learn what [he is] and what it [all] means", becomes a beckoning to the players to take his place and investigate the setting by playing out their own adventures.

Apart from such cases of prologues/epilogues, the use of "embedded" narratives in the *WoD* core-rulebook is especially notorious. In fact, within the first 30 pages of the book, there is little mention of players, rules or characters. Instead, and after the

prologue proper, the reader is presented with a number of short, fragmentary narratives intercalated with considerations on the basics of storytelling. In general terms, these narratives serve a similar function to that of frame stories in literary texts (cf. Wolf, 2006: 179-206). However, because of the fact that the framed story – the one produced during play – is clearly the dominant text during a RPG session, the function of these texts can be described in terms of what Wolf has called '*mise en cadre*':

"In this case, rather than shed light through revelatory similarities in a 'bottom up' process – as in *mises en abyme* – the framing implicitly sheds light on the framed text in a 'top down' process. As narratology has failed to provide a separate term for this reversal of *mise en abyme*, I have proposed [...] to baptize it '*mise en cadre*'" (ibid. 198)

Furthermore, these stories, although mostly fragmentary and unrelated, not only serve the general function of establishing the mood and genre of the game – both of which are explicitly stated in White Wolf's games – but also *exemplify how these frames can be translated into narratives*.

.1(Intra-)textual, implicit framings

Although they are by far not as salient as the previous examples, intra-textual¹⁷ framings also play a central role in the interpretation of the content of the rulebook. Moreover, because they are neither statistic, nor setting information in the proper sense, these elements clearly serve a different function than that of structurally (the rules) or materially (setting information) grounding the game. Indeed, these framing devices influence how meaning is to be ascribed *within* the "primary framework" of the fictional world. While the rulebook provides a system of rules and information concerning elements, creatures and phenomena of a fictional setting, this data still portrays a fictional environment which is, to a great extent, without meaning. As Fine (1983) has observed, since the events of the role-playing game take place within a fictional 'world,' "[t]he creation of the broad outlines of a fantastic setting is not

¹⁷ Again, intra-textual refers in this case to the fact that these framing devices occur *within the rulebook's main text*, as opposed to the previous examples such as the cover, prologues and epilogues which are at its borders. As in the previous cases of embedded/framing narratives, however, it remains difficult to determine whether these framings may be considered intra- or extra-textual in relation to the session's diegesis.

¹⁸ This, of course is not a narrative instance in the proper sense, as there is no actual narration of 'events'.

sufficient to set the stage for a game.” (76) Because of this, it becomes necessary to also “establish a world view that directs the game action and represents the implicit philosophy or ideals by which the world operates.” (ibid.) This, precisely, is the main function of rulebooks’ intra-textual framings. In the following example, we may observe how setting information is intertwined with intra-textual framing in order to influence the interpretation of the diegetic reality from “within”:

The Kindred gain most of their power and strength not from their own innate abilities, but from the influence they wield in the mortal world. [...] *Why risk one’s own potentially eternal existence, miserable as it might be at times, when one can manipulate pawns into taking those risks instead?* [my emphasis] (*Requiem* 26)

Clearly, there are two types of discourse available in this paragraph. On the one hand, the first half of it consists of the stating of information from an “uninvolved”, third person point of view. However, what immediately follows it is a sentence that portrays what can be interpreted as the thoughts of a vampire within the fictional world itself. In narratological terms we could describe this as a transition of the “narrative” instance from an extra-, heterodiegetic perspective to an apparently intra-, homodiegetic one. By creating the illusion of observing the fictional world from within, this transition – a beautiful case of ‘free indirect discourse’ in fact – frames the diegetic world, thus adding new structures of meaning to it. A similar case of intra-textual framing can be observed in the next example where, after elaborating on the main characteristics concerning the vampire clan of the *Nosferatu* – a central aspect of which is the fact that they are generally repulsive, either because of their appearance, their smell, or both –, the text goes on to add

information concerning the way in which these vampires relate to other *Kindred*. If it were indeed only setting information (i.e. data) that was being conveyed, it would suffice to mention the fact that other clans generally have little to do with *Nosferatu* vampires. However, this information is again intertwined with the portrayal of “intra-diegetic” systems of meaning.

“If they had their druthers, most other clans would prefer never to associate with the *Nosferatu* at all, yet the Haunts’ [i.e. the *Nosferatus*] inarguable talents and brute force make them too dangerous to ignore. *So other Kindred offer them a tense hospitality, hide their unease behind wary diplomacies and pray that the Nosferatu leave as soon as possible.* [my emphasis]” (*Players’ Guide* 111)

Not only does this passage express the fact that *Nosferatu* are generally disliked, but expands its significance by portraying the attitude other Vampire’s have toward them and the circumstances under which *Kindred* might seek *Nosferatu* assistance. Thus, this passage reinforces overarching themes (frames) of the game such as ‘deceit’ and ‘conspiracy’.

4. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper I have argued that a close examination of TRPG rulebooks is central to understanding the way in which these games allow for the construction of highly complex, collaborative and interactive narratives. To demonstrate their impact, I have recurred mainly to Genette’s and Wolf’s considerations concerning the specific use of paratexts and framings in works of fiction. By distinguishing three basic rulebook components – namely, rules, setting and (meta)framing devices – I have attempted to show how these elements, in addition to their main

¹⁹ As Nephew (2004) has stated, “[t]he text necessarily presents the world as incomplete and fragmentary, as no sourcebook can describe every inch of a fantasy world.” (39)

²⁰ Indeed, as he concludes in one of his reviews: “I hope I can play this one day, either with my current group or with a group I’ll have in the future” (Game Geeks #117 *Houses of the Blooded*) Doubtlessly, this type of commentary would be inconceivable in any other medium as it would appear nonsensical to seriously comment on a book one has not read, a film one has not seen, or a game one has not played.

²¹ In *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre* (1991), Wolfgang Iser establishes the necessity of reformulating the traditional notion of reality and fiction as a binary system of opposed elements by adding the concept of the imaginary. Thus, he proposes a ternary system, arguing that all fictional texts are based on the triadic relationship between the spheres of the real, the fictive and the imaginary. Because of the fact that signs, which are used to refer to real elements or concepts – understood as those of the empiric, extra-textual world –, lose their original pragmatic determination in the fictional text, while the imaginary – understood by Iser as an experience which is “diffus, formlos, unfixiert und ohne Objektreferenz” (20) – is given substance and form by the text, the relationship between these spheres is one of ‘boundary crossing’. This crossing of boundaries occurs, according to Iser, by a conscious and intentional act he has called fictionalizing act (*Akt des Fingierens*).

function, serve as framings to the potential diegeses created during game-play. In this respect, I have argued that setting and rules not only provide the structural basis to the game but that they also frame it as they invariably imply reductions of the imagined world². Consequently, by including or excluding (hypothetical) information, they create expectations concerning the playing of the game much in the same way as initial framing devices used in “traditional” written fiction. At the same time, rules and setting information affect the interpretation players make of diegetic events. Rulebook paratexts, for their part, are especially notorious for having a “double” framing function as they extend their influence from the rulebook towards the diegesis by triggering important frames within which the

During the process of gaming the players progressively reduce the space of possible stories down to a single story – one set of things “happened,” while all other sets did not.”

diegesis is to be constructed. In addition, the rulebook’s intra-textual framing devices serve to add diegetic meaning to the otherwise purely factual information given by the game setting.

In view of the aforementioned, perhaps the best way to describe TRPG rulebooks would be as a *system of framings*. However, because of the fact that the diegesis only emerges during the actual playing of the game, the framings provided in the rulebook are to be understood as surrounding a diegetic void. This void, however, is not a completely abstract nothingness but, because framing devices are conveyors of meaning, it becomes what in Iserian terms is called a *Leerstelle* or semantic blank. (In other words, a semantic blank can only exist within an established system of meaning; only within it may a semantic vacuum be “filled”.) As Henry (2009) has stated, “the existence of these fictional worlds, written without their stories, is an invitation for stories to happen.” (7) Rulebooks are therefore texts that enable the visualization of potential diegeses. One could say then, that the rulebook is also an artifact that produces an aesthetic object, the object being

the reader’s visualization of stories in potency. Indeed, Kurt Wiegel’s video reviews of TRPGs on the internet are a good example of this. Wiegel, who is an experienced game-master, discusses in short video clips different role-playing games, commenting on their playability and story possibilities. However, in many of these cases, Wiegel’s commentary is done without any actual playing experience of the game³. Likewise, it is not uncommon for players to purchase rulebooks for different games, not so much with the objective of playing them, but rather as a mode of gathering ideas – be it rules, setting or storylines – for campaigns already running in another game system. In this respect, it is important to distinguish rulebooks from proto-diegetic phenomena such as the draft of a novel. In this last case there will regularly be a single text (i.e. one story) as an outcome, whereas a RPG sourcebook may inform an indefinite number of narrations. Thus, one could argue that RPG rulebooks are to be understood as an incomplete ‘act of fictionalizing’ (*Akt des Fingierens*)⁴. Here, indeed, the imaginary has been fixed by giving it form as setting information. In fact, it has been given an additional aspect of “reality” by the introduction of rules for its transformation into statistically determined elements. However, the rulebook in itself is still not a single complete story and is, as yet, not completely ‘realized’ (*realisiert*). Indeed, “the creation of world, character, and story become “real” when experienced during the course of a game session, rather than on the reading of the game rulebook itself.” (Nephew, 2004: 39) Thus, the role-playing game rulebook is a text still imbued by the possibilities of the imaginary. It is only during game play that this *fictionalizing act* is completed. As Borgstrom (2007) has observed, “[b]efore the game begins there is a large space of possible stories defined by the initial premise. During the process of gaming the players progressively reduce the space of possible stories down to a single story – one set of things “happened,” while all other sets did not.” (58) For this reason, the expectations triggered by a rulebook’s framing devices directly influence the formation of the story. Indeed, there is no actual ‘horror’ *within* the rulebook of the *World of Darkness* but, because its framings trigger this specific genre frame, the players, as well as the GM, will be inclined to produce a text that matches what is expected from it⁵.

²² In this respect, Wallis (2007) has pointed out that “all stories must follow the rules of their genre and of storytelling in general if they are to satisfy an audience.” (78) Consequently, a “game’s mechanics must take into consideration the rules of the genre that it is trying to create: not just the relevant icons and tropes, but the nature of a story from that genre” (ibid. 73).

The system of framings constituted by the rulebook is therefore crucial in order to establish the specific 'interaction codes' and 'improvisation patterns' (as by Fatland, 2006) relevant to a given game. Equally important, however, is the fact that by doing so TRPG texts also reveal to their readers, both implicitly and explicitly, how this is achieved, inciting players to further modify or even replace them with other (framing) texts. This specific mode of self-disclosure, as well as the use of framings in TRPGs to incite the production (and not only the reception) of text is what I have called *genesic framing*. Moreover, it is this feature that is likely to account for much of the complexity of the TRPG medium as well as for its persistence in time. Indeed, despite the appearance of alternatives in more technologically advanced media, TRPGs are still unique in that participants are not only playing a (storytelling) game but, by doing so, they are also learning the mechanisms that will allow them to (re-)construct and manipulate it along the way.

This specific mode of self-disclosure, as well as the use of framings in TRPGs to incite the production (and not only the reception) of text is what I have called genesic framing.(11)

Finally, it is important to note that by focusing on rulebooks as "primary" texts, it is possible to elucidate how the different authorial instances involved in the game – primary, secondary and tertiary – extend their influence over the 'story space' beyond their specified areas of agency. If the narratives created during role-playing games may be seen as an actualization of player expectations, their (potential) fulfillment is to be understood as the result of collective negotiation. While the latter may be done explicitly, as in meta-game dialog in general, from what has been discussed in this paper it becomes evident that much of it in fact results from the manipulation of expectations and diegesis interpretation by means of genesic framing. In this respect, a description and analysis of how secondary and tertiary authors make use of such framing strategies is still a matter for further investigation.

As for now, it is possible to assert that tabletop role-playing games demonstrate the true extent to which framings are relevant in mediating works of

fiction. This is especially important if we consider the notion that all fiction is in fact a form of pretense play (cf. Walton 1990; Iser 1991; Sutrop, 2000). Indeed, much as the players' individual visualization of the game events, any aesthetic or literary work is only truly available as the individual experience of a given recipient. When communicating about these texts, negotiation through framings – interpretations, blurbs, reviews, opinions, etc. – allows us to bridge the gap between our own experience of the text and that of others⁶. Thus, not only may role-playing games teach us something about the way in which we negotiate reality (cf. Mackay, 2001) but, foremost, about how we negotiate fiction⁷.

5. REFERENCES

- [1] Achilli et al. 2004. *The World of Darkness*: White Wolf Publishing.
- [2] Achilli et al. 2004. *Vampire: The Requiem*: White Wolf Publishing.
- [3] Achilli et al. 2006. *Requiem, Chronichler's Guide*: White Wolf Publishing.
- [4] Blackwelder et al. *Vampire: Players' Guide*: White Wolf Publishing.
- [5] Borgstrom, R., 2007. Structure and Meaning in Role-Playing Game Design. In: P. Harrigan and N. Wardrip-Fruin, eds. *Second Person: role-playing and story in games and playable media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 58–66.
- [6] Bunia, R., 2006. Framing the End. In: W. Wolf and W. Bernhardt, eds. *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 359–383.
- [7] Consalvo, M., 2007. *Cheating: gaining advantage in videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [8] Costikyan, G., 2007. Games, Storytelling, and Breaking the String. In: P. Harrigan and N. Wardrip-Fruin, eds. *Second Person: role-playing and story in games and playable media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 5–13.
- [9] Dembeck, T., 2006. (Paratextual) Framing and the Work of Art. In: W. Wolf and W. Bernhardt, eds. *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 263–295.
- [10] Fatland, E. (2006). Interaction codes: Understanding and establishing patterns in player improvisation. In T. Fritzton & T. Wrigstad (Eds.), *Role, play, art: Collected experiences of role-playing* (pp. 17–34). Stockholm: Foreningen Knutepunkt.
- [11] Fine, G.A., 1983. *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago, London: Univ. of Chicago Press.

²³ As a matter of fact, Stefanescu (2006) has pointed out that "all comprehension of a literary work is ultimately a negotiation between the interpretive frames imposed by the reader and those suggested by the text itself." (330)

²⁴ A similar point has been made by Lopenen and Stenros (2012)

- [12] Gelber, D., Costikyan, G., and Goldberg, E., 1984. *Paranoia*: West End Games.
- [13] Genette, G., 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- [14] Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L., 1974. *Awareness of dying*. Chicago: Aldine.
- [15] Goffman, E., 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- [16] Grünzweig, W. and Solbach, A., eds., 1999. *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext/ Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- [17] Gygas, G. and Arneson, D., 1974. *Dungeons and Dragons: Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil and Miniature Figures*. Lake Geneva: TSR.
- [18] Hammer, J. (2007). Agency and authority in role-playing 'texts'. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 67-93). New York: Peter Lang.
- [19] Harrigan, P. and Wardrip-Fruin, N., eds., 2007. *Second Person: role-playing and story in games and playable media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [20] Harviainen, J.T., 2008. A Hermeneutical Approach to Role-Playing Analysis. *International Journal of Role-Playing* [online] (1), 66–78. Available from: <http://journalofroleplaying.org/> [Accessed 21 Sep 2012].
- [21] Harviainen, J.T., 2012. Systemic Perspectives on Information on Physically Performed Role-play. Doctoral dissertation. Tampere, Univ of Tampere
- [22] Hayot, E. and Wesp, E., 2004. Style, Strategy and Mimesis in Ergodic Literature. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41 (3), 404–423.
- [23] Henry, L., 2003. *Group Narration: Power, Information, and Play in Role Playing Games* [online]. www.darkshire.net/jhkim/rpg/theory/liz-paper-2003/ [Accessed 21 Sep 2012].
- [24] Hindmarch, W., 2007. Storytelling Games as a Creative Medium. In: P. Harrigan and N. Wardrip-Fruin, eds. *Second Person: role-playing and story in games and playable media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 47–55.
- [25] Hitchens, M. and Drachen, A., 2008. The Many Faces of Role-Playing Games. *International Journal of Role-Playing* [online] (1), 3–21. Available from: <http://journalofroleplaying.org/> [Accessed 21 Sep 2012].
- [26] Hruschovski, B., 1984. Fictionality and Fields of Reference. *Poetics Today*, 5 (2), 227–251.
- [27] Ilieva, A. 2012. Cultural Codes, Cultural Memory and Cultural Concepts in Live Role-Playing Discourses. Paper presented at Role-Playing in Games seminar, 10-11 April, 2012, Tampere, Finland.
- [28] Iser, W., 1991. *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven literarischer Anthropologie*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- [29] Lankoski, P., 2004. Character Design Fundamentals for Role-Playing Games. In: M. Montola and J. Stenros, eds. *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon, 139–148.
- [30] Loponen, M. and Stenros, J. 2012. Power Relations in Cultural Semiospheres. Paper presented at Role-Playing in Games seminar, 10-11 April, 2012, Tampere, Finland.
- [31] Machell, M., 2002. *The Problem with Character Backgrounds* [online]. Available from: <http://www.realms.org.uk> [Accessed 21 Sep 2012].
- [32] Machell, M., 2003. *Social Contract Gaming* [online]. Available from: www.realms.org.uk [Accessed 21 Sep 2012].
- [33] Mackay, D., 2001. *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art*. Jefferson, North Carolina, London: McFarland & Company.
- [34] Miller, J., 2006. Role Playing Games as Interactive Fiction. *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* [online], 6 (1). Available from: <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/122/contents122.shtml> [Accessed 22 Sep 2012].
- [35] Montola, M. and Stenros, J., eds., 2004. *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon.
- [36] Nephew, M.A.B., 2004. Playing with Power: The Authorial Consequences of Roleplaying Games. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 64 (11).
- [37] Padol, L., 1996. *Playing Stories, Telling Games: Collaborative Storytelling in Role-Playing Games* [online]. Available from: <http://www.recappub.com/games.html> [Accessed 24 Aug 2009 - document no longer available online].
- [38] Punday, D., 2005. Creative Accounting: Role-Playing Games, Possible-World Theory, and the Agency of Imagination. *Poetics Today*, 26 (1), 113–139.
- [39] Rein-Hagen, M. et al. 1991. *Vampire: The Masquerade*: White Wolf Publishing.
- [40] Schick, L., 1991. *Heroic Worlds: A History and Guide to Role-Playing Games*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books.
- [41] Sommer, R., 2006. Initial Framings in Film. In: W. Wolf and W. Bernhardt, eds. *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 383–407.
- [42] Stefanescu, M., 2006. The (Dis)Continuity of Framings. In: W. Wolf and W. Bernhardt, eds. *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 329–341.
- [43] Stenros, J., 2004. Notes on Role-Playing Texts. In: M. Montola and J. Stenros, eds. *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*. Helsinki: Ropecon, 75–80.
- [44] Sutrop, M., 2000. *Fiction and Imagination: The Anthropological Function of Literature*. Paderborn: Mentis

- [45] Wallis, J., 2007. Making Games That Make Stories. In: P. Harrigan and N. Wardrip-Fruin, eds. *Second Person: role-playing and story in games and playable media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 69–80.
- [46] Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of Representational Arts*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr.
- [47] Wandhoff, H., 2006. Found(ed) in a Picture: Ekphrastic Framing in Ancient, Medieval, and Contemporary Literature. In: W. Wolf and W. Bernhardt, eds. *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 179–207.
- [48] Waskul, D.D., 2006. The role-playing game and the game of role-playing: the ludic self and everyday life. In: P. Williams, S.Q. Hendricks, and W.K. Winkler, eds. *Gaming as Culture: essays on reality, identity and experience in fantasy games*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 19–38.
- [49] Wiegel, K. *Game Geeks* [online]. <http://gamegeeksrpg.com/> [Accessed 22 Sep 2012].
- [50] Williams, P., Hendricks, S.Q., and Winkler, W.K., eds., 2006. *Gaming as Culture: essays on reality, identity and experience in fantasy games*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.
- [51] Wolf, M.J.P. and Perron, B., 2003. *The video game theory reader*. New York, London: Routledge.
- [52] Wolf, W. and Bernhardt, W., eds., 2006. *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- [53] Wolf, W., 1999. Framing Fiction: Reflections on a Narratological Concept and an Example: Bradbury, Mensonge. In: W. Grünzweig and A. Solbach, eds. *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext/ Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 97–124.

David Jara is a Chilean Ph. D. candidate in literary studies at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. His current research focuses on the negotiation of narratives and fictional spaces in tabletop role-playing games.