The Vampire Foucault: Erotic Horror Role-Playing Games as a Technologies of the Self

Popular abstract: In Technologies of the Self (1988), philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault summarizes his life work as an analysis of how various truth games explore "the relationships between truth, power, and self" and in this series of lectures he investigates the "practices whereby individuals, by their own means or with the help of others, acted on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being in order to transform themselves to attain a certain state of perfection or happiness" (Foucault 1988, 15, 18). While Foucault provides a genealogy of religious and philosophical examples of these technologies of the self, those familiar with role-playing games (RPGs) recognize that their practice also meets these criteria. Even though most people play RPGs for entertainment and escapism, they are potentially transformative (Kemper 2020; Bowman and Hugaas 2021), especially erotic-horror RPGs, like *Vampire: The Masquerade* (*VtM*) (Davis et al. 1992).

This essay will explain how RPGs function as a type of truth game and how they can be understood as technologies of the self when played to achieve *transformative bleed*. It will also use Foucault's thought to explain how some RPGs, like *VtM*, are better suited for transformative bleed because their *technology of signs*, i.e., the setting and rules that define meaning within the game, enable the development of more psychologically complex characters through game mechanics inspired by Jungian depth psychology (Bowman 2010; Beltrán 2012, 2013). Finally, my most recent character, Robin Alecto, will be used as a case study of how the game mechanics of *VtM* function as a *technology of the self.*

Keywords: transformation, empancipatory bleed, Foucualt, erotic-horror, *Vampire: the Masquerade*

Albert R. Spencer
Portland State University
aspencer@pdx.edu

In *Technologies of the Self* (1988), a posthumous anthology of lectures delivered by Michel Foucault just two years prior to his death in 1984, he summarizes his wide-ranging thought as follows:

> What I have studied are the three traditional problems: (1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those "truth games" which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and object? (2) What are the relationships we have to others through those strange strategies and power relationships? And (3) what are the relationships between truth, power, and self? (Foucault 1988, 15)

While Foucault probably never encountered Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) or one of the other commercial role-playing games (RPGs) available during the 1970s & 1980s, he did enjoy and advocate BDSM as a technology of the self and multiple scholars note how BDSM is a type of RPG (Plant 2007; Sihvonen and Harviainen 2020). This bridge allows us to consider RPGs as potential truth games and to apply these three questions, and other analytic tools developed by Foucault, to the content, play, and functions of RPGs.

According to Foucault, *truth games*, like medicine, science, and law enforcement, shape society through a sophisticated process of role-playing. Participants assume or are assigned certain roles (e.g. doctor-patient, police-criminal) which structure their power, norms, and actions. Consequently, truth is not an independent object waiting to be discovered, but a product that emerges through the interactions of the participants. While RPGs have lower stakes than the previously mentioned truth games, they follow the same process of role assumption that seeks an outcome or truth that emerges through the complex interaction of setting, player-character actions, non-player character reactions, stats, rules, and

ludic elements, like dice, which simulate randomness. Likewise, its participants function as both players and characters, which speaks to the oscillating roles of subject and object to which Foucault refers. Players oscillate between holding our characters at an objective distance, which theorists label *alibi*, and experiencing their characters subjectively, which is labeled *immersion* (Bowman and Lieberoth 2018, 253).

This oscillation between subject and object, player and character, and alibi and immersion often result in bleed or the "phenomenon of emotions, thoughts, relationships, and physical states spilling over between in-game and out-of-game" (Bowman and Lieberoth 2018, 254). Bleed can be positive or negative, but it can also be transformative when it reveals hidden psychological insights to the player and empowers the development of new capacities in their daily lives. Transformative bleed usually emerges as an unexpected byproduct when RPGs are played for entertainment. For example, a player might notice that routinely playing a certain class, like a Ranger, symbolizes a deep personal motivation, like the need to feel self-sufficient. However, it is not uncommon for some players to experiment with "playing for bleed" through a variety of techniques, such as creating characters who are close to their own identity, playing to lose, steering their character towards extreme circumstances, ascetic practices in real life (e.g. sleep deprivation, drugs, fasting, etc.), or by exploring taboo scenarios (Bowman and Lieberoth 2018, 254-255).

Playing for bleed is a form of edge play and can be risky; nevertheless many communities and scholars support the idea that if play occurs in a safe setting with mutually supportive adult players and routine use of safety tools, then RPGs can harness bleed for the purpose of self-transformation. For example, members of the Nordic larp community insist that role-playing can function as a "transformative space within which we can explore our edges and mold our self-concepts through play" (Bowman and Hugaas, 2021). Consider how this emphasis on self-creation of identity resonates with the following summary of Foucault's technologies of the self:

> His new project would be, rather, a genealogy of how the self constituted itself as a subject. . . . an investigation of those practices whereby individuals, by their own means or with the help of others, acted on their own bodies, souls, thought, conduct, and way of being in order to transform themselves and attain a certain state of perfection or happiness, or to become a sage or immortal, and so on. (Foucault 1988, 4)

Peak experiences during play often signify that transformation has occurred or is immanent and include such experiences as a possessing force where the player is so immersed that "the player abandons a personal identity and surrenders to the character. . . to directly experience the full subjective reality of the character" (Turkington 2006); character realization or a "strong sense of the character as a distinct entity" from the self (Bowman and Schrier 2018, 403); archetypal enactment where the player sets "aside their own identity for a time in order to take up another, more essential kind of role" usually of a mythic or religious nature (Beltrán 2012, 94); and emancipatory bleed where the player frees themselves from the internalized mythic norms of systemic forms of oppression (Kemper 2020).

Thus, role-playing games, especially transformative play, resemble the historical technologies of self that Foucault discusses (Socratic self-care, the Stoic practice of askēsis, and the sacrament of confession in the Catholic church) because they involve communal social practices to achieve self-transformation and similar states of perfection (Foucault 1988, 19-41). It should also be noted that all these technologies are dialogical and involve conversations between a student seeking transformation and a master guiding that process. Traditional RPGs mimic these structures, especially ones which involve a game master who verbally describes a scenario to which the player-characters respond.

Foucault also insists that truth games empower self-transformation through their technologies of signs or the tools which "permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification" (Foucault 1988, 18). With regards to RPGs, their technology of signs would be the settings and rules they use for play and naturally some rules increase the possibility of playing for transformative bleed. Thus, a game like Vampire: The Masquerade (VtM) (Davis et al. 1992) that focuses on narrative storytelling as opposed to tactical combat, like D&D, is more likely to explore content and scenarios where transformative bleed might occur. First, the players are not the human heroes who fight these monsters; they are the monsters! Therefore, the drama of these games is less about completing quests or good deeds, than it is about experiencing the perspective of a supernatural being through the pursuit of personal agendas; the negotiation of complicated political scenes; guarding against or confronting other supernatural beings; uncovering forgotten forbidden lore; remaining undetected by humans; and maintaining one's sanity across decades or centuries.

Consequently, these different narratives require different rules than tactical or combat games, thus a different technology of signs which is most obvious at the level of character creation. While most editions of D&D focus on calculating the combat stats of the character with minimal attention to their social, psychological, or philosophical traits, in VtM this ratio is reversed. In all World of Darkness (WoD) games, only three of the core Attributes are Physical (Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina) whereas the other six form an equal balance between Social (Charisma, Manipulation, and Appearance) and Mental (Perception, Intelligence, and Wits) Attributes. This ratio signals to players that they should use their combat skills as a last resort when solving problems. Indeed, an important dramatic tension in VtM and other WoD games is that characters should resist using their often-overwhelming supernatural powers, especially for violence, out of fear of exposing themselves as monsters or psychological degeneration.

More importantly, the VtM character creation also includes elaborate stats for a character's psychology. Players begin to create their characters by selecting a Nature and Demeanor from a list of personality Archetypes (e.g. Autocrat, Bon Vivant, Child, Judge, Rebel, etc.) that reflect their Character Concept. Acting in accordance with these Archetypes allows a character to regain Willpower, another psychological trait, that they use to resist various forms of supernatural manipulation and can spend to increase the likelihood that a specific action will be successful. Furthermore, the rules encourage tension between a character's Nature (true self) and Demeanor (public personae) because diverging Archetypes allow a character to regain Willpower through a wider range of behaviors than if they were the same or similar. This tension provides a mechanical advantage for creating characters with psychological depth and multiple scholars have discussed extensively White Wolf's deliberate incorporation of terms and concepts from Jungian depth psychology (Bowman 2010; Beltrán 2012).

For example, when creating my most recent character, Robin Alecto, I selected the Rebel archetype for her Nature and Defender for her Demeanor. Rebel's regain Willpower when they "inflict significant damage on the order you despise" and Defender's regain Willpower when they "successfully defend your chosen object of loyalty from some outside threat" (Baugh et al. 2002, 139-140). Robin was patterned on vengeful female protagonists, like The Bride and O-Ren Ishii from Kill Bill and Arya Stark from Game of Thrones. According to her backstory, Robin turned to a life of crime and violence when her father, a politically conscious teamster, was murdered by the local lords for rabble rousing. Indeed, she draws her surname Alecto from one of the Furies from Greek mythology. The name translates to "implacable or unceasing anger," specifically against the mortal criminals she chastises. During play, her Nature and Demeanor mechanically represented Robin as a traumatized individual motivated by her childlike rage against those who harmed her (her Rebel Nature), yet she found night by night through her loyalty the other PCs in her vampire coterie (her Defender Demeanor). These

complex psychosocial motivations allowed me to find the balance between an antisocial character who nevertheless maintained her own moral compass by putting the needs of her companions over her own.

Characters also possess a Humanity rating which is the total of other Virtue stats, like Conscience, Self-Control, and Courage. These psychological and philosophical stats are perhaps the most important in rules because they symbolize the central tension of the game: maintaining the character's sanity and avoiding becoming a complete monster. When confronted with stressful circumstances, players have no guarantee their characters will react according to their will. If a player fails a Virtue roll, they will engage in problematic behavior such as violence, depravity, gluttony, or panic, because the Beast within seizes control and acts according to fight-flight-freeze-fawn responses. Coping with these moral failures heavily shapes the drama of VtM, especially if it leads to Degeneration (a reduction of the character's Humanity rating) which pulls them closer to becoming a mindless monster. If their Humanity reaches 0, the player is no longer allowed to play that character because the Beast is in full control, and they will likely be banished or destroyed by the other members of vampiric society out of fear that the presence of such a monster will jeopardize their own security.

Not only do these elaborate psychological game mechanics quantify a character's process of self-transformation, but they also allow players to explore how their deepest desires and fears are intertwined. The genre of VtM is best described as erotic-horror roleplaying because vampires are characters that represent both our ideal self and taboo self: the person we desire to be (eros) and the person we fear becoming (horror) (Bowman 2010, 172, 176). We find vampires compelling because they symbolize ideal beings who are immortal, eternally young, virile, charming, and supernaturally powerful, yet they have obtained this power by engaging in behaviors that many cultures consider forbidden, from deep taboos, like cannibalism (vampires must drink blood) and necrophilia (vampires are animated corpses), as well as behaviors that are repressed in some societies, like bisexuality (vampires desire the blood of all genders) and androgyny (vampires cannot procreate sexually so gender is purely a matter of social construction and personal identity).

As a result, role-playing a vampire requires a player to explore their desires and their fears, both of which can be transformative. The game is erotic in the broadest Platonic sense of the word because each character must explore a purpose that gives meaning to their parasitic immortal existence whether that is a desire for status, honor, wealth, power, knowledge, redemption, transcendence, etc. Given that these desires also shape our real lives, players learn by proxy about their advantages and disadvantages through the drama of the game. Likewise, VtM also enables exploration of eros in the sense of sexuality and gender through erotic role-play (ERP). Players can easily play gender non-conforming characters and may use their sexuality to solve problems, specifically to seduce their prey for feeding or to otherwise manipulate mortals.

Indeed, Ashley Brown investigates the nature, risks, and benefits of ERP in her book Sexuality in Role-Playing Games (2015) and uses both Foucault's theories of sexual normativity and sexual discourse to analyze how the setting and systems of WoD support ERP:

> . . . erotic role-play can be understood as an activity undertaken voluntarily to explore the mysteries of sexuality with the reassurance the activity is frivolous and thus contains limited risks to the self. Rules are additionally understood as confining potential self-discoveries made through erotic role-play and limiting their potential to supplant normative notions of "austere" sexuality with alternate sexualities developed through play. (Brown 2015, 7)

Essentially, ERP allows players to liberate themselves from the sexual norms of their society and to use the game and its technology of signs to create their own sexual discourse. This liberation and discourse results in several unique advantages, such as exploring sexual fantasies and scenarios in a

safe, supportive, manageable, and bounded space; experimentation with their own gender and sexual identities; imagining sexual behavior beyond the bounds of realism and the physical limitation of human bodies; and as a tool for deepening the psychology of their characters, their relationship to each other, and their connection to the shared imagined world (Brown 2015, 33-35, 72-74).

While risky and not to be attempted except by adults who consent to this type of play and subject matter, this sexual discourse can result in several tangible benefits, like stronger Platonic friendships, insights into the players' own sexual desires, and the actual creation and experience of new carnal pleasures (Brown 2015, 126). ERP is exciting in the same way that viewing a sex scene in a fantasy drama, like True Blood or Game of Thrones, is exciting, except the participant is not a spectator but a co-creator of this pleasure. From Foucault's perspective, this act of creation is crucial for RPGs and ERP to qualify as technologies of the self for a truth game can only be transformative if it empowers participants to create new pleasures as well as new truths. Self-discovery liberates us, but Foucault insists that self-transformation requires the participant to be the agent of her own creation (Plant 2007, 535).

One relevant scene occurred not long after their transformation when they were experimenting with their new powers. Recognizing she was the only member with martial experience and that she was supernaturally resilient, Robin invited her companions to stab her in the gut so that they might overcome their fear of combat. While the intention was pragmatic, the scene was unexpectedly erotic. Feeling confident enough to allow a companion to penetrate their body in an act that could be fatal to mortals demonstrated a high degree of trust on the part of Robin and her coterie. This led to them mutually experimenting with their powers on each other, including Obtenebration (shadow tentacles) and Rego Motus (telekinetic manipulation of limbs and bodies). This experimentation concluded with the characters sharing each other's blood. The surface justification for this communion was to exchange vampiric powers, but the unspoken motivation was to create a more intimate bond among them. In VtM, if a mortal or vampire drinks a vampire's vitae (blood) on three separate occasions, they will become Blood Bound to that vampire and serve them without hesitation. Even one drink creates a mild supernatural affection and is often used in the setting either to seal alliances or as a punishment for transgressions.

Thus, this session represented the characters creating their own bulwark against the warring powers through a free, innocent, and queer communion in contrast with the "Last Supper" where the Conspirators forced them into their supernatural society. The intimacy of this scene bled into our relationship as players. While we already had a strong bond after years of play, the effect was not unlike Truth or Dare or other adolescent icebreakers where the alibi of the game facilitates an acceptable amount of light eroticism that binds the group together. This bonding occurred simultaneously in the game among the characters and in real life among the players. Indeed, we fondly and jokingly refer to it as the "Vampire Slumber Party" session.

Returning to the previously mentioned scholarship on RPGs and Jungian depth psychology, Bowman insists that character creation and transformative bleed are best understood as mimicking Jung's process of active imagination through which players access their personal unconscious and the collective unconscious which allows for individuation or a return to their actual persona but enriched through their experiences (Bowman 2012, 35). Except for characters who are randomly generated or assigned, this model builds on the Jungian idea that all characters emerge from our shadow, the subconscious parts of our psyche that are repressed or hidden from us but out of which all imagination and growth springs. Thus, horror play allows us to access these dark and frightening regions of our being; theorists like Yeonsoo Julian Kim suggest that it can be healing and transformative by empowering player agency; safely exposing us to our fears in a controlled environment; witnessing the ordeals of

others which creating a sense of togetherness among participants; consciously unpacking our fears through the process of debriefing; managing existential dreads fundamental to the human condition (e.g., aging, death, grief); and exploring the manifestation of fears across cultures (Kim 2022).

Like ERP, horror play is a form of edge play and even its enthusiasts caution that while risks can be minimized through active consent and routine use of safety tools, the risk of harm cannot be eliminated. Bowman warns that engaging in shadow work inevitably triggers what Jung called the complexes or patterns of emotions, memories, perceptions, wishes, and behaviors which reside within the shadow (Bowman 2012, 36-37). While facing these complexes is worth the benefits, doing so will likely trigger negative bleed which must be responsibly processed through personal reflection and debriefing with fellow players. Indeed, Bowman acknowledges in her exploratory ethnographic study of social conflict in role-playing communities that this genre of RPGs does generate more negative bleed than other games and it can be difficult for groups to process this bleed, especially after long-term play (Bowman 2013, 19-21). Beltrán echoes this concern saying, "While this engagement is not necessarily problematic, the more people involved with engaging the Shadow in a game, the more likely that one of them will have difficulty coping maturely with exposure to that archetype" or more succinctly, "you are what you eat" (Beltrán 2012, 96-97).

Heeding the advice of Bowman and Beltrán, I discussed with my Storyteller and the other players during Session 0 that Robin was a conscious exploration with the unresolved anger towards my father that lurks in my Shadow. He abandoned me when I was five and his sporadic presence throughout my life has been very complicated. Likewise, I deliberately chose Clan Brujah for Robin because their clan curse of rage mechanically represents the theme I wanted to explore. When I discovered VtM as a teenager, I was immediately attracted to the Brujah: a noble, but begrudged, clan of philosopher-kings who have fallen from grace due to their vampiric curse of excessive rage. Most members of this clan either pine for their idyllic past, yearn for a utopian future, or rebel for the sake of rebellion. You do not need to be a trained psychoanalyst to recognize the parallels with my own experience. Playing members of this clan allowed me to channel my adolescent frustrations not only towards my father, but with oppressive and exploitative power structures in general.

Throughout the recent Chronicle, Robin would often face the dilemma of whether to pursue vengeance or forgiveness and employing a game mechanic that quantified and randomized her fits of anger created dramatic situations. Frequently, she discovered that impulsive rage only left her with guilt for the unintentional suffering it created, whereas a calculated and deliberate revenge often satisfied her needs and the agenda of the coterie. Forgiveness emerged as an alluring temptation, but one she could not consistently pursue. These dilemmas culminated in the final battle of the Chronicle when Robin masterfully assassinated the vampire lord who murdered her father during the first round of combat. However, with her vengeance quenched, her next move was more ambiguous. She began indiscriminately killing the other members of her opponents, including one who unbeknownst to her was a deep cover spy for her allies. This enraged the leader of her allies who immediately attacked and killed her in the next round.

Robin's death was a powerful moment of character realization where I simultaneously identified with her and disassociated from her. First, experiencing the fulfillment of vengeance and fresh betrayal in the same scene was intense. Robin's rage had finally been discharged only to be replaced instantly with a new nemesis. I experienced this catharsis with Robin, but more importantly, I witnessed the devastation Robin's death provoked at the table as the other characters rushed to her aid and defense. As a player, the response of my fellow players and their characters was transformative. Their in-game lamentations and pietà soothed my mostly resolved feelings of abandonment. Sensing the impact of the moment, the Storyteller created an "out-of-body" moment for Robin where she had the option of

choosing forgiveness and finding final peace at last. In real life, I wanted to choose forgiveness for I am a practicing Buddhist-Stoic trained in conflict resolution and aware that vengeance only leads to more violence. But that choice did not feel authentic to Robin, who chose to cling to her spite and returned to her body. Thus, the Storyteller ruled that Robin was not dead, but had entered Torpor: a deathlike state that can last for years or even centuries as a vampire's consciousness lies dormant.

That complex experience of catharsis with Robin followed by dissociation with her was transformative. I witnessed in stark relief the difference between Robin, the archetype of the wounded child grieved by her companions, and me, the wise adult surrounded by supportive friends. Something from my Shadow was finally purged and I will continue to unpack its significance. Likewise, I am relieved that Robin is dead and that those feelings have been buried, even as I muse about her possible resurrection as an NPC in my own Chronicle. These moments of character realization and transformative bleed can happen in any RPG, but by employing themes and game mechanics that support this kind of play, VtM provides special tools for this type of conscious self-development. Of course, such playstyles should only be attempted with a supportive group, the consent of all players, and the routine use of safety tools. This allows them to function as technologies of self and VtM models how such psychological elements can be woven into game design.

As can be seen, all role-playing games function as truth games and by applying Foucault's tools of analysis we reveal how an RPG's technology of signs affect how it functions as a technology of the self. While all RPGs have the potential to be transformative, erotic-horror role-playing games, like VtM, provide more opportunities for self-discovery and self-creation because their setting, rules, and content allow for the exploration of more psychological, mature, and challenging subject matter than combat-focused games like D&D. The power of self-transformation is limitless, and a subsequent paper must examine how RPGs function as technologies of power which empower us to reflect on other power relations and to create our own norms. Indeed, Jonaya Kemper's article "Wyrding the Self" resonates with Foucault's insight when she calls for gamers to use character creation and play as an opportunity to "to decolonize the body and search for liberation from internalized oppression" (Kemper 2020). The potential for self-transformation also coheres with Joseph Laycock's explanation of the perennial suspicion of RPGs by conservative political and religious forces because the possibilities imagined through play threaten the possibility of cultural hegemony (Laycock 2015, 215).

REFERENCES

Baugh, Bruce, et al. 2002. *Dark Ages: Vampire.* Stone Mountain, GA: White Wolf Publishing.

Beltrán, Whitney "Strix." 2012. "Yearning for the Hero Within: Live Action Role-Playing as Engagement with Mythical Archetypes." In *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2012*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman and Aaron Vanek, 91-98. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

———. 2013 "Shadow Work: A Jungian Perspective on the Underside of Live Action Role-Play in the United States." In *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2013*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman and Aaron Vanek, 94-101. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2010. *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

———. 2012. "Jungian Theory and Immersion in Role-Playing Games." In *Immersive Gameplay: Essays on Participatory Media and Role-Playing*. Edited by Evan Torner and William J. White, 31-51. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

———. 2013. "Social Conflict in Role-Playing Communities: An Exploratory Qualitative Study." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 4: 4-25. https://doi.org/10.33063/ijrp.vi4.183

Bowman, Sarah Lynne, and Kjell Hedgard Hugaas. 2021. "Magic is Real: How Role-playing Can Transform Our Identities, Our Communities, and Our Lives." In *Book of Magic: Vibrant Fragments of Larp Practices*, edited by Kari Kvittingen Djukastein, Marcus Irgens, Nadja Lipsyc, and Lars Kristian Løveng Sunde, 52-74. Oslo, Norway: Knutepunkt. https://nordiclarp.org/2021/03/09/magic-is-real-how-role-playing-can-transform-our-identities-our-communities-and-our-lives/

Bowman, Sarah Lynne and Andreas Lieberoth. 2018. "Psychology and Role-Playing Games." *Role-Playing Game Studies: A Transmedia Approach*. Edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding. New York, NY: Routledge. 245-264.

Brown, Ashley M. L. 2015. *Sexuality in Role-Playing Games.* New York, NY: Routledge. (Now Ashley M. L. Guajardo).

Davis, G., et al., 1992. *Vampire: the Masquerade.* 2nd Ed. Stone Mountain, GA: White Wolf.

Foucault, Michel. 1988. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault.* Ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton. University of Massachusetts Press.

Kemper, Jonaya. 2020. "Wyrding the Self." In *What Do We Do When We Play?,* edited by Eleanor Saitta, Johanna Koljonen, Jukka Särkijärvi, Anne Serup Grove, Pauliina Männistö, and Mia Makkonen. Helsinki, Finland: Solmukohta. https://nordiclarp.org/2020/05/18/wyrding-the-self/

Kim, Yeonsoo Julian. 2022. "Journey into Fear: Horror for Healing and Transformative Play." Transformative Play Initiative, March 29. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4xHRSFdty8&t

Laycock, Joseph. 2015. *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic Over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Plant, Bob. 2007. "Playing Games/Playing Us: Foucault on Sadomasochism." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33, no. 5: 531-561. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Sihvonen, Tanja, and J. Tuomas Harviainen. 2020. "'My Games Are Unconventional': Intersections of Game and BDSM Studies." *Sexualities* 0, no. 0: 1-17. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720964092

Turkington, Moyra. 2006. "Getting in the Cockpit." Sin Aesthetics, November 17.

Albert R. Spencer, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Portland State University where he specializes in American Philosophy, Existentialism, and Applied Ethics. His most recent book is *American Pragmatism: An Introduction* (2020) and he has written three e-Textbooks with Kendall Hunt: *Philosophy of Sports* (2020), *Philosophy of Sex & Love* (2020), and *Philosophy of War* (2021). He originally encountered role-playing games during the Satanic Panic of the 1980s and considers them a gateway to his career in philosophy. The current renaissance of RPGs inspires him, and he is excited to turn his life-long passion into a subject of professional study.