

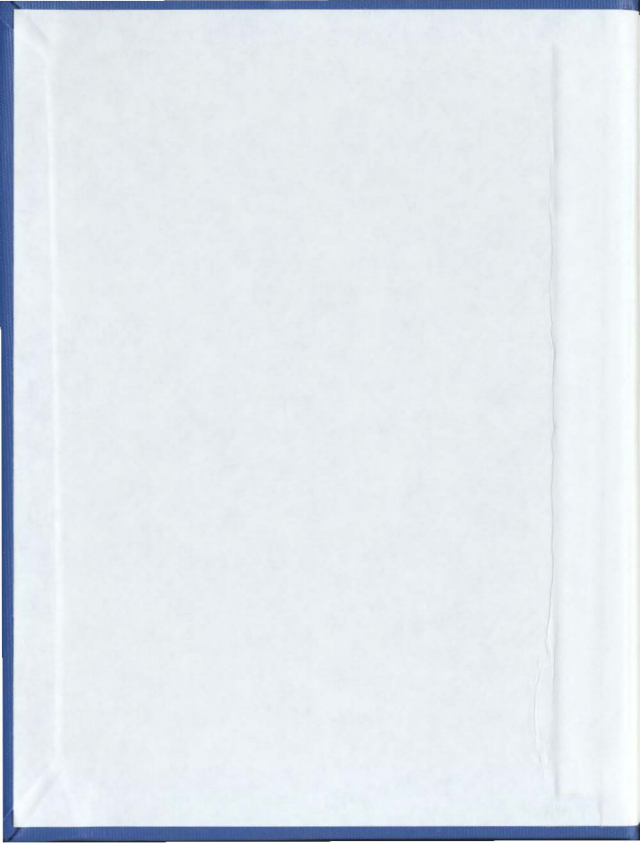
"WE LAUGH AT THE WORLD AROUND US"  
THE FOLKLORE OF A YOUNG MALE  
FRIENDSHIP GROUP

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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SUSAN MARY ANNE HART









"We laugh at the world around us"  
THE FOLKLORE OF A YOUNG MALE  
FRIENDSHIP GROUP

BY

(C) Susan Mary Anne Hart, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate  
Studies in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Folklore  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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Newfoundland

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transformation of mass-mediated culture into small group folklore, most notably recorded music, paperback science fiction and fantasy novels, and movies and television; and games, being war-games and fantasy role-playing games. The third research objective is to determine how the factor of all-male membership influences group folklore and identity. Masculine culture has been so taken for granted by most scholars that it has seldom been the focus for study, and even then the approach has rarely been satisfactorily rigorous. Competitiveness, as mentioned above, is the element of male culture most strongly evidenced in this group, but other elements such as an orientation to success and avoidance of emotional expressiveness, are also to be found, always in distinctive folkloric patterns. The final research objective concerns the manner in which a group transforms the products of mass-mediated culture into items of in-group folklore. No modern, urban folk group is unaffected by the mass media, but this does not destroy its folklore; rather, the content of such media is incorporated into the group's folklore and transformed in the process. This group, as indicated above, chooses certain areas of popular culture appropriate to its members age and leisure orientation.

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I thank all these people very much, but the ones to whom this thesis is inevitably dedicated are the members of the group which is its subject. They have been marvellous subjects for study and have encouraged me in my research and writing far more than I had any right to expect. Writing about them never failed to interest me. I will always count them among my good friends.

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# Chapter I

## Introduction

"Folklore is a function of shared identity," states Richard Bauman, who goes on to observe that it is "shared within group boundaries and made distinctive by this esoteric sharing" ("Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore" 32). The present study concerns the folklore which identifies and characterizes a young male friendship group. While the group is not unusual, it has created and maintained a unique fingerprint in the form of a distinctive pattern of cultural expression. The statement by one of the members that "we laugh at the world around us" hints at the nature of the group's shared identity; humour is intrinsic to most group interactions, and is frequently directed outwards in a manner calculated to demonstrate the performer's superiority. Also implicit in "we laugh at the world around us" is the unity of group members and the boundary separating them from their social environment.

The need for a study such as this in the discipline of folklore is denoted in my four research objectives. These can be formulated as questions: Does an informal, modern friendship group possess folklore? How does a friendship group establish its identity? How does the factor of all-male membership influence group folklore and identity? How does a group transform mass-mediated products into items of in-group folklore? The ways in which folkloristics will benefit from answering these questions will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

The first research objective, to discover whether or not an informal, modern friendship group possesses folklore, may seem at first unnecessary. Such a group is automatically defined as a folk group within accepted definitions (Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context" 12; Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore 2; Barre Toelken 50). Yet very few folkloristic studies concern friendship groups, and not even these define them as such (Roger Abraham's, Deep Down in the Jungle; Steve Bartlett, "Social Interaction Patterns of Adolescents in a Folklore Performance"; Stanley Brandes, Metaphors of Masculinity; James Leary, "The Boys from the Dome"). Larger communities and increased mobility have decreased the centrality of neighbours and family to people's lives in modern times, and friends fill some of the roles left vacant. The friendship group is therefore a folk group of growing importance, yet it has been largely ignored by folklorists. This neglect can be attributed to some characteristics of friendship groups which make them difficult to identify and gain entrance into: they are very small, unlikely to contain more than a dozen members; they are informal; they live only as long as their members, and sometimes more briefly than that. While such groups may not amass a large body of durable folkloric items, contemporary folkloristic concepts of *tradition* are broad enough to acknowledge the traditional patterns they do yield (Frank Hall 27; Sandra K. Stahl 10-15). The working definition of tradition which will be used in this study is suggested by Dan Ben-Amos:

[Tradition] is *folklore in potential*. It is knowledge that is secure in the minds and memories of the people only to be performed on appropriate occasions; the sense of appropriateness itself is subject to rules of tradition. ("The Seven Strands of Tradition" 123).

Thus, tradition is the knowledge which generates folklore, rather than the lore itself. Within this concept of tradition, the folkloric character of an item is determined by its cultural roots rather than its longevity. Friendship groups are pervasive, significant folk groups in our society which express themselves in distinctive traditional patterns. The group under consideration has significant traditional patterns which continually produce folkloric items. Folklore appears to be intrinsic to communication among members of friendship groups. These are good incentives for folkloristic analyses of friendship groups.

Ironically, the best study of a friendship group available does not even focus on the factor of friendship in its analysis; this is James Leary's ground-breaking Phd dissertation, "The Boys from the Dome: Folklore of a Modern American Male Group;" which concerns a group of young men who attended an all-male American university together, and continued to stage regular reunions afterwards. The identifying and bonding factor of friendship should be obvious because it is based on popularly accepted criteria, but Leary chooses instead to categorize his group as *modern* (2). The folkloric themes of "The Boys from the Dome" are, Leary shows, influenced by historical circumstances, mass culture, American male-group culture, the personalities and creativity of group members, and the contradictions for young professionals between the worlds of work and play (5). The same influences are evidenced in the group under consideration, although the resultant patterns of culture are quite different. Leary is himself a member of the group he examines, but he neglects to discuss his own role within it, although he does provide character sketches of the other group members (16-25). He recounts the formation of the group culture, which grew in vitality as its members came to

know one another better, mainly through conversation (26). Conversation will be shown to be very important to the present group as well. Leary's group's culture emphasizes playful, joking behaviour, which Leary relates to the fact that it is a male group in a university setting (28-30); the study group parallels Leary's in this respect. Leary also stresses the effect of life in the modern world (52). The group's folklore is considered within the framework of: conversational genres; play genres, including gaming and dramatic routines; narrative genres, being jokes and personal experience narratives; and static genres, that is, artifacts (63-89). The major group custom is the *gig*, a wild, uninhibited weekend party wherein the individuals involved are transformed into *mad, hurt* group members through various activities and the use of drugs (95-104). While much of the group folklore Leary analyses corresponds to that of the study-group here, the central transformatory custom of the latter involves gaming rather than partying, and differs in other essential ways. It is interesting to note that both groups have a member who is the centre of humorous in-group legends (7). Leary suggests that his group's folklore criticizes mainstream cultural values and the emphases of male groups in particular, in such a way that the members are freed from entrapment by these values (169-171).

The second objective of this thesis is to discover how a friendship group establishes its identity. Bauman has stated that folklore results from shared identity, and Alan Dundes takes this one step further with his assertion that folklore is "one of the principal means by which an individual and a group discovers or establishes identity" ("Defining Identity through Folklore" 151). This work will demonstrate that a friendship group establishes its identity mainly

by creating and maintaining a distinctive folklore, particularly through its humour style and content.

The third purpose of the present study is to discover how the factor of all-male membership influences group folklore and identity. Male groups have been studied extensively, but ironically the factor of masculinity has seldom been seriously considered in the process. This is because the masculine principle has so dominated our society that it has been taken for granted and rendered invisible. Angela McRobbie observes that meaning has been examined in uncritically masculine terms (38); Deborah David and Robert Brannon state that the masculine role is so pervasive that it has never been examined -- "the fish will be the last to discover the ocean" (2). Academic disciplines have not been immune from this peculiar blindness.

It has been suggested that men and women have separate subcultures. Susan Greendorfer argues that "inherent differences in belief systems, value structure or underlying cultural patterns which are embedded in gender roles" should be viewed on a cultural level rather than a psycho-social one as they have been in the past (108-109). A female researcher analysing a male group is truly an outside observer as prescribed by traditional ethnography.

The few studies of masculine culture as masculine culture which have been conducted take three approaches. Two of these are sociological, viewing the male role as a difficult one fraught with tension. The first of these supports the status quo, urging that boys be brought up with as little uncertainty as possible about their masculinity (Ruth Hartley; Lionel Tiger, Men in Groups). The second rejects Western society's masculine role, proposing radical social change so that

masculinity can be more broadly and comfortably defined (Robert Brannon; Marc Fasteau; Stephen Morin and Ellen Gaffinkle; Joseph Pleck). The third approach, rarely used, is preferable in folkloristics; this attempts to provide objective descriptions of male roles and how men deal with them in a particular society, rather than evaluating and criticizing them (Stanley Brandes; Kay Cothran; Marlene Mackie).

The most widely known study of masculine culture is Lionel Tiger's Men in Groups, which takes the conservative approach of championing this culture. Tiger's thesis is that a biological propensity for certain male-group behaviours, such as *male bonding* and aggression, is a predetermined factor in men's lives and in society at large (xi). He explores the relationship between biological and social processes, and the purpose and activities of male groups. Rather than conducting any original research, he synthesizes readings from a variety of disciplines. Arguing that human behaviour is subject to some of the same principles as animal behaviour, he relates primate male bonding and shows of aggression to analogous human behaviours, suggesting that these are innate (18-40).<sup>1</sup> Tiger attempts to add further support to his biologically-based hypothesis by claiming that prehistoric hunting activities contributed permanently to a male orientation towards male groups and aggression (42-51). Tiger's arguments concerning biological predestination are extremely flimsy and have been conclusively

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<sup>1</sup>The evidence he uses is all from studies of rhesus monkeys and baboons, not the species most closely related to humans. He ignores other primates which exhibit contrasting behaviours. An examination of a representative range of primate studies, says Naomi Weisstein, "only tells us that there is no one biologically natural female or male behaviour" (221).

disproven.<sup>2</sup> As a scholar, Tiger has some stimulating ideas but a wholly inadequate methodology.

The key to Tiger's study is the concept of *male bonding*, which he defines as an achieved relationship in which two or more males react differently to one another than to outsiders, recognizing one another as "distinctly relevant to themselves" (20-21). He suggests that this involves a selective process analogous to courtship, that the bond generates considerable emotion, that participants derive satisfaction from the bond which they cannot from women, and that this is why there is sexual division of labour (100). Tiger sees the male bond as intrinsic to human communities (60), the particular form the bond takes varying according to men's different cultural experiences. Women, Tiger maintains, do not form bonds with one another (216). Tiger's ideas about male bonding are not disproven by the present study, but the assertion that females do not bond according to the same principles is quite unfounded. Other studies have demonstrated that women do, in fact, form meaningful groups (Mackie 151).<sup>3</sup>

Tiger also writes about *aggression*, which he defines as a process of conscious coercion against the will of another individual or group, with violence as one possible outcome (158). Validation of membership within a male group

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<sup>2</sup>Every controversial point Tiger makes has been amply disproven and dismissed several times over. His methodology has been proven unsound, his approach sexist and too subjective (examples being selected to fit the arguments), his concepts nebulous and contradictory. For critiques of Men in Groups, see Carter 101-109; Fried; Mackie 67-68, 150-153; Pierce 242-245; Weinstein 218-221.

<sup>3</sup>I heard an interesting example on the radio one morning. On October 28th, 1985, Stuart MacLean interviewed eight women who have gathered together twice weekly for sixty-two years, and maintain that their friendship has been a deeply valuable part of their lives (Morningside, CBC Radio). This is indisputably a *female bond*.

requires triumph over others (183); its very existence may lead to an aggressive relationship with the outside environment (172). Tiger's theories about aggression are born out in highly distinctive ways by the study group.

By far the best and most objective analysis of masculine culture available is Stanley Brandes' Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore. Brandes makes a study of Monteros, a small Spanish town, its cultural themes and the ways in which certain metaphors of masculinity are repeatedly manifested in these themes. He pinpoints two male identity concerns: "their place in the social hierarchy and their relationship to women" (8), and shows how these are culturally instilled and expressed through parades and ritual, skits, jokes, nicknames and other verbal play. Brandes shows how this folklore functions to help these men form a self-image, delineating "who they are and who they should be" (8). Masculine-role characteristics identified and discussed by other scholars are revealed in the folklore of this small town. Young men assert overtly their strength and endurance, and covertly their sexuality, in parades (17-36). Women are feared for their supposed drive to destroy men, and for robbing men of their semen, presumed to be in limited supply (83-84). Assertiveness in men is associated with the genitals, their locus of power (92-93). Powerless over the political and economic factors in their lives, these men very much fear victimization, and their defense mechanisms of aggression and never-revealing personal truths are embodied in folk drama (159-160). They avoid churchgoing partly because they do not wish to reveal their personal concerns in Catholic confession (187). Humour compensates for their inexpressiveness and competitiveness.



In jokes, Andalusian men reveal and share their most deeply buried anxieties with one another, and thereby achieve a feeling of intimacy and camaraderie that they would find difficult to express through more overt means. Through pranks, on the other hand, men find a safe, jocular release for the hostile, competitive attitudes with which they also regard one another. (98)

As will be shown in this study, the above statement could as well apply to the group under consideration.

Brandes finds two central folkloric themes in Monteros, social status and sexual identity, both of which address the issue of dominance and submission. He suggests that the cultural emphasis on dominance and submission had been perpetuated by the Franco dictatorship, and is likely to change under the new political system, which deemphasizes sex and status considerably (211-212).

Throughout this study, and particularly in Chapter Three, the issue of masculinity will be given due consideration. This factor has had a profound influence on the identity of the group under consideration.

The fourth and final research objective concerns the manner in which a group transforms the products of mass mediated culture into items of in-group folklore. Folklorists have been aware of the existence of such patterns for some time (Richard Dorson, "Folklore in the Modern World"), but have seldom attempted to trace them.<sup>4</sup> A few stimulating sociological studies have been made of subcultures which are centred around the usage of items from mass-mediated culture. Dick Hebdige analyses British youth subcultures and the distinctive

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<sup>4</sup>For exceptions see Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "The Dialectics of the Legend;" Neil Rosenberg, Country Music in the Maritimes: Two Studies; and Peter Narváez, "The Folklore of 'Old Foolishness': Newfoundland Media Legends."

symbolism these groups have constructed around legitimate objects in their environment (Subculture: the Meaning of Style). He observes that the media plays a crucial role in interpreting and categorizing experience in the modern world, and therefore that which becomes encoded as subculture in many cases has already been subjected to media handling (85). The media also plays a crucial role in interpreting a subculture once it has been established, generally obscuring its message through exaggeration and trivialization (97). Gary Alan Fine examines the subculture of young American players of mass-marketed fantasy role-playing games (Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds). He describes the essentials of the games themselves, delineates the typical players and their commitment, which is often intense, and analyses the nature and interactions of the gaming groups. The group with which the present study is concerned is partially focussed on one of the fantasy role-playing games discussed by Fine. Other popular culture products such as record albums and paperback science fiction are also important to this group. These artifacts are not used simply, however; rather, they function in special ways and in both a symbolic and a real sense are transformed by group usage.

In order to meet the four research objectives, I will begin this study with a profile of the group itself. Chapter Two deals with the group's history and evolution, as well as the eight individual members. An understanding of their personal backgrounds, their roles within the group, and their interrelationships, is necessary to interpret this group's folklore. Chapter Three concerns the group character, viewed in terms of four elements intrinsic to the study group: its identity, the friendship bond, the group interpretation and enactment of

masculinity, and the relationship of the group to its social environment. Chapter Four focusses on conversational genres, group humour, and the manner in which mass-mediated culture is transformed to become part of this group's body of folklore. Chapter Five is a discussion of group gaming, primarily war-gaming and *Dungeons and Dragons* (a fantasy role-playing game), including a comparison of the latter game with traditional children's role-playing games of Newfoundland. The main themes of this group's folklore are competition and shared fantasy, as chapters Three and Four will show.

Before moving on, it is necessary to explain my methodology and approach to the research topic, and the reactions of the study group to myself and my work.

My fieldwork methodology and approach cannot be attributed to any one, clear source. It has developed over the course of six years as a student of folklore. There are three major influences: my own interests and personal style, the lecturers in the Folklore Department of Memorial University, and the writings of James Spradley. The first influence is difficult to define but must not be discounted; it is the dreaded *subjectivity* to which no researcher is immune. I will account for this as thoroughly as possible with reference to my relationship to the study group. The second influence is also difficult to delineate, as it involves the traditional technics of oral transmission. I will always recall Peter Narváez' lucid instructions concerning fieldwork, the use of the tape recorder, and transcription methods in my very first folklore course. Wilfred Wareham stressed the

importance of letting the informant direct the interview and encouraged his students to ponder our personal relationships with informants. Gerald Thomas advised me to get to know a group and its dominant cultural themes before directing my research, so that this research would more truly reflect its subject. It was partly because of this that I chose to study a group which I already knew, thus avoiding the long period of time I would otherwise have needed to gain sufficient understanding of my subject.

James Spradley, an ethnographer within the discipline of anthropology, has published several ground-breaking ethnographies and fieldwork guides.<sup>5</sup> Although I have not directly used his *ethnographic semantics* approach, it has influenced my work. Spradley stresses the importance of defining a research subject and its main elements *in terms of the culture being studied* before any further analysis can take place. Thus the understanding of the culture is drawn from within rather than being imposed. With this in mind, I searched for esoteric definitions of *friendship* and *masculinity*, which turned out to differ from some of the patterns generally associated with these concepts.

Participant observation and interviews were the two means used to conduct the research for this study. During the summer and early autumn of 1984, I spent as much time socializing with the group as its members would permit. Generally this involved going out to downtown bars and visiting with them when they dropped in to see my brother, who is one of the members of the group. After every encounter, I would record everything I could remember of it in my journal

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<sup>5</sup>See my unpublished paper in MÜNFLA, "James Spradley and the Ethnographic Semantics Approach."

for field notes. This journal was also kept erratically throughout 1985. References to it within this study are identified with the page number and date, as well as the initials FN, which stand for field notes. Thus *FN 49, 30/8/84* denotes page 49 of the field notes journal, recorded on the thirtieth day of August in 1984. Direct quotes from these field notes are not verbatim transcripts.

All interviews were tape-recorded on my own machine, using Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (hereafter referred to as MUNFLA) sixty-minute tapes. Between one and three private interviews were conducted with each of the eight informants, and three group interviews with between three and five group members present at each were also held. (See Appendix B for a record of dates and informants for each interview.) All interviews were held in my own home, as the informants preferred. They were all familiar with and comfortable in this location, as one of them lives there and the others frequently visit. The group interviews were aided by beer and/or wine, provided by the interviewer. The relaxed atmosphere and one another's company turned these group sessions into social occasions in their own right, thus blending these "interviews" into participant observation.

Transcribed portions of the interviews are scattered throughout this thesis, and more comprise Appendix A. These are referred to using my own system; a concordance with their MUNFLA numbers is provided in Appendix B. Each is designated with my initials, an arbitrary number indicating which tape the transcription is excerpted from, and a or b to show which side of the tape is referred to. Thus, *SH24b* denotes tape number twenty-four of Susan Hart's collection, the second side. If not otherwise indicated, the name of the speaker precedes this reference: for example, (*Nelson, SH24b*).

The transcriptions are as faithful as possible to the originals within limits of legibility. Standard English spellings are used with some familiar colloquialisms such as *gonna* and *they'd*. Wordless sounds are indicated phonetically: *um*, *aargh*. Spoken letters are indicated as capital letters: *D* and *D*, *HO*. Stressed words are italicized, as are the names of games and musical groups: "we've always been friends," *Afrika-Corps*. Laughter is indicated with (l) if only the speaker laughs, and (ll) if others join in. In cases where the speaker changes the direction of a sentence, interjects a phrase, or is interrupted, the shift is indicated with a double dash: "I don't like the responsibility of being -- I like to design a world." Indecipherable words and phrases, of which there are very few, are indicated with a question mark in parentheses (?). The interviewer's comments and questions are indicated in italics. When more than one informant speaks in an excerpt, the speaker's name is indicated on the left. Lengthy conversations are sometimes numbered for ease of reference, each passage by the different speakers being chronologically numbered.

This thesis is based on verbal utterances. There are, of course, many non-verbal communications which are omitted to the detriment of this work. On the scholarly level, I did not feel adequately trained to accurately detect the meanings of these. On the unconscious level, I probably learned as much from these cues as anybody else, and this knowledge has hopefully enriched the present study. Any rate, this group has a highly verbal culture, so language is used to transmit everything of importance, even if these pieces of knowledge are also transmitted through other conduits.

All research is inescapably subjective, cultural research especially so, and the study of a small group of individuals is perhaps the most difficult of topics when it comes to preserving some measure of objectivity. It is therefore necessary to openly examine those personal biases which affect my view of the group under consideration.

I have known the group members personally for as long as the group has existed, and some of them longer. One of the members is my brother, only a year younger than me. A couple of the others I knew well through family connections. Yet most of the other group members were little more than faces with names to me before I commenced this study, boys who always seemed intensely involved in their games, and who wanted no truck with girls. They would sit in our living room for hours on summer nights, and I would slip past the doorway with a curious peek in, but I was never welcomed to enter. I would come upon two or three of them huddled in whispered conference in a private corner of the house, and know that I must pretend not to even see them. Sometimes the house would reverberate with rock music, but the boys were not dancing or playing air guitar, rather they were draped like so many rag dolls about our darkened living room. And even when they were not about, my brother was often on the phone with them, or using their esoteric vocabulary to the whole family's puzzled amusement, or insulting me so mercilessly that I become convinced that he despised me. It is only now that I understand about any of this, and understand that the insults are not intended to distance me but rather to communicate companionship. At the

time I did not understand, as none of the families of these boys understood; the group was amongst us but alien to us. Only the group members themselves understood the aspects of one another which were bound up in the group identity.

As an outsider to the group, I did not really begin to know its members until I began to study them. Even my brother was revealed to me as a far more rounded character than I had suspected. In this sense, I brought more objectivity to the study than I had expected.

There is one sense, however, in which I have been a peripheral member of the group since the late 1970's. A female friend of mine longed to play *Dungeons and Dragons*, and when she discovered that my brother played this game, she persuaded me to ask him to let us join his gaming group. This he did reluctantly, but we did not last long at the game; the group members were very uncooperative and scornful of our novice's ignorance. Also, they played so often that we, who unlike them had outside interests, could not always participate. Within a month or two we dropped out of the game, and my brother told me later of the gruesome deaths our gaming characters had been subjected to, once we deserted. When I asked one of the members about this episode years later, he confirmed that we had been unwelcome:

That was when the game was in such a height that ... anything new was out of the question ... No-one new was allowed. That's what happened to you and Jennifer. Just couldn't have anyone new playing. (Nelson, SH13b)

This was only one of the reasons for our rejection by the group; the other is supplied by another member: "I hated girls up until Grade Ten ... When you and Jennifer were playing, I was just there ~~ugh~~" (Ted, SH9b). Not only was this



an intense period for the group when toleration of outsiders was lower than usual, but also we were females and therefore beyond consideration for membership. Nevertheless, this episode did introduce me to the group, and no doubt contributed to the members' acceptance of my wish to study them.

By the time I came to study the group, its members had much more positive attitudes towards females, but the fact remained that they comprise a male group. My being a woman influences the way I view a male group, and also the members' reaction to me. My access to some areas of group culture is automatically barred. Other factors make up for this, however. If I were male, I would probably take for granted those aspects of group culture which have struck me as peculiarly masculine, the analysis of which has contributed greatly to this study. A second factor which works to my advantage as a researcher is that I am perceived as less of a threat to group solidarity than a male researcher would be. A male researcher attempting participant observation within this group would appear to be trying to gain membership, something which I could not possibly hope to achieve. Since the group is not inclined to adopt any new members, it probably would have rejected him.

When I first asked the members of the group whether I could make a study of them and their folklore, they were cautiously receptive. Several of them expressed the fear that I would pry into their personal lives; one said, "You won't expect us to gossip about each other, will you?" (Philip, FN7, 7/7/84). When I explained that I was interested in the nature of their friendship, their games, and other folkloric items such as humour and storytelling, they decided to accept my request. Because of this initial reaction, I avoided very personal questions

throughout the study, and attempted to respect the members' privacy even when I did learn personal and controversial things about them. This is a study of group folklore, not group psychology, and such detail need not be recounted even though it contributes in subtle ways. On occasions when confidentiality came up in conversation, I always stressed the security of MUNFLA, where they knew I planned to deposit my research results. Even so, one of the members refused to allow any of the tapes with his voice on them to be deposited.

The member least enthusiastic about my frequent presence and questions was, understandably, my brother. The one private interview I held with him was my worst; he was incommunicative and discouraging.

I'm keeping this vague, deliberately. You'll have to live with that ... You're my sister. I just, I'm not going to tell you anything particularly detailed. Probably most other people won't either, because you're my sister. Cause if you get into detail it can get quite personal ... I don't know, you might have to dig it out of us ... Be a challenge.

My heart sank at these words, but even though it was a challenge to study the group, the members were far more communicative than my brother had predicted. Even he let down his guard during group interviews and when I went about with the group, and he was very encouraging when I showed him early versions of the present report. I believe that being my brother's sibling was little more than an initial obstacle, and more of an aid than a deterrent. The members knew they could trust me not to betray them, because they knew my personality and because I would be loyal to my brother.

Characteristically, the group soon began to use me and my study for their own entertainment and benefit. The members would suggest that I come

downtown with them and buy them some drinks. At group interviews, upon my brother's suggestion, I supplied them with alcoholic beverages and some "munchies", and the members turned these initially formal meetings into informal social occasions in their own right. I became a subject for teasing, teased about my personal eccentricities and my femaleness as well as about my research.

Nelson            You are a nice little blond girl who, when walking down the street any guy (I) would say *aahhh* ... Deep down inside that's why you called us here, isn't it? (II) ... Tomorrow she can go, "Oh, I had three guys over tonight, you know, three young twenty-one year olds over to my house, ay?"

Phil                Yet she puts down strippers.

Nelson            Right.

Phil                [with pretended disgust] Oh, I don't know.

(SH28b)

The members would gleefully remind me that I was dependent on them and must cater to them: "It's not what you want, it's what we want. We're your subjects and you must treat us carefully". (Phil, FN12, 11/7/84). They threatened to "clam up" and stop helping me, or to go to my supervisor and declare that everything they had told me was "a pack of lies," if I refused to cooperate with them on a given point. Their competitive streak was applied to the private interviews they gave me, and they pleaded, half-seriously, for me to decree a "best" informant. These were all joking reactions to my study, but there were a few serious concerns as well. They worried that one or the other of them had revealed too much. They worried that I would portray them in a more emotional light than they approve. They were also displeased when they realized that I was going to quote them exactly as they spoke.

We're denying bonding, Kirk, we're denying it. This could be quite embarrassing ... We do not bond. We never have anything to do with it ... I must warn you, when she quotes us she quotes us word for word. So try to speak as if you'd write, so it doesn't sound too silly. Don't say words like *stuff* and *gosh* and *you know*. (Phil, SH27a)

Despite these apprehensions, the members of the group relaxed sufficiently in my company for me to collect much valuable group folklore.

Another aspect of the group's character had an unusual effect on this study. Because the members are intellectuals to varying extents, they have shown a keen interest in my written analysis. Knowing that they are likely to read it has influenced the manner in which I present the analysis. I have always felt that informants have the right to see what is written about them, so I do not consider this an undue influence. This intellectual bent also aided the study, in that members were able to make very helpful analytical statements about the group, which led my own analysis in profitable directions.

I made mistakes, of course. On a few occasions I annoyed members of the group by inserting my curious presence when they wished to be free of it. When writing my analysis I came up with more questions I could have asked, more aspects of group culture I wished I had observed. Yet by then it was too late; the group felt it had been interviewed enough. Despite this, I continue to have an excellent relationship with all members of the group.

I have protected the anonymity of group members through providing them with pseudonyms and concealing their backgrounds. It seems that I am more cautious about this than the members themselves, for quite frequently I have been with them when, in casual conversation, they proclaim to outsiders that they are the subjects of my thesis. They appear to be proud of the fact.

One final introductory point remains to be made, and this is that the group has continued to change since the period my fieldwork was conducted. Its members are becoming increasingly scattered across the North American continent. Most of them now have steady girlfriends. A couple have finished their university educations and are beginning their careers. As a result, the group today seldom has physical reality. Nevertheless, its members still maintain bonds with one another and are aware of themselves as a group. The present study has contributed to their awareness of the group identity, and perhaps has increased its strength.

though these groups are pervasive and highly valued in our society. Folklorists have probably been discouraged by the facts that friendship groups are informal, relatively short-lived, difficult to identify and study, and very small and independent of one another. Leary voices frustration at this gap in the discipline, but even he does not use the identifying and bonding factor of *friendship*.<sup>6</sup>

Although there is an extensive cross-disciplinary literature concerning small groups, differences in approach render most of it inapplicable to the present study. Anthropologists generally focus on kinship-based groups in their discussions. Psychologists prefer to study groups under artificial laboratory circumstances. Sociologists tend to stress non-cultural factors when they analyse small groups.

The small group is a cluster of persons who interact face-to-face over time, and who generate culture. It is characterized by cooperative problem-solving, a sense of group identity, interpersonal attachments and antagonisms, and a similarity among members which increases as a result of long-term interaction (Tom McFeat 6-7). Erving Goffman refers to the same kind of collectivity as a *team*, being a "set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained" (Presentation of Self 104). This display requires a corresponding secrecy about the reality of the group, in which sense it is also a secret society (104). Similarly, Gary Alan Fine states that if one has a commitment to a group, one will keep its secrets, these secrets being the difference between its desired public image and its true culture ("The Manson Family" 49).

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<sup>6</sup>See discussion in Chapter 1, page 3.

Different kinds of groups as defined by various scholars can be placed on a continuum according to the intensity of the bond between members: the most loosely-bonded group being the network (Elizabeth Bott 58; Ronald Schwartz 75), and there are successively stronger bonds for communities (Roger Abrahams, "Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore" 184; Leary 186), subcultures (Fine, Shared Fantasy 26), primary groups (Dexter Dunphy, Cliques, Crowds and Gangs 25; Marlene Mackie 119), and cliques. The last describes the group studied here: "a small group of intimate friends which provides a basic security for the individual and a centre for the exchange of ideas" (Dunphy, Cliques, Crowds and Gangs 59). The group could also be described as being a kind of primary group, being part of a few subcultures, belonging to a community, and being involved in a complex network of social relations.

Although they do not stress its significance, many small group researchers make it apparent that all small groups have folklore, and thus culture. For example, sociologist Erving Goffman comments that there seems to be no grouping which lacks games, reveries (ie. discussions of shared history), and cautionary tales which function "as a source of humour, a catharsis for anxieties, and a sanction" (Presentation of Self 14). Two of these resemble two of William Bascom's classic four functions of folklore: amusement and maintenance of conformity resembles the "source of humour" (291-293); and "catharsis for anxieties" is essentially another widely recognized function, *emotional expression*.<sup>7</sup> Fine, a sociologist and folklorist, coins a specific term for small-group culture, *idioculture*, which he defines as:

<sup>7</sup> See for example Alan P. Merriam, The Anthropology of Music, 219-223.

a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction ("Small Groups and Culture Creation" 734).

Fine argues that such a term is necessary for the accurate analysis of certain cultural elements specific to certain groups; different groups in comparison; the creation and diffusion of culture from small groups to larger ones; groups as cultural units having social reality, history, and a sense of meaning; and culture as mediation between environment and action (735-737).<sup>8</sup> The present study concerns the idioculture of a friendship group, insofar as it concentrates on Fine's first and fourth points, that is, the cultural elements specific to this group, and the social reality, history and sense of meaning which the group holds for its members.

### Group History And Evolution

The roots of the group under consideration lie in the childhood of its members. Their friendship flourished when they were between the ages of twelve and eighteen, and now, that they are in their early twenties it continues in a somewhat different, muted form. This duration is not unusual, for many peer groups can be traced back to childhood play groups (Dunphy, Cliques, Crowds and Gangs 16; Tom Kitwood 161). Because of friendships among their parents,

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<sup>8</sup>Using this construct, Fine has productively studied various groups and written about them in "Small Groups and Culture Creation: the Idioculture of Little League Baseball Teams," "The Manson Family: the Folklore Traditions of a Small Group," and Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds.



Garth, Mike, Ted and Richard have "known each other basically all our lives" (Richard, SH7a). Another link for these four is that they all grew up within a ten-minute walk of one another. Mike, Ted and Richard went to the same elementary and junior high schools. Ted's recollection of his first meeting with Michael indicates the competitive spirit of their relationship from its inception:

I met Michael in kindergarten and ah, sat down at the desk there. And I had a pencil and he had a pencil, and somehow we got into some competition about whose eraser was larger, and started rubbing against it -- anyway, it's so Polish. (SH9a)

The two soon discovered a mutual interest in dinosaurs, model-making and war-gaming, interests which Richard did not share, but "I was very patient with them I think" (Richard, SH7a).

The relationship between Garth and Michael had a separate origin, but because Garth also liked to make models, Michael soon introduced him to Ted.

Mike said, "You know, there's this kid down by -- lives down by Pius Tenth [school] who's also interested in this stuff" ... you know, like that. We were interested in something that we had in common, so it tended to bring us together. (Garth, SH6a)

The importance of this factor of shared, unusual interests is accentuated when it is compared to the effect of widespread interests. For example, if the favorite leisure activity of both Ted and Garth had been baseball rather than model-making, they would probably have associated exclusively with others in their immediate neighbourhoods and at their respective schools. However, because they were not aware of many other model-making peers, those they did discover held a heightened attraction. This supports Eric Berne's theory that one joins a group because one shares "certain interests, social attitudes, experiences and distinctions

from the rest of the population\* with the other members (The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups 121).

Even though Nelson was in the same class at school as the others, his interest in war-gaming was not revealed to them until they met again in the context of Boy Scout Camp.

We went to a Scout Camp, they started talking about war-games. Myself and Kirk Hastings -- who I was already friends with due to being neighbours -- also war-gamed. Well, we fit this together and these two groups lashed on. (Nelson, SH12a)

These four -- Mike, Ted, Nelson and Kirk -- became the central core of the group, sponsoring others into it for purposes of gaming. Four other boys -- Richard, Alex, Phil and Garth -- also became members over the years.

Nelson had met the Hastings brothers, Kirk and Alex, a few years before. Kirk tells the story of their first meeting:

We met him [Nelson] the very first day we moved in ... we were unloading all the furniture, and this group of kids came along and gawked at us and sort of pointed at us and made comments (ll). Nelson was one of them ... They took us around and [we] ... did things kids do. (SH10a)

For years Nelson and the Hastings were no more than part of the same group of neighbourhood kids, playing baseball together and doing "whatever you do when you're young" (Nelson, SH12a). Then Kirk and Nelson discovered their shared interest in war-gaming, and Alex, who was a few years younger, introduced them to the music of a British rock group named *Led Zeppelin*. Nelson describes the effect this had:

Bang! That was a big tie-in all of a sudden. That was something different from the other guys around the neighbourhood, right? ... The

other guys wouldn't stay around [to listen to the music] cause they didn't like it, but we'd all hem and haw over the records and that. And that's one thing that first I got to know the Hastings well, or better than just as neighbours. (SH12a)

Popular and rock music have been acknowledged by scholars as very important to youth culture (Simon Frith 40; Herbert Gans 96).

The first war-game battle between Michael and Ted, Kirk and Nelson, is remembered for the fact that the two pairs of players entered it with differing expectations. Each was familiar with "devising strategies and moving forces of men and equipment around" (Kirk, SH10a), but Kirk and Nelson did not use a system of rules. Even now this is debated and laughed about:

Ted (I) I'll tell you exactly what happened. We were at camp and Nelson -- Nelson starts telling us what a great war-gamer Kirk Hastings is, right (I).

Nelson (interrupting) The navy. He knew lots about the navy.

Ted So anyway ... Mike and I were saying, "Oh we use that sort of rules and this sort of rules," and (II) it turns out all these fools did was just sort of go and knock their men down.

(SH24a)

Kirk later remarked that "I think that I was a bit of a letdown when they finally met me ... we were not on the same level as they were in terms of the gaming" (SH10a). Even though overtly intolerant of the other pair's gaming style, Mike and Ted continued to play with them and soon the four were regularly holding war-games of various types, deriving much pleasure from them. Garth also joined this war-gaming group. Richard, who lacked the interest to participate, and Alex, who was not quite old enough, often came along as

observers and/or judges. Alex recalls that the first time he really got to know the group was at a three-day summer war-game in Mike's backyard, when he insisted on coming along because his brother was borrowing some of his war-gaming equipment (SH15a). The group's war-gaming will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. Meanwhile a crucial episode in the group's history, the so-called *Arms Race*, must be touched on.

Most persons think of an arms race as something which occurs between hostile nations, understood only by their heads of state, if anybody. However, this group of boys experienced an arms race at first hand. They had been war-gaming together for a couple of years, and were becoming restless within the limits of the style they had been using. The boys decided to create a World War III scenario, each of them controlling a different nation: Michael had Australia; Garth, Brazil; Ted, the U.S.; Nelson, China; and Kirk, England. Alliances which pitted Mike and Garth against Ted, Kirk and Nelson were formed. Right away the personalities involved increased the game's complexity.

Mike            Nelson pretended to be on our side for quite awhile.  
We figured him out pretty quickly though.

Nelson            What a crock!

Mike            ... Whenever you'd talk to me, I used to phone you  
back, and your phone and Ted's phone would both be  
busy ... it's true, ask Garth ... We weren't positive,  
but we sort of knew.

Nelson            Oh, Garth will say it now. (H) I'm sure he will, just so  
he doesn't look like a fool. You were fooled.

(SH24a)

The plan was to take a year to stock up on equipment in the form of miniature armies and weaponry before beginning the war-game.

Well you see, the way we were basing our war-games, the amount of material each guy had was the actual amount he bought. So it depended on how much money each of us had, and how much we were willing to spend on everything. And most of us were willing to spend very rationally ... [but] one of us was a little carried away. (Kirk, SH24a)

This player, Ted, had two advantages: a relatively large stock already, and more money than the others. The friction caused by this discrepancy and by Nelson's deviousness, which was accepted as a realistic tactic, was further fueled by pre-existing rivalries between Mike and Ted, Mike and Nelson. Ted muses:

Michael and I have always been sort of competitive, and I think it was a mistake to [oppose us] ... That was a bad thing to do! ... I'd say, "Ah Knox, all you're worried about is winning!" And I was just as guilty. (SH9b)

He recalls the two of them sending "threatening notes" to each other in class at school (SH9b).

The boys bought what they could at local hobby stores, ordered more equipment from England, and also created some of their own. When they realised that their preparations were mounting into an obsession, they tried to bring them under control. Ted describes their methods:

Boy did it ever go overboard! ... We even had things like TALT talks & Tactical Arms Limitation Treaties ... sixty dollars every two months was all you were allowed to spend. (SH9b)

They were supposed to declare their purchases but they were soon trying to find ways to circumvent TALT: developing "secret weapons" and, as Garth admits, "sort of cheating" (SH5b). Resentments developed. Ted says that "we nearly broke up our friendship ... we got so mad at each other" (SH9b). This bears out

Roger Caillois' insight that over-intense play results in negative real-life consequences (45).

The Arms Race ended in two stages. First, Garth and Michael dropped out. According to Garth this was on their own initiative because they were unwilling to continue spending so much money. Ted remembers this episode differently:

I just said, "Ah, the hell with this, the hell with Knox ... and Garth ... Me and Nelson and Kirk are just gonna play among ourselves against each other." But then, amongst ourselves we started getting in an arms race. (I) Cause we started -- Michael and Garth had all this stuff, and they started selling it to us. (II) (SH9b)

Thus, although they did not recoup nearly as much as they spent on the Arms Race, Mike and Garth did benefit by dropping out, enough for Garth to consider it a "very great moral victory". (SH5b). Just as Nelson at an earlier stage felt that he had managed to make fools of them, they left the others feeling silly for persisting with a lost cause.

The game was never played as planned. Ted and Nelson continued to war-game, but not with the equipment or scenario devised for *World War III*. The Arms Race is an important episode in the group's history, one which revealed tensions and welded bonds, and one which provided enduring conversational topics. Philip did not know the others at the time but he has heard so much about the Arms Race that he is able to give a fairly accurate description of it. He observes that the other members of the group still "get into very big conversations about [war-games] ... they're legend" (SH2a).

A few group members have commented that they learnt a valuable lesson from their Arms Race: "I think that's an experience everybody should go through,

learning how *expensive* war can be" (Garth, SH5b); "[it was] really educational ... I mean, I can sort of understand the [American-Soviet] arms race looking back on it" (Ted, SH9b); "[it] was a great insight into how the world works" (Mike, SH24a).

Richard may have found war-gaming dull, but he was captivated by a new game called *Dungeons and Dragons* (commonly termed *D and D* by its-players), which he discovered at his mainland boarding school. He gleefully recounts bringing news of it home to his friends, on-a-vacation during his grade nine year:

That was my baby ... I played *Dungeons and Dragons* before anybody else did. I came back here and told them that I had played *Dungeons and Dragons*, and Michael was so pissed off, he said, "Damn, you're always playing these games before me!" (SH7a)

It was Paul Goldberg<sup>9</sup> who actually initiated the first *D and D* game within the group. Paul became a good friend to Mike and Ted when they met in elementary school. Like Richard he was uninspired by war-gaming, and also like Richard he discovered *D and D* while living elsewhere -- in this case, on a visit to California. There he bought the basic rule-books and dice needed, and upon his return he introduced the game to his friends. As Ted describes it, they were tired of war-gaming that summer and ready for a new activity. They had read about *D and D* in a war-gaming magazine and their interest was sparked; when Paul returned in the fall and suggested playing, they were eager to do so. Fine observes that members may be recruited for a gaming group by simply changing the orientation

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<sup>9</sup>Paul is discussed as a peripheral member on page 70.

of a pre-existing group (Shared Fantasy 47), and this is what happened here. Paul became bored with the game within six months or so, but in the meantime he had become acquainted with the other members of the group and became permanently, albeit loosely, associated with them. The others continued to play, more and more intensely.

The members believe that they were the first to play *Dungeons and Dragons* in Newfoundland. The game was very new, little known, and not yet fully developed; they had to teach themselves to play with minimal guidance. The first game was played at Ted's kitchen table with Paul presiding as *dungeon master*, commonly termed DM among players, and Ted, Michael, Garth and Nelson playing *characters*. They thoroughly enjoyed it, even though they were somewhat confused to begin with. "It was fascinating ... We did really weird things with the rules ... There were so many things we weren't sure about" (Michael, SH24).<sup>10</sup> The group continued to play with increasing intensity for several years. Each of them ran at least one campaign, which would be played at the dungeon master's house. Whenever members meet even now, they still discuss characters, playing styles and particular adventures from each campaign. If one listens for very long to their "nostalgia" one soon becomes aware that the campaign directed by Ted is the most significant and pleausrably remembered of them all. Ted kept records throughout, and he states it lasted precisely two years and eight months. The others are still in awe of the amount of creative effort and

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<sup>10</sup>*Dungeons and Dragons* will be described in Chapter Five; meanwhile, it is necessary to know that each game is played as a campaign led by a *dungeon master*, lasting through a limitless number of sessions.



time Ted devoted to this game.<sup>11</sup> Richard says "I was amazed at the amount of work Ted most have done" (SH7b), and Kirk suggests that Ted had a "total commitment" to "just making it as good as possible" (SH11a). Ted's energy was reserved for *Dungeons and Dragons* as a result of what most would consider an ordeal, a broken leg in a cast:

Well, I was pretty lucky at that, cause I hurt my leg and one summer I just lay around, had absolutely *nothing* to do, so I wrote a lot [for the game]. That helped quite a bit. (Ted, SH9b)

This is not an uncommon experience; many artists first discover their creativity when enduring the enforced solitude and immobility of illness or other disability. As highschool students with a relatively empty summer, the others also had plenty of time to devote to the game. Various scholars have noted that young people have a large amount of leisure time in Western society, and comprise a distinctive *leisure class* (Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson 180; Frith 61; Gans 70). Herbert Gans acknowledges that teenagers require an inordinate quantity of "cultural fare" as a result (70). For a period the members of this group gamed for almost as many hours as, but more intensely than, the average person works.

Six nights a week for six hours at least. Sessions till two o'clock in the morning ... sometimes there was some vicious yells ... There must have been some nights when we woke up the house. (Nelson, SH25b)

While "a lot of the yelling was just getting right involved in the thing" (Ted SH25b), some of it resulted from argument. The players sometimes disagreed

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<sup>11</sup>The dungeon master must spend many extra, solitary hours in preparation in addition to the time spent actually playing.

about the strategy they would have to share, or might feel themselves to be unfairly treated by the dungeon master.

Because these friends had become so involved in their own brand of *D and D*, their group became exclusive. Several outsiders attempted to join their games over the years but none of them measured up to their standards of playing, and so none of them lasted very long, until Philip showed up. They were consciously rejected.

As with the group's war-gaming, *D and D* playing eventually reached a peak of almost unbearable intensity. A civil war developed in Ted's campaign. To make the game more manageable, Ted had split the players into two parties adventuring independently, and conflict arose between them. "The dungeon master, in an exceptionally brilliant way, ah, played us off against each other ... to make for an interesting game" (Garth, SH5a; see page 236 for his fuller description of this period). The climax came when a beloved character of Nelson's was "killed" by some of the others. Nelson was by all accounts extremely upset, and the tension affected members' relationships.

It [the gaming] always intruded upon reality, but it never got to the point where the friendship was in danger of breaking up. I mean there were times when people walked out on other people, but they came back. Maybe a day or two later. There were times when people wouldn't speak without sort of almost wishing to spit on the other person ... Venomous, but it was never really too serious. (Kirk, SH11a)

The group's *D and D* playing survived the "civil war." In fact, even Ted's campaign survived it, and the player-characters did reunite and cooperate again. Several more campaigns were played over the next few years, and thus it was that Phil joined after Ted had moved away.

Phil was sponsored into the group by Nelson, whom he had met at university. According to Nelson, the pair first discovered an affinity for each other when they shared a scorn for a dull English course; to liven things up, they argued with the professor and chatted about rock music. Eventually their conversations led Nelson to mention *Dungeons and Dragons*, and when Phil expressed an interest Nelson invited him to play:

[Phil] was in a first-year English class [with me]. We had a -- oh, hell with it -- we had a Pakistani girl teacher who's Catholic. And me and Phil being very right-wing WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] types, ah, did a lot of arguing -- not arguing violently, but just arguing, you know, to be pains in the neck, I'd say. This was a foundation English class so it wasn't a very serious class, you could go in there and fall asleep every day and pass it, you know, it was just a garbage type thing. Your average garbage university course. And then we found out we liked the same music. And he was English, like the Hastings and Stuart. So I got to sort of talk to him a bit more than everyone else in the class. And for that year we were pretty close friends. We broke off second year of university, type thing, when our classes ended we saw less and less and less. But then all of a sudden um, he got interested in *Dungeons and Dragons*. I knew he was a little bit -- I invited him to come down [to the Creative Gaming Society], I started hanging around with him again, and a couple of months after that I introduced him to Michael and Alex, and he got to know a bit all the friends. Except Ted, he doesn't know Ted very well because Ted was going away at this time. (SH12a)

It is interesting to view this same period from Phil's perspective as well. He does not detail the classroom banter as much (perhaps because he knew I had been told about it already), preferring to emphasize conversations outside class:

[We gave the professor a] Hideous time, yeah. We were both quite good at that. I mean, we'd discuss music and stuff on the way back through the tunnels ... laugh at everybody and discuss the glories of the *Who*, and he told me about [Led] *Zepplin* and stuff. Bob Dylan and other important things. (SH2a)

After they had known each other in this fashion for some time, they met one day

at the local Mall, and Phil invited Nelson over to his nearby home to listen to records. Soon they began to socialize regularly together:

We decided to associate more. I was probably really good friends with Nelson for quite a while before I was friends with Michael ... He'd speak about everyone else. [For example,] I mean, Mike, he'd talk about all Mike's books and his records and everything. Basic Knox jokes that continue on. (Phil, SH2a)

Phil was introduced to group members not only through Nelson's talk, but also through *Dungeons and Dragons*. He was impressed at how caught up in the game Nelson and the others seemed to be, and intrigued by *D and D* itself. When Nelson invited him to join a campaign which he was DMing, Phil acquiesced and quickly became absorbed into the group. Philip's interests and sense of humour earned him an unusually easy entrance into this well-established group. Even Ted, who knows Phil least of all because he is seldom in town, wholeheartedly endorses Phil's membership: "he fits in really well with us" (SH9a). This friendship group is probably not alone in the possession of this principle that all members are considered friends, no matter how tenuous their dyadic relationships.

*Dungeons and Dragons* may have been the main vehicle for Philip's entrance to the group, but to his disappointment playing halted within a year or so after he joined, and even while they continued to play, they did so with less intensity than in the past, only once a week. Alex asserts that "what really killed it [gaming in this group] was people going away" (SH15a), and to some extent he is correct. Two core members, Ted and Mike, were absent from the province too much to play, and the game lost its impetus.

There were a few gap-fillers, namely, Phil and the *Creative Gaming Society* (also known as CGS). While Phil proved a very satisfactory friend and player, CGS was a disappointment. CGS is a university club which was set up by George Henderson and Stuart Ames the summer before most members of this group entered university. These two people were previously unknown to the others, but became peripheral members as long as the group continued to play *D and D*. The club has proved to be lastingly popular, still meeting regularly on Sunday afternoons. However, the CGS style of play is not accepted by this group. Even Phil, the novice, soon tired of CGS:

I think they [this group] started it [CGS], and I think as they went from the forefront they kind of dropped out, because other people we didn't particularly get on with joined ... it wasn't as good playing with the other people. (SH2a)

Once they dissociated themselves from the Creative Gaming Society, however, no member of this group could find the time or energy to create and play the sort of world which would satisfy them. Their playing standards are too high for them to accept a half-hearted game.

We can't play *D and D* now, cause we can't find a campaign to play for any length of time. Cause that was so intense that we can't find anything else like it ... If we could work it out so that there was time we could play it, I'd say we'd still be pretty into it ... But it would take a lot to match it, it was so good you couldn't match it. (Nelson, SH13b)

All group members agreed that they would like to play together in future, under the right circumstances (ie. having the time and proximity to one another), and indeed at the final writing of this study, some of them have begun a new campaign.

*War-gaming* and *Dungeons and Dragons* are the main activities which have bonded group members and filled their shared time. From the very inception of the group, however, there have always been other social activities which a few of them at a time would participate in together. A list of these must include: discussions of world affairs both present and historical; collecting and discussing books and records; watching movies, television, plays, and live bands; drinking together; trips "around the bay";<sup>12</sup> walking and driving; model-making; playing other games; house visits. These activities were and are crucial to the continuing friendship of group members, but did not shape its history and identity as did war-gaming and *D and D*.

Since the group stopped playing *D and D*, its members have intermittently shared the aforementioned social activities. The group almost never assembles as a whole, however. This disintegration is apparent to group members, who attribute it to the present lack of proximity and spare time. Phil describes the changed pattern of social interaction:

We're not as close as I imagine they used to be, or they were when I first started hanging around with them. I mean, before when you'd do something in the night you'd phone up everybody else and see what they were doing. But now ... any of the combinations [of members] could do something without being obligated to phone the others, where before the others would feel probably slightly spited if they -- if they weren't phoned. (SH2b)

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<sup>12</sup>The St. John's term for travel outside the city.

Observation of the members' social patterns nevertheless reveals that association with one another is a strong continuing element in their social lives.<sup>13</sup> For Mike and Ted, this group comprises their only active friendships in the city. The travels of various members have in some respects aided group unity, for an extra effort is made to get together whenever a member returns. Apparently the individual changes which have occurred and the time which has passed since members last met, never produces strain. "That's one thing that always strikes me. Whenever I come back it's as if I've never been away, that's what I always tell people" (Ted, SH9b). Members believe that their relationship will continue in this pattern. In future, they will probably reside in different cities and provinces, visiting St. John's only occasionally. At these times they will make an effort to see one another. Also, if a few of them do find themselves living near one another, as Garth says, "there'd be no problem just simply picking up -- picking up right where we left off" (SH5a). If it is ever possible, they would be eager to play *Dungeons and Dragons* together again.

The enduring character of the group's friendship is not unusual; 97% of respondents to Psychology Today's questionnaire on friendship have good friends whom they seldom see anymore, and yet continue to be important to them (Parlee et al. 45). In "The Manson Family: the Folklore Traditions of a Small Group," Gary Alan Fine remarks that a group becomes more stable, intense and significant to its members over time, and its culture is resultingly enriched; the group "increasingly becomes a focus for group reference and action" (47-48).

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<sup>13</sup>See Appendix B.

Rober Abrahams observes that as a sense of enduring groupness arises, items of expressive lore multiply ("Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore" 165).

The lasting quality of this friendship group has resulted in a wealth of distinctive folklore, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Four.

Paradoxically, it would appear that now when the group is especially rich in lore, its physical unity has weakened. This is more an appearance than a psychic reality, however. Eric Berne remarks that a group may survive as an ideal long after its physical presence is lost, as Israel did for centuries (The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups 48). Thus, a loss of tangible unity such as this group is experiencing, does not entail the loss of the intangible bond among members, which after all is the final essential.

The following chronology summarizes this group's history.



### Before Kindergarten

Michael, Garth and Richard all know each other through their parents' social relations.

### During Elementary School

Richard, Michael, Ted, Nelson and Paul all attend the same elementary school. Michael and Ted have social relations with Richard and Paul separately. None are friends with Nelson yet.

Michael introduces Garth to Ted through war-gaming.

Nelson meets Kirk and Alex through their neighbourhood group.

### During Junior High School

At Scout Camp Nelson, Ted and Michael discover their mutual interest in war-gaming. These three along with Garth and Kirk form a war-gaming group, which becomes increasingly intense.

Just as war-gaming reaches its peak, Richard and Paul (independently) introduce *Dungeons and Dragons* to the group, and all the aforementioned members start to play. However, Alex does not at first play with the others, due to age differences, nor does Richard, because of geographical separation.

### During High School

The group plays *D and D* with increasing intensity. Paul stops playing.

### During University

Through the Creative Gaming Society they meet Stuart and George, who join the gaming group temporarily.

Nelson meets Phil in a university course and brings him into the gaming group as well.

*D and D* is discontinued. The group no longer associates with Stuart and George. The others continue to socialize, usually only two or three at a time.

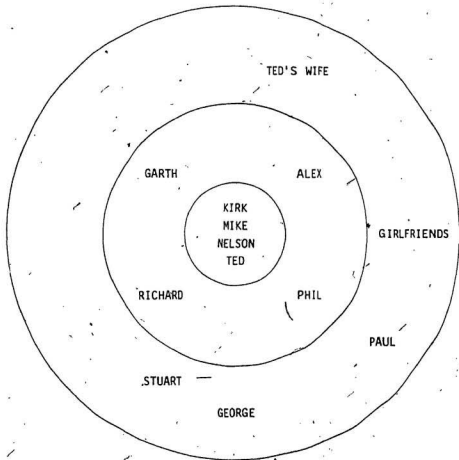
### Members of the Group

Formal groups have initiation rites, special in-group names and passwords, and other rituals and customs which clearly demarcate membership. Informal groups operate far more subtly and hebulously, and whether a certain individual is a member or not is therefore a debatable point. One of the first questions I asked each of my informants was, "who are the members of this group?" Only four of them were universally and unconditionally considered members: Michael, Ted, Nelson, and Kirk, who form the nucleus.

There are three levels of intensity within the membership of this group, although there is no a conscious hierarchy. The first level includes Mike, Ted, Kirk and Nelson. These four are all very close to one another, as well as to some other members of the group. They are central because they have invested the most energy and emotion into the group and its gaming. No other member has ever entered the group without sponsorship from one or more of these four. The second level includes Garth, Richard, Phil and Alex. Garth and Richard were not as involved in group gaming as the first level members, and Phil and Alex have only become members within the last five years or so. Each of them is very close to some but not all of the first level members and other members. These two levels comprise the group core, as delineated and discussed within this thesis. However, there is also a third level, which includes a number of *peripheral members*, who have been associated with the group in various ways, but not participated fully enough to be considered members. It should be stressed that, while there is little conscious differentiation between first and second level membership, third level membership has a considerably lower status within the group. Figure 1 portrays the three membership levels of the group.

**Figure 1: The Three Levels of Group Membership**

The inner circle includes first level members. The middle circle includes second level members. The outer circle includes peripheral members. The double line between the second and third levels stresses the difference in status of peripheral members from the core members.



It is unusual to be able to describe every member of a folk group, for most groups have too many members. In a group this small, such description is not only possible but also essential, because the personalities and interrelationships of members are intrinsic to it. In "Re-evaluating the Concept of Group," Beth Blumenreich and Bari Lynn Polonsky argue that the term *group* is used too arbitrarily and ambiguously by most folklorists, and that folkloric items are not shared by all members of a group (13). Their suggested solution is to change the approach to folk groups; however, a study such as this is an alternative solution, and also an opportunity to test the assumption that the folklore of a group is shared by all its members.

A brief biography and character sketch of each first and second level group member, complete with a discussion of how he is perceived by the others and how he relates to them, follows. After this there will be some analysis of third level membership. Before these begin, a few general statements are in order. Except for Alex, all group members were born between 1962 and 1964. And except for Philip, they all live within a fifteen minute walk of one another, although not necessarily in the same neighbourhood. Ted, Richard, Mike and Garth grew up near Churchill Square, and Kirk, Alex and Nelson on a semi-suburban street about a mile away from the others. Each member except Garth has one or two siblings. Most of their parents have middle-class, professional careers.

#### First Level Members

##### *Michael Knox*

Michael Knox's parents are from the maritimes of Canada, but he grew up in St. John's, except for a year spent in Cambridge, England, in 1971. Between 1981

and 1985 Michael spent each autumn and winter studying for a BA in Ontario, and is now doing a Masters degree in International Relations at an Ivy League university. He has plans for a PhD.

Michael is quiet and reserved with most people. Dave Nelson recalls that when they first met, "Michael was a bit shy at the time, not *shy* ... but he didn't quite have the dominant personalities that me and Ted did" (SH12a). Nonetheless, he has always exuded an aura of confidence and self-sufficiency and can be quite as talkative and assertive as anybody else within this group. Richard sees Mike as one of the group leaders by virtue of his qualities of "quickness" and "smartness" (SH8a). Nelson admits that he is difficult to tease: "You can't get Michael on the go as easily [as most people] ... You can't bug Mike cause he's too smart, he gets too many comebacks" (SH12a).

Michael describes himself as very competitive -- as a boy he had to make a conscious effort to be less so with his friends -- and ambitious. His friends observe the effect of these qualities on his behaviour with a measure of admiration. For example, Kirk comments:

I suppose the one who really knows his stuff about music is Mike. Ah, he has a formidable record collection, he really gets into what's behind the music. And he's always seemed that way ... he [always] appeared to have a good grasp of modern music. (SH10a)

Michael is an expert not only concerning music but also concerning another group collecting passion, science fiction; "Mike was the one who was most into that, but everybody else caught onto it" (Kirk, SH10b). He is keenly interested in politics and military history, and able to argue about these subjects for hours on end. Mike is perceived as having an exceptional vocabulary: "Mike knows more words

than all four of us [present] put together" (Phil, SH29b). On the whole, Michael is very intense about his interests and thorough in acquiring knowledge about them.

Even though he is closer to this group of friends than to anybody else (except, now, his girlfriend), Michael prefers not to confide in them: "I never talk about personal things much anyway, I keep everything in myself ... That's just my way of dealing" (SH22b). Mike stresses that this should not imply a lack of trust for his friends, and he told them so directly when the issue arose with them once. They appeared to be accepting of Mike's self-restraint, a quality which most of them share. Kirk describes Mike as easygoing, understanding, and compassionate, qualities to be valued in any friend.

One of the core members of this group, Michael holds strong links with each of the other members. He is unique in being close to *all* of them. Garth and Richard were each personal friends of his before the group coalesced. Ted and he were the first to war-game together, and did so the most intensely. When Kirk first met Mike and Ted they were operating as a team in a war-game, he and Nelson being their opposition, and he viewed them as being very similar to one another. "I did link them together but over the years [I realised] ... that they are very different people" (SH10b). This perception changed as Kirk discovered that his interests and goals were similar to Michael's. Michael's relationship with Nelson has always been especially competitive, both in their gaming and their conversation. He has only socialized with Philip and Alex during the past four years or so, but he does so on a very regular basis in the summers when he is at home. He and Phil presently share one of the closest relationships within the group.

### *Ted Spencer*

Ted Spencer was born in St. John's to parents who had also grown up in this city. He did an engineering degree at an Ontario military college between 1981 and 1985, summering with the Army Reserve mainland Canada. Before this he, like the others, attended at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) for a year. Upon graduation Ted joined the army and married a woman whom he had met during his training. The wedding took place in the summer of 1985, on the mainland.

Ted has always been the tallest member of the group. He has been active in various school teams as well as informal neighbourhood games over the years, and the sport he was most involved in was basketball, which he continued to play until the spring of 1984. Perhaps Ted was too enthusiastic a player for his own good, for on repeated occasions he was forced to spend weeks in a leg cast. Now his knee requires surgery and he will not be able to participate in team sports anymore. Ted accepts this situation with characteristic good cheer.

It is difficult to describe Ted, because he has only paid two brief visits home since this study began, and he was previously very shy and reserved with women. He himself admits that "I hated girls up until grade ten ... I was a late bloomer, I guess" (SH9b). The impression I have gleaned from my observations and those of group members, is that Ted deals fairly with his friends, is somewhat conservative in outlook, intelligent and well-read, although not an intellectual, and highly committed to and creative about his interests. Kirk portrays Ted as follows:

He always goes all out ... in whatever he does. He's very good at it too, usually, as a result ... Ted was extremely creative, that's amazing ... [because] he's sort of a solid military engineering type ... It came through really strongly in *D and D* ... he spent hours and hours on campaigns, and he made them really good, and he DM'd them really well. (SH10a, 11a)

When Ted gets intensely involved in something, like war-gaming, *Dungeons and Dragons* or basketball, he becomes a very assertive and dominant player. The others respect him for his interest and ability, while finding his weaknesses endearing.

Everyone borrows money off Ted, no-one bothers to pay him back. Ted's too gullible, oh he's gullible ... Michael took a *Pink Floyd* record off Ted had it for about three years ... Ted always forgets everything. He forgets people have [his stuff]. (Nelson, SH13a)

Another trait Ted is known for is his susceptibility to teasing: "As Michael says, I believe, 'Ted is so buggable'" (Kirk, SH17b). One oft-cited example of the group's teasing of Ted, is that they used to pretend to scorn his favorite rock group, *Pink Floyd*, and show boredom with the classical music which he liked before they ever did. Much to his chagrin on return visits, Ted discovered that once he had left, the others began to openly collect and enjoy this music.

Ted is also known within the group for amassing possessions, most notably, his vast collection of war-gaming paraphernalia. Commenting on his eclectic book collection, which contains many duplicate volumes. Mike says of him that:

Thing is, he has so much money, he just buys really strange things ... [but] he doesn't care about possessions really, can you believe it? (SH21a)

An incident which demonstrates both Ted's intensity and his lack of concern for his possessions, is recalled in group legend as *the Ant Wars*:



He used to burn his models ... as part of what he called the *Ant Wars* ... He had piles and piles of stuff, so he could afford to be sort of be a bit destructive, I suppose. And ah, with some of his older equipment and ah, infantrymen, he'd go out. And there was this anthill at the back -- maybe I shouldn't describe this, could be embarrassing.

*No, I think he told me a bit about it himself.*

Okay, well. This was when he was very young, when he was about eleven or twelve I suppose. And ah, he had these rudimentary rules figured out. And there was this giant anthill on the back of the Spencer residence, and um, I guess they didn't like the ants anyway so he was doing the family a favour getting rid of some of them.

He'd go out with a hammer and box of matches, and he'd set up his troops and his tanks and advance on the anthill. And ah, he'd have rules so that the tanks fired -- only had a certain number of rounds they could fire, and every tank shot was, was a hammer knock on the ground, usually squashing an ant or something. And he also had rules whereby the ants and the infantry had flame-throwers, and of course the flame-throwers were matches. So he'd burn an ant, or he'd smoke out an anthill or whatever. (Maybe he wouldn't actually burn an ant, okay I'm exaggerating. But he'd certainly chase them away or terrorize them.) Anyway, and for rifle shots he'd just have light hammer blows, so that's the way it was done.

And the ants could have their revenge of course, by crawling all over the stuff. And if they did that, then he'd burn the tank that was crawled over, and ah -- or he'd burn the *men* that were crawled over. And that was sort of the way the war went ... Anyway, that's the sort of weird things we got up to. (SH10a)

Ted's name was continually on his friend's lips when they received the astounding news of his wedding engagement. On the one hand, they found his marriage plans typical of his total commitment to his interests. On the other hand, the facts that he had paid scant attention to women in the past, that he is the first of their number to take this step, and that in doing so he is radically altering his future plans, all cause them some alarm. They at first expressed antagonism towards the fiancée and scepticism as to Ted's possible happiness in the future he had chosen for himself. In their conversations they expressed

concern for Ted personally. This was naturally coupled with a covert concern for the future of the group and his membership in it. Several scholars have noted that adolescent peer groups generally disintegrate when their members become seriously involved in courtship and marriage (S.N. Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation 111; Kitwood 170; John M. Reisman 123). Thus, such fears are justified. Only Richard was outspoken enough to question Ted directly on his decision, and he was unusually tactful in doing so. The behaviour of the others is represented by Michael's statement that "it's not my place to give advice" (FN98, 11/3/85). Ted is their friend and therefore they support him; most of them attended the wedding, and Mike and Richard were ushers.

Ted is one of the core members of this group. He was a member from the earliest days, the most enthusiastic collector of war-gaming paraphernalia and a very absorbed war-gamer, and has been described as "the prime mover" for *Dungeons and Dragons* (Kirk, SH10b). The only members he does not know well are Phil and Alex, who became active members after he left for university. The ones he is closest to are Mike, Richard and Nelson. Ted and Mike always teamed up in war-games, and were bound together as boys by a mutual interest in dinosaurs and model-making. Their university education led them both to the same town, where they socialized regularly if not frequently. With Richard, he has kept up a steady correspondence stemming from Richard's years at boarding school, an institution which intrigued Ted. Both of them speak of being able to communicate well together: Ted says, "I can talk best with Richard out of everybody, I think" (SH9a). His relationship with Nelson, by contrast, is marked by frequent disputes: "Nelson and I were always the fiery ones, we'd always be at each other's throats" (SH9b).

### *David Nelson*

Nelson grew up in a suburban neighbourhood somewhat removed from those of Mike and Ted, but close enough to be in the same school zone. He is a part-time student at MUN, and a full-time airport worker, a job he enjoys for its monetary rewards and travel opportunities. Dave Nelson is almost invariably referred to by his surname within the group; although not by outsiders. Alex comments that he has to remind himself to ask for "Dave" when phoning him at home (SH16b). Mike once found occasion to scold his mother for addressing Nelson by his surname; she had never heard him called anything else, but Mike felt it inappropriate for somebody of the parental generation to use this casual form. He will therefore be referred to as Nelson throughout this study.

Nelson has the most forceful and colourful personality of anyone in the group, and the others find him endlessly fascinating. "He's very charismatic, you know, in a very strange way" (Alex, SH16b). Garth describes him well:

Nelson is someone we constantly talk about. He's ah -- I guess Nelson is our shared humour (ll). He is very funny as a person, the things he does are very funny, um ... There are times when myself and Michael and Whitney, say, are downtown, and basically, the whole evening what we talk about is Nelson ... I think all of us are a little amazed by him, really ...

*What can you say about him? Can you describe him a bit for me?*

Nelson is a, somebody who professes to be really conservative, and I think it may once have been true but it's no longer. It's, it's sort of a joke with him now. Um, but he's really interested in manipulating people simply for the sake of it. Not necessarily with any kind of real objective, but just for the ... satisfaction of successfully directing other people's actions. Um, he will engage in the most complicated intrigues over who is going to pay for the next beer ... where he can not only

afford to pay for the next beer, but he probably *will* pay for the one after that. But it gives him satisfaction to have these big intrigues over essentially nothing, nothing harmful. But to have these big intrigues, manipulate people, and just see how people act. He loves doing that and he's *very* good at it. He, he really hasn't been doing that much lately, but he used to do it to us all the time. And um, amazingly enough -- you know, we'd invariably discover this afterwards but we never seemed to realise it at the time. He really is very good at it.

We can all see Nelson possibly being a very scary charismatic leader, sometime in the distant future. None of us will take him seriously anymore, but I'm sure masses of the world's population could. Yeah, we're sort of puzzled by Nelson, we talk about him a lot. He's very, very smart in some ways but not in others. But he's really scarily smart in some ways. (SH5b)

Nelson depicts himself as a competitive person who likes to dominate and win arguments and games, and has the tenacity to do so. Other members of the group others are quite aware of these traits. Richard states that Nelson has good ideas but difficulty communicating them. (SH8a), and Nelson himself admits that he "can't articulate very well at all" (SH29b). There is similar concurrence on the suggestion that, although interested in world politics and military history, he is less knowledgeable and less well-read on these subjects than some of the others. And yet he is acknowledged as an extremely successful debator. "Oh, he's a brilliant arguer, although he doesn't know anything, it's incredible ... he just keeps leaping from point to point" (Michael, SH21b). Nelson's potency is largely due to his ability to irritate, mock, or as it is commonly termed within the group, *bug* the others. Ted, one of his prime targets, says that:

He's sort of a devious type of personality ... He loves kicking up a fuss ... (I) He gets a demonic pleasure out of having people pissed off at him ... But I don't think he does any of it with malice. (SH9a)

It is generally admitted that Nelson can triumph over any other group member in an argument, no matter what his expertise on the topic. For example, Mike has a

large vocabulary and an impressive knowledge of the Vietnam War, yet Nelson has repeatedly vanquished him in arguments concerning Vietnam. "I imagine a little farther along Mike will be a world authority on Vietnam, but Dave will still be able to beat him in an argument on Vietnam. However ludicrous the argument technique may be, Mike will still be reduced to mush when the argument is over" (Phil, SH29a).<sup>14</sup>

Nelson, whether purposely or not, is an exceedingly humorous person. He also possesses considerable charisma and leadership ability. This is exemplified in his quick rise to power in his discipline's student society, of which he is now president. He stated that "the really smart people ... know I'm full of it ... [but the younger ones especially] go for me en masse" (SH29b). When Phil heard him say this, he pointed out that Nelson is respected even by those who "see through" him: "you do it with such incredible expertise" (SH29b).

Nelson perceives himself as emotionally inexpressive, "fits of anger" being his chosen outlet (SH14a). He admits to having a "ferocious" temper when he appears to be losing a competition. Nonetheless, he has the ability to remain cool when the others attempt to tease him: "I don't let anything bother me" (SH13b). Paradoxically, he is the most critically forthright of them all in discussing himself and the others. This alarms them; "I find sometimes you're incredibly honest about everything, to an annoying extent" (Phil, SH29b).

When Nelson is present he is likely to be at the centre of group activity, and when he is not a certain proportion of the conversation is bound to concern him.

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<sup>14</sup>See page 142 for a fuller discussion of Nelson's abilities and effect.

He also influences his friends in deeper ways: Mike states that "Nelson played an amazing influence in our lives" (SH28a), and Kirk remarks that "after knowing him for awhile it's very hard not to ... resemble him in many respects ... Some of it has rubbed off on me, so to say" (SH10b). This is especially evident in certain mispronunciations, phrases and mannerisms which they have picked up from him and which they call *Nelsonisms* (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

Nelson has always been very active in sports. His interest began when he played baseball and other sports with neighbourhood children, including Kirk and Alex Hastings. Nelson believes that he developed better skills and a more competitive spirit when playing with his older brother's friends. In recent years, he has played on university teams and other, officially sponsored teams in softball, football, rugby, curling and hockey. Only lately, however, has he done much socializing with the other players. Because of this he spends less time with his old friendship group, who have very little interest in team sports. He is most active in sports in the summer, but in the winter an equal amount of his spare time is devoted to the student society of which he is president. Nelson spends relatively little time at his studies.

Nelson continues to have a lively relationship with most of the other group members. As intimated earlier in this chapter, he and Mike are very competitive and argumentative. This started with their days of war-gaming on opposing sides. Now, Mike wryly admits, "when I get to arguing with Nelson I automatically take up a contrary position" (SH22a). Nelson gives a more detailed description of their reactions to each other below:

As we argue, I go from slightly ~~centre~~ right and he's slightly centre left ... but as we argue we get more radical ... So we start off, [for example, on the topic of] whether the Americans should be giving arms to some -- say, Israel... by the time we're finished an hour later, he's arguing that the Americans are imperialist pigs, and I'm arguing that we should nuke the Russians immediately, you know, all-out war right away and win while we have the chance. And it just goes, like just -- voom! We drove -- we drive each other to the extremes. (SH13b)

Nelson recognizes that his outlook does not actually differ a great deal from Michael's, and certainly their shared political interests have drawn them closer. They have also liked the same sort of music all along; "a lot of my musical influence was from Michael" he says (SH12b).

With Ted, Nelson has always had an even more manifestly competitive relationship.

We were quite willing to scream and yell at each other for hours on end to have one man move up half an inch [in war-gaming] ... The roof was raised. And we got on each other's nerves all the time ... He got to the point where I was so good at badgering him, I could just go in, in five minutes time ... he'd just go, "Oh, leave me alone!" Just, don't even say a thing, just sort of stare at him for a bit. Make a couple of comments about his shirt. And that'd be it, he'd fly off the head, total despair. (Nelson, SH29b)

It is an accepted fact within the group that Ted is the one most susceptible to Nelson's gibes. He does have a little ammunition in return, however, as Kirk describes it:

Ted and Nelson used to get fairly ah, peeved at each other, and Ted would always go, "Ta, ta Nelson," and ah, used to irritate Nelson. And ... Nelson used to say, ... "Cry, Spencer, cry." (SH11a)

Thus the pair has traditional teasing expressions for each other. It may appear paradoxical that Nelson asserts that "one of the greatest bonds we have in this group is between me and Ted" (SH29b). This bond has been forged by their

private relationship, which is frank, close and confiding. The others are not fooled by their display of hostility toward each other in public; they are aware that it is more of an entertaining performance than anything else.

Nelson has known Alex and Kirk Hastings longer than other group members, due to the fact that the three were members of an earlier, loosely-tied, neighbourhood group. When the three discovered a shared interest in certain music, they began to have sessions of listening to and discussing albums, sessions which did not interest the other neighbourhood children. When Nelson and Kirk, and to a lesser extent Alex, started war-gaming, their friendship was affirmed. Both brothers consider Nelson a close friend even though they see less of him these days.

Nelson has never been as close to Garth or Richard as to some of the others, but he nevertheless considers them to be his firm friends. The growth of his friendship with Phil has been described earlier in this chapter. He filled an important gap left in Nelson's social life by the absence of Ted and Michael.

### ***Kirk Hastings***

Kirk Hastings is British, and spent his early childhood in England, but his family has lived across the street from the Nelsons since he was a young boy. His younger brother Alex is also a group member. Kirk has an Honours in history from MUN, and is now completing a Masters in Soviet Studies at an Ontario University. During his summers as an undergraduate, he participated in the Canadian Naval Reserve.



Kirk is the quietest personality in the group, and he is perceived as such, although Phil feels that his naval experience has made him "a lot less retiring" (SH1a). Kirk is at the centre of the group, one of its four core members, but he is not one of its leaders. For example, Nelson once commented without resentment that he does not take the initiative in organizing social occasions for group members (SH27b). Like Ted, Kirk is a favorite target for teasing within the group; "Kirk is one person who gets up his hackles" (Richard, SH86). However, his reaction is far more subtle than Ted's, probably only observed at all because they know him so well. His brother Alex describes his response to teasing:

He's not aggressive, he isn't, not at all ... He doesn't tease, he doesn't irritate, he doesn't do anything like that. He'll just sit back and take it and not say a thing. Or just laugh and make a comment. (SH17b)

The fact that Kirk is not highly talkative or demonstrative does not prevent him from having a firm position within the group. Two aspects of his image are described below:

I remember when I first met you, Kirk ... carrying books around, you were always looking busy and scholarly. And I was right, you were scholarly, Kirk. (Phil, SH27a)

Kirk gives off the image ... [of] a folky-archaeologist type, you know, downtown apartment, living-alone type guy. (Nelson, SH29a)

Thus, Kirk is seen as a scholarly and independent person. Implicit in these characterizations is the strong respect the others have for Kirk. He is known to be very well-read, with considerable expertise on the USSR. His usual behaviour is to listen to the others converse and then quietly make an astute, decisive statement which thoroughly impresses them. "Kirk reads a lot. When Kirk says

something, you know it's backed up by years of ... wisdom ... No-one argues with him" (Mike, SH21b).

If someone's having an argument, Kirk can usually come in with the last word and settle it all. Everyone's "Wow!" ... Kirk come in on somebody's side, that's it, it's been decided ... People joke about it, I don't know whether it's true or not ... He's very quiet but when he says something, it means a lot and that's it. (Philip, SH3b)

Philip is aware that there may be a difference between Kirk's actual behaviour and the group's perception of it.<sup>15</sup> Kirk has other interests and skills: he plays the violin and has participated in neighbourhood sports over the years.

Kirk is very different from his brother and except for their association together in this group, the two lead quite independent lives. It was through Nelson that Kirk met the others in the group, and Kirk feels that Nelson has affected his personality over the years. When he first met Ted and Michael, Kirk regarded them as very different from himself, but since then:

We've evolved very similarly -- or we've had very similar experiences. And that, you know, is bound to bring -- to converge people's perspectives. (SH10b)

This is especially true of his relationship with Mike, for they are following a similar academic route. Whereas he used to be closer to Nelson than anybody else, he now feels most compatible with Mike: "It's very odd, I don't know whether it's personality or something, but I feel a lot closer to him than before" (SH10b). Kirk marvels at this because they actually see rather less of each other these days, being seldom in St. John's at the same time. He did see a great deal

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<sup>15</sup> Upon later consideration of this comment, Philip thought it important to add that this usually happened in the context of an argument between Mike and Nelson, and that it was brought to his attention by Nelson.

of Philip as an undergraduate, "so I know him extremely well" (SH10b). Thus Kirk is closest to Mike, Philip and Nelson, and carries on a friendly social interaction with all the others as well.

### Second Level Members

#### *Richard White*

Richard White comes from a St. John's family, and grew up within a few blocks of most other group members. Between the ages of fourteen and eighteen Richard attended boarding school on the mainland, living at home for only about three months out of each year. After working at a dance bar and then a retail store for a few years, Richard now lives near downtown and is studying for a commerce degree; he is very interested in going into business. Richard's friends are impressed at his persevering interest in this line of study and career. In the ordinary run of things, he is viewed as "ridiculously ambitious" (Michael, SH1a), always enthusiastic about some new scheme which usually does not work out.

Richard appears to be an incongruous personality within the group, his several points of difference being accepted only with much comment. Unlike the others, except Garth, he smokes cigarettes. He is by far the most open member of the group, always quite willing to talk about himself, his feelings, and what he thinks of the others. As Alex says, this can be "slightly irritating" and embarrassing (SH23a), but his friends have become so used to his behaviour that they tolerate personal comments from him far more than from anybody else. Furthermore, his openness invites confidences from them too, and the following statement of Michael's was echoed by some of the others: "I'm a lot more open

with Richard than almost anybody else. Cause he tells *me* everything, I tell *him*\* (SH22b). Richard therefore has a special value for his closest friends.

A few years ago, Richard confided something to the members of this group which startled them greatly: Richard had realised that he is a homosexual, and had decided to "come out of the closet" about it. At first this was kept a secret while he and they got used to the idea, but since then he has become open and even public about the fact that he is gay. To Richard, this is the only appropriate response:

I've kind of come out and said, "Okay, this is what I am, I have certain needs that have to be fulfilled ... No-one in the group talks about sex except me, I think. (SH8a)

Perhaps if the others had had to make such a difficult re-definition of themselves for one another, they would also be able to take the extra step of being more open about their personal problems and feelings. Since this is not so, they find Richard's frequent and deliberate mention of his sexuality a little embarrassing. They are not alienated however, and on the whole Richard is pleased with their long-term reaction:

We're still all friends. They make jokes about it ... They feel that I'm comfortable enough that they can tease me about it ... Michael put it quite well once; he ... told me I have the most sordid sex life of anyone he knew (11) ... Phil Whitney said to me a couple of weeks ago -- I mentioned that ah, I'd met a nice young man -- Phil said, "You're *always* meeting nice young men!(11) Every time I talk to you, you've met a nice young man" ... The only advice he gives me is to mend my evil ways. Which, I laugh at that. (SH8a, b)

Studies have shown that when men are better informed about homosexuality, they form more positive attitudes about it and even begin to feel more comfortable with their own masculinity (Stephen F. Morin and Ellen M. Garfinkle 42-43).

Richard's future plans are very conventional. In five or six years when his career is well under way, he hopes to meet somebody he can settle down with and have a stable family life. He is unhappily aware that this is difficult for gay men to achieve.

Richard was never as interested in war-gaming as the others, and although he was enthusiastic about *Dungeons and Dragons* he was absent much of the time it was being played. In recent years he has been drawn away from the group into a different sort of social life from the others by virtue of being gay. For these reasons, he has never been as deeply involved in the group as some of the others. However, as he explains below, he is very close to two of its core members, Michael and Ted.

Ted's very important to me ... I know how he feels about my life-style, but ... when I was away at boarding school, I'd always come back and go over and see Ted, we'd sit down and we'd have a good -- some really good talks ... and then when Ted was away, he'd come back and we'd have some really good talks ... We're very much alike, we went through a lot of the same headspace, and dealt with it in the same ways a lot of the time ... I realise that more and more now, the older I get.

Um, Michael's very important too ... You see Michael's always been my friend, we've *always* been friends ... If I have a problem or something like that, then I tell Michael. Sometimes I don't tell him quite as quickly as he'd like. Like last year ... when I was fired from the *Speakeasy*, um, I waited til Thursday night to tell him ... I was given my warning on Tuesday, and I remember him saying then, "Why did you wait to tell me?" And I don't know why I waited, I just -- I didn't want to bother anyone ...

And I told him the happy things, I mean like when I got my promotion, I called up here Saturday night and I said, "Wow, guess what happened to me!" And I'm sure I called up and told him when I got my job at *Club Max* after having been unemployed for a month and a half, and oh other things. (SH7b)

Richard communicates especially well with Alex and Phil, this closeness being of a

recent rather than a longstanding nature. Both mentioned frequent, long conversations with him at *Kibitzers*, a downtown bar which was a group favorite for a time.

### *Garth Ramsey*

Garth Ramsey is an only child of American parents, whose childhood was spent alternately between England and St. John's. Garth was always near the top of his class; "he's a marvel. Apparently at [his old high school] they still talk about him" (Kirk, SH10b). After completing an Honours BA at MUN, he has gone on to do a Masters in archaeology in Alberta. His summers for the past several years have been spent on various archaeological digs. Even though Garth thoroughly enjoys his chosen field, he would much rather it did not separate him so much from the people he cares about. He has some very good friends in St. John's, not only within this group. His association with the group has always been irregular, for he has "lots of other interests and goes around with other people". (Michael, SH1a).

Kirk remembers Garth entering the group on Michael's sponsorship, taking on an individualistic role from the beginning:

The very first time he came to a war-game ... all the equipment which had been "shot up" during the war-game, and all the "men" who had been so-called "killed," these figures were given to Garth, and he was in charge of the "Army of the Dead" ... He'd just sit around and set it up, and sort of look menacing with it. (SH10a)

Garth possesses a stereo and a huge album collection. He has had a very strong influence on the others' musical tastes, and they all frequently visited him, to talk

and listen to his latest acquisitions. In Richard's view, Garth has become more interesting and sociable as he aged and is now a "very nice, very educated, civil young man" (SH7a). He tells an anecdote of meeting him by chance after Garth had returned from his first semester in Alberta:

Garth has a very interesting outlook, he does have a good sense of humour. I remember meeting him actually, last December he got home and ah, by chance I was walking down Water Street and he was going to the *Fishing Admiral*. "Garth! Wow!" And ah, so we kind of "Hello," and I mentioned how strange it was that everyone was going off to do their plans that they had originally meant to do, and here I was kind of sitting at home not really sure what I was going to do, at home. And Garth said, "Well, we've all been foolish enough to ah, go on with our original plans, (ll) whereas you've had the sense to stop and look at it." Which I must say made me feel better. (SH8a)

Richard is not the only one to admire Garth's insights and skill with words. The following conversation gives a good indication of their attitude toward him.<sup>16</sup>

- Phil                    If Garth says it, it must be true I think.
- Kirk                    He is, he is *the Great Garth*. He doesn't like to be called that ...
- Philip                  Nelson coined that as well, *the Great Garth*. That's when, Nelson and I used to ... try to hang around, go into Garth's house and bug him.
- Nelson                  Yeah.
- Phil                    He used to try to stop us from coming into his house, but we always would. (ll)
- Nelson                  We'd just come to listen to the words of wisdom he had to say for the night.
- Phil                    He'd keep us on the doorstep for awhile, Nelson and I would just stand there, eventually he would have to ask us in. (l)

<sup>16</sup>It should be noted that Garth's idea, mentioned here, was devised during the Falklands War, when Britain was pitted against Argentina, the capitol of which is Buenos Aires.

- Susan*                    *Why would he try to keep you out?*
- Phil*                    Oh, I don't know. He was busy writing something. And Nelson and I weren't (l) ...
- Kirk*                    Garth is more removed [than Mike]. I mean he has to be. It's just the --
- Phil*                    Greatness.
- Kirk*                    Yes, exactly.
- Phil*                    ... We don't often come across silly things that Garth does or says.
- Nelson*                  Garth is much more right-wing than Mike ... Garth had a big theory that if we [naked Buenos Aires] and all of a sudden apologized, and said, "Oh, it was just an overreaction..."
- Phil*                    [sarcastically] "We got upset and a few million people got killed, I hope you can forgive us." (l)

(SH27b)

The group members Garth feels closest to are Michael and Nelson; like Richard, he is not a core member but is close to some core members. Garth has been friends with Richard for a long time, also. His relationship with the other members can be summed up in Ted's words: "I consider him [Garth] a good friend but I don't see him much at all" (SH9a).

### *Philip Whitney*

Philip Whitney was born in England, but he has lived in St. John's since the age of ten, in a house somewhat removed from other member's homes. He is presently completing a Masters of Business Administration at MUN. Phil considers himself to be very conservative, moreso than he would like; he admits that he does not



take chances very often, or live for the moment, even though he values spontaneity.—He is well-mannered, frugal and ambitious. Phil is very particular about his friends, and partly for this reason he was somewhat of a loner between the time his family moved to Newfoundland and the semester he was befriended by Nelson.

I went to a very small school full of Pentecostals and other funny people that I — I mean, I had friends but nobody that really was on the same wavelength as me there. (SH2a)

His outlook and interests, such as the music he favoured, set him apart from the others.

Like other British schoolboys, Phil collected model soldiers: "I had the biggest collection of *Airfix* soldiers in the neighbourhood ... [but] when you come out here there's nobody else to play war-games [with]" (SH28a). He did not meet this group until they had passed the war-gaming phase, but perhaps the shared interest, albeit not dominant by then, helped create a bond. Certainly it was related to the *Dungeons and Dragons* playing which did introduce Phil to the group.

Phil met Nelson at MUN and through him the rest of the group. He turned out to be exceptionally compatible with the others in worldview, sense of humour, and interests. The others enjoy his sarcastic speaking style and his wry wit. Richard remembers his early impression of Phil, formed when they played *D and D* together: "Here was this rather quiet person who'd sit at the end of the table and every now and then make a funny statement" (SH7a). Although Phil got along well with the others from the beginning with minimal initial discomfort, there was an initiation period, a process of conformation to group standards. Nelson was later to tease him:

It took me six months to make [you] sensible. ([I] Me had some good really, but a lot of bad really too. [You liked] Socialism ... Your whole outlook on life was a bit different. (SH27b)

Phil quickly became a group member. Richard speaks for them all when he says: "he's one of the group. We all accept him for what he is; Phil's a weird guy. He's great, I like him" (SH8a). Phil values this group companionship even when the activities themselves hold little attraction for him: "Phil always follows the crowd, he's known for that" (Nelson, SH14a).

Despite the fact that Phil scarcely knows Ted, a core member, he is very much one of group. He is in the paradoxical situation of being an affirmed member despite scarcely knowing one of the core members. This is only possible because he is very close to the other core members. He was sponsored into the group by Nelson, who made a point of introducing him to the Hastings brothers because of their shared British background.<sup>17</sup> Both of them are close to Phil now, and socialize with him a good deal. Nelson also takes pleasure in being partly responsible for Phil's friendship with Michael:

[I] introduced him to Michael, and of course now they're really good friends. They actually now tie in together closer than I would with either one of them. They grew together, they grew perfect for each other ... Michael and Whitney are probably the closest two now, when Michael is here. (SH12b)

On another occasion, Nelson teasingly accused Philip of imitating Michael in various respects, calling him a *Mike clone*. "Everything Mike writes, wears, or does is just perfect ... [everything] that Mike says is just great with Phil" (SH27b).

<sup>17</sup>They find it highly amusing that Nelson is forever introducing them to people with British accents.

This is an exaggeration; Mike's statement that they share an "ideal way of dressing and living and stuff, style" (SH1a) is perhaps a more accurate portrayal of their friendship.

As for Phil's relationship with the other two members, he frequently socializes with Richard but seldom with Garth.

### *Alex Hastings*

Being Kirk's younger brother, Alex Hastings had an early life similar to Kirk's. He became a student at MUN when he finished school, majoring in philosophy, and in the summers working at a daycare centre. Alex took a year off to work in London and travel through Europe, because he wanted to know more about the world outside of St. John's; he believed himself to be overly "innocent and naive" about other places (SH16a).

When the others speak of Alex, the adjectives which they frequently, albeit jokingly, use are *nice* and *good*. Since his travels, Alex has become a practising Buddhist, taking a stance of socialism, non-violence and vegetarianism. Alex is genuinely ethical and charming, but his friends profess cynicism about the true depth of all his new beliefs and values. They all like to tease Alex about his *goodness*. For example, after Alex had declared that he "loves everyone," Nelson once goaded Alex into telling him to "bug off", whereupon he replied "there you go, you don't like me now, do ya?" (SH13a; see the full narrative on page 140). Another example is the time that Michael discovered Alex absentmindedly mutilating grass from a lawn one day and gave him a lecture on the cruelty of destroying harmless living things (FN37, 8/8/84). Sometimes the others

deliberately provoke Alex with outrageous statements, but he is aware of what they are doing and he manages to ignore them much of the time. Like his brother, he does not reciprocate teasing: "I don't do that (I), I'm no fun" (SH17b). Nevertheless, Alex sees himself as an assertive person who periodically and thoroughly argues his point of view.

I don't talk very much ... Sometimes when they're talking I get into it, but most of the time I sit back and drink (I) ... listen, make a comment once in awhile ... [But] I'm a lot more aggressive, and my beliefs are a lot more aggressive [than Kirk's] ... When I start talking, it's kind of like a spurt, and I talk for half an hour, you know (I), and then I'm quiet for awhile. (SH17a)

Like Nelson, Alex's arguments seldom have great factual basis. He argues for his ideals regardless of reality, because "certain things should stand regardless of what's going on now" (SH17a). According to Philip, Alex's style is to "automatically disagree" with many statements:

He usually disagrees in such a nice way as well. Any opinion you make, he comes out with -- he disagrees with very nice reasons, and you're really very nasty for disagreeing with him (II) ... [you might say] "I don't like that person," and Alex says, "I like him a lot." (SH3b)

Whereas the group respects Kirk's statements for having a firm factual basis, it respects Alex's arguments for his idealism.

Alex knew of the group before he joined it, through Kirk. He was interested in war-gaming but, as Michael puts it, "Kirk kept him out ... big brothers are always like that" (SH1a). As they grew up however, the few years difference in age mattered less and less, and when Alex proved himself to be a good *D* and *D* player, he was gradually welcomed into the group.

Because of his affectionate nature, Alex gets along well with all members of the group. He shares the longest friendships with Kirk and Nelson, having known them before the group's formation. When in town, he socializes most frequently with Mike and Phil. He also sees Richard regularly and gets along particularly well with him, being the most liberal-minded and tolerant group member. Because they have been seldom in town since he joined, Alex is not as well acquainted with Garth or Ted. Alex also has many other friends.

### Third Level Members

Most of the third level or *peripheral* members are other males who have played *Dungeons and Dragons* with the group at some point, but whose playing style did not suit its standards and who were therefore covertly excluded as soon as was expedient. Earlier, there were some who joined in on a few war-games but did not collect equipment assiduously enough to keep up. Most of these people were never seriously considered to be part of the group, although they may have been candidates for membership at some point. Three of them had so much contact with the group, however, that they ought to be discussed in some depth. These have been mentioned in the group history already: Paul Goldberg, Stuart Ames, and George Henderson.

Paul Goldberg differs from the first and second level group members in several ways. He is not WASP; he is a champion chess-player; he attended a French university for his undergraduate degree so as to become bilingual; and he is presently engaged in graduate work in the sciences in California. Because of his exceptional intellectual skills Paul has always preferred to associate with people

older than himself, and he is a few years younger than the members of this group. This used to cause him some difficulties because he was not as socially mature as his friends, and unusual to begin with. Paul has a strong friendship bond with Ted and Michael and gets along with most of the others. However, all of them find him irritating at times and a couple simply avoid him. Nelson explains the situation from his point of view:

Paul is a part of the group but I don't get along with Paul very well, so therefore I don't consider him part of the group. (SH12a)

Paul introduced *D and D* to the group and played it with them for six months or so, after which he grew bored of the game and stopped. Because of his friendship with Michael and Ted, and because he knew the others, Paul continued to socialize with them irregularly.

The other two peripheral members deserving attention can be discussed as a pair. Stuart and George met the group when they established the Creative Gaming Society at MUN. This was certainly a popular move with group members, and their playing style was approved enough that they were even invited to join Ted's campaign. However, their style jarred a little; Stuart "wouldn't play particularly sensibly ... it didn't fit in with the way the rest of us played" (Kirk, SH28a; see page 232 for fuller discussion). For the few years that the group continued to *D and D* after meeting Stuart and George, their playing style was tolerated. The pair came along on trips "around the bay." When the group's gaming stopped, the socializing also ended and now they seldom meet.

Other peripheral members are girlfriends, but there have not been many of these until very recently. For the most part, no member other than the one going

out with her seems to know a girlfriend well at all. Michael's statement concerning Nelson's girlfriend applies generally: "His girlfriend's part of a different group ... him and his girlfriend don't really do things with us" (SH1a). The feeling is that however compatible, no girlfriend has the appropriate background, the *history* and gaming interests to fully participate in the group. Although most members do not openly admit it, they have purposely excluded females from the group throughout its history.

### Summary

This friendship group evolved from a set of childhood associations to an activity-centred group of young males who met through parents, school, and each other. Although they did not grow up in the same neighbourhood, they were drawn together by their common interests, first in model-making and war-gaming, and later in *Dungeons and Dragons*. They also socialized outside of their gaming, and continue to do so now that circumstances prevent gaming.

The eight members of this group exhibit a certain homogeneity: they are all males of similar age, they are all WASPS, they are all university-educated. Each shares experiences, characteristics and behaviours with all or some of the other group members. Each is perceived as having a distinctive personality within the group.

## Chapter 3

### Group Character

The character and identity of a friendship group are functions of the personalities, roles and relationships of its members, and of the history of experience they share. This identity is further shaped by factors of homogeneity among members and by their perceptions of themselves as a group. These elements will be considered in the ensuing discussion of the character of this young male group. First of all, the members' perception of the group identity will be discussed in relation to the researcher's observations and relevant scholarly literature. This will be followed by analyses of the nature of their friendship, masculinity as one of the most influential elements of their shared identity, and finally, the manner in which members distinguish themselves from outsiders.

#### Group Identity

Like most other friendship groups but unlike the majority of folk groups which have been studied, this group has no name for itself. The explanation for this lack lies in the fact that it is an informal group, casual and uninstitutionalized by preference. Nevertheless, there is a patent group identity. Group members see themselves as unusual, somehow different from most of the



"people around them. \*Eccentric would be a good word to describe us... The things we talk about, the way we talk about them, unique kind of sense of humour, in-jokes that flourish" (Phil, SH2a). Phil also comments that to join this group, one must "be slightly eccentric, kind of eccentric or [having] a bit of nuttiness" (SH2b). The fact that Phil joined rather later than the others made them all aware of some elusive quality which most outsiders to the group do not share.

I think having Phil there points to something that -- its sort of a common underlying mentality almost, cause he fitted in so well and yet he joined after so much else had gone on, after Ted had actually left... His joining, his friendship with us seemed to indicate there was something deeper there. (Kirk, SH10b)

This *something deeper* is necessary before any group can begin to generate its own folklore. Consider, for example, Leary's statement about the formation of the group culture he studied:

With increased knowledge, communication became more condensed: terse expressions now served in place of longer explanations. The students had internalized congruent ideas concerning rules, roles, and situations. They had, from disparate elements, formed a fledging culture. At this point, importantly for the folklorist, play became possible. (27)

The *something deeper* referred to by Kirk and the emergence of a culture delineated by Leary both direct us to the concept of *worldview*. A *worldview* is the set of cognitive patterns by means of which the members of a culture perceive and experience the world and their place in it (Toelken 225; Dundes, "Thinking Ahead" 69). Every culture and subculture has a distinctive worldview, although many of these worldviews are closely related. Folklore is a good source for learning about a culture's worldview because it often makes the principles and

themes of this worldview explicit (Dundes 70). These are rarely otherwise articulated, being assumed to be basic tenets of reality by the participants in the culture. Dundes suggests the term *folk ideas* to mean "traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world," which are expressed in a variety of folklore genres but have no fixed underlying forms ("Folk Ideas" 95). People tend to speak of "the world" as though there were one fixed, definable reality, when in fact there are as many different realities as there are paradigms. Reality is dependent on perspective. We need to believe that there is a definable reality of which we have some understanding, because the uncertainty of chaos is impossible to live with. Therefore we create cultures, within which the members share a worldview, a reality, and support one another's belief in an orderly world.

Analogous to the concept of *worldview* is Thomas S. Kuhn's theory of the scientific *paradigm*, expressed in his classic work, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Kuhn's purpose is to show that the history of science is not a cumulative process as it has previously been viewed; rather, it is a series of different *paradigms*, each considered by the discipline which espouses it as complete and final. A *paradigm* is a set of standards and knowledge which a discipline expounds and uses, and which is basic to the understanding of all members of the disciplinary group: Members can assume that they all share a knowledge of this paradigm, and therefore need not explain certain things to one another. Subdisciplines have their own variations of the main paradigms. The rules of a paradigm are covert and never consciously considered except during periods of change from one paradigm to another, when they are much debated.

One paradigm is never rejected until a new one is found; it is prerequisite to intellectual perception of the world. Kuhn's *paradigm* is essentially a narrowed concept of *worldview*, and his discussion of groups of scientists throughout history can be generalized to other groups. Every group has a paradigm, and it is this shared, taken-for-granted knowledge which is the basis of folklore. The scientists Kuhn describes are a folk group, and the patterns they evidence are paralleled in other folk groups. Like the paradigm, the worldview is assumed by each group member to be known to all other members, and therefore does not require explanation. The worldviews of subcultures are variations on the worldview of a dominant culture. People are only made aware of the existence of this worldview as a version of reality, rather than reality itself, when they are exposed to differing worldviews. Cultural change, like disciplinary change, occasions heated debate and leaves many group members behind, resisting the alterations to their worldview. Nobody can function without a worldview; it is humanity's way of perceiving the world.

The worldview of group members is not only shaped by the group, but also by its cultural context. This group is part of Western, more specifically North American and Canadian, culture. It is situated in Newfoundland, a province which retains more traditional culture than most other parts of North America. However, only three of the eight members are from native Newfoundland families, and even these are thoroughly established in St. John's, the provincial capital. St. John's culture has much in common with mainstream North American urban culture. The fact remains, however, that the dimensions of tradition in Newfoundland continue to be such that even the most "modern" groups evidence

strongly traditional patterns. This is true everywhere to varying extents. *Urban* and *culture* have often been perceived as opposing constructs by scholars. Louis Wirth, a pioneer urban sociologist, suggested in 1938 that cities reduce intimacy and break down traditions (363-366). Wirthian views have been seriously challenged, however. Critic Herbert Gans has pointed out that a variety of subcultures and diverse life-styles flourish in the urban setting (191-193). In the 1970s folklorists began to systematically search for urban folklore, with such studies as Richard Dorson's Land of the Millrats; Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter's Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire; Martin Laba's "Urban Folklore: a Behavioural Approach;" and John Widdowson's "Oral History and Tradition in an Urban Setting." The group under consideration is one among many which, to paraphrase Laba, lives in its own definition of a city and has its own strategies for dealing with the urban environment (169). Some of these are discussed later in this chapter, in relation to the group's dealings with outsiders. The members and most of their parents have university educations and are middle or upper-middle class. They are all white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants from Anglican families, although they do not consciously practise this religion or permit it to hold much significance in their lives.<sup>18</sup> There is a strong British influence, five of the group members having lived for extended periods in England. All these factors contribute to compatible outlooks on life, a shared worldview.

The similar backgrounds of this groups' members is typical among friends. Odd Ramsøy points out that although friendship choice appears spontaneous, it

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<sup>18</sup>There are qualifications to be made on this point. Ted has married a Catholic woman and formally converted to her religion to do so. Phillip's family is devout even though he is not. Alex is a practising Buddhist.

has a certain predictability (16). Like chooses like; friendship is generally *homogeneous*. Aristotle comments that friends "have common tastes and like to be together" (213). Plato asserts that friendship between opposites seldom succeeds, but between people who are similar it is likely to be "gentle and mutual throughout life" (228). John M. Reisman finds that people's friends tend to be of comparable age, status, sex, character, friendliness, and geographic proximity (118).

In the course of the interview, each member made a few descriptive statements about this group. Many of these are assertions about things they do *not* do. They do not gossip or talk very much about women or sex together, although some of them admit to having such conversations with other friends. Richard is the only one who talks about sex to the others, upon his own initiative and without encouragement. They seldom get inebriated together; Mike, for example, prefers exotic, expensive drinks. It is unusual for a Western male group not to indulge in much sexual banter and drunkenness (Leary 220). Another way in which the group differs from the norm is identified by Garth:

One thing as a group that we do not do much at all -- and this has probably shown up -- is simply sit down and consume some medium ... There's always something else that we have to do, usually involving making fun of what we see. (SH6b)

Media is used not so much for its own sake as for a source of humour. Another thing which this group does not do is tell traditional, structured jokes or other narratives. Kirk thinks that this group's humour:

has taken on a specific brand, a specific direction ... I can't really describe it offhand. Every group has a sort of weird -- well, not weird but offbeat -- style. Which other people don't ... catch onto. Cause

that's what really gives the group its identity. If other people could understand that easily then, you know, the group would sort of lose itself. (SH10b)

While the members' talk avoids personal matters, it is very lively and there is a great deal of it. Apart from the occasional tennis game or hike, no physical activity occurs within the context of the group.

We prefer to think and talk rather than *do* things. I think it's fairly obvious from the type of people we are. I suppose Phil is the one extreme of that. (Kirk, SH11a)

Several members are very physically active on an individual basis, but when together they prefer to express themselves verbally, avoiding physical contact or exuberance. They like to appear neat and clean and occasionally well-dressed, but not unusual in any way.

This discussion is not the only part of the present study concerned with group identity, for all group folklore contributes to group identity. Richard Bauman asserts that "folklore is a function of shared identity," and is the basis upon which one group distinguishes itself from another ("Differential Identity" 32). Identity is constructed over time and requires shared definitions. Alan Dundes suggests that folklore is the most important vehicle for the communication of a group's symbols of identity ("Defining Identity through Folklore" 150). Thus, the study of a group's folklore reveals its identity.

Two of the most important defining characteristics of this group are that it is based on friendship and that it is exclusively male.

## Friendship

Because this group defines itself as a collection of *friends*, it is important to understand what its members believe friendship to be. In the first private interview with each group member, I asked him to define friendship and give some idea of what he thinks friendship involves for him. The initial response was in most cases to plead ignorance, for they have never considered this subject very deeply. Eventually each thought of something to say on the subject, and there were some very insightful contributions.

There is a belief among the members of this group that people who spend a good deal of time together are likely to become friends, or as Alex put it, the more people communicate with one another, the closer they become (SH15a). Ted points out that people may be very different from each other, but become bonded after surviving a stressful experience together (SH9a).<sup>19</sup> Kirk suggests that common experience shared over a long period of time creates a similarity among participants which leads to closeness:

I think it has a lot to do with common experiences, and going through the same sorts of stresses or experiences together, and gradually building up the same sort of perspective to the other person because your life has been the same, essentially. (SH10b)

Kirk also states that friendships between people with similar philosophies are likely to develop quickly, which "stems from the fact that they've been through similar experiences ... [albeit] separately" (SH10b). In the same vein, Michael lists shared interests, humour and conversational style as necessary components to a friendship relationship (SH1a).

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, several respondents to a *Psychology Today* friendship survey suggest that sharing certain experiences, especially life crises, often bonds people (Parlee et al. 45).

Although friendship is generally reckoned to be a voluntary or *achieved* relationship, it is acknowledged by some scholars to arise from associations about which the participants have little or no choice. Reisman points out that friendship is often found in situations where people chance to have frequent contact (91). Similarly, Kaspar Naegele states that to varying extents, impersonal relations yield personal ones (234). Nevertheless, friendship is acknowledged to be peculiarly separate from other institutions of society (Yehudi Cohen, "Patterns of Friendship" 351; Eisenstadt, "Friendship and the Structure of Trust" 143). This is not an accidental separation for, in our society at least, people desire to keep their friendship private and free of "the competitive public sector" (Robert Paine, "An Exploratory Analysis" 137). Thus the following paradox: the members of this group chanced to meet through family and educational institutions, but once they had chosen to become friends, they kept the resultant group carefully separate from these institutional influences. Prescribed, standardized culture presented by formal institutions frequently provides the setting for informal events, such as the development of a friendship. It can be said that friendships develop in the *interstices*, or informal nooks and crannies, of formal institutions.

Related to the notion of friendship arising from similar or shared experiences, is the idea that it is at least partly based on shared activities, and shared interests in these activities. Gaming, listening to music, and conversing are favorite activities for the members of this group. Nevertheless, Richard denies that these are essential to their friendship:

Our interaction didn't centre around *Dungeons and Dragons* anymore than it centres around bars ... [It centres around] our friendship. We're friends, that's all there is to it. (SH8a)



Richard's comment demonstrates a typical reluctance to discuss friendship, which is widely viewed as a tabooed, sacrosanct topic. Perhaps because friendship is so significant, people would rather accept it as a given than question it.

By its very nature, friendship permits openness among its participants. Intimacy is commonly considered a universal characteristic of friendship (Douvan and Adelson 176; DuBois 17; Naegele 236; Paine, "An Exploratory Analysis" 120; Ramsöy 12; Reisman 126). However, intimacy itself is sometimes confused with the *display* of intimacy, as when Robert A. Lewis describes it as a combination of verbal sharing and physical affection (108). (See also Jessie Runner 431; Francis Bacon 81). This approach does not allow for the existence of intimacy without display, such as is found within this group. Eric Berne suggests that covert relationship games are the next best thing to the rare *true* intimacy (Games People Play 19); perhaps these can be interpreted instead as an alternative form of expressing intimacy. The members of this group are very reserved about personal matters, but even they acknowledge the importance of being able to confide in one another:

I guess a friend is somebody that, whether or not you *do*, you could talk to. You know them well enough, they know you well enough. There's ah, whether or not you ever talk about heart-rending matters and what-not, um, you know each other well enough that you could. (Garth, SH5b)

Sometimes the confidence is merely a remark which cannot bear much publicity, and requires the understanding and discretion of a friend as listener. Nelson explains that one's friends are:

the people that you can more openly talk to, such as crap on other people on the team who aren't pulling their weight. You won't openly

do it, but with your little group of friends you can do it, feel a bit more comfortable. Or you can say to [one of them]... "You did it wrong" ... I can yell at them about anything, sort of... you know, everyone is not afraid to say what they think is going on and, [there's a] sort of openness going on between people. (SH12a)

Nelson and Richard both feel free to openly criticize their friends to their faces, but not all the others do. In one interview, Mike, Alex and Phil agreed that although a joking insult is quite acceptable, serious criticism should always be avoided (SH23a).

Different subcultural groups vary greatly as to the manner and amount of their expressions of intimacy. Even though they recognize the importance of intimacy, the members of this group tend to avoid its display. This is not unusual, and some scholars bemoan the fact that such avoidance is excessive in our society. "Society frowns upon candidness, except in privacy; good sense knows that it can always be abused; and [part of our psyche] fears it because of the unmasking which it involves" (Berne, Games People Play 172). Related to Berne's theory is Lewis' statement that male intimacy in our culture is usually confined to expression through games; "without a game to play, men usually do not relate well together" (125). A member of the group explicitly states his adherence to this view:

People say it's healthy and everything [to be open about yourself], but I have never -- I don't trust people that much ... *knowledge is power* ... It's something that they [the confident] know about you, that not everybody else knows, and it's an advantage for them ... you don't have to give anybody anything. (Phil, SH4a)

Similarly, Abrahams states that words are commonly seen as very powerful and dangerous, and that therefore people guard carefully against gossip about

themselves (\*A Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip\* 292). In the community he studied, Abrahams found that friends were chosen with consideration of their discretion, and that not even they were fully trusted to keep confidences secret (292). Men are expected to be especially inexpressive and therefore are less emotionally intimate with their friends than with women (Douvan and Adelson 194; Marc Fasteau 7; Marlene Mackie 153; Joseph Pleck 149). This is partly due to homophobia (Fasteau 14; Lewis 112; Morin and Garfinkle 41).

The members of this group believe that friendship involves *responsibility*, which encompasses the trust and discretion necessary before confiding can occur. Friendship also entails cooperation, concern, sympathy, love, and understanding (Alex, SH15a). Yet by their behaviour, it would appear that most group members prefer to be independent, and to lean on one another as little as possible.

Friendships where, which are really based on ... two people who see each other as someone they can talk to about problems ... don't tend to last because almost invariably one of the people ... becomes more secure, less needful of the relationship. And it doesn't tend to last. One person benefits, and the thing usually ends before the other person benefits. (Garth, SH5b)

Similarly, the members believe that loyalty should exist but that it need not be tested. Nelson asserts that he would willingly join a fight to defend his friends, if necessary: "I wouldn't hesitate to help them, even if it meant me getting hurt also" (SH12a). Scholars also view loyalty and trust as essential to friendship (see Robert Brain 18; Douvan and Adelson 176; Eisenstadt, "Friendship and the Structure of Trust" 144; Naegele 243; Plato 116).

The members' ideas about friendship relate to the nature of their shared bond. They share not only past experiences, but also backgrounds, values, interests and goals. Their taste in humour and desire for personal discretion coincide. They trust one another. According to their own definitions, these people are friends.

Scholarly and popular definitions of friendship overlap but do not coincide with this group's perceptions. Philosophers and poets view friendship idealistically. For example, Cicero defines it as "a complete accord on all subjects human and divine, joined with mutual good will and affection" (quoted in Reisman 97). Aristotle considers friendship "necessary to the good life ... in itself a good and beautiful thing" (203), and describes the supreme friendship as *perfect*, wherein friends are equals who love each other and wish each other well for their own sakes (208). Susan Polis Schütz's collection, The Language of Friendship, contains more such idealistic evaluations of friendship. Ethnographers, on the other hand, describe friendship more objectively, sometimes so clinically as to disregard its affective content altogether. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown defines friendship as the obligation not to display hostility (107). Several scholars have attempted typologies of friendship relationships, based on the closeness of the bond involved (see Aristotle 207-208; John Reisman 2-11). A servicable system of measuring and categorizing friendships is probably impossible to devise, however. Cora DuBois designs an alternative evaluative approach in her comparative study of friendship patterns. She proposes a cross-cultural model of friendship based on a set of five dimensions: voluntary and preferential; expressive and instrumental (as poles of a continuum); dyadic or polyadic;

intimate; and mutable versus durable (17-18). Thus she indicates the parameters of the friendship relationship without subjectively delimiting it.

With DuBois' model, this group's friendship can be described as a durable, polyadic friendship, with an underlying but seldom-expressed intimacy. The friendship is polyadic but contains dyadic relationships within it. It is voluntary, and therefore achieved, in that every member has the freedom to leave, but with some shadowings of an ascribed relationship in that no one member has chosen every other member individually as a friend; rather, he accepts them all as friends by virtue of their group membership. The expressiveness of this group usually comes through in its folklore rather than in direct communication, and the friendship is instrumental in that it provides social opportunities, but members do help one another in numerous ways as a matter of course. Thus the friendship of this group falls near the centre of the continuum between the expressive and instrumental poles.

A few of the elements from DuBois' model warrant extended discussion. To begin with, although this friendship group has endured for over a decade, it has changed during this time, and the members are beginning to be separated by the distances of Canada. However, as Elizabeth A. Bott points out, even when one does not see an old friend for long periods of time, she/he may continue to be important "in giving a sense of the continuity of one's identity" (Bott 298). Respondents to the aforementioned Psychology Today questionnaire state that most of their close friendships originated in childhood or at university, and endure despite geographical removes; 97% of respondents have friends they seldom see (Parlee et al. 54, 113).

While DuBois acknowledges that friendship may be polyadic, many scholars describe it as necessarily dyadic (see Brain 206; Paine, "An Exploratory Analysis" 128; Eric Wolf 12). There is emphasis in the literature on the *best friend*. Brain states that groups aid survival and provide emotional satisfaction, but are not very significant in terms of interpersonal relationships (187-188). Paine argues that friendship cannot develop within a group, since relationships are not a matter of choice and members cannot show favouritism ("An Exploratory Analysis" 133). Yet within this group interpersonal dyadic relations are very important, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. The group can be described as having two levels in this respect: that of groupness and all this entails, and that of interpersonal relations. The latter level can be seen as a collection of dyads, but it is more than this, for each is influenced by the whole. In his article "The Crowd: Friendship Groups in a Newfoundland Outport," Ronald Schwartz shows the significance of polyadic friendships for a certain small community. Here the emic term *crowd* refers to groups bonded mainly by friendship, and secondarily by kinship, neighbourhood, age, and/or occupation (83). These groups function throughout various stages of the life-span (86-87). Dyadic relations are thought to threaten individualism, their strong emotional ties undermining the social order (92). Polyadic relations, on the other hand, are experienced as stable and enduring; they entail generalized obligations, and embody fundamental social values" (92). The members of this group are also fiercely individualistic, as is expressed in their competition among themselves. They too are wary of emotional ties. Unless these factors change, they too are likely to want to retain their group friendship.

The participants in friendship are commonly of the same sex, and many people, including scholars, assume that cross-sex friendship is impossible. This follows from the fact that friends tend to be alike in important ways. Mackie states that platonic cross-sex relationships seldom last in our society because people do not believe in their possibility (164). This is predictable, considering the cultural divisions between the sexes. *Exclusive* friendship, having the greatest degree of intimacy, can only occur between same-sex equals, according to DuBois, although *close* friends may be of the opposite sex (19). This point is debatable, according to whether one ascribes to the idea that a sexual relationship is a friendship or not. Several members of this group have a single female companion to whom they are especially close, but they do not share a high degree of intimacy with any other women:

There are qualitative differences between men's and women's friendships. Mackie shows that the former stress activity and conversation about activity, the latter expressiveness and conversation about relationships (153). It has often been observed that men's friendship groups tend to be larger than women's. Pleck admits that male friendships lack the emotional rapport of their female counterparts, and goes so far as to state that men do not value their friendships very highly compared to women (149). On the other hand, DuBois suggests that male friendship is considered relatively strong, free, and mobile (27). In a West Indian community studied by Abrahams, friendship was something engaged in primarily by young men as part of their rebellion from family and the home environment ("A Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip" 298-299). Stanley Brandes, with reference to homophobia, makes a very insightful statement about

male friendship: "there is an inherently ambivalent quality to close male friendships wherever they are found; and [this] ambivalence is overcome through teasing and prank-playing of one type or another" (213). Brandes has discovered one of the reasons why humour is so central to the male friendship group.

The friendship of this group is probably similar in character to that of many other young, male friendship groups in Western society. However, it should be kept in mind that friendship is culturally diverse. Yehudi Cohen links friendship type to social structure. According to Cohen, our society has an "individuated, social structure," characterized by an emphasis on personal economic gain, loose group bonds and weak family ties ("Patterns of Friendship" 353). The sort of friendship which dominates such a society is *expedient*, wherein participants are motivated by gainful purposes and dissolve the relationship when these needs are no longer met (353). Cohen's generalization clearly does not hold for the group under discussion. Paine, on the other hand, lauds middle-class friendship because it is independent of cultural institutions and "takes care of our affective needs tolerably well" ("An Exploratory Analysis" 122). DuBois also sees friendship in urban society in a positive light, pointing out that large communities are conducive to close friendships, since they provide the opportunity to interact with a range of personality types (23). Brain observes that there is no formal, ritual element to friendship in modern society (9), and therefore "friends in our culture are left to find their own symbols and make up their own rituals<sup>20</sup> -- private jokes, special greetings, nicknames, regular meetings" (106). As will be shown in

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<sup>20</sup>The term *ritual* has a narrower meaning within folkloristics, applying to more elaborate customs than those mentioned by Brain. The term *folklore* is more appropriate in this context.



the following chapter, this is exactly what this group has done. Similarly, psychologist Steve Duck suggests that the private sharing of cultural elements between friends is one of the reasons why friends are appreciated, and that daily life is built more upon such culture than upon broader culture (17). Non-folklorists who study friendship and small groups continually allude to the expressive behaviours inherent in these constructs, without actually describing or analysing them.

### Issues of Masculinity

This group possesses many of the attributes of male groups in general, but expresses them in a distinctive pattern all its own.

—It is typical for adolescent peer groups to be monosexual, but these groups commonly disintegrate as their members mature, become career-oriented and begin serious dating (Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation 111; Kitwood 170; Reisman 123; Ernest A. Smith 114; Peter Willmott 41). Kitwood states that a minority of adolescents stay with their monosexual peer groups because they as yet lack the social skills necessary to move beyond them (170). The perception among academics is that adolescents who retain their monosexual peer group membership are engaging in deviant behaviour. Schwartz disputes this idea with his observation that some friendship groups persist even when their participants mature and life-styles change (86-87). This is certainly the case for the present group as well. If such a pattern is deviant at all, it is nonetheless a recognizable one within Western culture, and not so much a reflection of members' inadequacy as of a different speed and style of social development.

Monosexual groups are related to societal emphases upon gender differences.

Males and females in our society are not taught to regard one another as peers (Mackie 164). The adolescent monosexual clique holds norms of indifference and antagonism towards the opposite sex, and has the potential to disrupt or delay courtship relations of its members (Smith 46-50). In the traditional small-town life of a Spanish community, Brandes discovered that "men and women from all social classes agree that sex-exclusive groups are more animated and relaxed than are groups composed of both sexes" (98).

There is a tendency for boys to play in larger, more complex and competitive gaming groups than girls (Mackie 157). These groups involve aggression and dominance hierarchies (Jean Stockard and Miriam M. Johnson 241). Studying boys in East London, Willmott has found that they generally form groups of about six members in childhood, and continue to interact intensely and informally throughout adolescence (22-27). Leary characterizes the typical male group as occurring in a special setting, involving drinking and intoxication, competition, misogyny, exaggeratedly masculine self-images, and verbal interaction which emphasizes joking, kidding, pranks, insults, and obscenity (220).<sup>21</sup> Marc Fasteau suggests that men prefer to meet in groups rather than dyads throughout their lives, so as to avoid deeply personal contact with one another (partly because of male inexpressiveness and partly because of homophobia) and to help prove their masculinity (16, 67). It has been argued that male groups protect men from women and femininity, and encourage the

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<sup>21</sup>Leary places this analysis in an appendix and, disappointingly, does little to relate it to the actual character of the group he has described.

objectification and denigration of women (Stockard and Johnson 241). Tiger has observed that male groups have an element of misogyny (Tiger, "Sex-Specific Friendship" 48).

The young men in this group resist the suggestion that they have deliberately excluded women.<sup>22</sup> Several of the members have pointed out that their shared activities do not appeal to most girls. Few females of their acquaintance are interested in *Dungeons and Dragons*, none in war-gaming. Gary Alan Fine explains the reasons for women's lack of involvement in fantasy role-playing games on three fronts: *culture* -- their fantasies are not as concerned with aggression and material objects as are those of males, and they do not tend to form large, activity-centred groups; *recruitment* -- they are not part of the network of war-gamers and science fiction fans from which players are generally recruited; and *male attitudes* -- male players discourage females from joining, fearing their presence would cramp their macho gaming style (Shared Fantasy 63-70). A few members of the group under consideration have suggested that, if a girl who shared their interests had come along at the right time, she would have been welcomed into the group. However, when two girls, myself and a friend, did join Ted's campaign at one point, they were viewed negatively and denied cooperation within the game; they were soon so discouraged that they dropped out, and their characters were subjected to gruesome deaths.

The reasons for the exclusion of women are deeply embedded in Western culture: a culture in which females are only beginning to participate in war and

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<sup>22</sup>The fact that the interviewer is female may have discouraged such an admission.

politics; a culture in which exciting adventures are thought to be a male domain; a culture in which little boys and little girls are encouraged to differentiate and avoid "the opposite sex." This group by its very nature cannot accept women as members, even though all the members are, to varying extents, receptive to feminist values. In order to do so, they would have to redefine the group so much that it would lose its past identity. They are beyond the age of scorning and avoiding girls and at the age of courting them. Nevertheless, they continue as members of a male group, whose culture inevitably retains a childhood residue of exaggerated emphasis on masculinity.

In Western society, male and female roles are traditionally seen as very different, and even opposed to one another.<sup>23</sup> Even so, sex role differences have been overemphasized; one study shows that there is a high correlation between attributes considered very feminine and very masculine (Michael V. Cicone and Diane M. Ruble 9). Thus, although we may believe that men and women are very different, our ideals for both coincide in many respects. Yet cultural beliefs in the differences are not to be discounted, especially when the attitudes under discussion are those of a male peer group which has grown up together. Young boys gain most of their information about sex roles from their peers, who tend to provide an exaggerated image of masculinity (Ruth Hartley 459).

Masculine roles and stereotypes are best placed on a continuum, the emphasis on certain attributes varying according to the subculture and the scholar involved: competitiveness, sexual assertiveness, dominance, aggression,

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<sup>23</sup>Marlene Mackie's Exploring Gender Relations: a Canadian Perspective provides a good critique of many sociological studies of sex roles.

successfulness, and emotional inexpressiveness (J. Balswick and C. Peek 384; Brandes 9; Robert Brannon 12; Fasteau 12; Alan Graebner 27; Alan E. Gross 88-94; Alan M. Kirshner 79; Robert A. Lewis 4; Peter N. Stearns 27, 102-103). Some of the expressions of these themes are discussed in the introductory chapter to this study. The manners in which these themes are expressed within this group will now be analysed.

These males do not show tendencies of being *sexually assertive*, except for the special case of Richard. As previously noted, they scarcely even talk about women. Until very recently they have had little to do with women socially. This is not the "typical" pattern portrayed by popular culture and sociological literature, although as suggested above, it appears to be a regular pattern within our culture. The members of this group became friends at an age when males of their culture commonly eschew the company of females, and they continued to find the monosexual group a rewarding social context later than the majority of their peers.<sup>24</sup> As a result, they did not learn how to socialize with girls as easily or early as other boys. Nor did they ever initiate a pattern of sexual banter, rather expressing a fastidious attitude toward such crudity. This situation has been acceptable to them because it has many compensations. When they eventually did begin to show an interest in women, it was in their activities with outsiders to the group that they did so. Nelson, through his membership in a university society, overcame these difficulties earlier than the others, and

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<sup>24</sup>Peter Naryás has suggested that the peaceful environment of middle-class homes, which provides an appropriate atmosphere for intellectual activity, also decreases opportunities to meet people of the opposite sex. Working class boys, on the other hand, have less comfortable homes and therefore prefer to socialize "in the streets," where they happen to have ample opportunity to meet girls. Therefore they mature faster in this respect. (Personal communication, April 1988.)

describes them as follows.<sup>25</sup>

Although the guys won't admit it, it's true, they're *scared to death* [of women]. If a girl came over downtown tonight, ah, dressed in anything at all that's, you know, a little bit done up, the guys would all faint. ... Although it's probably getting, it's getting better, it's still there. And it takes a long time to break. And it took a long time for me to break away from it... I'm sure deep down they'd all love to have girlfriends, they just don't know how to do it. (SH12a)

Either the members of this group do not value sexual aggressiveness as greatly as do other males in this society, or they see themselves as failures in this regard. Probably both of these attitudes are present.

The attributes of *dominance and aggression* are stressed by group members, as evidenced in the manner in which their games and conversations are conducted, and by some of their shared fantasies. A telephone conversation which I had with Phil one day jokingly hints at this theme:

Philip            I'll talk to you when I re-emerge [from my studies].

Susan            *Like a butterfly from a cocoon.*

Philip            [disgusted] Don't say *that*.

Susan            *Why? There are male butterflies you know.*

Philip            Yes, well I guess so. As long as I can be a poisonous one.

Susan            *Poisonous! Is it masculine to be poisonous?*

Philip            (!) Yes! Well, I guess I could be a monarch butterfly.

(FN109, 15/4/85)

Phil finds the image of a butterfly too feminine to admit identification with.

<sup>25</sup> It should be stressed that Nelson made this statement in 1984, and that it no longer holds completely true.

unless it be dangerous or at least large and impressive-looking. Aggression is seen as a survival mechanism; "if you make people think you're afraid of them, you're gonna get annihilated ... [but] if you look a bit tough, they won't pick on you" (Nelson, SH29a). Even Alex admits that aggression seems to be necessary to survive and succeed in our society, although he does not see it as a positive characteristic (SH17b). He considers himself and the other group members, excepting his brother, to be aggressive.<sup>26</sup> Aggression is never directly expressed within the group. The channels which members choose are *humour*, directed at the outside world and one another, and *games*, in which they combat imaginary enemies. Their aggressions are expressed verbally in ways that do not cause physical harm.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, many other male groups express their aggressions physically, through sports and battles.

The attribute of *successfulness* is highly valued. Most of the members put a great deal of effort towards achieving high grades at university, their present arena for self-evaluation.<sup>28</sup> Nelson is not as concerned about this, but he is similarly energetic when it comes to winning at team sports, and reaching the political pinnacle of his university society, as its president. Up to this point in their lives these young men appear to be very successful.

*Competitiveness* has pervaded the interactions of this group from its very beginning, with Ted and Michael's kindergarten controversy over whose eraser

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<sup>26</sup>Some examples of aggressive and dominating behaviour are quoted on pages 49, 52, and 277.

<sup>27</sup>See newspaper interview with psychologist David S. Hart.

<sup>28</sup>This should not imply that high grades are the primary reason for members' intellectual activity, nor that they meekly accept professorial evaluations of their work. It is merely that they use this structure towards their own competitive ends.

was larger. The two main group activities for years were both highly competitive, war-gaming inherently so, and *D and D* because they made it that way. The members' conversations continue to be set in a competitive framework; when they are not debates, they are likely to involve humorous insults and continuous attempts at one-up-manship, as in the following conversation. Mike and Phil had been talking about hats when Phil made the opening remark.

- Philip            My head's huge.
- Michael         Is it as big as my head?
- Philip            Oh, easily. Probably bigger.
- Michael         ... I've yet to find a hat that fits on my head. [He and Philip send Susan off to fetch a tape measure to settle the dispute.]
- Susan            *[having measured Michael's head] Twenty-four inches. I think it might be the hair [which makes it seem large].*
- Philip            Well, I've got hair too.
- Michael         Yeah, we've all got hair.
- Susan            *Well not everyone. I mean, thirty years from now, Phil probably won't have any hair.*
- Philip            Get away. It's ridiculous.
- Susan            *Now let's see [measuring Philip's head]. Oh, around twenty-four. Yeah, you guys have the same size head.*
- Philip            [in annoyance] Ah, damn!!
- Michael         That's no fun at all ... Should measure everyone in our friendship group. Maybe we all have the same size heads. [They measure Susan's, which turns out to be twenty-three and a half inches in circumference.]



- Philip Inferiority. Female head. Mine *must* be bigger than Michael.
- Susan ... You don't use your entire brain. A
- Philip [Sarcastically] Oh, no.
- Michael I do.
- Philip You do not, liar!
- Michael I do too! I do.
- Susan How do you know?
- Michael That's how I come up with terms like "comprehensive theory of violence."
- Alex I think Michael uses a large percentage of his brain.
- Philip Think he does, do you?
- Michael Yeah.
- Susan No larger than the rest of us.
- Michael I have to store away all the clichés and quotes and rock trivia somewhere.

(SH23a)

It is interesting to note that in the rhetoric of our society, big headedness is associated with pretentiousness and an exaggerated self image; to call someone *big headed* is an insult. Even while Phil and Mike assert their superiority, they are making fun of themselves.

The members' competition extends beyond their face-to-face interactions, to spur on their ambitions and their strivings for excellence in the fields of academe, apparel and musical taste. To illustrate this, let us dip into another group conversation. In this excerpt, Kirk and Philip speak jokingly about their competition with Mike. On a humorous, surface level they are not admitting

that such competition exists, but on a deeper level it is a significant influence on their behaviour.

Susan [To Kirk] Do you have political ambitions?

Kirk Well you see, Michael appears to so that means, well we're trying to keep up with Mike. Although I must say that it's very difficult, we are attempting to. And so if he has political ambitions then we must too.

Philip ... I deny this, I deny this completely.

Kirk Actually, I think I should say ... that there's no point in competing with somebody if he's aware that you're competing with him. That sort of ruins it ... He sort of tries harder. Keep this sort of under our hats. [At a look from Phil] Phil of course has nothing to do with this ... I hatched this all myself ... The fact that I'm leaving the area of clothing alone and concentrating on academics and maybe politics has, you know, has *nothing* to do with it. Clothing holds no interest to either myself or Phil --

Philip Especially not me! [We comment favourably on Phil's attire.]

Kirk Michael would be impressed.

Philip Not that we'd care anyway.

Kirk No, no. Especially you Phil.

Philip I especially don't care.

(SH28b)

The members of this group differ from other young male groups in that their competition occurs in the areas of knowledge, collections and gaming skills rather than the areas of physical ability and courage or sexual prowess. Competition is such an important factor in the folklore of this group that in Chapters Four and Five, I will analyse its expressive behaviours in terms of

*competitiveness*. This is the aspect of "masculine" behaviour which this group values most.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, men in this culture as well as others traditionally avoid demonstrating their feelings; they are *emotionally inexpressive*. To show emotion or admit personal failings is to make oneself vulnerable and thus jeopardize the other aspects of one's masculine identity, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The members of this group scrupulously avoid openness about personal problems and emotions. This was acknowledged as a masculine trait by Philip at a group interview when Mike was explaining that he tells *nobody* about his personal worries; Philip said approvingly, albeit with an ironic tone, that to bottle things up is a "very manly thing to do" (SH22b). On another occasion he stated that:

We're very secretive about everything really. Very -- we don't show emotions at all, really. Except we go grumbly, we show the grumbly emotions. When we're discontented with something we show that quite willingly. (SH4a)

Except for Richard, the members are very cautious about revealing their most personal thoughts and feelings. This is not to say that they do not do so indirectly, or that they do not know one another well enough to exchange hidden, perhaps unintended messages. They are essentially very private people who do not easily or directly impart personal particulars. Rather, they express their emotions obliquely, through their folklore, as will be seen in the following chapters.

By virtue of being all-male, this group demonstrates many traits viewed as masculine in our society, but as with any small group, does so distinctively.

### Interaction with Outsiders

No folk group functions independently of others in the modern world. As one small social unit in mass society, this group has many contacts with other subcultures and is part of the dominant culture. Such a group must constantly struggle to preserve its autonomy. The existence of outsiders is not only a potential threat to, but also an affirmation of a group's identity. Bauman points out that identity cannot be defined without contrast to different individuals and groups ("Defining Identity through Folklore" 150).

A group is distinguished from its social environment by its *boundary*, a mental construct based on an agreement among members as to who is and is not a member (Bott 289). A basis for membership is needed, if only to justify keeping outsiders from entering. Fine suggests that the knowledge and acceptance, or lack thereof, of a group's idioculture can be used to establish "protective boundaries" between insiders and outsiders ("The Manson Family" 48). These boundaries must be sturdy enough to maintain the group, yet flexible enough for productive interaction with the environment (Dunphy, The Primary Group 91).

A discussion of boundaries brings us to the *esoteric-exoteric factor*, which involves the beliefs and attitudes of two groups about themselves and one another.<sup>29</sup> The esoteric-exoteric factor distinguishes a group from its environment and justifies this distinction; Abrahams calls it "the dynamic of group boundary-

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<sup>29</sup>For definitions and discussions of this factor, see William Hugh Jansen, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore;" Abrahams, "Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore."

making" ("Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore" 169). The existence of a group history provides an esoteric area of knowledge for group members, and distinguishes members from outsiders in that only they can meaningfully refer to and understand past events of significance to the group (Fine, Shared Fantasy 130). When a member of this group mentions the TALT talks or the death of Tim the Magician, only another member will comprehend. In her landmark study Patterns of Culture, Ruth Benedict states that "each [culture] from the point of view of another ignores fundamentals and exploits irrelevancies" (24). The same is true of subcultures and of all small groups. Whereas fantasy gaming is fundamental to this group's culture, it is totally irrelevant to many others. Meanwhile, sexual conquest is important to many other young male groups, but not to this one.

Outsiders to a group, as stated in Jansen's discussion of the exoteric factor, are viewed negatively because they threaten the distinctiveness of the group unless they are kept outside. Identity is confirmed through exclusiveness and insistence on homogeneity (Douvan and Adelson 184). Taunts, humorous tales and stereotypes are used as reinforcements. Paradoxically, this divisiveness at one level is used to gain cohesion at the internal level of the small group (Burns, "Folkloristics" 126).

Within the context of the group, group members provide the standards against which they measure one another. Certain professors, musicians, writers and politicians receive their admiration and respect, but when together, the members often show marked disrespect towards the ordinary people who surround them in their daily lives. The following conversation illustrates group members'

attitudes towards their peers, and the way these are usually expressed. Here the members refer to outsiders as *twits*, *idiots*, and *jerks*, and admit to feeling superior to them.

Nelson For years we used to have sessions where ... we gathered around. And we would walk downtown, we'd be there, "Ah, that guy's a twit," or "That guy, what's he wearing?" Putting everyone down on the face of the earth just mindlessly, for no reason...

Philip I've always been kind of arrogant and superior to people who are dumb.

Kirk Yes you have. We have noticed ...

Nelson Some groups are members of the culture that's going on around them, but we were a little bit separate from it, that's why we had more people to crap on.

Philip We're a counter-culture.

Nelson See, other people A. [listened to] the music that was going on at that day, and wore the clothes that people are going around in --

Philip [We] call them idiots (l).

Nelson -- Did, you know, did stuff that we didn't do, [and if we were like them] then we'd have less people to crap on. Cause they'd go out places and most people would be like them. Now a bunch of us would come along and they'd probably say, "Ah, look at the jerks over there," something like that ... We'd very, very seldom find what we call a sensible person.

Philip I think -- I think there's almost a certain degree of arrogance. Some people who were different from the norm would become -- feel inferior and different and left out. We were different from the norm and felt we were *better* than everybody else.

Nelson Right. Exactly. We were (l). That's what we felt, we felt that, seriously too.

- Susan        *Did you dress differently as well?*
- Nelson        No, no, no.
- Philip        ... We were kind of, maybe a few years back of everyone.
- Nelson        But we just, you know, we were listening to older music than everyone else. Someone would come along and say, "Ah, listen to some new stuff," we'd [raspberry noise], "Get away from me."

(SH28a)

The fact that each member participates in other small groups adds to the complexity of the reference group, for although an individual is an outsider she/he may be an insider to another group a member is part of. The three most obvious, and perhaps most significant, outside influences are: educational institutions, family, and other friends.

Because the members of this group have been students throughout most of its existence, educational institutions have had a strong impact upon their friendship in several ways. To begin with, school and university have affected the possibility and frequency of interaction. Their schedules are very similar, and similarly flexible. Quite often they have attended the same institution together, therefore meeting not only at leisure but also at work. In several cases it is through this institution that they first met. Paradoxically, the distances between some of these institutions have meant long-term separations which limit and temporarily prevent group socializing. Secondly, educational institutions have shaped members' individual lives: several have been rewarded for scholastic success with scholarships and fellowships, and Mike, Kirk and Garth are considering careers in the academic milieu. Thirdly, educational institutions have

influenced the identity and the folklore of the group. Members use academic contexts as a forum for the competition so intrinsic to this groups' culture, evaluating their success in terms of course marks, academic awards, and knowledgability. They often discuss their studies together. Nevertheless, this group is not merely an academic subculture. Even though most of its members belong to academic communities, the group holds itself apart, and members view educational institutions with the same critical eye they reserve for all outsiders. They often criticize and ridicule specific departments, professors and courses; for example, Nelson speaks of an "average garbage university course ... you could go in there and fall asleep every day and pass it, you know." (SH12a).

The family is a central institution in any society, including modern urban North America. Two members of this group have never lived away from their parents (Nelson and Philip), one has returned after a year's absence (Alex), three are off at university but still return home in their free time (Mike, Kirk and Garth), and only two have permanently "moved out" (Ted and Richard). Of these two who have moved out, Ted has started a family of his own, and Richard frequently expresses positive feelings about family life and about his friends' families. He maintains social contact with some of these families whether or not the group members who belong to them are present.

The members of this group appear to have more in common with each other than with their families. Those living at home do not necessarily even eat with their families. They seldom discuss their families together, and when they do the conversation is likely to concern something impersonal, such as family diet or their fathers' taste in music.



The family has served to bring group members together in the cases in which their parents know one another. Also, it has provided houses where members can socialize. Yet group members purposely keep their families very separate from the group itself, with minimal contact and knowledge shared between the two. An illustration of this is that they very rarely invite one another to share a family meal, which would give the family and group members opportunity to interact, thus threatening the distinctness of the group.<sup>30</sup>

While the relationship between family, educational institutions and this group can be seen as complementary, the same is not true of the relationship between this and other friendship groups. The latter are similar to it and therefore compete most with it for the time, energy and allegiance of members. During the peak periods of war-gaming and *D and D* playing, this was the primary friendship group for its members. Since then, however, most of them have formed bonds which are equally strong, if not stronger, with other individuals and/or groups. Ted, who has married and joined the army, is the extreme example.

Members of the reference group judge outsiders to be different from themselves in essential ways. Even if their age, sex and leisure preferences are the same, they may not have a similar sense of humour or outlook on life. Furthermore, they may not have been available at a time when the group was disposed to welcome new members. Decisions as to who can or cannot be a member are made informally and unofficially. Very few potential members are

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<sup>30</sup>Richard has made an exception for himself in this respect as in several others; he frequently dines with the Knoxes, for example.

considered acceptable: whereas Phil was welcomed, Paul, Stuart and George were left outside. Third level members count as outsiders.

Ridicule is a device commonly utilized to demarcate group boundaries, traditionally used in *blason populaire*. A teasing session, whoever it is directed at, functions to entertain and maintain the group at the same time as it makes outsiders feel uncomfortable and left out. Every element of difference from the group may be commented on; clothes, music and activities all give occasion to "call them idiots," as Phil puts it (SH28b). Every difference is a mark of outsider inferiority, and thus of the group's superiority. In this manner the group carries on, and from its own point of view wins, a competitive relationship with outsiders.

Even if it does not involve ridicule, a conversation can help to preserve a group's exclusiveness with its topic. The comment that *D and D* has assisted their friendship elicited the following response from group members:

- Michael            It's also a way to keep out people...
- Ted                 Um-hum, yeah.
- Michael            Very good way ... We'd sit around and talk about *D and D* all the time ...
- Nelson             Yup. Filtered out everyone else.
- (SH26a)

On the other hand, if they wish to befriend somebody, especially a female, *Dungeons and Dragons* may become a taboo subject. "If a girl hears about it, she'll say, 'Wow, that guy's weird'... war-games and *D and D* are sort of associated with people who are antisocial" (Ted, SH9b). Although they are generally pleased with the ways in which they differ from their peers, the members of this group nevertheless avoid public openness about any of their

activities which are likely to be misunderstood or criticized. They realize that what they view as a mark of superiority may be perceived as one of inferiority by outsiders, and this they wish to avoid.

It may be polite and tactful to avoid a conversational topic which would make outsiders aware of differences from members, in other words, aware that they *are* outsiders, but even this is another form of boundary maintenance. For to keep knowledge from somebody is to withhold understanding and trust. The members of the group do share these things among themselves; and therefore have a bond which separates them from non-members. "It's a very cliqueish group. I mean this is a *group*, and unless something very strange happens then its going to be very difficult for someone else to get in" (Richard, SH7b).

### Summary

Although informal, this group has its own identity and the members believe it to be special and different from other such groups. *Friendship* and *masculinity* are the concepts crucial to its definition, and these are interpreted in distinctive ways by this group.

The group does not exist in isolation and therefore interacts with other individuals and groups continually. Within the context of this study, these are termed *outsiders*. The group has certain methods of distinguishing itself from outsiders and excluding them, usually involving ridicule and the withholding of esoteric knowledge.

## Chapter 4

# The Folklore of the Group

The four main areas of folklore for the young, male group under consideration are conversational genres, humour, popular culture as it is transformed for group purposes, and games. This folklore is shaped and patterned by the group's cultural themes of competition and shared fantasy. The following chapter will analyse the group's folklore in the light of these themes. Also to be considered in this analysis are the context, emic categories, aesthetic values, functions, uses and meanings of various folkloric items within the group. Discussion of games will be reserved for the following chapter, for games are so significant in this group that they require special consideration.

The folklore of this group reflects its nature as a leisure group, and for this reason much of it lies within the realm of *play*. Furthermore, like all folklore it functions as a form of *communication*. Before embarking on a discussion of specific items of folklore, therefore, I will examine the literatures concerning play and communication, as they relate to the folklore of this group.

### Studies of Play

The study group is a leisure group in that it meets during its members' spare time for activities intended to be entertaining rather than useful. Leisure is widely viewed as the freedom to engage in activities not centred upon making a livelihood, although it is also idealistically seen as a chance for creativity and the opportunity to achieve understanding of life's deeper realities (Eric Larrabee and Rolf Meyerson 5-10). In our culture, adolescents have more leisure than most other groups, to the extent of being considered hedonistic, but they also have more direct pressures on their choices (Frith 61). It is commonly supposed that once out of childhood one does not play. Yet everybody engages in play, and play is the focus of all leisure groups.

Play eludes precise definition but has been repeatedly described as having certain key characteristics; it is: voluntary; intrinsically rewarding rather than goal-oriented; enjoyable; rule-governed; central to social life; creative; culturally variant; subjectively perceived and experienced; and bounded in time and space.<sup>31</sup> The elements of fantasy and competition have also been considered intrinsic to play by some scholars, but these will be dealt with separately. All these characteristics of play clearly apply to the folklore of the group under consideration, as will be shown.

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<sup>31</sup> Scholars who cite these characteristics are as follows: Abrahams, "Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore" 181-184; Barnett 114-124; John Bowman 241-248; Cailliois 9; Zelda Cohen 2; Norman Deanin 23; Robert A. Georges, "Relevance of Models" 6; Georges, "Relevance of Models" 22; Johan Huizinga 13; Douglas Kleiber 205; William Levinson 2, 14; Peter Loizos 234; Lynch 56; Norbeck 48-53; Plato 49; Stevens 238-240; Brian Sutton-Smith, "Children at Play" 55-59; Sutton-Smith, "Towards an Anthropology of Play" 228.

The most important and influential scholars in the field of play are Johan Huizinga, Roger Callois and Gregory Bateson. Huizinga first published his Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture in 1938. The thesis of this book is that play predates and is essential to the creation of culture: "culture arises in the form of play ... it is played from the very beginning," although as a culture becomes more sophisticated the play element is confined to certain spheres (46). Huizinga examines play as part of knowledge, competition, war, politics and art. He acknowledges the aesthetics of play, observing dimensions of rhythm, harmony, tension and its solution (10-11) and states that the only way to satisfy the need for living in beauty is play (63). He asserts the transcendence of play:

Play is a thing by itself. The play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play can very well include seriousness. (45)

As has been shown in the history of this group, the members commenced playing together before a shared culture was formed, and as will be shown here, the shared culture is largely based on games and fantasy. This folklore, like all folklore, contains serious meanings and messages. Thus Huizinga's theory that play predates and is essential to culture may be true for small group history as well as for the general history of cultural development.

In Man, Play and Games, Roger Callois comments that most scholars of games have approached the subject in a different manner than Huizinga, viewing games historically as obsolete cultural survivals. He suggests that the two approaches can be reconciled: "the spirit of play is essential to culture, but games

and toys are historically the residues of culture" (58).<sup>32</sup> Caillois identifies four kinds of play: *agon*, being competitive, skilled play,<sup>33</sup> *alea*, involving chance; *mimicry*, in which the player temporarily assumes a role; and *ilinx*, the pursuit of vertigo in order to temporarily unbalance perception<sup>34</sup> (14-23). Play can become extremely intense, which may lead to its corruption, that is, real-life consequences in the form of cheating at games of chance by professional players, or self-alienation within somebody who begins to believe a *mimicry* role, or abuse, as opposed to controlled use, of drugs for the purpose of *ilinx* (45-51).

*Agon* and *alea* are intrinsic to the games played by this group, and *agon* is central to their culture. *Mimicry* is central to *Dungeons and Dragons*, and as a fantasy element enters into much of the group's folklore. *Ilinx* is generally avoided by the members of this group, who place too much value on being in control of their lives, both public and personal, to risk unbalancing their perceptions. The kind of play which verges upon corruption within this group is *agon*, because of the centrality of competition to its members.

In "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," Gregory Bateson theorizes that play was important in the evolution of communication since it involves "signals standing for other events" (181). These signals are comprised of actions which

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<sup>32</sup>Caillois, like many others, uses the terms *games* and *play* indiscriminately. Scholarly references to games should be considered to mean play in general within the context of the present discussion.

<sup>33</sup>In Georgan's restatement of this typology, he stresses the use of *strategy* in this sort of play ("Recreations and Games" 182).

<sup>34</sup>Norbeck notes that "transcending ordinary psychic states," especially through the use of drugs, is an acceptable play-form in many cultures, frequently incorporated into their religious practices. However, in Western culture most drugs are illegal and socially disapproved, thus lacking "peaceful modes of control" and being subject to abuse (52-53).

"do' not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote" (180). Central to the evolution of communication, states Bateson, is the *paradox*, which for play is centred on the question "is this play?" (182). Norman Denzin takes up this idea of paradox in play, restating it as "we know it will be the same, but always different," play being an interactional form whose content and substance must be re-established each time it occurs (13). Participants in play "establish new definitions of the immediate world at hand; their play may build upon itself and create its own history, which may take storytelling form" (17, 23). John Bowman also builds upon Bateson's ideas. He suggests that the message "this is play" is communicated through nonverbal cues such as laughter, smiles, and exaggerated or repeated movements, as well as through explicit verbal statements and speech play (245-246). The idea that play is a paradox arises from the fact that it involves two levels, fantasy and reality, both of which affect each other. The folklore of this group contains many fantastic elements with real import, and the unique interplay of fantasy and reality creates a world private to group members.

Play is commonly considered the antithesis of work, and therefore traditionally viewed negatively in our culture (Levinson 1; Edward Norbeck 48; Stevens 238), as demonstrated in such proverbs as "idle hands are the devil's workshop." Martha Wolfenstein suggests that in modern society, play has moved into a valued, even obligatory position, with the result that the play-work dichotomy is blurred and some of play's intensity is lost (399-401). Peter Loizos also sees play and work as having elements of each other, some work being creative and therefore playful, and some play in the form of games being highly



time-consuming, involving commitment, and having hierarchical organization (236-238). The obvious example of such play within this group is *Dungeons and Dragons*, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter. Thus, play and work are not as separate and different as one might assume. The play shared by the members of the group under consideration prepares them for their future work roles in many ways.

Play and the play-world are also commonly opposed to *reality* in our thinking. Caillois conceives of play as occurring in a parallel, incompatible domain; "play and ordinary life are constantly and universally antagonistic to each other" (63-64). Bowman, however, contends that it is simplistic to contrast play with reality, both being social constructs and play being "a significant, pervasive element of human experience and everyday life" (240-241). Denzin represents a compromise position when he states that although play occurs in the immediately experienced here-and-now, it involves detachment from literal reality (13-14). Huizinga sees play as converting reality into images, play being dependent on the mind rather than on material things (3-4). Similarly, Robert Lynch proposes that play draws upon reality (57). Georges maintains that children at play "learn to imitate reality objectively" ("Relevance of Models" 6). The most constructive solution to this debate is Bowman's, which considers play and reality as different but interacting levels of life, rather than as opposites. I will use the phrase *everyday life* as a contrast to *fantasy life*, so as to avoid the suggestion that fantasy and reality preclude one another.

Play can also be discussed in relation to *culture* with valuable results. It has already been mentioned that play is culturally variant, and that Huizinga and his

adherents consider it to be at the root of culture. John Roberts and Brian Sutton-Smith theorize that games reflect culture, there being three sorts of cultures by their reckoning. Cultures which emphasize achievement are predominated by games of physical skill; those which are subject to environmental uncertainty and which stress responsibility have mostly games of chance; and complex societies which enforce obedience generally play games of strategy ("Child Training and Game Involvement", 474).<sup>35</sup> The folkloric play of the group under consideration emphasizes strategy, just as Roberts and Sutton-Smith suggest is true within complex society.

One of the elements of play is *creativity*. Serena Wade defines creativity as "a process of conscious manipulation of the environment that results in its redefinition in a unique manner," its source being the original exploitation of ideas and observations (40). Janet Harris suggests that creativity lies in the free shifts of activities within the playful context, and that play is central to creativity and therefore to cultural change (28). Context influences the potential range of playfulness and creativity. Jules Henry points out that the school environment discourages creativity because of its disruptive effects, only permitting it when "tamed and directed toward socially approved ends" (33). Because internally directed groups "have greater control over the satisfaction of their desires," state Rosemary Randall and John Southgate, there is a greater range within them for creativity and destructiveness (471). A measure of independence being necessary to creativity, small groups such as this one purposely avoid close ties with formal institutions.

<sup>35</sup> These findings would appear to be opposed to Huisinga's, but are reconciled with the suggestion by Harris that culture arises from play but also influences it, while play continues to modify culture (31). Thus play and culture continually interact for their mutual enrichment.

### Communication and Performance

Communication is not a simple occurrence, for it takes many forms and its success is dependent on the degree of shared culture between performer and audience. The central form of communication is face-to-face informal conversation, according to Erving Goffman (Strategic Interaction 132). Goffman identifies two kinds of communicative expressions: verbal signals which one "gives" and non-verbal signals which one "gives off," the latter being "the more theatrical and contextual ... presumably unintentional kind" (Presentation of Self 4). The manipulation and observation of non-verbal, supposedly unconscious, communications can become an information game of concealment, discovery, false revelation and rediscovery (8). A performer puts on a *front*, intentionally or unintentionally employing expressive equipment in order to project a certain definition of the situation. Mark L. Knapp suggests that nonverbal communication is a necessary support for verbal communication, being variously used to repeat, contradict, substitute, complement and accent it (9). Goffman and Knapp are both making the point that there is much more to communication than direct exchange of information. A central concern of folkloristics is the interpretation of the underlying messages of certain communicative events.

Folklore is *performed*, that is, consciously presented to an audience. Goffman makes some interesting assertions about performance. He states that few performances are completely honest, nor should they be if life is to be carried on smoothly; "life itself is a dramatically enacted thing" (Presentation of Self

71-72). One uses the arts of concealment, accentuated revelation, and misrepresentation to achieve the desired performance or impression (Strategic Interaction 14). The limitations of this performance or "expression game" are physical factors, knowledge, human nature, and social norms (43). A performance may be staged by a group or a *team*, who may also form their own audience (Presentation of Self 81-82). Each member is responsible for continuing rather than revealing the performance, for aiding in an appearance of spontaneous unanimity, and for a particular performance role (82-101). The study group frequently performs so effectively as a team that outsiders are kept ignorant of many aspects of the group's culture. The members also perform constantly for one another, using folklore to aid them, in the arts of concealment and misrepresentation, within the limitations of social norms from the larger culture.

Folklorist Richard Bauman states that performance is primarily a mode of communication which transforms literal language for its own purposes (Verbal Art as Performance 9). Thus, performance is seen as primarily a verbal expression of folkloric items. Bauman suggests that an important area for research is the performance characteristics which serve to capture audience attention and give the performer control over the group, as well as "establishing the continuity between the noticeable and public performance contexts of everyday life" (28). He also urges that communities with relatively little emphasis on performance skills and style are worthy of study (Verbal Art 19), as exemplified in his article, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community." Acknowledging that conscious attention to speaking varies greatly from group to group, he observes that the La Have community does not greatly

value speaking (330-331). Its central speech act once was male gatherings at the local store in winter (334), and although the participants paid no attention to formal linguistic devices or performance skills (340), their talk had traditional patterns and functions (334). Similarly, Jansen states that audience expectations of performance quality vary greatly according to emphasis: low expectations are matched by a focus on content, high ones by careful attention to style and form ("Classifying Performance in the Study of Verbal Folklore" 117). The group under consideration is one of those communities which focusses on content far more than style and form in most of its folkloric performances. The exception is gaming, which is highly stylized within the group, as will be shown in the following chapter.

Not all performances are folkloric; to qualify as such, they must involve interpersonal contact, artistry, and a basis in tradition (Abrahams, "Genre Theory" 1978; Burns, "Folkloristics" 129; Stahl 13).

### **Conversational Genres**

Conversational genres are a new focus for folklorists, but they fit within the older concept of *verbal art*, which is distinguished from ordinary speech by its performance characteristics (William Bascom, "Verbal Art" 247). Abrahams defines *conversational genres* as traditional utterances which arise in the course of everyday communication and attempt to control a situation ("A Rhetoric of Everyday Life" 51). Conversational genres take on some of the characteristics of informal conversation, according to John McDowell; spontaneity; casualness,

characterized by hesitation, retracking, "bad" grammar, vernacular speech, and obscenity; egalitarian roles; and an open agenda, that is, free movement among topics (McDowell, "Conversational Genres" 121). Conversation occurs in various *styles* such as discussion, debate, argument, shoptalk, joking around, chattering, and gossiping (122). Conversational genres are easily inserted into these styles, serving to divert serious conversation to "a reprieve of frivolity," and to comment on the conversation itself (122-124). Personal experience narratives, wordplay, quotations,<sup>36</sup> boasts and taunts are the significant conversational genres for the group under consideration. Before these are discussed, the particular conversational contexts which occur within the group will be described.

### Conversations

The members of this group pride themselves on being skilled conversationalists, and are often well satisfied to do nothing but talk, listen to music, and drink when they get together.

Talk is always important, right? I mean you have to talk, I mean it's a main communication. But ah, in this group talk seems to ... be more important than in some other groups, because um, I don't know. You're either talking about music or you're talking about books or you're talking about other friends or what you did today or whatever, you know? Talk is very important. That's why you go to bars, other than to drink. (Alex, SH15a)

No matter what the overt topic, the distinctive style of a conversation among group members communicates their bond, their groupness. Members consider

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<sup>36</sup>Quotations will be discussed later in this chapter, as part of the folklore with which the group surrounds the media products it uses.

their conversations to be superior to those of outsiders. The conversations of children, preppies, and one's family have been specifically mentioned as "dull" and "trite" in comparison (SH3a, SH22b).

The context of a conversation is usually a member's home or a pub, although it may be anywhere the members happen to meet. Many conversations are dyadic, that is, involving only two people, even when several members are present. According to Nelson, this is especially true in recent years.

It's only when you start, they start the big reminiscing, that you go back, that everyone talks together. Or you talk about something that everyone knows about [such as medieval history or international politics]. What's happening now is everyone's getting their own field of knowledge, and unless you transcend the boundary where more than ... two people know about it, you get side conversations going on. It seems to be more now than it was before. (SH13b)

This is understandable considering the diversity of modern society, wherein many individuals possess specialized fields of knowledge. Much of the specialized knowledge of group members does not coincide.

Domination of conversations varies according to three factors. First of all, *personality*; Ted, Kirk, Philip, and Alex have all expressed a preference for listening rather than participating most of the time, but they are aware that the impact of their few words can often be significant. Michael, Richard and Nelson are generally voluble; as Nelson puts it, "I'd make sure I got my ten cents in about everything" (SH13b). The second factor of *subject* is related to the first. When present, Ted is one of the main participants in discussions of gaming, often directing the conversation. Alex is quick to stand up for his ideals and debate a point. Philip and Mike are the main participants in fantastic and nonsensical

talk. When the conversation turns to war or politics, Mike and Nelson may spend hours wrangling a point. The third factor is *recent return*; if a member has been absent for some time, he is encouraged to talk and attentively listened to, his membership thus speedily reaffirmed.

As a result of its informality, conversation in this group tends to drift from subject to subject. This corresponds to McDowell's characteristic, the "open agenda" of conversation, being a free movement among topics ("Conversational Genres" 121). The conversation is seldom consciously manipulated, but if it becomes dull, overheated, or enters taboo territory, somebody may suggest a change in topic.

Conversational subject matter ranges widely but in predictable directions. Shared past is a persistent topic, as are related areas of mutual interest. Thus, not only war-gaming but also military history and contemporary international politics are likely to be discussed. Covertly related to the members' verbal reconstructions of *Dungeons and Dragons* scenarios are their *fantasizing conversations* (Phil, SH3b). Recent personal history, usually in the form of interesting or funny anecdotes, is incorporated into group history once it has been recounted. Conversations are also frequently centred on humour and the media, and "we talk about all kinds of ridiculous things that mean nothing really" (Alex, SH16a). The subject matter of group conversations, whatever it is, is transformed into shared cultural knowledge. Two distinctive types of conversations common to this group, which relate to the themes of competition and fantasy, are arguments and fantasy-oriented talk.



Argument has not been focussed on very much by cultural scholars, but in an analysis of open-line radio shows, Martin Lovelace observes that there are traditional modes of argument (30). This group performs in a traditional argumentative mode, with a particular set of aesthetics. At the end of the final group interview, which like the others was essentially an informal conversation directed largely by the group itself, Nelson commented with satisfaction that "lots of good bleeding went on" (SH20b; see page 287). He used this violent imagery to mean that there was plenty of teasing and arguing involved. Argumentative ability is fundamental for group members, Nelson being considered master of the art and tending to take a right-wing stance (see page 142). Mike is noted for his extensive knowledge, Alex for his idealism and for playing devil's advocate: "I just like to argue so I just take the opposite stand" (SH16a). When they were playing war-games or *Dungeons and Dragons* intensely, arguments frequently erupted between members: "near the end we'd play for ten minutes and argue for three hours" (Nelson, SH24a). This was part of the pleasure for them, until it became excessive. Nelson talks about the war-games he still plays occasionally with Ted:

Just for old nostalgia's sake more than anything else. So I can have a good argument with him. We always argued viciously about everything we ever did in war-gaming anyway, so, so that was it. (SH12a)

Argument is the most overtly competitive form of conversation. Bauman finds that argument is characterized by an element of contesting, and that it functions to aggressively confirm male identity ("The La' Have Island General Store" 338). Donald Brennels observes that adolescent "verbal duels" are especially winning-oriented, but are prevented from becoming "deadly serious" by a skillful blending of abuse with artistry (178-180). In other words, the

conversational genres employed in this conversational style serve to relieve tension.

The young men of this group always strive to win but seldom admit defeat, thus preventing sure victory on most occasions. Nevertheless, Alex points out that:

Your perspective is bound to change when, if someone points something out that you've never thought of before. But now, you won't admit there and then, but later on you might change your view, and next time you're arguing or whatever, you might have a slightly different view. (SH16a)

If a member cannot make a clear victory, at least he has honed his skills, shown off his abilities, and as Nelson puts it, done "some good bleeding". Argument is a natural release for aggressive tensions.

Group arguments may be better understood if one of them is analysed in detail; the following is fairly representative:

- (1) Susan *I find it much easier to have a discussion without getting all intense.*
- (2) Phil Oh, you need to get intense.
- (3) Alex Depends what you're arguing about. There are some really intense topics, right.
- (4) Mike Violence. [Earlier in the evening, Mike and Susan had had an intense argument about violence.]
- (5) Susan *[Not hearing Mike, continuing to explain why she prefers less intense arguments] ... And it can be fun.*
- (6) Mike Violence?
- (7) Philip Yeah!
- (8) Mike Yeah! ... You can't argue against that [violence], because people will always be insane or it's always a good way to get things ... the capacity always exists and also the reality always exists.

- (9) Alex           The reality doesn't have to exist, though.
- (10) Mike          No, you're just sort of saying these things. They sound good but it doesn't mean anything.
- (11) Alex          (1) Why does the reality have to exist? Explain.
- (12) Phil          ...It's human nature. \*You can't change human nature. You might as well say don't --.\* [This is a quote from a comedy routine called \*The Reluctant Cannibal,\* by the British pair Flanders and Swan. The father is reasoning to his son that it is just as ridiculous to say "don't fight people" as it is to say "don't eat people." This argument wins the son over.]
- (13) Mike          ... You agree there's no such thing as a perfect world, don't you?
- (14) Alex          No, I don't.
- (15) Susan         *Yay! That's just what I was saying!*
- (16) Alex          There's very little use to living if you don't believe in some kind of perfection.
- (17) Mike          ... It's like eradicating an entire human impulse. [He goes on to expound on the universality of violence.]
- (18) Alex          Hope for a peaceful world is like a hype for God, I mean there's very little difference. [A discussion of hope and faith ensues.] So you're rejecting the idea of heaven, when you reject the the utopia, the perfect society.
- (19) Mike          As a matter of fact, I do reject the idea of heaven. But that's not the reason I reject the idea of utopia. Faith is something different. I respect people with faith a great deal, [like my] Uncle John.
- (20) Alex          Well, I have faith in the ideal society.
- (21) Mike          Well, that's fine, but that's not reality. That's faith ... You can hope, but you can't do anything with that hope. I would never hit anybody and I

don't kill animals and stuff like that. You have your own code ... and I agree with equality of women and stuff. Stuff.

- (22) Phil            Yeah, yeah. (With humour; also serving to release tension.)
- (23) Mike            Yeah, yeah.
- (24) Phil            Yeah.
- (25) Mike            It's the way things have always been, the way things always will. I'm convinced of it.
- (26) Alex            Okay, you're convinced, I'm not.
- (27) Mike            Right.
- (28) Alex            There.
- (29) Mike            I'm not gonna hit you over the head with a shovel, but -- you're wrong.
- (30) Alex            I hope you're wrong.
- (31) Mike            You're not wrong in hoping, but you're wrong in thinking.
- (32) Alex            I (ll) -- let me figure that one out.
- (33) Mike            ... First of all, I think war is a good thing.
- (34) Susan            [outraged] What?!
- (35) Mike            Occasionally, yes ... if no-one ever used violence to adjust their situation, then we'd all be still, you know, living in feudal times.
- (36) Phil            Or running around building pyramids.
- [The argument turns to poverty and its relationship to war.]
- (37) Mike            People have never been poor because people refused to give them money. People are poor because they've been kept poor for some reason, or because of their environment.... I'm talking about being in a situation

which can only be changed through violence ... How does one war lead to another? That's ridiculous, that's facile.

- (38) Alex      Isn't it better to educate people? 'Wouldn't that alleviate the amount of violence that goes on? ... Isn't that a civilized nation's responsibility?
- (39) Mike      That sounds pretty paternalistic .. We're not supposed to interfere in other nation's business.
- (40) Alex      But we do. Because ... all our companies run the countries ... the economies ... The companies themselves aren't moral agents, they're just interested in profits, they don't give a damn about the people.
- (41) Mike      Yeah, exactly.
- (42) Alex      And that's what's wrong. [A discussion of the pros and cons of capitalism ensues.]
- (43) Mike      I don't know why I'm arguing this. I'm making it up as I go along. We should get on to something else.
- (44) Phil      You're doing very well. You're making more sense than I've heard you make in quite awhile.
- (45) Mike      [Not sure whether or not this is a compliment] Well, there you go. Actually, I agree with quite a few things you say [to Alex and Susan], *but* the world's in chaos.
- (46) Phil      It's more-so than before. It's increasing rather than decreasing.
- (47) Mike      Most of the world is constantly at war. [The conversation turns to nuclear war, outside help for developing countries, Gandhi, and finally communism.] ... I think communism is extremely bad, and Russia is a force for absolutely no good in the world.
- (48) Alex      I have no idea, I've never lived there.
- (49) Mike      No, in the *world*, Alex.

- (50) Alex            So is it good in the USSR?
- (51) Mike            No.
- (52) Alex            It's a very young system.
- (53) Mike            It is, but it's not developing towards freedom at all ... I keep thinking of more and more things to say [but I want to stop].
- (54) Susan            *Is this why ... you don't talk about politics so much anymore?*
- (55) Mike            It's with Nelson [that I don't wish to argue], mainly.
- (56) Phil            If Nelson was here he'd be screaming by now. So would Mike.
- (57) Mike            I'm not really sure what I think either ... I find it really hard to take a stand.
- (58) Phil            It's impossible to take a stand if you're gonna be really honest.
- (59) Mike            It's not impossible but it's very hard. At the moment I'm rethinking a lot of the things I used to think. I was sort of really dogmatic bleeding-heart liberal in the spring, having read all sorts of books about Latin America and stuff, but thinking about it -- you know.
- (60) Phil            You can change every five minutes. It's gross. Sounds kind of wishy-washy and namby-pamby but you don't know.
- (61) Alex            Views aren't solidified.
- (SH22a)

The topic of this argument is *violence*, with Mike insisting that it is intrinsic to life and therefore inescapable (8, 17, 25), and Alex contending that pacifist ideals can and should change this reality (9, 16, 20, 38). Mike and Phil occasionally make joking remarks which serve to reduce the tension (6-8, 21-24, 29), but Alex is earnest throughout. The performers eloquently display a critical awareness of

capitalism (40-42), communism (47-53), religious conviction (18-19), poverty (37), and the troubles of the modern world (45-47). Part of the reason they cultivate a knowledge of world affairs is to use it in such arguments. Particular episodes within the argument are of special interest. Firstly, the members present express at the outset the feeling that argument is necessarily intense (2-3), but at the end state a reluctance to pursue extremely heated argument (53-56); thus, there are limits to a "good" argument. Violence is a particularly significant topic within the context of a male group, as Mike and Phil indicate with their joke at the outset that they enjoy violence (6-8). At the end, Mike admits a new-found uncertainty as to his position on issues, which makes him reluctant to argue (57-61); another aspect of the group's argument aesthetic is that one should take a firm stand. Sincerity, although not strictly necessary, is desirable (60). Among other things, argument is a game of rhetoric played for enjoyment by the members of this group, and does not involve real enmity.

Quite often these young men like to play with words, ideas and their future lives in conversation. They term this activity *fantasizing conversations*. Sometimes these are individual fantasies being aired for group amusement, but usually they are group creations, very much related to fantasy gaming.

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Kirk   | With us, it wasn't just ah, that we shared them [the fantasies], we <i>developed</i> them together, you know.                       |
| Philip | Same now, outside of <i>D and D</i> ... Mike and I and our silly "Brideshead" and "Pope of Greenwich Village" and things like that. |

(SH28a)

Mike and Phil are the specialists in this speculative fantasy, a good example of one of their distinctive shared daydreams being the following:

Our silly fantasizing conversations about being in China or Bangkok or Brideshead or somewhere like that ... It's mostly Mike and I. Everyone else thinks it's very silly. I'm sure Alex Hastings disapproves ... [It's aimed at] creating an ambiance.

*You talk about the idea of being in Bangkok?*

That's one of Mike's ... it's a very good one. You sit around and um, wearing big baggy white cotton-shirts, in a sweaty room, smoking high-class cigarettes. And Bangkok has become part of you. And, and we're correspondants with English newspapers, and ah, I can't get the atmosphere properly. We need to be going back and forth, Mike and I, poetic dreams and so on ... Part of us in Bangkok and part of us in England, we can never be home either place. We're just stuck on the international scene and the mystique of Bangkok ... Mike wants us to be involved with opium, I'm not sure about that. And we have loyal manservants. We drink, we drink too much as well.

*Susan: In the early twentieth century or something?*

Yeah, the good old days. Great imperialism. After World War One perhaps ... That's what we do ... each creating a different image, and all the images will come together, that'll be it. We just sit there and think how nice it would be. (Phil, SH3b)

Fantasies such as this are generally based on media images and ideals of wealth and power, which they have jokingly termed "the romance of money and power" (FN55, 30/8/84). All their fantasy has a core of humour. They like to talk about how rich and ruthless they will someday be. During one conversation at *Kibitzers*, a local bar, Mike, Phil and Richard decided that when they become "incredibly powerful and famous," somebody is going to turn this thesis into a movie about them. This sparked a discussion of who should play them: Phil wants Jeremy Irons; Mike, Nastasia Kinsky in a bear suit, or Mickey Rourke; and perhaps Roger Daltrey could play Nelson. They agreed that this will be a movie about *power*, along the lines of The Godfather, and therefore will involve the killing off of their families.



I can see all of us sitting around a mahogany oak table in an impressive Victorian room, wearing classy suits, very expensive. We look up at the fan on the ceiling -- there should be a fan in here -- and then the camera pans down and we're sitting here at this table [in *Kibitzers*] ... This is the beginning of the movie. (Phil, FN34 8/8/84)

It was decided that each member will have his own theme music, with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the film as a whole. Orin E. Klapp has observed that people often use celebrities to go on "identity voyages," wherein they vicariously experience the celebrity-heroes' adventures (212). Sometimes the roles played by these celebrities in movies involve activities which are taboo, yet attractive (226). The members of this group are involved in such a "seductive experience," as Klapp terms it, when they fantasize about a Godfather styled future.

Even in fantasy, group members compete for superior status. They speculate as to who will be most successful:

Our accountants will get together and decide which of us is worth more. (1) How much money we have, whose wife is better looking (1) ... pictures of our children, "My child did this, what did yours do?" (Phil, SH4a)

Violence also plays a part in the imagery, as with the above movie imagery and in a fantasizing conversation wherein members speculate upon the possibility of Alex becoming a mass-murderer one day:

Philip           What if Nelson turned out to be a mass murderer?  
He'd look really bad for our -- you know, for our careers.

Michael          Oh, he will too. You can see it in his eyes. [Pause.]  
No, he wouldn't do it, He's extremely rational.

Philip           Maybe Alex can be a mass murderer.

- Michael Alex could be, yeah. If he was called by God or something.
- Philip All this niceness might just suddenly stop.
- Michael ... Oh, he'd be very polite and coy. Polite and coy, it'd make a great story. Charles Manson.
- Alex ... You can write books about me.
- Michael ... "I was Alex Hastings' chauffeur."
- Philip Before he went mad ... "We always knew he was going to be a mass murderer. We could tell it from the way he looked."

(SH21b)

Part of the joy of this scenario lies in its incongruity; for Alex is considered the most morally upstanding member, and yet his friends are constructing a villainous future for him. An excellent example of an aggressive group fantasy is described by Nelson:

That was done a lot, going on about great things that they were gonna do or stuff like that ... Fantasizing, making stuff up. Everyone used to say ... Nelson's going to go back to Germany, and revive Deutschland and all that stuff, and Peter'll take over the Russians and all that kind of stuff. On a grand scale that used to go on ... Newfoundland separatist [stuff]. Ted was gonna be our general when we took over ... Phil be in charge of economics, finance minister. Kirk'll be Navy, and Ted the army, and I'd be in charge of propaganda and everything. Stuff like that, we're always yapping about stuff like that ... We used to do that a lot, right through [group history]. (SH14a)

The discussion of fantasizing conversations introduces the topic of group fantasy, one which arises repeatedly in this group's folklore. Fantasy is a creative transformation of reality, influenced by culture and the individual (Cottrán 220; Douvan and Adelson 31; Fine, Shared Fantasy xiii). Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi declare that "tradition is the building block of fantasy," thus suggesting

folkloric roots for all of fantasy ("The Memorata and the Proto-Memorata" 237). /

In our culture, fantasy is generally viewed with suspicion, for we prefer to banish whatever cannot be explained (Sheila Finch-Reyner 133). This is important point of deviance for the members of this group, for they do value fantasy, albeit in certain, contained forms. Fantasy occurs on a continuum with other symbolic communication, as Fine has observed: "since language allows people to talk about things imagined or not present, fantasy is simply an extension of what we often do with language in other circumstances" (231). Sheila Finch-Reyner cites psychologists and anthropologists in arguing that people need imaginative activity, need "the mysterious other dimension of meaning always felt to be present in true fantasy" (128-130). To be effective, she states, fantasy must be based on an accepted current concept of the universe (134). Similarly, the fantasies of the group under consideration are based on the shared worldview of its members.

Fantasy is frequently conceived of as a very personal, nonsocial activity (Stevens 247) but it often occurs publicly. For example, Kay Cothran discusses the fantasy world of tall-tale tellers centred on heroic characters with whom they identify: "trash is an acceptable fantasy realm in which a man can strut as a character, a real whopper of a self, while passing through illogic and fear to humour or excitement" (231). Similarly, Kirshner finds children identifying with comic-book superheroes who have abilities supernatural in kind and degree (76-77). As will be seen in the following chapter, the character roles of *Dungeons and Dragons* correspond closely to the heroes of tall tales and comic books in this

respect.<sup>37</sup> Comic books and fantasy novels, both of which have been avidly collected by members of this group, involve the use of someone else's fantasy rather than that of one's own creation, an important difference from fantasies created by the group. Some such input may be necessary. Finch-Reyner relates fantasy novels to wonder tales and myths; all of which provide symbolism in people's lives (130-131). Fantasies may also be shared informally, through intimate confidences to friends (Yehudi Cohen, "Aggression, Fantasy and Adolescence" 167), or through play in a fantasy world created by one of the participants and negotiated amongst them (Kelly-Byrne 164-166; Hall 35). This corresponds to the activities involved in *Dungeons and Dragons*. According to Dexter Dunphy, primary groups play out shared fantasies and incorporate them into a group "mythology" comprised of "those aspects of individual fantasies which are shared and persist because they have their basis in common life experiences" (The Primary Group 34). The fantasizing conversations discussed above have been incorporated into group folklore, as have the gaming fantasies to be discussed in the next chapter. Evaluated in terms of scholarly views of fantasies, this study group has an extremely rich fantasy life.

Two kinds of conversation, confiding and gossip, are taboo for this group. Both are concerned with personal feelings and relationships, which these "inexpressive" males feel a cultural aversion to discussing. However, it is unavoidable that there be at least some such talk in a group with a close, strong bond.

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<sup>37</sup> Rolf Brednich has shown that comic book heroes correspond in many ways with the heroes of märchen: for example, both are characteristically immortal, rooted in the real world, sexless, and reliant on magical items such as special costumes (48-50). *Dungeons and Dragons* heroes have the same characteristics, as will be shown in Chapter 5.

A truism of confiding within this group is that something told to one member eventually gets communicated to all the others. As a result, members do not trust one another to keep a confidence completely private (SH22b), yet there is an implicit understanding that outsiders will never be told. Competition is more responsible for this taboo on confiding than lack of trust.

I think it's a pattern left over between us, that we don't talk about things. There's not much reason for it anymore. I think it's a pattern left over ... [because] we're all very competitive. (Mike, SH22b)

Speaking of their teenage years together, Richard comments that "when you're that age you don't confide personal problems ... it didn't seem to matter" (SH8a). Thus, the group's masculinity was combined with the group's formative years to create a barrier. This barrier is not insurmountable, and very occasionally, members will have an honest, open talk. Most of the time, however, their personal communication is indirect. They have spent so much time together over the years that they have learnt to read one another's emotions; "you could see what everyone else was thinking" (Nelson 13b). This is a conscious process even though covert.

You can't do it [confide] outright. That -- it doesn't work really. You can go through the motions of doing that but it seems so artificial, so contrived. This way it has a, a ring of sincerity about it. I mean you go through all this trouble of making everything up and hiding it, and various things ... It's complicated, it's elusive, that's its whole nature, you can't really put it down to the one thing. But it's interesting because I think that almost every close friendship group, of our age level anyway, does the same thing ... they talk about it [personal matters] in a sort of oblique manner. You know, it's sort of the obliqueness of it that really ties people together. (Kirk, SH10b)

I think our sort of ah, deeper emotions are sort of expressed ... in the way we ... use sarcasm a lot. We joke a lot, and that usually has some sort of oblique meaning. (Kirk, SH29a)

Covert and circuitous communication depends on folklore, and for this group, folk humour is the most significant medium. Philip contrasts Richard's openness with the way the rest of the members operate.

Richard asked me how my love life was, and I commented on it, and he said, "Why?" and he gets into [a discussion of] it. While Mike and I, and Alex, wouldn't talk about it like that. We'd be very superficial about it, joke about it, but not really talk about it ... Like I wouldn't say to Mike, "Gee, yes, I really like her, I love her," etcetera, etcetera. I'd say, "Yeah, really great looking, woah!" etcetera like that. They basically mean the same thing. (SH4a)

Whereas he can communicate directly with Richard, Phil needs to cloak his personal feelings with humour when talking to other group members. It is significant that Phil says *they both mean the same thing*; he believes that the indirect communication of personal feelings through group folklore passes the message along just as satisfactorily as direct communication would.

Gossip is generally viewed as one of the inevitable performances of everyday life, but it is denigrated when spoken of in the abstract because it threatens reputations (Abrahams, "Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip" 292-293). It functions for community control, to demonstrate trust in a friend, to affirm sex roles and to increase performer status (290-301). The aesthetic of gossip stresses knowledge of and obedience to the rules, and the demonstration of verbal ability.

This group is unusual for genuinely eschewing gossip.

Philip

That's probably one of the differences [we have from other groups].

Susan            You wouldn't say, "is Nelson still going out with that girl?"

Philip            We might say it, but we wouldn't say anything else about it. "I don't know" [would be the reply], and that would be it ... I gossip but not with, I don't think with any of them.

(SH3b)

Other members have also said that personal comments are minimal within the group, but they admit that they do gossip with outside friends. Gossip entails extended, speculative talk, whereas these young men confine personal communication to brief, informative statements, expressions of concern, and humorous comments about one another. The only exception evident in the data was the news of Ted's engagement; this wrought such changes in Ted's life, and therefore the group, that conversational analysis was necessary for acceptance and understanding to occur.

The functions and aesthetics of gossip mentioned by Abrahams are fulfilled by other folkloric forms within this group, namely, teasing and other humour, argument, and the assumption of aggressive roles in fantasy gaming. These provide ample opportunity to assert community control, affirm sex roles and demonstrate performance abilities. Just how much other activities fill its place is indicated in the following quotation from Nelson:

Mother used to always say I gossiped on the phone. But what I was talking about was *Dungeons and Dragons* characters. We were ah, talking about strategy [for] the next time we played. So we'd talk about, "Well, I'll do this, do you wanna do that?" So we'd be talking on the phone for *hours*. And Mother, you know, [thought] it *had* to be pure gossip, right, you don't talk on the phone for hours exchanging facts. (SH14a)

Such conversations accomplish some of gossip's functions, although they do not take the form of gossip.

### Personal Experience Narratives

Personal experience narratives are the only kind of storytelling events which occur regularly in this group. Their performance is informal and unstylised, in keeping with the conversational context, and their contents are thoroughly entwined with other elements of the idioculture.

The personal experience narrative is related to the legend in that both genres may concern supernatural, extranatural or abnormal persons, forces and events which deviate from everyday norms (Dégh and Vázsonyi, "Dialectics of the Legend" 47). However, the personal experience narrative is more immediate than the legend, in that it is concerned with the experiences of the narrator or other familiar persons; thus, it is an even more "sensitive indicator of social conditions within small groups" than is the legend (8). Laba claims that personal experience narratives are the most prevalent folkloristic form amongst urbanites; he sees it as crucial to the personal evaluation and handling of experience for them ("Urban Folklore" 163). Personal experience narratives have a looser form and shorter lifespan than other folkloric narratives, however, and as a result have received relatively little academic attention until recently. Nonetheless, personal experience narratives are traditional, reflecting traditional narratives in theme, plot and functions, and containing other traditional elements (Sandra K. Stahl, "The Personal Narrative as Folklore" 12-15). Such narratives must voice



attitudes traditional to the group in order to succeed (24). The personal experience narrative is characteristically more individualized than traditional tales, and is necessarily improvisational (17-18). Unless exceptionally good, it is generally considered interesting only the first time it is heard, although it may be retold to new audiences or due to forgetfulness (25-26).

Studies of personal experience narratives in context reveal significant comparative findings. In the Okefenokee Swamp Rim in Georgia, where Kay Cothran studied the personal experience narrative, it is part of a folk category termed *talking trash*. This talk occurs in the local community store amongst men, and "competence in talking trash goes hand in hand with the essentials of male sociability" (218). Cothran notes that while each personal experience narrative is ephemeral, the custom of narrating them is traditional (219). *Talking trash* involves two kinds of events: the performance event and the event to which it refers (22). It functions to evaluate human relationships and behaviour, and to validate the traditional life-style which this group clings to (231). In his study of a general store on a Nova Scotia island, Richard Bauman's findings about the personal experience narrative are strikingly similar to Cothran's ("The La Have Island General Store"). There too it has functioned as part of the male role, being used for the "display, maintenance, and development of personal identity" (334). *Yarns*, as they are called locally, are valued for the uniqueness and novelty of the experiences they describe, rather than for the performance style of the tellers (334). They occur in "a chain of association," each relating in some way to the previous one (337). Leary describes a somewhat different context, that of a friendship group originating at a college dormitory, which is once again a male

group. For them, personal experience narratives chronicle their play, their first impressions of one another, and certain memorable events, as well as commenting on intragroup behaviour (83). Like the male groups studied by Cothran, Bauman and Leary, the group under consideration uses personal experience narratives to confirm members' masculinity and group identity, as well as to chronicle its history.

A glance at the seven personal experience narratives already discussed in this study gives some indication of group narration patterns. Their subject matters are typical. Three concern initial encounters and first impressions (Mike and Ted on page 26; Nelson and the Hastings on page 27; and Nelson and Phil on page 36), thereby chronicling group history and intrarelations. Two more narratives concern gaming (Garth's *Army of the Dead* on page 63, and Ted's *Ant Wars* on page 49). Both of these involve discussion of individual, albeit public, fantasies within the group's war-games. The group's personal experience narratives and other conversation often revolve around fantasy gaming, most commonly *Dungeons and Dragons* (see pages 225, 277 and 284). Another narrative concerns Nelson's success at *bugging* the others (see below). Nelson's exploits, as indicated before, are a frequent conversation topic. The seventh personal experience narrative concerns a discussion between Richard and Garth, wherein Garth reassures Richard about the direction his life is taking (see page 64). The topic of this narrative indicates the primary importance of talk and success for group members. Although characteristic, these seven narratives do not represent the full range of narrative subject matter for this group, which is as wide as the varied range of experience which the members feel bears repeating.

Two other narrative topics appear typical: etiological legends about the origin of certain words and phrases popular within the group (see pages 147, 149, and 166), and those concerning humorous incidents (see pages 140, 176, and 283).

These seven personal experience narratives are also stylistically characteristic of narratives told within the group. Nelson's description of a time he successfully *bugged* Alex is typical:

- (1) He's gotten silly lately, getting on to all this Buddhist stuff.
  - (2) He was always like that though, a bit off the head ... his little religious kicks and little "I love everyone" stuff ...
  - (3) What I did with him once was ... we were going about ... something about migration in England or something, we were arguing that [they're letting] too many non-, ah, non-skilled labour into England, it's mucking up the country ...
  - (4) So Alex went, "It doesn't matter, I love everyone."
  - (5) I said, "No you don't."
  - (6) He said, "Yes I do, I love everyone. I do not hate a person."
  - (7) So I was trying to bug him.
  - (8) And finally he looked at me and said, "Just -- just bug off!"
  - (9) And I said, "There you go, you don't like me now, do ya?"
  - (10) And he was [expression of anger] "Arrr."
  - (11) You see?
  - (12) But I've said lots of silly things to bug Alex over the years.
  - (13) Alex's always been a weird character.
- (SH13b)

Nelson's story serves to illustrate his initial point, *he's [Alex] gotten silly*, and shows Nelson's reaction to it, namely, humorous aggression. Although not rigidly structured, this narrative is introduced and concluded in a manner which fits it smoothly into the conversation, which concerns Alex and very much resembles the

conversation in its grammar and vocabulary. Nevertheless, the narrative tone is distinctive enough to engage the listener's attention. To tell a story, however brief, is to present a monologue requiring a longer attention span than other forms of conversation. One of Nelson's performance tactics is to vary his speaking voice in order to indicate that he is quoting somebody, as well as to mimic that person's style, thus providing dramatic effect. There is also an element of repetition, with most sentences containing at least one repetition.

- 1 and 12 -- silly
- 1 -- gotten, getting
- 2 and 13 -- always
- 2 -- little, little
- 2, 4 and 6 -- "I love everyone"
- 3 -- something, something; England, England
- 4 -- "I do not hate a person"; "you don't like me now"
- 6 -- I do, I do
- 7, 8 and 12 -- bug
- 8 -- just, just
- 9 -- you, you; don't, do

These repetitions demonstrate the traditional character of personal experience narratives on two counts. Firstly, they are evidence that the teller has repeatedly told this and other stories about himself, thereby establishing a patterned structure for it (Walter J. Ong 148). Secondly, they suggest a structural symmetry not unlike that found by David Buchan in traditional Scottish ballads (87-144). The story is framed by *silly* at beginning and end; interestingly, the term is applied to both participants in the interaction. This puts them on an equal basis, which is paradoxical considering that the narrative concerns the verbal triumph of one over the other. Another term framing the story is *always*, which emphasizes that there is a larger repetition occurring: Alex's interest in Buddhism is not an isolated incident, and Nelson's reaction is customary. This

term signals the representativeness of the incident, the fact that it is itself a repetition in certain respects. Insofar as this personal experience narrative portrays one member of a culture pointing out the deviant behaviour of another, it functions to show what is and is not appropriate within this group's culture. Most members of this group consider such a statement as "I love everyone" unrealistic and somewhat silly, even though endearing. McDowell has suggested that the aesthetic of personal experience narratives stresses *coherency*, achieved through the use of filler words to signal pauses and emphasize certain words and ideas, and *delight*, accomplished with smooth delivery, humour, appropriate topic, dramatic effect, and balance and a minimal structure ("Coherency and Delight: Dual Canons of Excellence in Informal Narrative"). This personal experience narrative appears to utilize the same aesthetic, excepting the characteristic of minimal structure.

The informal conversational context breaks down barriers so extensively that audience members may become performers. Philip and Nelson together tell a story which illustrates Philip's point that Nelson is a supremely successful arguer:

Nelson I can't articulate very well at all. I can't even think up half the words.

Susan ... Dave, you get the point across amazingly well.

Nelson Yes, but in ridiculous ways.

Philip ... You can out-argue with Mike. Mike knows about twenty times more words than all four of us [present] put together, and you can still --

Kirk What is this thing about words, anyway?

Philip I was gonna say it has nothing to do with the words. You can still out-argue him.

- Nelson                   That's cause I just use basic Knox (II).
- Philip.                   He'll get really frustrated. You and I'll argue, go on, I can know the subject well, but you can still beat me.
- Nelson                   Remember when we were arguing the great Vietnam thing with Mike downtown. And he was speeling up all these facts about the American massacres, and I was there, looking at him, saying "No" ... He was turning red in the face, "They murdered ... " (II).
- Philip                   Mike just crumbled. Mike knew the stuff better than he knows anything else, and he just couldn't compete with it. There's Nelson going on, and Mike was just, "What? What? What do I do now?"
- Nelson                   [recalling a similar incident] ... And he was turning red in the face ... And I was humming "God Bless America." And he was ready to just go "Ahhh".
- Philip                   I imagine a little farther along, Mike will be a world authority on Vietnam, but Dave will still be able to beat him in an argument on Vietnam, however ludicrous the argument technique may be, Mike will still be reduced to mush when the argument is over.
- Susan                   *Does he affect other people this way?*
- Kirk                    Um-hum.
- Nelson                   I crush Ted.
- Philip                   He'll get me.
- Susan                   *Anybody outside the group?*
- Philip                   I imagine so, although I haven't witnessed it.
- Kirk                    Well he usually doesn't reveal all his ah (I), abilities.
- (SH20b)

Philip frames the story with comments about Nelson's argumentative ability, and participates in its telling. Nelson takes the main role of narrator, recounting a

similar incident as well as the one being focussed on. Both are performers and audience to each other, with a few others present to act as audience as well.

An episode is unlikely to be repeatedly discussed and performed unless it has great humour or significance for the group. Some personal experience narratives were retold in my presence, but on most occasions this was for different configurations of the group. Limited repetition is tolerated by the group audience (Alex, SH17a). Once an incident has occurred, the members involved may reminisce together about it. As Richard states, "we relate numerous stories about various events over the past three, four, five, six months" (SH8a). Fine states that an item may be selected for a group's idioculture on the basis of five elements: it must be known (based on shared knowledge), usable (not taboo), functional, appropriate, and triggered in memory by group happenings ("Small Groups and Culture Creation" 738-743). It is on this basis that a personal experience narrative is recalled and performed.

There are three main performance situations for personal experience narratives within the study group. Stories are most often repeated when group members have been apart for some time, and need to renew their bond with recollection of their shared past. To really succeed as a bonding mechanism, a personal experience narrative must be known to *all* members of the group; therefore, the second sort of occasion for narrative performance is to tell it to any members who were absent during the episode it concerns. Thus it eventually enters the repertoire of all group members, and even those who were not involved can tell the story. The third performance situation for personal experience narratives is that in which only one group member, the narrator, was present

during the episode concerned. These rarely become group narratives, so are likely to be told only once. The tale of Ted's *Ant Wars* is an exception because it is funny, unusual, and involves the group interest of war-gaming (see page 49). Group members tell stories about themselves in order to entertain and to enlighten others about aspects of character and personal history. An example of this is Nelson's narrative about a violent act of his in hockey which expressed a frustration he could not put into words:

Well, I should tell you, the last game I finally got to do what I wanted to do all year. We were behind five to two, we had five minutes left and we had a power play. And the other team had a breaker ... I ran him down, and just dived at his feet, and went, "Waaah!" Scratch, right, on both his ankles. And he just went *bung!* Oh, it was glorious. I didn't even wait for the referee. I just walked in the penalty box and sat down. That made the whole season worthwhile. It was glorious ... Well, you express everything in that. I mean, every emotion that I had during that game ... was expressed in that one penalty I got. Total frustration. Just going out -- *arr* -- *crunch*. (SH29a)

Once a story is known to all, it may be repeatedly referred to without actually being retold. It has become part of the group paradigm, the shared knowledge which is the source of their beliefs and attitudes and their worldview. The fact that an incident can be briefly referred to without its narrative being repeated to provide full understanding, also functions to differentiate members from outsiders. This is commonly the case with jokes as well.

### Wordplay

*Wordplay* is a term I am using here in a new way, to encompass not only esoteric vocabulary but also creative turns of phrase. My definition of wordplay is *esoteric meanings for words and phrases which are distinctive to a group and*



*considered humorous within it.* Wordplay could equally well be included in the discussion of group humour. Much wordplay is transitory but the items focussed on in the following discussion have lasted for years, and will continue to exist as long as group members associate with one another.

Previous scholars with folkloristic concerns have examined wordplay, but it is still a very new field. In the friendship group he studied, Leary found a small but significant "esoteric vocabulary," including nicknames, special insulting terms, greetings, taunts, and descriptive terms such as *hurt*, which denotes overindulgence or craziness for his study group (63-69). Abrahams asserts that any small group formed for social purposes will develop a body of *slang* terms related to its shared activities ("A Rhetoric of Everyday Life" 57), which it uses as a traditional method of signalling inclusion (5). Peter Farb observes that many groups use words uniquely and creatively, and that this wordplay functions "to maintain a boundary against outsiders" and to signal belonging to insiders (122-124). He states that many items of wordplay are also forms of verbal duelling, and that most speakers duel even in casual conversation (95).

Two major forms of wordplay for this group can be distinguished. Firstly, there are terms and phrases from standard English which have generated new meanings within the context of the group. Items of wordplay are frequently ordinary words in vogue within the group for a time, becoming intentionally imbued with a special significance. One example of this is *genre*, of which Alex said, "that's one of the in-words with us at the moment ... It's a real word, probably means very little" (SH17a). Sometimes specialized usages have been inadvertently generated as in the following citation:

Phil brought up Kirk -- it was something Kirk is an authority on, you know -- and I said he was "confounded by his own knowledge" or something like that. (ll) And for months after that, everyone used to bug me about that. When Kirk found out about that, he got a good laugh out of it ... I didn't know what I was talking about in a way, but you know it was funny I guess ... It's things like that, they don't sound funny, but they are at the time.

*When you bring it up again, it's sort of got this added thing, this special little group thing.*

Yeah, right. You know, we might be talking about Kirk again and then you say [offhandedly], "Of course, he's confounded by his own knowledge" ... And you tacked it on to everything from then on. That's basically what happens. (Alex, SH16b)

Secondly, there are terms, phrases and neologisms attributable to one member of the group -- Nelson. The group calls these items of wordplay *Nelsonisms*. Nelsonisms dominate the group wordplay scene. Alex sees them as the inspiration for all group wordplay.

I can think of where it kind of started, and that was with Nelson. He was the first one that I can think of who used to do that. I guess it was in us all, but he used to do it very openly, way back ... when I first knew him. I mean, he used to come up with these really weird sayings ... that he really thought were hilarious, and he used to say over and over and over again for years, you know? ... He used to create a lot of meaningless words. And the most recent ones just, they got a bit more sensible as he matured. (SH16b)

Nelsonisms are considered hilarious by all the group members, and are often gleefully repeated by them. Kirk and Phil discuss Nelsonisms below, with reference to "I'm surrounded by fools," which Phil was sure he had heard elsewhere and was therefore not original.

Kirk                    It's not just the phrase itself, it's the way he delivers it.

Phil                    Okay, his delivery is unique.

- Kirk He did it the same way almost every time.
- Phil *It's the Panzers all over again.*
- Kirk ... That was another one.
- Phil If something was really glorious, he was *That's the Panzers all over again.* Followed quickly by *glorious*, probably.
- Kirk ... If he's very pleased or happy about something, he's had a great success and, or we have had a great success, or he has scored a great success against one of us or all of us, then *it's the Panzers all over again* ... During the Second World War when they [the German Panzer tanks] were used in the Blitzkrieg so effectively, they became sort of a byword for military efficiency and effectiveness. Potency. That's, that's what it's all about.

(SH27a)

Performance style, as Kirk and Phil assert, is valued in the group's wordplay aesthetic; "his delivery is unique." Some items of wordplay also have an aggressive function; the two discussed here both award the speaker a superior status. Kirk mentions ten Nelsonisms and their origins in the following excerpt.<sup>38</sup>

And then there was also of course Nelson's Gollum imitation, you know, *precious* and all this ... it became part of his speech. You know how Nelson will always come up with these new phrases like ah, *Snotty-cruddy Bolsheviks* and ah, *pocketees*, that was another Gollum thing. You remember he always used to say *pocketees* ... That was another bond [for the group], cause we were the only ones who could understand what he was talking about. (ll) And everybody started using them, they were sort of the common linguistic currency of the group ... There must have been about *fifty* of these words and phrases he used from time to time. He didn't use them all at the same time, they went in phases. He had a particular favorite that he used for a couple of months; would crop, would come up [often]. One of the most

<sup>38</sup>To understand this quotation, it is useful to know that Gollum is a goblin-like character from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and that Nelson affects a horror of communism.

recent ones is saying, alright, is *glorious, the horror*. In Apocalypse Now the ah, the lead character is always saying *the horror* over and over again, trying to convey what was going on. And that was a popular one after everybody saw Apocalypse Now, which was another link between the group ... Oh, I wish I could remember more. *Annihilated* was one of them ... I always picked up whatever he was saying, it was ridiculous. *Ratnik von Schnatwick* was another one ... *Dutchland*, that was another. Well you know, German for Germany is *Deutschland*, but Nelson mispronounced it. (II) Like, "Do it for the *Dutchland*" is one of his phrases. (II) *Scrummaster*, yeah ... Well, that's a very trivial story ... Well ah, one of the first war-games um, we had relatively few models. One of the few models we did have was of a German salt gun used in Second World War, called the *Stremushause*, and that's a fairly difficult name to remember, pronounce. And ah, Nelson has terrible times with names (II), so he pointed to this tank one day, said, "Okay well, let's move this *scrummaster* from over here to over here." And Mike just cracked up!

*Ever since then everybody's always referred to the scrummaster?*

Yes. There are plenty of stories like that, mispronouncing things. Wasn't just Nelson ... Another one of the common jokes ... whenever we're in a tense situation, whether it's in real life or in *D. and D* someone always says, "Well, I can create water." You know, it's a sort of common joke ...

*He does have a way with words, doesn't he?*

Oh yeah. A way with misusing words ... One of the more common ones he used was, he'd sort of mutter under his breath, "ah, *communist, communism*." (SH11a)

It is significant that most of these are related to the group's military interests. One example of the use of Nelsonisms by the group is an occasion when Nelson was having trouble with a newfangled beer bottle-cap, and Kirk commented "It's *communism* again" (SH27a). Some items of wordplay are relished by group members for years while others are discarded after a few months. Farb points out that after a group has used certain items of wordplay for very long, they may become generally known, and therefore more must be created "to keep the in-group vocabulary intact," that is, impenetrable to outsiders (124). This is an area of folklore where items are valued for appearing fresh and new.

Perhaps the most firmly entrenched Nelsonism is *hygenics*, and when group members get into conversation using this term, they enter the realm of fantasy. Nelson explains the origin of this word.

One night I decided to bug Kirk, I mentioned about *hygenics* ... We were walking downtown, and someone was going on about Kirk's army training. I said, "Oh, better not get Kirk mad ... since he knows *hygenics*." *Hygenics* is a word just made up out of nothing, I don't know what it means, right? But it's sort of a cross between eating right -- what's the word for that? Hygene-type, a word between *hygene* and *self-defense*, right, just nothing, right, that's how it came up to me -- bing! ... as a joke. Well it sort of did get him [Kirk], well he didn't know what it was, right?. And I went, "Ah, this *hygenics* thing," go into a karate stance [howls appropriately], "Kirk knows *hygenics*." Since then it's been a sort of a joke ever since. (SH13b)

*Hygenics* is generally used to denote a mysterious martial art Kirk has supposedly learned in the navy, but as a nonsense word it can be used to mean a variety of processes, always with special properties.

Mike	How about those <i>hygenics</i> , Phil? Do you use much in your hair? (ll)
Kirk	The guy who writes [a certain war book series] doesn't know about <i>hygenics</i> ... (ll)
Mike	The Canadian navy's tactics is to come alongside the Russian ship --
Nelson	To outrun them! (ll) ... <i>Hygenics</i> , ah!

(SH25a)

Thus, wordplay can be used for shared fantasy sessions. The group is capable of going on for much longer than this, in so seemingly serious a fashion that I must admit they fooled me in a gullible moment (see A.4.1).<sup>30</sup> Thus the term has been used as a practical joke.

<sup>30</sup>Phil called me up a few days later to confess that they started out speaking of it in their usual manner, but when they realised that somebody was actually believing it, they made extra effort to be convincing (FN104, 15/4/85).

### Boasts and Taunts

Boasts and taunts are both conversational genres which function to temporarily raise performer status, either by exaggerating the speaker's own attributes, as in boasts, or by pointing out or fabricating defects in the others, as in taunts. Within this group, all boasts and taunts have a surface element of humour, and an underlying element of belief in their superiority to outsiders.

*Boasts* appear to be uncommon within this group. The only ones collected were some comments of Phil's upon his sexual attractiveness. On one occasion he nicknamed himself *iron thighs* and *bedroom eyes* (FN59, 3/8/84); on another he spoke of having "animal magnetism" (SH22b). However, these boasts have little to do with the way Phil perceives himself or expects to be perceived. Rather, they poke fun at the macho stereotype and at Phil himself for feeling some attraction to it. Abrahams has observed that boasts are commonly centred on masculine attributes ("A Rhetoric of Everyday Life" 55).

*Taunts*, usually termed *insults* by this group, have always been highly prevalent within this group, especially when the members were in their mid-teens.

I remember there was a time some years ago, we used to do this a lot. And ah; it was, it got almost ridiculous. Every time we said something to one another, it would be prefaced with, "No offense but --" (ll). And of course it would be saying the most offensive things you can imagine. The most insulting things ... "No offense, but you're a shit-head" ... I guess a lot of humour rests in laughing at each other, laughing at whoever's not there. Even more-so just laughing at each other's mannerisms, and building up a body of humour about those. (Garth, SH5b)

Insults function to provide humour for the group, and there is an obvious competitive element as well in the trading of insults, similar to "Playing the Dozens". The aesthetic of insults favours moderation; the insult must be effective without actually hurting the victim very much. Alex comments that teasing goes on a great deal in this group, and describes its limits:

Oh yeah, it's nothing serious ... it's almost an art in a very strange way. Because you can go overboard, and then it isn't funny anymore ... You've gotta be very careful.

*You don't tease about some subjects, I guess.*

Well, almost anything's game ...

*Well, I guess it could get embarrassing.*

Yeah, yeah it can. But, I guess it would be to anybody who wasn't part of the group. Like, "your hair is funny," kind of thing ... They don't mean it, they're just being silly, you know ... Very strange.

*You think it's not a common kind of thing to tease people?*

Not in that way. I've never met it before in any other group ... nothing similar to that at all.

(SH17b)

The members continually insult one another: Nelson branded Phil an "incompetent fool" when Phil could not help him with some homework (SH13a); Phil addressed Mike in a letter as "my short-legged friend" (SH3b); on other occasions he accused him of being a "boring person" and a "communist" (SH22a); in return Mike joked that "Phil's obsessed with my body" (FN59, 30/8/84), teased him about his expensive new shoes (SH22a), and called the *Republic of Cashmere* which Phil had created in *D and D, Swamp City* (SH19b). Abrahams states that taunts assert group values and appropriate behaviour through poking fun at deviations from it ("A Rhetoric-of-Everyday Life" 55). Taunts are other-directed, and thus more group-oriented than boasts, which may explain why they are so much more prevalent within this group.

Farb has observed that name-calling among children takes place in four categories: it is based on physical peculiarities, one's name, social relationships, and mental traits (84). While some of this group's insults fall within the first, harshest category, most concern mental traits, supposedly the least hurtful category among children. However, considering the emphasis upon intellectual capacity within this group, insults based on mental traits may be the most effective attacks.

Teasing is frequently shared, with two or more members cooperating to "give a hard time" to another member. In the following excerpt, the teasing focusses upon Farb's category of "physical peculiarity".

Mike Phil, you're clumsy, you know that? (I)

Alex I think you're drunk.

Mike I think he is.

Alex [making an announcement] Phil is drunk.

Mike He is.

Phil I am not.

Mike He is too!

Phil I, this is only, not even two glasses of wine. But my tummy does hurt still.

(SH22b)

All participants, including the victim, enjoy such an exchange. On another occasion, Mike and Nelson cleverly used the factor of the tape recorder to imply non-verbal actions on the part of Ted.

Nelson No obscene gestures, Ted. We don't need that here.



Mike: Yeah. Put those pants back on. (ll)  
 Ted: [ignoring them] What's going on tonight, anyway?

(SH24b)

The element of fantasy is once again apparent.

• *Insults* correspond to the pattern of *kidding* which occurs among the British coalminers whose folklore was studied by Tony Green. Green defines kidding as "any humorous attack by one acquaintance on another, whether verbal or not, provided that it is not both cruelly satirical and formally elaborate" (48). Kidding is characterized by opportunism and spontaneity; it involves improvisation within a tradition which arises within lasting relationships (47-48). The coalminers comprise an all-male group which feels deeply ambivalent about its work, and their kidding is "one component of a special mode of communication" which expresses these elements (53-54). The kidding of these men parallels the insults of the group under consideration, in style if not content. The structural frame provided by their customary statement "only kidding" is matched within the study group by "no offense but". Whereas the coalminers are ambivalent about their work, the ambivalence of this group concerns the expression of intimacy. Although obscenity is at the root of the miner's humour, it appears to be absent from this group's. The researcher's female presence may have been a deterrent, but in any case it is possible to assert that obscenity is not one of the essential or customary communication patterns within this group. The physical gaming context of family homes which predominates most shared group activities, makes such a development unlikely and difficult. But both are male groups which express their masculinity partly through joking, and both are highly

competitive (61). Furthermore, both groups use kidding/insults to express group solidarity and members' individuality (62). This behaviour pattern is thus shown to be highly expressive and versatile.

Insults and teasing are elements of the *joking relationship*, which has received much attention in anthropological literature. The pioneer of this area was A.R. Radcliffe-Brown who published two seminal studies in the 1940s on "joking relationships". He defines the joking relationship as:

A relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence (90).

Radcliffe-Brown goes on to describe this as a relationship of "permitted disrespect," combining a pretense of hostility with a real friendliness (91). The joking may involve horseplay, obscenity and verbal elements (90) but must keep within certain custom-defined boundaries (103). Joking relationships occur in all societies, generally in certain social situations such as between in-laws or potential marriage partners (104). Radcliffe-Brown does not consider joking between friends at all, emphasizing inter-generational teasing instead. Kathleen Alford points out that joking relationships also occur between friendly, intimate equals with the motivation of enjoyment (279-282). Richard Howell's findings also critically develops aspects of Radcliffe-Brown's theory: where Radcliffe-Brown states that the joking relationship symbolizes separation, Howell finds that it means closeness; where the former sees it functioning for conflict avoidance between participants, the latter argues that it conditions people against "rough treatment in the larger society" (4). Teasing, Howell maintains, is the essence of a joking relationship, being employed "to mark, test, and affirm social

boundaries" (3). Brain suggests that joking relationships help to maintain alliances in ambiguous social situations in which tension makes straightforward comradeship difficult or impossible (181, 186). In such cases "friendship is expressed mainly through teasing" (186). There is a taboo on being offended by such teasing (183).

The group under consideration is a case of equals expressing their intimacy and achieving enjoyment through teasing. Members' tension about their personal feelings requires that they communicate their friendship indirectly, through teasing. To show offense would demonstrate misunderstanding of the group paradigm, and thus an outsider's status.

Abusive joking is disruptive unless it occurs in a context of intimacy (Alford 286); because of this, it can be used to test intimacy and trust in a conversational setting (Hall 41). Philip Mayer asserts that "the most clearly distinctive mark of the intimacy between pals [in Gusii age-sets] is their indulgence in playful insults" such as physical horseplay and obscenity concerning mothers (32-33). Mayer defines *playful insults* as a pattern of behaviour wherein apparently insulting words and actions create pleasure instead of anger (27). Thus we have the situation which Lawrence La Fave and his associates have called "an irony of irony:" an unrealistic, extreme insult by a friend is viewed as amusing by the subject, while a realistic, less extreme insult from a stranger is considered offensive (283). They argue that this is so because it is different enough from perceived reality to be unthreatening, and because the friend has paid one the compliment of assuming that one can "take a joke" (285). Group membership is often contingent on the ability to take a joke (Howell 7). Intragroup joking is

accepted and even contributed to by its focus (Lundberg 28). This is repeatedly demonstrated in the scenes of teasing within this group. If a group's members can laugh at themselves, this "indicates that they have a trusting, communal relationship" (Fine, "Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humour" 173).

Although the culture of the reference group does not permit members to express their intimacy in a direct fashion, the members have found an alternative. They make overt declarations to imply the opposite of intimacy, in the form of insults and other teasing. The connotation of these insults is reversed within the group system of meanings. Thus they express their intimacy in a manner oblique to outsiders, which furthermore does not compromise their identities as masculine, competitive and independent.

Conversational genres are a significant form of folklore for this friendship group, and probably others as well. This group uses talk creatively to communicate indirectly about personal matters, to assert shared identity, to perform, to play, and to provoke laughter. It does so using distinctive patterns which have become traditional to its members.

### **Humour**

Humour is highly functional within groups: it can be used to make social interaction more harmonious (Frank Hall 42); to enforce social control (M. Barron '89; Fine, "Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humour" 173; Don Handleman and Bruce Kapferer 513; Richard Howell 5); to express friendship (Handleman and

Kapferer 513); and to decrease social distance (Ruth Coser 172). Humour "unites the group by allowing it to reinterpret together an experience that previously was individual to each" (Coser 178). More specifically, shared laughter strengthens group bonds and promotes group cohesion (Coser 180; Fine 173; Gerald Pocius 12). In other words, humour can be used to aid the composition of an "official" group history, one which is accepted by all members. Humour helps a group form its identity in other ways as well, as Fine points out:

The power of the group culture can be recognized by anyone who enters a group that has been in existence for some time. Most groups, particularly those characterized by informality, develop a set of joking references that may be unrecognizable by those outside the group. (\*Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humor" 170)

This idiosyncratic humour is, I hypothesize, the hallmark of every friendship group. Its' function of delineating a boundary and keeping outsiders beyond it will be further discussed in the context of aggressive humour.

Distinctive humour serves to set one group apart from another, to communicate membership and draw boundaries. Outsiders are dramatically reminded of their status when they cannot grasp why the members are laughing, as one member of this group states:

It's funny when, say, you have other people with you. They don't always catch onto the jokes and everything. That's really funny. They're kind of sitting there, thinking you're insane. (Alex, SH15b)

An outsider's discomfort can add to humour. Outsiders, of course, may choose to simply dismiss such humour as lunacy; a girlfriend of Nelson's told me "they've got a crazy sense of humour; they tell these terrible jokes and laugh at them" (FN48, 30/8/84). Barre Toelken has observed that a folk performance may have

various audiences, sometimes including relative outsiders to the performance tradition; the performance is always primarily aimed at those present who know the tradition best (108-109). Thus, outsiders are likely to misinterpret and feel left out by a folk performance. While this group's humour may be perceived as being especially unusual, one member, Garth, correctly contends that every friendship group has a unique body of humour.<sup>40</sup>

Probably like all friendship groups, and certainly all the ones that I've ever been in, um, they'd all have a ... body of really internal humour and whatnot that would be completely inaccessible, at first at least, to anybody encountering us. (SH5a)

Something that would be a friendship rather than an acquaintanceship can emerge just from sharing a body of humour ... So much of really every group of people that I've been involved with ... so much emphasis is placed on humour. Um; not only laughing together at various things but um, being ah, being proficient in making people laugh. Not necessarily by acting like an idiot but ah, you know there's a lot in that. Shared kinds of humour ...

*What would you say is the style of humour for this group?*

There's no kind of emphasis on what you might call jokes ... Maybe it's just ... the kinds of people that I hang around with; but I've never really found that jokes are really all that popular ... Some of it's based on, analysis of each other I guess. Ah, we laugh at each other. Sometimes in a slightly offensive way, that sometimes happens ... The style of humour in this group, and it is somewhat different from the style of humour in other groups ... is, I guess, satire. We laugh at the world around us ... we sort of laugh at the things we see around us, at the ridiculous things we see around us.

*Your families, for example?*

No.

*Politics?*

Yeah, politics. I guess you'd call it current events in a way ... The people we laugh at for the most part are either each other ... [or outsiders] we find extremely humorous, or laughable in a way, but for the most part we laugh at things and events. (SH5b)

<sup>40</sup>See also his comments on Nelson's centrality to group humour, page 52.

Several ideas emerge from Garth's musings: a shared body of humour is central to group friendship; proficiency at provoking laughter is valued by such groups; every group has its own preferred style of humour; and, this group favours satire and ridicule of themselves and their environment. Analysis of relevant literature and of this group's expressive behaviour will demonstrate the validity of these ideas.

Humour is commonly used to express intimacy, particularly among people who for some reason cannot otherwise express it (Alford 270; Brain 186; Brandes 98; Coser 177; Fine, "Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humour" 165; Philip Mayer 32). Because the members of this group can seldom bring themselves to discuss personal matters directly, they often use the mask of humour to do so. Joking is a major factor in many male relationships (Brandes 97; Fine, "Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humour" 165; Leary 28). Fine explains this in terms familiar from previous discussion of the male role.

Perhaps because males are constrained from revealing personal information that could make them vulnerable, their expressive culture revolves around the display of emotion through humour much more than is true among women (185).

The humour styles favoured by this group are described by its members using such terms as *satire*, *irony*, *ridicule*, *sarcasm*, *cynicism*, *wit*, and *silliness*. Most of these require a humour object, often a person, to *make fun of* or *put down*. In other words, the status of the humour object is changed and reduced. This ties in with scholarly descriptions of humour as an incongruity, a deviation from the norm, and a playing with or suspension of order (Brain 181; Fine, "Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humour" 160; Hall 42; Powell 53).

"The excitement of the joke lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience of society may be arbitrary" (Brain 18). Thus humour helps to make people aware of paradigms and of their arbitrary nature. Schiller suggests that the paradox or "dynamic duality" is basic to joking, jokes being the one area of life in which paradoxes can be resolved and accepted (in Pocius, IV 6-7). Humour involves *transformation*, and the humour of this group usually transforms the status of somebody or something to a lower one, thus providing the humourist(s) with a sense of superiority, however fleeting. As Garth says, "we laugh at the world around us." Humour is one way of fulfilling the competitive aims these young men constantly strive for.

Verbal elements and abilities are essential to most items of this group's humour, which is why *wordplay*, *boasts* and *taunts* have been discussed as conversational genres. These forms are equally relevant to the present analysis. Several of the personal experience narratives discussed can also be classed as humour (see especially pages 140, 142, and 166). Nonverbal elements such as gesture and intonation, as Phil points out, also contribute to group humour (FN122, 3/10/85). This includes such particulars as hand movements; facial expressions and signals, such as a smile or a raised eyebrow; laughter, which may be half-suppressed, or in the form of giggles or a belly laugh; and vocal imitations. Another important aspect of humour is the conversational context, outside of which an item may not appear funny at all; as Alex says, "things like that, they don't *sound* funny [later], but they are at the time" (SH16b). Sometimes the humour does work in another context, or the context is repeated, and then an item can be used again, becoming what members call an *in-joke*.



Some little key joke'd come up, a tactical joke ... lots of in-jokes were mentigged all the time ... there'd be lots of in-jokes that'd be now and then brought up, *hygenics* being an excellent example, right. Stuff like that ... reminiscing about silly things that happen. (Nelson, SH14a)

In-jokes correspond to Frank Hall's category of the *joking expression*, a remark having traditional and innovative elements which is used to evoke the aesthetic response of laughter (26). At its inception a joking expression is spontaneous and reliant on a specific context, but if the conversational context is recurrent or if it can be modified into an independent, mobile form, the joking expression may become traditional to the group (27). Similarly, Handelman and Kapferer recognize that joking may be *setting-specific*, that is, rooted in a specific context, but perhaps transplanted and used as a continuing source of humour (485). William Fry's term *situational jokes* corresponds to Hall's *joking expression*. Fry suggests a working tripartite division of jokes into: *canned jokes*, having a fixed form and being minimally related to the context; *situation jokes*, being spontaneous and originating from the context; and *practical jokes*, being previously prepared but dependent on the context for presentation (43).

The *canned jokes* Fry speaks of are the sort which have usually been focussed on by folklorists as well as other scholars, when they consider jokes at all. However, other humour is equally worthy of study. In a survey of the frequency and types of humour encountered in a day in the life of university students, Roger Mannell and Lynn McMahon's subjects averaged 18.1 humour incidents (147). The four common types of humour stimuli were: mass media in 12.3% of instances; memorized jokes in 13.2%; telling or recall of previous events

in 21.6%; and a social situation from which it emerged spontaneously in 52.9% (148). The first category is folkloric to the extent that it represents small group artistic use of mass media content, the second corresponds to *canned jokes*, the third deserves attention for its dependence on personal experience narratives and recollection of group history, and the fourth category corresponds to Fry's *situational* humour. Situational humour probably occurs most readily in a closely bonded group, because its members have similar interpretations of events, and are likely to find the same things amusing. Most of the humour of the group under consideration is situational.

Phil claims, with some justification, that all this group's jokes are original (FN50, 30/8/84). This group favours *situational* over *canned* jokes, as do the students in Mannell and McMahon's study. Structured jokes such as folklorists have traditionally studied are hardly ever told.

Very rarely, that's one thing that is really rare ... I can't even remember jokes. We never got into [it]; someone will remember some specific joke but it'll only be one or two, then it'll be over with. Some people come in, you know, they'd speel off for hours jokes, but we never did that ... There was no, no quoting from a joke book. (Nelson, SH14a)

Although they are aware of such joke-telling traditions, these young men do not participate in them. They would rather create their own humour, using one another, their environment, and media, thereby displaying their creativity and knowledgability. Their messages and aesthetics are better expressed with their own humour than with that borrowed from outside groups.

There are five principal kinds of humour for this group: wordplay, teasing, practical jokes, laughing at the external world, and outrageous statements. The

first two have been dealt with in the discussion of conversational genres, and the others will be analysed in the ensuing discussion.

Fry states that the *practical joke* is previously prepared but dependent on context for its humour to succeed (43). I suggest that the preparation may be minimal, often occurring in the same context as the joke itself, as with *the Kerplunk Incident*. One evening when Mike and I were eating pizza together in Churchill Square, Mike told me about *the Kerplunk Incident*, which he was surprised I had never heard of. He told me that one night when Ted, Mike, Richard and other group members had been downtown drinking, they were overwhelmed by the desire to play *Kerplunk*, a board-game which Philip's family possesses. Philip was not with them, being home asleep. Nevertheless, they went to his house and demanded of a drowsy Phil that he fetch the game and come play it with them. He complied almost wordlessly. Halfway down the street, however, Ted realised that his car was low on gas, and decided that he would be unable to drive Phil home later on. He told Phil that he had better go home now! Poor Phil wandered back to his door, where he was confronted by a puzzled and disapproving father. Phil's family has dismissed his friends as "crazy" because of such incidents. (Ted also has a habit of honking his horn in farewell whenever he drops Phil off, thus waking up the family.) (FN120, 8/7/85.) Although largely unplanned, the member's callous behaviour resulted in a practical joke on Phil, one they enjoy recalling.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>For another example of a spontaneous practical joke, see page 284, wherein the researcher is duped.

The instigator of most of the practical jokes is Nelson. There was the time that he and Mike met Ted at the airport, and he convinced Mike that they should hide with the baggage while Ted was in the washroom. When Ted came out and showed consternation at not being able to find them, Nelson "had a good laugh" before revealing himself. This was "a typical Nelson idea" (Mike, FN38, 11/8/84). On one occasion when the group was war-gaming at Ted's house, he locked some members outside in the rain without Ted's knowledge, for a good half hour (FN39, 11/8/84). On yet another occasion, he and Mike together hatched the idea of camping out overnight in a tent on Ted's front lawn, while Ted had some army buddies visiting. Mike, Nelson, Kirk, Alex, and Phil all spent the night (except for Alex, who left before dawn), and at nine a.m. heard Ted's voice roaring "Who the hell is camped on our lawn?" Annoyed, he would have nothing to do with them, but his mother fed them breakfast (FN110, 8/8/85).

Practical jokes are designed to discomfort the intended victim, usually through confusion or embarrassment. Once they have succeeded, they enter the group's stock of humorous narratives and continue to provide humour whenever recalled. The victims do not feel any lasting enmity, but neither do they tell the stories.

*Laughing at the external world* is done a great deal (Garth, SH5b). Individual politicians, media celebrities, and acquaintances are often ruthlessly criticized and ridiculed. This activity is linked to teasing in its intention of placing the humour object in an inferior position. However, the humour object is an outsider to the group in this instance, which makes a crucial difference, not only in significance but also in style. Groups of outsiders may be stereotyped in a

humorous way. Thus members can shelter themselves from taking outsiders seriously, as every group needs to do as a protective mechanism. When I suggested to Phil that Italian men have no taboo about showing their emotions, he dismissed them as "funny continental Europeans." Nelson and Phil first met when teasing an English professor who differed culturally from themselves (see page 36). In argument with Mike, Nelson once made the following disconcerting statement about the Vietnamese, "what do you expect, they're Buddhists!" (SH21b). Observing a group of nuns walking past St. John Basilica, Mike and Phil commented that they looked like penguins, and began to speculate about their mating season (FN51, 30/8/84). One of the most persistent jokes, also an item of wordplay, concerns the silly phrase of an outsider, "I can create water":<sup>42</sup>

That was a great joke. There was a whole bunch of other *D and D* jokes like that, that were going on for a long time. But that was one of the classic ones ... We were all about to die or something, you said, "I can create water." I mean it's just -- it's totally useless, right, it's the same as saying, you're in a rainstorm, and saying, "I, I'm gonna have soup tonight," you going up a cliff, right? Totally irrelevant to the situation and totally stupidly mindless at the time ... We all broke out laughing and from then on ... whenever you were [one was] in a situation where you couldn't do anything, help yourself ... you'd go, "I can create water." That'd be the joke from then on ... in the situation when you couldn't do anything and you were helpless ... That was probably the biggest [*D and D* joke] of all. (SH14a)

It is interesting to observe how outsiders are teased when present at a group gathering. For example, Richard playfully sat down in a chair at *Kibitzers* temporarily vacated by a friend of mine (FN4, 7/7/84). He soon got up and there was no animosity apparent, but the message was clearly that the outsider was not

<sup>42</sup>It should be explained here that I was the player involved, and my character was a magician, one of whose magic spells was the ability to conjure up water.

entirely welcome. As an outsider who persisted in hanging about, I was continually, and sometimes mercilessly, teased. The teasing often emphasized the fact that I am a woman.

*Outrageous statements* are comments which delight this group precisely because they would shock and offend many of the people around them. Phil recalls a couple such statements made one night at *Kibitzers*, and the reaction to them.<sup>43</sup>

Mike said, "There are no poor people, just cheap people." At the time ... it was just great. Such an incredibly horrible thing to say. (ll) It's kind of like, "let them eat cake" ... Mike and I both laughed an awful lot, and Alex just kind of chuckled ... he didn't particularly appreciate that kind of thing. Though if he didn't agree with the sentiment, it's still kind of funny. (ll)

*And then Paul was there and he made some kind of comment.*

Oh yeah, something about Ronald Reagan's -- Michael Jackson being the only black guy Ronald trusts with his wife. Not really funny, it's just that ... we just kind of go on, just for the sake of it. (SH2b)

Outrageous statements overlap with teasing. Thinking up outrageous statements sometimes turns into a contest. On yet another evening at *Kibitzers*, Mike and Phil insisted I write down this series of statements which they dreamed up as they went along, and laughed over extensively.

Mike I think that success is measured by the amount of suffering it entails, especially if it's other people who are doing the suffering.

Phil I've got to overcome my morality.

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<sup>43</sup>For one of these statements, it is necessary to know that Ronald Reagan is the right-wing President of the United States, and Michael Jackson an enormously popular young black musician, who is also slightly effeminate and the member of a strict religious sect.

- Mike I think God is a disease of the Western mind. We need Reagonomics.
- Phil I think war all boils down to sex. The mushroom cloud is orgasmic.
- Mike Let it [hostility] all out. It's healthy.

(FN57, 30/8/84)

These outrageous statements are typically delivered in a mock-serious manner, which according to Fry is an element that adds hilarity to any joke (145). Sometimes the outrageousness is more than a single statement; it becomes a fantasy. On yet another evening at *Kibitzers*, Nelson asserted that all wheat-eaters other than cows should be annihilated. He went on to explain that this way, we can breed more cattle and thus eat more steak, which ought to be the main staple in everybody's diet. On that same evening, Nelson and Phil expounded a theory that beer-drinkers make better fighters than wine-drinkers. This is why the Germans were military geniuses in the world wars, but, "look at France, when did they ever win a war?" Nelson added that losing sports teams are probably wine-drinkers. (FN81, 3/2/85.) Related to this is Nelson's pretended support for the Nazi regime.

All that German stuff I go on [about], that's just to bug people. That's great at bugging people, they get right upset ... and think you're serious and everything. (SH14a)

The implication is that people unperceptive enough to be fooled so easily deserve to be discomfited.

Nelson is the focal point for group humour, and he dominates every area of it. This is not an unusual circumstance, for many cultures have an

institutionalized comic role (Howard Pollio 147). Fine identifies four types of humorous figures: the *fool*, who combines public stupidity with insight; the *clown*, a performer engaged in contrasting the realistic and absurd with an underlying tragic tone; the *comedian*, who presents humour to an audience of strangers ("Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humour" 161-164). The fourth role is that of *wit* or *joker*, being somebody who has a witty or sarcastic remark for every occasion. The wit is typically dominant, gregarious, and highly influential in group interaction (163). Nelson alternately performs two of these roles: he is a *clown* in that he insightfully contrasts the realistic and absurd, and a *wit* in that he has a clever rejoinder for every situation. Nelson accentuates the deviance of this group from societal norms, but this is a deviance the others welcome and enjoy.

Group members deny performing obscene jokes; Phil declares that this group is "above" obscenity (FN50, 30/8/84). This is not typical of male groups, which are generally very concerned with sexual themes in their joking. Admittedly, my female presence would deter sexually-focussed joking, but it is probable that such talk is actually minimal for this particular group.

The distinctive humour of this group is well described by Garth's statement, "we laugh at the world around us." This group creates its own humour, derived partly from the members' imagination and partly from their environment. This is one of the main ways these young men deal with their environment and, at least verbally, triumph over it. As economically and socially powerless individuals at this point in their lives, humour and fantasy are the only ways in which they can achieve this triumph.



### The Transformation of Mass-Mediated Culture into Group Folklore.

<sup>44</sup> Modern folk groups routinely transform items of mass-mediated culture into their own distinctive folklore. Until recently, most folklorists have viewed popular culture as the antithesis and destroyer of folk culture (Dorson, "Folklore in the Modern World" 61). Dorson was one of the first to suggest the reverse, that modern media not only transmits folklore but also generates new heroes with folk culture roots, such as Mickey Mouse, Mr. Clean and James Bond (62-63). Similarly, Dégh and Vázsonyi find in their research that modern media has become an important influence on and transmitter of legends ("The Dialectics of the Legend" 36). Mass media especially affects the culture of young people, who use it to gain information, ideas, and imaginative experience (Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel 20). Media consumption varies according to educational level as well as age, with college graduates watching less television and reading more books than other North Americans (Leo Jeffres and John Robinson 265). The members of the group under consideration follow this pattern; they read voraciously and seldom watch television.

Technological media are highly functional within subcultures. Jeffres and Robinson find that mass media may be used to supplement, accompany or stimulate participation in various group activities (257). They also aid social

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<sup>44</sup>The term "mass-mediated culture" was coined by Michael Real in his book by that name, in 1977.

integration in group situations (271). Media frequently functions as part of the creative process (Herbert Gans 57; Serena Wade 41). Various media products can be used for escapism, providing temporary respite from everyday life (Gans 35).

The two main forms of mass-mediated culture used by the group under consideration are rock music on record albums, and science-fiction and fantasy literature in paperback books. Other media, used by this group somewhat less than records and paperbacks, are audiovisual media in the forms of movies, television, and movie videos shown on television. The following discussion concentrates on these three areas.

#### Recorded Music

In their early teens, the members of this group discovered rock music, which became very important to them. This is common among young people. Whereas classical and folk music are not intended for mass marketing, popular music is produced expressly for "the simultaneous consumption of a large youthful market," and is meaningful only in relation to this audience (Simon Frith 11-14). Since the emergence of the Beatles in the early 1960s, young people's leisure patterns have focussed around music to a phenomenal extent. Indeed, pop music has become part of the process of identity construction for many young people (Wicke 219). Carl Belz argues that rock music "has assumed the character and function of the traditional folk sound," in that it has "come up from the people," and requires its aesthetics "to serve content and feeling rather than the other way around (130-132). The aim is to suit audience demands rather express the

maker's creativity, the experience of the song mattering more than its artistic origins for most listeners (136). Serge Denisoff maintains that the experiential level is more important than the intellectual level in music, which is why the lyrics are often de-emphasized (422). Belz points out that lyrics are often repetitive, inane, and meaningful only within the context of the music, by which they are frequently obscured (133-134).

While the members of the study group are typical in their interest in rock music, they are unusual in their preference for sixties and early seventies music over current music.

Well, the music is one of the things that early tied us in together ... We were all in a [nineteen-] eighty, seventy-nine, this era, but we didn't like any of the music that was [recorded] ... after seventy-two, or not a lot of it. We liked the older groups and it's hard to find people like that ... We all bought lots of records. Michael has two hundred and fifty records, I have a hundred and seventy-five, Phil has over a hundred now himself ... obviously we were all willing to spend money and listen to records. And when you get people that like the same records you are buying, then that -- and like listening to them -- that ties you in a little bit ... And musically yes, we were very close, and we still are very close. (Nelson, SH12a)

This shared taste in music has played a part in the history of the group, for it brought together Nelson and the Hastings (see page 27) and, later, Nelson and Philip (see page 36). After they had ceased to play *Dungeons and Dragons*, Mike and Nelson regularly shopped for records together, as often as twice a week, thereby keeping their friendship active (SH26a). During this stage, the group would gather to "sit around and listen to records quite a bit" (Phil, SH2a). Perhaps the period when music held most significance for the group was the summer of 1983, which Phil describes as "intensely music-oriented" (SH26a).

The group has a custom of gathering at a member's home and listening to music together. Typically, the group would take over the room with the stereo (living room, den or bedroom), sprawl on comfortable couches, chairs and rugs, turn up the stereo to the highest bearable volume, and surrender themselves to the music. Kirk reminisces that "we'd all sit around in the dark together, have some beers, we'd all be glazed together" (SH10a). Mike recalls that he used to keep a bottle of vodka hidden in his basement, reserved for these occasions (SH26a). This was before most members had reached the legal drinking age. Sitting in the dark, imbibing alcohol, they sometimes fell asleep; "we'd wake up about an hour later (ll), 'Boy that [music] was great'" (Mike, SH26a). Usually these evenings were informally planned, but they occasionally culminated in a special occasion. For example, the group once spent a weekend at Nelson's family's cabin on the anniversary of Jim Morrison's death,<sup>45</sup> when they listened to *Doors* music and got drunk; "we just went on for about ten hours, in the dark" (Mike, SH26a). Nelson describes a refined version of these gatherings wherein they would take turns choosing the music:

One custom used to be, ah, to have a time when we'd go and listen to records, go to someone's house ... sit around and listen to records. Everyone, what we'd do is everyone gets their choice, like everyone gets their half a album, a side of an album. We'd go through, okay everyone's got their side of an album, we'd go right through again and again and again. No-one sort of argues. Unless it's something that really revolts someone ... In general, you'd use the person's record collection at hand. Most of us had enough records that everyone'd find something that they'd wanna listen to. Mightn't be what you were into at the time, but something is there somewhere, that you have liked, or are thinking about liking so that you'd wanna listen to it ...

<sup>45</sup> Jim Morrison was a charismatic vocalist and songwriter for a rock group called *The Doors*, who died of a drug overdose.

*Do you plan it [the evening]?*

Sort of, sort of. It's like, "What are you gonna do tonight?" "Let's have a music listening thing." (SH14a)

The custom of taking turns at choosing the music was probably devised to keep the peace, because even though all members had the same general tastes, they had individual preferences. Garth remarks that "we'd always end up fighting over controlling the turntable ... it was another forum for competition" (SH6a). There was competition over size and quality of the record collections, with Garth and Mike leading, and also over which was the greatest hard-rock group of all.

I think the rivalry began when Mike discovered *The Who* ... There'd be see-sawing of power as some new statistic about the popularity of *Led Zeppelin*, popularity of *The Who*, the money one of them made in their latest tour, or something like this. We used to follow them like ... some people follow sports ... We'd accumulate statistics. (Garth, SH6a)

Even with this rivalry, members did not collect fanzines, although they did sometimes buy Rolling Stone, a magazine which focusses critical attention on popular music.

Each member has his own favorite music; "it became a matter of having one's particular band that one could rave about" (Kirk, SH10a). A member is said to be *fanatical* about his favorite band. It is not unusual for people to experience music on such a personal level. Huizinga suggests that music is highly personal, "the source of some of our deepest emotional experiences, and one of life's greatest blessings" (162). Many people are consciously aware of music's importance in their lives, as Laurel Doucette shows in her discussion of the singing traditions of a small Quebec community, where "music is perceived as one of the central elements of culture and not merely a peripheral addition for purposes of

entertainment" (20). Perhaps one of the reasons music is so valued is that it can be used to enter private fantasy worlds; music "transports audience and performers alike out of *ordinary life* into a sphere of gladness and serenity" (Huizinga, 42). Huizinga evidently has high art music in mind when he makes this statement; not all music inspires gladness and serenity. Nevertheless, the idea of transporting audiences out of ordinary life into an enjoyable emotional plane can be generalized. With reference to rock music, Peter Wicke suggests that:

The perceptual character of the sound, together with the imaginative delight in physicality that was both experience and effect of this music, were seen as bringing to life everything that in the everyday world had to be subordinated to the rationalised demands of school and work (229).

Fantasy being so important to this group, it follows that the members should value music, if only as a key to their fantasies. The manner in which they listen to it together, that is, in a darkened room with the relaxation aid of alcohol and the taboo against disturbing concentration, supports the assertion that they use music in this way.

Because these musically-induced fantasies are personal, it follows that group members would have individual preferences for certain styles and performers. During the heyday of the group, Mike's favorite was *The Who*, Ted's *Pink Floyd*, and for Nelson, Garth, Kirk and Alex the best of all was *Led Zeppelin*. Part of having a favorite is displaying enthusiasm for it and dislike of other members' favorites. Ted's fanaticism for *Pink Floyd* is a case in point.

Ted

I really liked *Pink Floyd*, and everyone was always telling me what a cruddy group this was, and when I came back [after being away for a summer] ... everybody had *Pink Floyd* records.

Nelson            That's cause you were going on and on and on --

Ted                No I wasn't going on, no more than you guys --

Nelson            You'd play a record and say, "this is a good part coming up, this is it, this is it!" (ll) Blocked all sound ... "What do you think of *this*?"

(SH26a)

The teasing behaviour of the others towards Ted on this issue is described by Alex:

I noticed that, cause I wasn't really ... a central member of the friendship group at the time, and I can remember going over to Ted's, and everyone would sit around criticizing *Pink Floyd* while Ted was trying to play *Pink Floyd*. (ll) And then afterwards, I remember one time walking down the parkway ... Michael, Phil, and me and possibly Kirk -- I can't remember if Kirk was there cause he's always so silent anyway ... I can remember Michael and Phil, they were saying, "Well, *Pink Floyd* isn't *that* bad" ... going to Ted's place to criticize them! (SH17b)

*Led Zeppelin* is very special to every member of the group; Alex calls it "the one [musical] group which is almost universally liked a great deal" (SH17b).<sup>46</sup>

Music is not only a forum for competition and private fantasy; it also has other social dimensions. Alan P. Merriam states that the one aspect of the creativity of music which involves the audience as well as the performers is social behaviour (103). Music enters into this group's social life in two ways: the members listen to music together and frequently discuss it as well. Such talk about media products is common in modern society. Mackie characterizes mass

<sup>46</sup>The group *Led Zeppelin* was formed in 1968 by four successful male musicians: a lead guitarist, bass guitarist, drummer, and vocalist. They composed most of their own material, usually in the hard rock vein. The title of the group was derived from a pun about bad jokes, "that went over like a lead balloon." *Led Zeppelin* disbanded after the sudden death of its drummer in 1980. See Paul Kendall's *Led Zeppelin in their Own Words*.

media as a "community of discourse" because it is a common knowledge base shared by many people (204). Irving Allen states that,

mass media content ... has a widely acknowledged but not always fully appreciated role in everyday face-to-face interaction ... as it enters the personal networks of everyday conversation, [it] becomes *play* and often the stuff of subcultures. (106-107)

Talk about rock music often takes the form of competitive argument for this group, but there is an underlying consensus.

We'd argue - you know, you'd say, "this is good and this is bad," and la-dah-dah-dah-dah, and everyone would argue away, but [there was a] sort of, you know, chemistry that everyone knew that this was a great album. You'd listen to it, "Ah, that's great, that's great." "Think I'm gonna buy this album next week," and "What album are you buying next week?" and "When I save up a bit more money, you know, from my paper [route] or whatever, I think I'm gonna get this album." "Oh great, I'd love to listen to that." And yeah, we'd argue, argue about it in some ways where we'd have different thoughts, or discuss it, or just enjoy listening to it together. But it all tied us in, made us closer friends because of it." (Nelson, SH12a)

This consensus extends to despising music favoured by outsiders, especially *easy listening* music and *country and western* music. However, as the members have matured, their musical tastes have broadened to encompass classical and folk music. All along they have favoured blues music, rock blues especially. The members of the group have inevitably had a great deal of influence on one another's musical tastes. Garth is considered to have the finest record collection, and is their "taste oracle" (Nelson, FN125, 31/10/85).

In the aesthetics of this group, instrumentation is considered to be more important and interesting than the lyrics of a song; "guitar playing is a favorite" conversation topic (Alex, SH17a). The mood of music is also a consideration.



The mood [stands out] I suppose ... the words contribute to it, but I don't think the lyrics [make the music good] by themselves. Whether it's angry or sad or moany, or very often happy. I don't seem to like happy music ... [The others have] pointed out that my music seems to be more moany than theirs, even though I'm actually not sure if that's true. (Phil, SH2a).

The aesthetic of rock music in general since the sixties mirrors the musical aesthetic of this group, in its emphasis on instrumentation and on feeling, involvement, power, spontaneity, intensity, and an experience of collectivity (Wicke 228). Thus, the group uses the products of mass media for their own purposes without regard for the original intent. Despite this twisting, several of these aesthetic elements of rock music are important to the broader group aesthetic, namely, power, intensity, and, in a differing form, the experience of collectivity. Highly charged feelings are also generated by other group activities, but the members prefer to express these obliquely.

One's choice of music is thought to reflect one's emotional state; Alex says that music "captures the essence of me ... reflects my emotions" (SH20a). Music is by nature evocative, and individuals favour that music which conjures up welcome images. In other words, music is used to complement one's fantasies. Perhaps this use of music for fantasy is why a few members of the group, in particular, Nelson and Phil, find live music distasteful; the visual and auditory distractions of a public bar or crowded stadium do not permit much peace for private fantasy. Another reason is that the group's usual emphasis on excellence does not tolerate the inevitable imperfections of local musicians. Nevertheless, they, Mike and Garth especially, do on occasion go to hear live folk or blues music, but do not withhold criticism if they feel it due. As Garth says, they seldom consume any medium uncritically (SH6b).

Music is highly functional for this group as a bonding mechanism, an expressive outlet, an opportunity for fantasy and competition, and a sign of groupness. It is used as an entertainment in itself, a subject of conversation, and as a body of collectable items. Its meaning is dependent on context and the individual's personal ideas and emotions.

#### Paperback Science Fiction and Fantasy Novels

Science fiction and fantasy literature has become immensely popular among young people in recent decades (Finch-Reyner 127). Edmund Little defines fantasy literature as literature concerning worlds which are both *other* and *impossible* when compared to our everyday realities (9). He argues that it has a greater impact than mainstream fiction because it deals with the quintessential (122). L. Sprague de Camp defines a sub-genre of fantasy literature, termed *swords and sorcery* or *heroic fantasy*, as fantastic fiction written primarily to entertain, wherein good and evil are clearly delimited and the complexities of society and personality are ignored (xi). He traces the lineage of this literature back to heroes such as Odysseus, Beowulf, St. George and Lancelot, but concentrates on twentieth century works. Unaccountably, de Camp omits *märchen* from his discussion altogether. He describes the essentials of the genre vividly: the hero "strides through landscapes in which all men are mighty, all women beautiful, all problems simple, and all life adventurous" (5). Heroic fantasy, de Camp argues, is the purist form of escapism (5). I suggest that it is also a distinctively masculine escape form.

Especially significant to the folklorist are the folk literature roots of fantasy fiction. Finch-Reyner argues that fantasy literature takes the place of *märchen* and myths for its modern readers, of which they are otherwise deprived (129-130). The structure, symbolism, and aesthetic of these written narratives are all inspired by traditional oral narratives. Some resemble *märchen* in that they provide clear moral choices and happy endings, while others involve ambivalence and tragedy, as do myths (Finch-Reyner 131-132). Thomas and Marilyn Sutton observe the relationship between myths and science fiction, and suggest that myth and science are alike in that they "reflect man's irrepressible curiosity about his origins and his destiny; they each can be seen as a particular human means of structuring the universe" (231).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, both are concerned with creating extranormal powers (236).

While these young men continue (albeit with lessened intensity) to collect and listen to music, they seldom read science fiction or fantasy literature anymore. Yet during the years of playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, they built up extensive collections of paperbacks in the science fiction/fantasy genre. There is a firm and obvious relationship between these two activities, and the link is J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings (hereafter LOTR), a lengthy work written in the 1940s, and published as a trilogy. This particular masterpiece is not only widely viewed as a touchstone of fantasy literature, but also is the favorite for the study group and very influential on its gaming. "In this genre, few have equaled and none has surpassed LOTR in vividness, grandeur, and sheer readability" (de

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<sup>47</sup>The Suttons' use of the masculine pronoun is appropriate in that science fiction has until recently been dominated by male authors espousing very conservative, patriarchal values (Mackie 216).

Camp 251). A cult-like following has sprung up around this trilogy since the 1960s, some of its members scholars who have written analytical treatises about LOTR. The trilogy concerns the adventures of a group of humanoids<sup>48</sup> in Earth's forgotten past, on a quest to save their world from evil. They are all male, but quite lacking in sexuality; as de Camp remarks in defense, "the theme of manly comradeship in perilous adventure, without sexual implications, is an age-old and respectable one" (242). Gershon Legman has also noted the sexless quality of much science fiction, relating this to its adolescent male readership's terror concerning their sexuality (313). Not surprisingly from Legman's viewpoint, LOTR has a special appeal to young people. Alvin Winder states that LOTR has "struck an expressive chord in the adolescent psyche," and suggests that this is partly because it encourages its readers to leave the security of childhood and accept adult reality (86-89). Not only the theme but also many of the names and other elements of LOTR are derived from folk traditions of European cultures, especially Norse and Welsh mythology through such sources as The Prose Edda and The Mabinogian. Anne Petty, who has some folkloristic training, goes so far as to analyse the mythic structure of LOTR using the methods of Vladimir Propp and Claude Levi-Strauss, in her One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology.<sup>49</sup> A cursory search of my own in Stith Thompson's Motif Index of Folk Literature located several märchen motifs used in LOTR:

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<sup>48</sup>This group includes humans, elves, dwarves, and hobbits. *Hobbits* are Tolkien's own creation; they are jolly, sturdy little men resembling a stereotype of English peasants.

<sup>49</sup>For extensive discussion of Tolkien's use of traditional elements, see the aforementioned Little and de Camp, as well as Ruth S. Noel's The Mythology of Middle-Earth.

- C422 Tabu against revealing identity of certain person (see vol. 1, page 72)
- C942 Loss of strength from broken tabu (see vol. 1, pages 145 and 140)
- D1388.0.1 Magic ring renders invisible (see vol. 1, page 39)
- F303 Wedding of mortal and fairy (see vol. 3, page 251)
- F706 Land of darkness (see vol. 3, page 194)
- G304.25 Troll turns to stone at sunrise (see vol. 1, pages 218-220)
- H1023.8 Fixing the two pieces of a broken sword (see vol. 3, page 200)
- H1235 Succession of helpers on quest (see vol. 1, pages 130, 182, 372 for examples)
- H1270 Quest to lower world (see vol. 3, pages 193-225)
- L100 Unpromising hero (see vol. 1, page 182)
- N835 Powerful man as helper (see vol. 1, page 182)
- R260 Pursuit (throughout; see vol. 1, pages 98 and 225 for examples)

Thus LOTR like other heroic fantasy literature is based on folktales and myths.

Kirk describes the group's interest in fantasy literature, and the connections between this interest and *Dungeons and Dragons* as follows:<sup>50</sup>

The science fiction bit, the fantasy book bit ... this developed from something which was related to *D and D* but was really quite separate, I guess it all springs out of Lord of the Rings. And you know how many people when they're early teenagers, or even earlier, have read the Lord of the Rings. And you know, it really is an experience and they feel changed because of it. And they meet other people who've read Lord of the Rings and there's a special bond because of that. And you know, in the sixties you have Tolkien societies, and "Frodo Lives" in graffiti on walls, and stuff like that. That's how much, how intensely it affected people. It's the same with us ... That was a big bond. (SH10b)

Once they had read LOTR, the boys were eager for similar literature, and began to collect paperbacks in the style of LOTR. Eventually their interests broadened to a wider range of fantasy and science fiction, and they would frequently discuss and compare favorite and recent readings. Science fiction, and especially LOTR,

<sup>50</sup>For understanding of this excerpt, it is helpful to know that Frodo is the hero of Lord of the Rings.

became "a source for ideas" for fantasy gaming (Garth, SH6a). Members would often browse in bookstores together, especially Mike and Garth. The usual competitive pattern for the group was evidenced: "science fiction became a source of rivalry, rival authors or rival tastes" (Garth, SH6a). Alex recalls:

We used to talk about science fiction all the time, about three years ago ... a lot of people go through that phase when they read science fiction and fantasy, especially when they're playing *Dungeons and Dragons* ... We used to read a lot of science fiction, then something happened and we started reading different things ... We don't talk about books as much as we used to. It's always the same books we talked about, over and over again. Tess [of the *D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy] is a favorite. Lord Jim [by Joseph Conrad] is another one. (SH17a)

In recent years, group members have become interested in literature classics, and Thomas Hardy, Evelyn Waugh, and Joseph Conrad are discussed more than fantasy literature, although Lord of the Rings is forever a favorite, and frequently reread.

Not only is Lord of the Rings the book with most influence on this group, but also it has numerous parallels to the group's life. This trilogy concerns a male group with nine members of varying temperaments and abilities but a shared aim. Four of these characters are hobbits, a race which has always lived in comfort and security, but must now face dangerous adventure. There are few women, and these few are either kept on pedestals or portrayed as ridiculous.<sup>51</sup> Sexuality is wholly ignored. The virtues espoused mostly lie within what is considered the masculine domain for Western culture. The adventures, although frightening, are

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<sup>51</sup>Folklorist Gershon Legman has noted that science fiction has an "anti-woman" element (313).

marvellous and successful. The group studied here is of similar size, emphatically masculine, possesses a strong emphasis on success and a secure childhood background. Their future holds daunting career challenges. Meanwhile, they have shared a rich adventure life through fantasy gaming.

Fantasy literature complements fantasy gaming, and so it has enriched group fantasies for years. Now that *Dungeons and Dragons* is seldom played by the group, individual members are less motivated to read fantasy literature. As university students they have little time for self-directed reading, and most of the reading they do now complements their intellectual explorations. This is not to say that they have left fantasy behind them, for any fiction claims the imagination, and even nonfiction introduces the reader to new worlds.

#### Movies and Television

Although less important to this group than music and science fiction, the audiovisual media of mass-marketed movies and commercial television have made some impact on the folklore of the study group. The members of this group occasionally go to movies together, and have done so ever since they were old enough to go without adults. Ted grew to six feet in height when he was only thirteen, and he was able to take the others along to "parental guidance" movies, masquerading as an eighteen-year-old. But their conversation about movies reveals that what interests these individuals most is the music used or the book from which the movie is adapted. In other words, the movie is a channel for the group's favoured forms of mass-mediated culture, recorded music and paperback

books. A few movies which came under discussion in my presence, will be discussed here, with attention to the significance they hold for this group. A good example to start with is the movie Pope of Greenwich Village, which Mike and Phil particularly enjoyed. After seeing it a few times, they bought the novel it was based on, and also some Frank Sinatra music which had been featured in the movie, and which they listened to repeatedly in the ensuing months. The story concerns a pair of friends who enjoy a hedonistic life-style, and attempt to enter the mafia world so as to support and expand their pleasures. The extraordinarily intense emotional involvement of the two young men in their friendship bond is one of the most striking aspects of this movie. It portrays a thoroughly masculine world which rejects women and relationships with them. The elements of male friendship, and a hedonistic lifestyle drew Phil and Mike. Another aspect which no doubt attracted them is the fact the pair of friends in the movie actually triumph over the local mafia boss in the end, albeit in what can only be a temporary fashion. Such a victory is bound to please young men who are oriented to a power and success which they have not yet achieved. A movie which concerns mafia power struggles on a larger scale, and which is especially favoured by the group as a whole, is The Godfather. The usual masculine emphasis on competition, power, and success are stressed in this movie and in the book it is based on. All the group members have watched this movie and its sequel several times, usually together with other members.

Sometimes members' extensive knowledge of the subject of a film will cause them to be highly critical of it. This is true of the Lord of the Rings movie, and also of most war movies.



Mike I used to criticize war movies to death ... like *The Big Red One* was --

Ted -Oh God, that was horrible!

Mike That got good reviews, I can never believe it ...

Nelson And it's total trash.

Mike Garbage!

Ted That's the one where those Germans are lying down pretending they're dead.

Mike Yeah. Oh, that was so bad it made you wince (l) ... Any fool could see it, it was just-stupid ... ridiculous. All these hero Americans running around doing everything on their own, capturing Hitler on their own, it was just stupid. I mean, anybody could get it, but they didn't. (l)

(SH25a)

The same pattern of ridicule concerning a popular culture representation of an area of group expertise is evidenced by firefighters watching the television series *Emergency* (Robert McCarl 121). In both cases, the groups also use such representations as a springboard for further conversation (122).

A movie which has made a unique impression upon this group is the cult classic, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. This movie utilizes both rock music and fantasy/science fiction elements in highly creative ways. It has also generated what Peter Narváez terms "a true contemporary ritual" and an international cult (4-5). The members of the group have repeatedly attended this movie together, and have entered thoroughly into the traditions it has generated, such as throwing toast, confetti and water at appropriate intervals; calling out responses to the action on screen, including ridicule; and even, on one occasion, attending the

movie in the costumes of some of its main characters. This is probably the only occasion that Ted has ever been seen "in drag".

The small amount of television which the group members watch and discuss falls into three categories. The first is humour, with preference for the Canadian series SCTV, and the British Monty Python series. All of these feature exaggeratedly incongruous humour bordering on meaninglessness, mostly generated by young men. The second category of television favoured is science fiction, such as *Star Trek*,<sup>52</sup> which of course matches the group's reading interests. The third is televised versions of novels, notably Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead Revisited, which like Pope of Greenwich Village is concerned with a pair of hedonistic friends, although in a widely divergent setting; the Britain favoured by these Anglophiles.

#### Quotations

Many group conversations are marked with quotations; indeed *quotes*, as members call them, form one of the group's conversational genres. Quotes are sometimes used within the group in the same manner as others use proverbs, namely, to impose the speakers' viewpoint on a situation. At other times quotes are used to contribute humour. Just as quotes extend across the boundaries I have created for the purpose of discussing the kinds of folklore performed in this group, so do they extend across different forms of media in their sources, as well

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<sup>52</sup> An article which explores the significance this series holds in the lives of its audience, is William Blake Tyrrell's "Star Trek as Myth and Television as Mythmaker."

as being derived from within the group itself, as with Nelsonisms. These may be derived from one of the members or from Lord of the Rings (for examples, see pages 147 and 148). The quotes are sometimes derived from a comedy routine members have heard on albums (such as Phil's quote from Flanders and Swann on page 123); the favorite source is Monty Python, an all-male British comedy team much favoured by the group over the years for their off-beat humour. Members have collected Monty Python albums and books, and they see the movies at every opportunity. Several quotes figure in the following conversation (these are indicated with quotation marks):

Phil "Oh, when I was ten I was working down in the pits eight hours a day."

Mike "Think you had it tough." [Monty Python, *The Four Yorkshiremen*]

Phil ... Got a few more minutes [on the tape], say something um --

Mike Brilliant? "What matter the victim, so long as the gesture is beautiful."

Phil "Beauty is only the perversion of our -- no, consciousness of our perversions."

Mike Right ah, ah, ah ... "We are all in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars."

Susan *You guys are scary, reading all these philosophers.*

Mike Our secret is we don't read them.

Phil Mike reads the first page and the last page. I get them from Mike. Alex's the only one that really reads them. See, Alex wanders around the library with lots of books and he's really reading Plato's Republic.

(SH21b)

The quotes which gain status within the group these days are literary quotes, so the above conversation switches quickly to them. But the game of impressing one another is revealed when the two joke that they do not actually read the works from which they quote. On another occasion, Mike stated, tongue-in-cheek, that "we read a page of Bartlett's Famous Quotations every day, to impress people with how well read we are" (FN29, 8/8/84).

Popular culture and the mass media are a constant influence on the life of every modern, urban group. The distinctive uses of and preferences for certain items of mass-mediated culture within small groups transforms these items into folklore. Folk cultures are too intrinsic to life to be simply destroyed by the mass media (Narváez, "The Folklore of 'Old Foolishness'; *Newfoundland Media Legends*, 139).

### Summary

Play and communicative performance are two important elements of this group's folklore, and the literature concerning them yields some interesting comparative data and analytical constructs. The folklore performed by this group falls into four overlapping categories: *conversational genres*, which occur in conversations of various forms, most especially arguments and fantasizing conversations, and include personal experience narratives, wordplay, boasts and taunts; *humour*, which is an important identifying factor for the group in its style.

and content; the transformation of *mass-mediated culture* into group folklore, most especially recorded music, paperback science fiction and fantasy novels, and movies; and games, in the forms of wargaming and fantasy role-playing games, to be discussed in the following chapter. The cultural themes of this group, competition and shared fantasy pervade this group's culture.

## Chapter 5

### Games

Gaming is central to the development and identity of the group under consideration, and therefore is the basis for much of its folklore. While the group members have played a variety of games together, ranging from traditional children's games such as *spotlight* and *tag* to adult popular culture games such as *Risk* and *Diplomacy*, and other widely-known games like *tennis* and *chess*, the two games which clearly emerge as significant group activities are *war-gaming* and *Dungeons and Dragons*. The continuing presence of these games in group folklore make them both possible and necessary to analyse, even though the analysis is handicapped by the impossibility of observing group members at their gaming. (Although some group members have resumed their gaming, they did not play at all during the study period.) After first providing an overview of scholarly game theory, I will discuss competition, strategy and cooperation as they occur in games in general and in the games of this group in particular. The body of this chapter will focus on war-gaming and *Dungeons and Dragons*, as they are played by this group. The history of each game, its structural elements, player roles, central activities, rules, equipment, and its significance to this group's folklore will be analysed. Finally, this chapter will compare *Dungeons and Dragons* to traditional role-playing games which have been collected in Newfoundland.

### Games Scholarship

Elliot Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith define *games* as patterned, repeatable play with predictable outcomes, a competitive element, and a strong goal orientation (7). Games are set apart from other play by virtue of their fixed rules and competition (Bowman 242-243; Georges, "Recreations and Games" 174). While most of the play within this group is competitive, little of it has fixed rules apart from informal behavioural boundaries. The group's games, on the other hand, are set apart by their extremely complex systems of rules.

Until recently, folklorists have seldom engaged in game theory. Early game collectors, such as William Wells Newell, founder of the American Folklore Society, believed that games could provide insight into national character,<sup>53</sup> and once that idea lost appeal researchers were generally content to collect them without categorizing or theorizing at all (Georges, "Recreations and Games" 176). Georges suggests that there are three reasons for this lack of interest: games have no counterpart in written literature; they have been relegated to the domain of children's folklore; and they are difficult to categorize and analyse ("The Relevance of Models" 4). Thus, games did not appear significant or easy to study, and were neglected. Meanwhile, social and behavioural scientists have discovered much social significance in games (Goldstein 168). Psychologists like Jean Piaget have related games to developmental stages of life (Avedon and

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<sup>53</sup>He expounded this idea in his Games and Songs of American School Children.

Sutton-Smith 4). Kenneth Goldstein encourages folklorists to study games so as to develop closer interdisciplinary ties with the behavioural sciences, and to contribute to the contextual study and classification schemes of games (168-169). He also suggests that game ethnography will better our understanding of the mechanics of folklore and the relationship between actual and stated gaming rules (169).

One of the first modern folklorists to consider games was Alan Dundes, who did so using a structural analysis system adapted from the study of folktales ("On Game Morphology: a Study of the Structure of Non-Verbal Folklore"). He points out that because games are rule-patterned, their actions occur in an ordered sequence (335). Like folktales, games often begin with a lack, such as missing players in the game *Hide-and-Seek*, and involve verbal formulas (336, 339). Unlike folktales, games have an uncertain outcome and each player role provides an equal chance of winning (337). Jan Harold Brunvand defines folk games as voluntary recreations with rules fixed by custom and tradition (28); thus, they are paradoxically both free and restricted. He proposes that games have four foundation blocks, of which every game has at least one: body movements, simple social activities, chance, and elementary mathematics of mechanics (283). The games favoured by this group stress the elements of mechanics and social activities, but the latter could scarcely be termed *simple*. Brunvand emphasizes children's games in his discussion, and makes a pertinent point:

In general it appears that what many children like most about games is the dramatic element. They tend to identify with the situations and characters represented in the games, and they especially prefer games which suit their own personalities best. (204)



A related observation by Brian Sutton-Smith, a child psychologist and folklorist, is that players have "distinctive attributes" which relate to the games they favour, and that they are actually moulded by those games ("Child Training and Game Involvement" 59). In collaboration with Avedon, Sutton-Smith pinpoints contributing attributes: child training, political and religious background, and individual personalities and skills (435-436). When these attributes are considered for the present group, it is evident that this group has not only chosen games which dramatize the cultural concerns it stresses, but also that its games have affected the members as individual personalities and as a group. The games both express and shape group identity.

### Competition, Strategy and Cooperation

Competition is a central aspect of most games. Gene Bocknek relates competition to aggression when he defines it as "the constructive use of aggressive feelings in activity relative to self or other people" (142). Central to effective competition, he argues, is the ability to distinguish assertiveness from hostility, and to be able to avoid overemphasis on winning (144). This distinction has been tested, imperiled and successfully sustained within this group, as was shown in the discussion of its history. Some scholars perceive competition itself in a negative light: William Levinson believes that competition has harmful side-effects and is therefore not "true play" (14-15); Jules Henry states that competition creates hostility, a fear of failure and an envy of success (38, 43). It can be argued, though, that such effects are usually minor and temporary. Huizinga points out

that while winning is the overt aim of competition, the outcome of a contest is objectively irrelevant within the structure of the game (49). The winner gains honour, esteem, and a semblance of superiority (50). Huizinga declares that even winning through luck makes a person feel special because of the idea that divine fate is on one's side (56). Caillois, on the other hand, argues that it is the games of skill which most of all involve competition, for it is here that one may reap "glory from a performance difficult to equal" (37). The latter reward is what the members of this group constantly seek for in their gaming. Huizinga observes that even war is essentially a contest for honour, the opportunity to win glory (90). War takes its purest competitive form when it is a game rather than reality; in this context, no worries such as social, environmental and economic cost or gain need distract participants or affect non-participants. Competition also occurs in the musical world (14), in sports (195) and in commerce (200); it pervades society. According to Denzin, players compete on several levels, not only

over the resources of their play, but they [also] compete over and in play itself. Further, they compete over the places they will occupy in the play sequence. Boasting and threatening are basic to play. (20)

This statement can be directly applied to the gaming style of this group.

Two of the thirty dimensions outlined in "Dimensions of Games" by Fritz Redl, Paul Gump, and Brian Sutton-Smith deal directly with the element of competition. These can be used to evaluate this group's competitive style. Within the dimension of *competition factors*, it can be observed that (a) winning is somewhat central but not excessively so within this group; (b) play is less goal directed than it is opponent directed; (c) self-enhancement is stressed more than defeat of the opponent; (d) team and individual competition are both evidenced;

as is (e) interference with participants by participants (410). The second applicable dimension is the pleasure/pain content of *winning or losing*; within this group's gaming, (a) loss of possessions occurs on a purely imaginary level; (b) implication of skill inadequacy is the most serious and painful result of loss; (c) implication that destiny is against one is of minor consequence; and (d) loss of dignity is nearly as dreaded as (b) (414).

Roberts and Sutton-Smith maintain that culture and upbringing influence people's competitive styles ("Rubrics of Competitive Behaviour"). These styles, according to Roberts and Sutton-Smith, occur on a continuum, ranging from *fortunists* who rely on luck, through *potents* who use physical power, and on to *strategists* who resort to wisdom (15). People having relatively high Intelligence Quotients and socioeconomic status tend to favour the latter end of the continuum (25). The members of the study group are clearly strategists, with some measure of potency on a fantasy level (ie. within *Dungeons and Dragons*, they identify with characters which develop immense physical powers). Roberts and Sutton-Smith state that games of strategy require the most intellectual understanding of all games, most notably of governing principles within the game, and become possible only with the "emergence of abstract thinking in early adolescence" (34). It is no coincidence, then, that adolescence is the stage of life when the members of this group commenced their intense strategic gaming.

Claire Farrer points out in her analysis of contesting that social play by its very nature requires cooperation as well as competition:

In contesting we are working with control and power: control over the outcome through the exercise of power. Yet that power must be sustained and allowed by our opponent or it cannot exist. (202)

To survive, a play group must cooperate. G. H. Mead observes that for the duration of a game, its morale dominates the players and they are above all members of the gaming community (160). Avedon describes action within a gaming group as being "action of a cooperative nature by two or more persons intent on reaching a mutual goal" (425). Huizinga suggests that the feeling of being "apart together" (that is, in a private world) which is generated within the gaming groups has the result that a "play community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over" (12). This is what happened to the present group. As such this one play group becomes a clique, and play begins to function not only for enjoyment but also as a display of status and attractiveness to outsiders (Zelda Cohen 97). Thus gaming, like other folklore, can be used for boundary maintenance. In the gaming groups Fine has studied, members share not only a knowledge of the rules but also in-jokes, common expressions, and similar backgrounds which set them apart from the larger cultural context (Shared Fantasy 28-30). Thus a gaming group takes on the properties of any small group.

Members are recruited for gaming groups by three methods. They may comprise a pre-existing group which changes its orientation to the game; they may have related interests and therefore be attracted to the game; or they may be invited to join by gamers within their social networks (47-49). The group under consideration evidences all three recruiting methods. Cooperation is an ideal shared by all groups, and is most evident in situations where players must defend themselves in the face of game challenges (165-167).

### War-Gaming

This group has played an assortment of war-game variants over the years, most of which have intermingled rather than being concentrated during any particular period. The exceptions are the loosely structured traditional children's games which the members only played in their early years together, before beginning any of the more complex war-games.

We played a lot of war ... running around, "killing" each other with guns ... We'd count to ten and get up again and get killed again ... We used to play around here [in Michael's neighbourhood] a lot. Just running back and forth, terrorizing all the girls. (Richard, SH8a)

The commonness of this activity<sup>54</sup> within Newfoundland contrasts with the relatively esoteric hobby of model-making, which each member of the group had taken up by the age of ten.<sup>5</sup> They soon formed a preference within model-making for constructing and painting miniature reproductions of military vehicles, particularly World War Two (WWII) ships, aeroplanes and tanks; they began to devour books concerning military history, particularly WWII battles. Boxes containing the appropriate plastic parts and complex instructions were purchased through mail-order catalogues and local hobby stores. The collecting of models and display of craftsmanship brought personal pleasure and awoke competition among group members) but was not enough to satisfy them. Garth states that "the models were around first, and then you try to think of something to do with

<sup>54</sup> Children's war-games are widespread and popular in Newfoundland, as indicated in the holdings of MUNFLA. See later discussion within this chapter.

these inanimate objects" (SH6a). The obvious thing to do with war machines is to make war.

Gary Alan Fine defines war-games as those which "simulate the strategy of battle and its competitive excitement without the personal hazards" (Shared Fantasy 8). This is as specific as any definition of war-gaming can be, because the variants range from chess to children's *Cowboys and Indians*. Avedon and Sutton-Smith outline the history of war-gaming in their The Study of Games. They find that the modern, adult tradition of war-gaming was initiated by Helwig, of the court of the Duke of Brunswick, who in 1780 developed a war-game based on chess to teach military tactics. Helwig used a map-like board with pieces symbolizing various military forces (cavalry, infantry, platoon boats, etc.). In 1824 von Reisswitz, a Breslau lieutenant, adapted this game so that the scenarios<sup>55</sup> were based on actual battles, with battle orders and reports being transmitted through an umpire, and outcomes being determined with dice. A Prussian officer named du Vernois further refined this in 1876, calling his version *Kriegspiel*, a game which could be played with varying rigidity of rules. War-games were continually updated and localized for use by the military as teaching aids (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, The Study of Games 271-275). In 1915 H.G. Wells, a science fiction author, developed an amateur variant, with a sand table to simulate landscape, and with miniature figures for added realism (Fine, Shared Fantasy 9). In 1953 Charles Roberts created the first commercial board war-game and the lastingly successful Avalon-Hill Game Company (Fine, Shared Fantasy 9). War-gaming is today an extremely popular hobby, especially in Britain.

<sup>55</sup> Scenario is a term used in gaming to mean the context which the gamers create for their play. In this case, the scenario may be a Napoleonic battle taking place on a rainy day in Poland.

More than half of the group members spent part of their childhoods in England, and were there exposed to the hobbies of modelmaking and war-gaming which are relatively uncommon in Newfoundland. Speaking of how his friendship developed with Michael, Garth says:

We've always known each other but I think it took an interest in war-gaming, military modelling, whatever, to actually ... make us friends ... I think we both derived that interest somehow from England, the fact that we both spent extensive time in England and it's such a, something that every kid does [there]. (SH6a)

Even though he has never visited England, Ted was the most enthusiastic war-gamer of the group, and has a vivid memory of many battles.

Ted                    We used to have some really good ones [war-games] when you [Mike] just came back from England ... remember downstairs [in your basement], the ones we used to have? One guy would have all the HO scale stuff, and the other guy would have the one thirty-second scale stuff, going at, going at each other?

Mike                    I can't remember that.

Ted                    You don't? Remember we used to set up a river, with ah, all those books ...

Mike                    Yeah, yeah I remember that. God.

Ted                    Lego blocks. They were pretty cool games, actually.

(SH24a)

At the same time, Nelson and Kirk were devising their own war-games:

Nelson                Me and Kirk had a lot of neighbourhood war-games, in the basement.

Ted                    Ye guys were making those balsa wood things.

Nelson                [After explaining that this was a naval war] That culminated in -- Kirk and me had thing where, over a

month or two we were gonna make as many ships as we could, and that would be a navy ... his navy versus mine. But his was about five times as big. So, when we started out the thing, I ran [my navy fled] away, right away, just ran. Kirk came around the corner. I had five submarines (I), and sunk his whole battle line (II) ...

- Kirk You didn't sink it, Nelson.
- Nelson Oh, I lodged a lot of damage though, it was just gruesome. (II)
- Kirk And he had two balsa-wood submarines which didn't even *look* like submarines.
- Nelson [after admitting that they were made at the last minute] ... We fought a couple of good ones ... the *Prinz Engen* and the *Bismark* against the *Hood* and the *Prince of Wales*.
- Kirk Oh yeah, that was a good sea battle.

(SH24b)

Their equipment in these early games was a melange of various scales, and some of it inexpertly homemade. The physical layout was composed of an odd variety of available materials, its resemblance to battlefields being much more a matter of imagination than of appearance. These aberrations did not at all impair enjoyment.

The members' tastes became more sophisticated over the years, and they gradually discarded outmoded playing styles and equipment. Speaking of his private *Ant Wars*, Ted explains that "I wasn't using the H.O.<sup>56</sup> stuff for anything really, figured I may as well use them to kill ants" (SH24a). Ted, Garth

<sup>56</sup>The initials "H.O." refer to a scale of 1 to 1/72 used originally for model railways, and later applied to models. Although Michael was not able to say what the initials specifically refer to, he did mention that it is a commonly used scale in modelling.



and Mike developed their playing style faster than Nelson and Kirk, with the result that the first war-game was an uneven match (see page 28). Nelson and Kirk learned quickly however, and soon the five of them were war-gaming regularly. The other three members were omitted because Richard lacked interest, Alex was considered too young, and Philip was still a stranger. However, Richard and Alex sometimes participated as judges in disputes, and in later years Alex joined in as a player. Certain patterns developed. Ted and Mike usually played against Nelson and Kirk, with Garth in a less fixed position, and an especially fierce competition developing between Mike and Nelson. Ted had by far the largest collection of equipment, and generously allowed the others to use it. The following discussion of an early war-game illustrates these points:

Ted                    [To Mike] Remember once we had one big one [war-game], with a whole bunch of tanks sort of going at each other.

Nelson                ... We used all of Ted's stuff all the time. The first war-game we had with that was probably the best --

Ted                    That was because we lost everything I had --

Nelson                That was really good, that was about three hours of extremely excellent -- we, Kirk and I, my plan was to retreat --

Kirk                   [mockingly] Plan A and plan B. (H)

Nelson                -- most of our forces across the garden and hide in the anthill.

Ted                    That was such an idiotic thing to do. (I)

Nelson                It wasn't. If we'd done it, there's no way you would ever have taken that hill.

Ted                    We blew you guys away in your first defensive position.

Nelson No you didn't!

Ted Yes we did.

Nelson We blew them off! That was our plan, to retreat, we were gonna leave. We had half our force up just waiting to drive away, not even in the battle. And it's only if ye hadn't wanted to quit just after we started to do that --

Ted No, you know why we had to quit, it's cause your father came over, you had to take a bath or something. (ll) Your father came over about eight o'clock and took you away.

Nelson You gave up!

Ted No.

Nelson [aggrieved] You told us not to retreat across the garden. You told us--

Ted No way!

[Mike enters. All talk at once.]

Nelson We weren't allowed up there. \

Ted Yes you were.

Mike What do you remember, Kirk?

Kirk We set up on the slope, I remember that.

Ted [disgusted] Baah.

Nelson We weren't allowed to the slope, we wanted to go right to the top of the anthill, and they wouldn't let us.

Kirk Was that the game that, the day after, Ted's father was there digging everything up ... trying to put everything back in place cause we'd gone and dug it up? ... We put lots of holes in Ted's garden.

Ted We used to do that all the time, though.

(SH24a)

Each pair of players in this particular game represents an army, using miniature troops. The context is Ted's backyard, representing a WWII-style battlefield. The structure and action are modelled on those of a battle, basically an attack-defense, retreat-advance pattern, with the potential outcome of one side losing utterly. A war-game continues to matter to group members long after it is over, and so they continue to heatedly debate its details a decade later. The intrinsic competition never ends.

The rules of a war-game are complex, and this group has used different rules for almost every game it has played. Sometimes they would send away for them through a catalogue, and sometimes they wrote their own using the mass-produced ones as a model. These involved specifications like the following: the heavier a tank, the slower it may move; when two tanks are in combat, dice are rolled to determine battle progress, with the score of 1 denoting a miss, 2 to 5 destroy, and 6 immobilize (SH24a). As Mike has pointed out, "it gets all complicated" (SH24a). It is generally agreed within the group that rules can make an important difference to the quality of a particular war-game, especially if they favour one side's circumstances.

- Mike            Whoever wrote the rules had a lot of power.
- Ted            We [Mike and I] wrote the rules most of the time, didn't we? ...
- Mike            We [all of us] used to get together sometimes. That [the dink area war-game] was the only time I wrote the rules, by myself.
- Susan            *But wouldn't everybody have to agree on them before you'd use them?*

- Ted                    No ...
- Kirk                    You [Mike] gave Garth your air rules before the game, but I didn't understand what you were doing in them, they were all convoluted, fifty million charts in there, they were really strange.
- Mike                    (I) I'd love to read them again.
- Susan                    *So could you skew the rules, favourably to yourself?*
- Mike                    A bit but not that much. I, I really thought that the faster things were the better they were.

(SH24a)

War-games would be played indoors in a spacious basement, or outdoors in a backyard. The advantage of playing outside is that players have real, diggable earth to work with. The advantage of playing inside is that bad weather and darkness do not interfere, but players must construct a satisfactorily realistic battlefield. Usually the group war-gamed indoors, especially as their scenarios grew more complex. Certain parts of the battlefield would be the players' own creations, while others were commercially manufactured for the purpose.

The items of material culture used in war-gaming occur on a continuum between purchased, commercial sources and the creations of the group. Purchased rules, equipment, and gaming scenarios lie at one end of the continuum, and "homemade" rules, equipment, and gaming scenarios at the other. This reflects the continuum between popular culture and folklore (Peter Narváez and Martin Laba, "The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum"). These elements may be combined; for example, purchased equipment may be governed by the group's own rules. Even elements devised by members have their roots in previously-played games and historical battles. Periodicals such as Battle for

Wargamers (a British monthly publication); catalogues such as The Old Soldier; masses of paperback descriptions of historic battles; and a huge, impressive volume of Jane's Weapon Systems (which Mike purchased at vast expense when he was eleven) had a pervasive influence.

Although many of the group's war-games were played in a setting created by the players, using realistic miniatures in a loose historic reconstruction of WWII battles, sometimes the historic reconstruction was of an earlier period, such as the Roman Empire:

- Mike . . . Remember that Roman Empire thing?
- Nelson . . . Yeah. That was so complicated that we never did much to it.
- Mike . . . Yeah, it was weird. The map was neat. I liked the map.
- Susan . . . *What is the Roman Empire thing, do you [Kirk know?]*
- Kirk . . . Well, one side was the Romans, and the other side was everyone else ...
- Nelson . . . We had all the rules set for barbarians infiltrating, the Romans along the frontier. And the Republics ah, rebelling every now and then.
- Kirk . . . Yeah, that's right.
- Nelson . . . They were rebelling too much. Like the first time two things rebelled, and the barbarians could sweep in. Half the legions were cut up ... Over a length of time the Romans should of lost, cause bit by bit they would have lost a bit of territory? And the Roman strength of the legions went down a lot of people ... but everything just exploded right at the start.
- Kirk . . . It wasn't the decline and fall, it was a --

- Nelson            Yeah, a race (ll) ... Everything just collapsed at one time, it was just gross. Half the legions were destroyed in, about a week?
- Kirk                Something like that ... that was one of the last ones we played, just a few years ago.
- Nelson            Yeah, just before you [Ted] first went away. Summer ... but Rome would have fell in six months, nothing could have stopped it.

(SH24b)

The war-games, as this conversation indicates, were only partial reconstructions, for their outcomes were necessarily uncertain. The players combined a chosen weapons technology with different locales in order to produce interesting battles, as Nelson and Ted did in a game they call *The Battle of St. John's*, using a map of their hometown (FN125, 31/10/85). Perhaps the most unusual war-game of all was Ted's campaign against ants (described on page 49). Generally, though, the group preferred WWII scenarios for two main reasons. To begin with, as Nelson put it,

it was a glorious war ... You got lots of variations, you know, tons of sides for us to be, couple of battles for us to fight out ... Modern stuff is too complicated. You could never play it reasonably .. It would happen too fast ... World War One is too boring, where you get men line up ... in trenches, "Charge!" and that's it. So unless you went back to Rome or the Napoleonic, there was nothing else to do. Korean War we could of done, if we wanted. But you know, why bother. (SH24b)

Furthermore, an exciting variety of battles was possible, with plenty of "sides" available for the players to choose from. The equipment, especially the tanks, was attractive, and models and rules were readily available. Another important reason for favouring WWII scenarios was that the group, most especially Nelson, was fascinated by the Germans.

I was always German when I could be. I only fought about two war-games when I wasn't ... Cause they're the coolest ... One small nation against the world. My God, of course they lost. They couldn't win. It's just amazing that they did as good as they did. but not only that, but their models are so much better. (Nelson, SH24b)

The others wholeheartedly agree with Nelson's assessment, and sometimes in the early games would bid to play the Germans themselves; "we used to fight over who was gonna be German" (Mike, SH24b).

The realistic details provided by carefully prepared settings and miniatures were sometimes forsaken for a popular culture version of war-gaming which is more abstract, but which requires less time and effort in preparation. This the members term *board war-gaming*, a title which alludes to the format it shares with many other popular culture games.<sup>57</sup> Most of these are marketed by the aforementioned Avalon-Hill Games Company. For example *Squadleader*, a particular favorite, is a WWII scenario of small-scale infantry battles within an urban context (Alex, SH19a).

The group has several times played a hobbyist's version of two-hundred year old *Kriegspiel*. Alex describes this as follows:

Ted would be at home, and usually ... he would be the game master and he would have one other person helping him. And he'd have this, the whole basement done out with trees, and, and all the different landscapes, rivers and anything else ... He'd set up the forces in different places, there'd be the Russians, the Germans and everything else. And there'd, you'd have two people at each house -- there'd be three, or four houses -- and you'd phone in your orders of where you wanted your men to go, and he'd give you responses like, "Well, you

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<sup>57</sup>Board wargames are popular among adults, much more widely so than the other games favoured by this group.

can see a certain number of tanks of an enemy force on the horizon" ... You'd have this map of the area at your house ... and your forces, and a bit of intelligence on the other forces. But that was it, and then you'd try to blow them away ... You didn't know where they were, you'd go for a long, long time not meeting anybody. But you'd have, you might have different radar detection devices, you might have spies ... it was fairly complex, it was good fun. (SH10a)

Even Richard enjoyed and participated in this game. One of the group's items of wordplay is derived from a *Kriegspiel* incident; *dust patterns*:

Mike            Garth phoned up once and said -- actually we were trying to figure out what was going on, you know, Nelson was the judge or something.

Nelson        [suppressed l] Yup.

Mike            And he said, there was a bit of movement over there. And Nelson said, "I saw a little movement in the distance," or something like that, and he [Garth] said, "What are the dust patterns like?" (ll)

Ted            It's just generally -- whenever in a *Kriegspiel* game, when you're the general sitting off in someone's house directing your army over at the other, at the house where the war-game's taking place, um, usually the judges give you a vague idea what's going on, so you're always sort of throwing out tendrils, desperately trying to grasp some idea what the heck's going on. And thus some of the rather desperate things like dust patterns (l), asking about dust patterns.

Mike            The idea of *Kriegspiel* you see, is that it's more like a real war, in that you don't know what's going on on the other side of the hill.

Kirk            You cut your line of communications, you lose contact with the other people.

Susan        *What can you learn from dust patterns?*

Ted            Ah, nothing, nothing. Just that there's something there.



Nelson                    It's a classical joke, like in *D and D* when you said, "I can create water". Same line of thought.

(SH24a)

The uncertain lines of communication in *Kriegspiel* add both realism and an extra dimension for players to puzzle over.

The common misconception about war-gaming which group members have encountered is that its primary concern is aggression, but this is far less emphasized than *strategy*, which is the central element in war-gaming, the area in which a good player must be adept and the one wherein gaming aesthetics come into play. Strategy is the art of war, the careful planning and directing of military operations. Strategy is the charm of war-gaming for this group.

War-gaming is primarily strategy, and as it happens, um, our culture sees military events as ... not only exciting but as *the* interesting events ... The interesting way of playing at strategy is to do it in a military context. But it's not really a violent game ... What we did with war-gaming is, make it into something more competitive. (Garth, SH5b)

After saying this, Garth plunged into a description of the *Arms Race*, which is indeed highly competitive (see page 29). Alex also argued that war-gaming has a competitive impulse which overrides the aggressive aspects:

It's not promoting war. I mean, in a way I think it shows you the terror of war ... because you do see the destruction on a symbolic level ... Someone does win, and someone does wipe someone else out sometimes. And that's winning, you say, yaay! And you have another battle. But at the same time, I mean, you're not treating it as if they're real people. I mean, you would never want to see a similar thing happen in a real setting. (SH19a)

Strategy varies among players. It reflects the strategy of real-life generals in some respects, but departs from it in others. Nelson, for example, states that "I

only fight when I can destroy everything I see; I only engage in battle when I know I'm gonna win" (SH20b). He believes that this strategy has won many battles for him. Kirk and Mike, he thinks, are "way too conservative," choosing to play "by the book, the way they should have done in real life," rather than "using the rules to win" as Ted and himself did (FN123, 31/10/85). Both strategies are realistic in their own ways: ruthlessly attempting to win is the way any general would fight, but on the other hand, she or he would not have access to all of the approaches possible in a game. In Ted's opinion, "the best war-games we had really was where there was always somebody on the defense, type of thing; we used to [also] have ones where everyone would just go charging at each other" (SH25a). There is not much strategy involved in a direct assault, and therefore it is less of an intellectual challenge. When Ted made this statement, Nelson agreed, replying, "Yeah, the best ones were ones where there was a defensive position being assaulted. Cause there was little to argue about."

Differing interpretations of the rules often resulted in arguments within this group, sometimes interfering with the game itself. The frustration of these disputes has brought about the only truly violent incidents within the group of which the researcher has been informed.

Nelson and I were always the fiery ones, we'd always be at each other's throats. And one time he leaned off and hurled a dice at me and hit me between the eyes. And another time... what I said made so much sense, so I hit him in the head. Oh it was vicious, Nelson and I used to argue so much. (Ted, SH9b)

One reason for these arguments is the extreme emotional involvement which the members of this group have in their war-gaming. When playing frequently, they

were intensely living a fantasy life as army generals, identifying themselves with, say, the German or the Russian cause of 1941. As military generals rather than young boys at play, their battles were deadly serious. This approach culminated in the Arms Race (discussed in detail on pages 29 to 32). Another reason for the arguments over war-gaming was the fierce competition between members. Each wanted very much to win, not only to succeed but also to temporarily prove superior to one another, thus gaining status. Yet the urge to preserve the group has proved stronger than the urge for individual supremacy and the fascination with war-gaming. Ted observes that when *D and D* came along it sort of shoved the war-games aside and I think that was a good idea ... they'd gotten much too competitive\* (SH9a).

These young men still play the occasional war-game together, but only a few times each year for a couple of sessions. *Dungeons and Dragons* has proved to be a vehicle for competition every bit as fierce as the group experienced in its war-games. The two forms of gaming, as this group plays them, have much in common.

### **Dungeons and Dragons**

In fantasy role-playing games, players develop heroic characters who adventure together in imaginary worlds. *Dungeons and Dragons* was the first fantasy role-playing game ever published, and continues to be the most popular of them all. As of 1979 it was being played by at least 300,000 North Americans, a number which has probably doubled by now (Livingstone 23). Countless others in

the English-speaking world also play *D and D*. Thus, the game has become a form of mass entertainment, recreated in unique variants by this and other groups. The members of this group were, to their knowledge, the first to play in Newfoundland, and must be among the most enthusiastic players anywhere.

Gary Alan Fine makes a thorough sociological study of fantasy role-playing games in his Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds. In this work he contrasts collective fantasy with individual dreaming; the former is constructed through communication and is subject to cultural constraints, the latter is free and random (3). Group immersion in a fantasy world is similar to shared psychosis but differs in that most players easily distinguish fantasy from reality (12).<sup>58</sup> The world of fantasy role-playing games is created by one of the members and influenced by players' shared understanding of medieval culture as well as contemporary political and cultural forms and attitudes (75). The creator (also called referee, dungeon master, or DM) of the fantasy world in role-playing games is not the only player having creative input into the game. Each, excepting the referee, takes on a character which is developed as the game proceeds.

[The] relation between person-self and role-self in fantasy gaming depends upon the player, the components of the role, and the expectations of the group. Sometimes the gamer plays *himself* as his character, on other occasions the gamer essentially becomes a different person. (Fine, 206)

The players are not so much performing roles as storytelling them, "each storyteller having authority over one character -- producing a collective fantasy" (214).

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<sup>58</sup>The debate about whether a given item of popular culture is a negative model or an escape valve is a familiar one. Bruno Bettelheim suggests that märchen help keep a child's fantasies in check (66), and the same may be said of *Dungeons and Dragons* for teenagers.

*Dungeons and Dragons* has its basis in war-gaming, and its history has a similar pattern to that of this group. The game is so complex that it can be properly understood only through playing, but a description of its essential elements will be attempted here.

Gary Gygax, the creator of *D and D*, war-gamed with miniatures from an early age just as did the members of this group. In a magazine interview with Ian Livingstone in 1979, he revealed that his particular interest was in medieval war-gaming using only a few figures, with whom he could identify more readily than an army. From this experimentation came the idea to create a fantasy world around the battling, and Gygax decided to market this concept. In 1973 he formed the *Tactical Studies Rules* Corporation (TSR) with some friends, and started publishing handbooks of instructions for a game he called *Dungeons and Dragons*. (Livingstone 23.) A few years later Gygax produced three manuals for a more complex version, which he termed *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*. This is the game played by the study group, although they refer to it simply as *Dungeons and Dragons* or *D and D*.

Gygax defines his game in glowing terms as:

a fantasy game of role playing which relies upon the imagination of participants, for it is certainly make-believe, yet it is so interesting, so challenging, so mind-unleashing that it comes near reality (Player's Handbook 7).

Unlike other sophisticated popular culture games of recent origin, material props are peripheral rather than essential to *D and D*; there are a few reference books, maps, writing paraphernalia, and a set of dice with varying numbers of sides. The activity is essentially cerebral, and occurs in any context where a group may meet regularly and in comfort.

Before proceeding with a description of how *Dungeons and Dragons* is played, some mention should be made of the exoteric views of the game. As with other conspicuous subcultural activities, it has often been met with sensationalist criticism in the press<sup>50</sup> (Hebdige 92). Claims have been made that *D and D* leads to teenage suicide and involvement in the occult, although psychologists argue that the game is a creative and cooperative outlet (Fisher 15; Hart 13). This controversy parallels the one surrounding märchen, which many modern parents and educators believe to be shockingly violent, and which are often purged of disturbing elements or not told to children at all. Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim admits that if the märchen were taken as depictions of reality they would indeed be outrageous, but as symbols of psychological happenings or problems these stories are true to life (155). Märchen stimulate the imagination, address inner concerns on a subconscious level, and portray the possibility of triumphing over evil and adversity (4-8). Not only does *D and D* involve many märchen elements, as will be shown, but it also functions in ways similar to märchen. Bettelheim notes that adolescents deprived of märchen in childhood frequently develop magical beliefs, including fantasy worlds, through the use of drugs, gurus, astrology and the occult, or "in some other fashion escape from reality into daydreams about magical experiences which are to change their life for the better" (50-51). This is precisely what the group under consideration does when it plays *Dungeons and Dragons*. This modern game is just one of the newly devised vehicles for fantasy, which are filling the void left by the decline of

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, "Popular Fantasy Game Taken Too Seriously?" by John Picton, *Metro*; and an interview with David Hart in *The Evening Telegram*. "Memorial professor defends Dungeons and Dragons Game."

traditional narrative performance. The behaviour of *D and D* heroes, like that of märchen heroes, would be unacceptable in our everyday world, but understood on a symbolic level it is highly functional for working out of adolescent needs and problems. The game provides an opportunity for imaginative exploration of unconscious concerns, and for vicarious moral success, just as märchen do.

One game of *D and D* will last through numerous sessions, each several hours in duration. Each game is termed a *campaign*, reflecting the military origins of *D and D*. The first step in a campaign depends on individual initiative; one of the players decides to create a world as a scenario for a campaign. This person draws a map, creating various regions and place-names. Then he or she peoples the world and creates various cultures and a history for them. The nomenclature and cultures are freely drawn from history and fantasy literature, as well as from popular culture and the imagination. Finally, adventure scenarios are constructed: dungeons with treasures to be captured and monsters escaped, towns to be saved from evil sorcerers, and so on. Many of the details must be refined as the campaign proceeds in unforeseeable directions. The creator of the world is the *dungeon master*, often termed DM, and this is the player with the most to do during the campaign. The DM holds the position of an omnipotent, omnipresent god of the world he or she has created. This is the position of greatest power and responsibility within *D and D*. The DM must balance gaming elements so as to achieve the best possible gaming experience for all: realism versus fantasy, her or his own dictatorship versus anarchy (Fine, Shared Fantasy 80-85).

The second step in embarking on a campaign is focussed on the other players and their roles as *player characters*, variously referred to as *PC's*, *characters*, or by name. Each player must roll dice to determine the six character abilities, which are strength, dexterity, intelligence, wisdom, charisma and constitution. Three six-sided dice are rolled to determine a score of between three and eighteen, but the dice are rolled more than six times so that players will have a chance to achieve some high scores. This is essential for the survival of a character. Thus, there is an element of chance enough to approximate the real-life fact that one cannot choose one's abilities, and yet this chance is controlled in such a way that these abilities are likely to be sufficient to enable success within the fantasy world. For example, a player may desire the top intelligence score of eighteen, but after rolling the dice a couple of times must settle for twelve, which is still better than the lowest score of three.

On the basis of these ability scores and the player's own predilections, the player next chooses a race, a class (i.e. profession), and an alignment for her or his character. One may be a dwarf, hobbit, gnome, elf, half-elf, human, or half-orc.<sup>60</sup> One may choose to be a cleric (worshipping one of the world's deities), fighter, magic-user, thief, or monk, depending on one's ability and race. Thirdly, as to *alignment*, a character may be good, neutral or evil, and of chaotic or lawful bent. A character's behaviour must be consistent with its alignment. The race, class and alignment of a character are chosen to complement those of other characters in an adventuring party. It is considered best to have a mixture; not

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<sup>60</sup> While most of these "races" will be familiar to anybody brought up on *märchen*, the hobbit and orc are derived from LOTR. Hobbits are short, chubby, placid, sturdy peasant-folk. Orcs are a gruesome, evil parody of elves; they are ugly, darkness-loving, argumentative, and strong.



all fighters, for example. Chaotic evil characters are too disruptive to be tolerated by most groups.

Two aspects of the character are developed as the campaign proceeds: *hit points* and *experience points*. Hit points represent how much damage one can sustain before being killed. Dice are rolled to determine the number of hit points at the beginning of the campaign, and the resultant number may be decreased when the character is weary or has been injured in battle, and restored when she or he has rested or been cured. The loss of all hit points results in death. *Experience points* are gained throughout the campaign, the DM awarding them according to the adventures experienced and the character's success in them. A character who has accumulated a large enough number of experience points may move up a *level* and acquire more hit points, as well as other bonuses. For example, a magic-user will be able to learn more powerful spells. There are at least twenty-one levels. All characters start out at first level, and those adventuring together gain experience at much the same rate.<sup>61</sup>

The third step is to choose a *quest* for the player characters. The DM will situate all characters in the same locale, arrange for them to meet, and give them one or two opportunities for an adventure. The quest is commonly motivated by the desire to acquire wealth, either as a treasure the characters seek to gain for themselves or as a reward for achieving a goal set by a wealthy patron. The underlying aim is to acquire as many experience points as possible, thus gaining ever more power. Characters start out with a small amount of money, in the

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<sup>61</sup> See Appendix E.

form of gold or silver pieces, with which they purchase armour and other minimal supplies. Finally they set out on their quest or adventure.

The dungeon master makes the quest realistic through various means. Information is carefully controlled: players are not permitted complete maps, only as much of a map as the characters would have available to them "in real life". If they meet a monster the like of which they have never seen, it is described to them and they have to figure out what it is and how to deal with it on their own. The characters are subjected to the normal vicissitudes of travel: storms, the need to sleep, the antipathy of strangers, getting lost. Time passes, so that during a few hours of play, days or even weeks may pass within the campaign. These are carefully recorded. The realism is limited, however; character's travel is livened up by an extraordinary number and variety of adventures, and death is often followed by resurrection.

The players and their characters must cooperate to survive and achieve their goals. They are necessarily suspicious of any strangers they meet. All strangers are defined as *monsters* until closer acquaintance reveals their intentions. The DM creates numerous *non-playing characters* or NP's, who may help or harry the group. The characters journey, not only through relatively uninhabited countryside, but also into towns and villages, and very often into dungeons. Most dungeons are extraordinarily complex, containing several levels, dangerous traps, bizarre monsters, and marvellous treasures. Some campaigns focus entirely on one dungeon. The players create, name and develop a personality for one or two characters each, with whom they closely identify and through whom they experience adventures.

Three kinds of artifacts are involved in *D and D*: those necessary to play the game, those generated by it, and optional aids. Three books by Gary Gygax are essential to playing *D and D*, each with a lurid cover depicting at least one threatening monster: the Player's Handbook, Dungeon Masters Guide, and Monster Manual.<sup>62</sup> These may be used by the DM throughout the campaign, but the other players are not permitted to refer to them during play. The first two explain details of the game; Player's Handbook is subtitled:

a compiled volume of information for players of advanced Dungeons and Dragons, including: character races, classes, and level abilities; spell tables and descriptions; equipment costs; weapons data; and information on adventuring.

The Monster Manual is "an alphabetical compendium of all of the monsters found in advanced Dungeons and Dragons, including attacks, damage, special abilities, and descriptions." Most of the monsters are also pictured. The monsters are drawn from three sources: reality (ape, barracuda, dinosaur, snake, giant squid), myth and legend (dragon, elf, ghost, minotaur, ogre, sphinx, succubus, unicorn), and fantasy literature (from LOTR, the giant eagle, orc, and giant spider). Some of the monsters are original creations. Not everything listed in the Monster Manual is evil, the alignment being indicated for each creature. Another essential to *D and D* is a selection of dice, having four, six, eight, twelve, or twenty sides. These are used constantly by the DM to determine everything from a character's hit-points, to the progression of a battle, to whether or not the group will be ambushed, to the likelihood of rain. The aim of using dice is to produce results as random as they would be in reality. Learning how to use them to best effect is one of the skills necessary to DMing.

<sup>62</sup>More than one monster manual is now available, but this group has mainly used the first one.

Many details of the world created by the dungeon master are generated as the campaign occurs. All the players take notes on the progression of the game -- mapping, recording hit points, delineating their characters in an ever greater depth. Somebody may keep record of the campaign history as well. The DM necessarily keeps the most detailed records.

Optional aids may enhance the campaign but are not central to it. Lead miniatures of monsters and character-types may be ordered from catalogues and painted by the players. These are decorative and can be helpful during battle or the exploration of a dungeon, in that their placement in relation to one another helps players visualize the scene. Magazines such as White Dwarf, Judges Guild, and Dragon provide advertisements for gaming paraphernalia, new ideas, new monsters (as suggested by readers), and interviews with prominent gaming personalities. Special modules of gaming scenarios can also be purchased by a DM, lessening his or her creative burden; these generally provide the plan of a dungeon or city and its peoples and contents, as well as a brief history. This can be modified by the DM so as to fit in well with the rest of the world.

*Dungeons and Dragons* is not unique; there are similar games such as *Chivalry and Sorcery* and *Runequest*. Other mass marketed role-playing games take on different themes. *Traveller* and *Gamma World* are science fiction games, involving much spaceship technology. *Boothill* is modelled on western movies, and *Bunnies and Burrows* on the widely popular novel by Richard Adams, about the travels and battles of a tribe of British rabbits, Watership Down. This group has tried playing some of these games, but has not found any of them so absorbing as *Dungeons and Dragons*.

*Dungeons and Dragons* is played differently in every campaign and every group. The fact that this group began its gaming in isolation from others means that the form and significance of its *D and D* is atypical. For example, Fine comments that *D and D* was designed more simply and with less sociological simulation than some other fantasy role-playing games, and as such is favoured by younger players (18). Whereas the older players he observed tended to move on to other games as their tastes become more sophisticated, the members of the study group developed the game to suit themselves, moulding it into a game with more emphasis on culture and social structure (see Appendix E). Rather than growing out of the game, they made it grow along with them.

Because *D and D* is too complex to be easily explained, the members of this group refused to describe it for me. Alex states the consensus opinion:

If people are interested in it, then they come along and try out, and try it out and see if they like it. It's not the kind of thing you talk about for hours before anybody's tried to play. (SH21a)

Players learn the game through a period of apprenticeship, their style being shaped by the more experienced players who guide them.

When the members of this group started to play *D and D*, they were forced to be especially original because they had no experienced players to show them how. They were isolated and the game was very new. "I think a lot of it for us was, we started it when it was ... sort of an underground type thing, even the way they [its creators] had it presented" (Ted, SH5b). As indicated earlier, the group's early play was rather confused and unsophisticated. The members do not regret these beginnings, though; now there is such a welter of instructions available that there is little room for originality in developing characters and new monsters. Mike says that the game has become:

too complicated. People starting now, oh, I feel sorry for them ... We started off with almost nothing and were able to [develop our own style] -- characters were the most important thing. (Mike, SH24b)

The group's war-gaming experience strongly influenced its *D and D* gaming style.

We had a lot of ... very technical army stuff done out, and all our campaigns, everything was all based on military [strategy] ... The battles we fought were all fought out [in detail], and done war-gaming-type way. And a lot of the administration [was militaristic] ... there was no anarchy anywhere in the world ... war-gaming affected the way *D and D* was set up. (Nelson, SH25a)

*D and D* thus contains some war-gaming elements, but in addition permits much more imaginative play for its gamers.

Lord of the Rings is an especially strong influence on this group's *D and D*. It has guided their playing style, forming a set of shadow rules; "we didn't judge by *D and D* rules, we judged by what it was like in Lord of the Rings" (Mike SH25a). Similarly, Kirk says:

What we did was to take Lord of the Rings and graft it onto *D and D*. Thus Ted's early campaigns were basically Lord of the Rings remakes, though of course he injected his own ideas into it ... You'll find us quoting things from Lord of the Rings [during play], memorable lines. And we have a sort of Lord of the Rings perspective of how *D and D* should be played, and what the game's supposed to be like. Nelson was mad about dwarves, you remember that, he was always quoting things about dwarves from Lord of the Rings ... Acts that they did, the Mines of Moria you know, that was a big thing. (SH10b)

Other science fiction books and movies have been used as sources for characters and scenarios in the group's gaming, but only Lord of the Rings has actually affected its playing style. The trilogy is so intrinsic to their approach that Nelson required Phil to read it before participating in *D and D*.

- Phil He said, "I won't let you in [my campaign] unless you've read Lord of the Rings."
- Mike That's cause people who didn't read Lord of the Rings came in [to 'the Creative Gaming Society] ... they didn't have a clue -- no character ...
- Nelson They based it [their play] on modern fantasy movies.
- Kirk And comics.
- Nelson Superman-type, Conan stuff.
- Mike No character, hack-and-slash.
- Ted I like it best when it's mostly human-oriented, you know, not all those ridiculous -- you don't go into a town and you're in a town with all bugbears or something like that. I like sort of going through the pastoral villages, and the odd weird thing occasionally happens.

(SH25a)

From Lord of the Rings, the group has acquired an interest in rich character development in their role-playing and relatively plausible worlds along the lines of Lord of the Rings Middle Earth. The emphasis on fighting scenarios by other gamers, termed *hack and slash*, is not favoured by these young men. This may appear surprising when their war-gaming background is considered, but for two factors. Firstly, they aspire to replicate the experience of reading Lord of the Rings in their gaming. Secondly, their competition is evidenced in more subtle ways within the game.

Let us trace the steps of preparing and playing a campaign of *D and D* again, this time with reference to how they occur in this group's gaming.

To begin with, somebody creates a world. This is ideally an experienced player, but since all members of the group, except for Phil, are about equally

experienced, each of them except for Phil has been dungeon master at least once. The world is usually loosely modelled upon some source from fantasy literature or history. Ted's world was especially influenced by LOTR.<sup>63</sup> However, he explicitly states that various of his world's cultures are similar to the Vikings, Saxons and Byzantines. Much of Ted's nomenclature and even parts of his world map, are also reminiscent of these historic cultures. It is significant that these are all cultures which flourished in the early Middle Ages; a modern concept of medieval times provides the setting for all *D and D*. Kirk drew upon Celtic mythology in particular when he designed his dungeons, being fascinated by its mystical, magical qualities (SH11b). Alex likes to draw upon ancient religions and emphasize the effects of deity-worship in his campaigns.

The essential facet of a *Dungeons and Dragons* world, from the point of view of gamers, is abundant opportunity for adventure. Alex describes a few scenarios he prepared as a dungeon master, and the adventures the other players had with them, as follows:

Valuna was a country ... There was ah, nine divisions in the country, nine provinces ... one of them was Vermabonk, which was the biggest one, and that was down to the south, and that's where the characters started ... It was ruled by an arch-cleric of the religion of St. Cuthbert ... it was basically a very good place, whatever that means, fairly civilised and all the rest of it ...

Well, the arch-cleric had a lot of problems, because the country had this temple in it; this awful temple which was ah, some great evil dwelled there. And it kept invading the territory around it, there were lots of bandits coming from it. It was *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, it was a huge place that had grown before and had had a massive force of about fifteen thousand orcs and things like that. And it had been destroyed, but now the Evil was growing again ...

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<sup>63</sup> As is shown in Appendix E.



And there was also another thing, where the country to the north was ruled by this king ... and his son, who was going to succeed him very shortly, had been kidnapped by the Temple of Elemental Evil. Now what was supposed to happen when his son became king, was Valuna and Feriondae were going to unite as one strong country. But the son had been kidnapped, so they couldn't unite.

So that was an adventure which the characters in the campaign spent ages trying to solve, and they never did solve it ... In the end I just had an NPC called Cyclo. He had one eye, he was a Paladin, and he was a lawful good guy. And he went into the temple and found the prince and brought him back and everything was happy. But it really irritated the characters ... and they knew Cyclo. They liked him, but they didn't like him as much after that. He was a really neat guy.

*Why were they trying to find the prince?*

The money ... and land, lots of land for building castles, and power. All the usual incentives. But they saved the world six or seven times ... they had a good track record.

*Could you tell me about one the adventures, one of the times they saved the world?*

... There are some really silly ones which sound really silly, but they were fun at the time.

Ah, one day, everyone woke up and there was this huge black cloud which was filling the world, and (I) pretty soon the black cloud had shut off the sun, and there was this blackness everywhere. It was very dark and awful ... and everyone was dying because the food was running out, because they couldn't grow food without the sun ... Lasted quite awhile, and people were pretty nervous about this because they figured they were going to die pretty soon ... So um, the adventurers were called in.

There were hints about where this black cloud was coming from, so they went down to the Wild Coast, and ah, in the forest was this ... massive chimney, which was creating all this black smoke -- obviously through magic as well -- and there was a dungeon underneath ... it was ruled by fire giants, lots of fire giants, and ... [the ruler] was a really powerful guy, he wasn't a human, he was some kind of mindflayer mutant. Mindflayers are really gross things ... they're really intelligent, they have psionics so they can attack you with their mind, and you know, just drive you insane or kill you. And this was a really powerful one, he was vicious.

*And how can you defend yourself?*

You have to have psionics yourself, otherwise you're in big trouble ... Kirk's character, Judas Redshield did, but it wasn't -- see, having psionics is bad unless you have a lot of them, because people attack you if you have psionics? They attack you psionically ... If this guy had three hundred points of psionics and Judas had a hundred,

Judas was finished. There was nothing he could do ... these mindslayers take your brain out with their tentacles, they wrap their tentacles around your face. It only takes one, about one to four minutes of fighting, which isn't very long in *D and D* time ...

It took a long, long, long time but they finally stopped the problem, and I really can't remember how ... I can remember there was a gate to the Astral Plane at some point, very close to the stopping of black smoke. They had to turn the chimney off basically, that's what I can remember ... there was a lot of casualties I believe, among characters. SH19b

Alex's interest in religion is demonstrated with the inclusion of a priest-king, and The Temple of Evil. The quest format is in evidence, but its outcome proves uncertain; the player's characters do not succeed in the first quest, and are naturally resentful when an NPC saves the prince and receives the rewards for which they had been striving. The quest in this group's gaming is frequently to "save the world," as it was for the adventurers in LOTR. When Alex and other group members describe *D and D* scenarios, they do so in the manner of the narrator of a personal experience narrative. Indeed, these are past personal experiences they are talking about, just as real in their memory as any non-fantastic adventure.

The dungeon master must balance the campaign so that it is neither too difficult nor too easy for its player-characters; he or she must avoid both the pole of autoocracy and the pole of complicity with player demands. A DM too absorbed with power will not keep the game going very long, because the players are in a weaker position and will certainly fail quickly; as Garth states the matter, "he's not providing you with insurmountable threats ... because that would just end the game very quickly, that would not be interesting" (SH5a). Sometimes a DM will become too attached to plans for a given scenario, and as a result over-insistent

that the players "choose" a certain course of action. When Richard was DMing, he sometimes avoided such frustrations by simply telling his players what had happened and giving them no choice in the matter, using the prefacing statement "to make a long story short" (SH25b). But as Alex states, "it's nice to have lots of choices for the characters, so they feel that they have some freedom, and they're not being pushed to do certain things" (SH21a; see A.2.1). Yet it is sometimes frustrating to prepare an exciting scenario, only to have the player characters bypass or miff it.

You have something perfectly designed that you wanted them to do, and they go do something totally different. So you do something like give them a pizza. (Ted, SH25b)

Ted actually did have a fantasy pizza delivered by an NPC to his characters on one occasion; they treated it with great suspicion. At the other extreme, a DM can be too attentive to the player's wishes; this group scorns dungeon masters who give the players whatever they want, as this makes things too easy. Although they grumble about having had to sleep in their armour every night for fear of attack during Ted's campaign, the consensus is that the difficulties provided worthwhile challenge.

One particular conversation with Mike, Phil and Alex yielded several interesting statements concerning dungeon mastering (see A.2.1). Mike declared that although he enjoys creating a world, "I don't like the responsibility" of being DM, and he prefers developing a character. Ted and Alex, on the other hand, have elsewhere voiced their predilections for DMing, and their view that playing a character is unsatisfying. The two different roles are evidently suited to certain tastes and abilities which not all group members share. Somebody who begins a

campaign as DM but does not enjoy it, simply allows it to peter out. The detailed work of creating a world is also discussed:

You do that on your own, you spend hours and hours and days and days and weeks and weeks, writing up all this stuff about a world ... and you detail countries and towns and cities and villages, things like that, depending on how detailed you want to get. (Alex)

The group members voiced disapproval of other styles of *D and D* gaming, when they involve such things as allowing players besides the DM to have a say in creating the world, or playing isolated scenarios rather than linked ones in a detailed world. On the subject of characters, it was agreed that even dungeon masters may partake of the joys of character development, using any NPC's they care to develop and make important.

Character development is of central importance in the *D and D* of this group. This can only be achieved through a long, varied campaign in a large world. Alex believes that interaction with non-player characters or NPC's is essential to such development (see A.2.1). Interaction between player characters is also viewed to be very important; some rather violent examples of character development are Nelson's elf-hating dwarf and Michael's bloodthirsty assassin.

High-level characters possess castles, many followers and servants, and obviously much wealth.

There is some debate within the group about the value of using character alignments. Mike argues that it is unrealistic to assume that anybody is consistently good or evil. (The same has been argued concerning *märchen* characters.) Yet within the game, if the DM believes that a character is not being consistent with its alignment, he might penalize the player. For example, Ted

once lowered a character of Kirk's by two levels for rampaging about attacking innkeepers and such with Nelson's dwarf when he was supposed to be behaving as a "good" character (SH21a). Some players, like Alex, choose to play good characters because it matches their real-life alignment. Others, like Mike, prefer evil characters because he "always found it useful to do evil acts ... [that way] you get more freedom of action" (SH21a). Fine has observed that, depending upon the individual role components and group expectations, a gamer may play as himself or as a different person; this accords with the experience of the study group (206).

A character's alignment is a lesser consideration than its personality among the members of this group. The latter may not advance the game particularly, but in their view it enhances it a great deal.

I was very into developing characters as -- I think the key word is as *richly* as possible, getting really into them as people almost ... and of course I didn't get anywhere near it but I was getting somewhere ... I thought that was the true essence of *D and D*. (Kirk, SH11a)

Other members also strive for character depth, although Kirk has been the leader in this respect. Fine corroborates this finding when he suggests that character realism is rewarded by the gaming group rather than gaming outcome (Shared Fantasy 212).

These players can vividly describe characters from past campaigns, of their own and each other's creation, in the same manner one would speak of heroes or old acquaintances. Richard recalls a dwarf character of Nelson's from Ted's campaign:

Balin-Dwalin was everybody's nemesis. This perverse, real-politic Machiavellian character. The mad dwarf of Bodo ... He was just out to rid everyone off, and accumulate power and wealth. (SH8a)

A player might possess more than one character at a time, so as to provide variety of alignments as well as more opportunity for activity. Alex talks about two characters Mike had when he (Alex) was DMing:

Xexadomes was a magic-user, and Malagate was a fighter-assassin ... I usually let them have two, that was the thing at the time ... In Ted's campaign there were two for most people ... Cause if you're a magic-user it can get boring, cause you don't do much. You just do a big thing once in awhile -- like you'll cast a fireball, and then you'll sit around for half an hour doing nothing. And it's nice to have a fighter and a magic-user, so you'll have a good variation, you know ... [One of Michael's characters] used to spend months and months and years in towns... and he used to spend all his time there thieving and politicking, you know just getting involved in the social structure and being generally evil. He had a children's milk fund going in the city ... just a front. He was going to run for elections but he never got around to it. And he was trying to create a good image, which he ruined several times by murdering people. (SH10b)

Phil affectionately recalls one of Alex's characters, somewhat unusual within *D and D*, named Dennis Satchel.

Phil He was really beautiful, I loved him ... he was one of the greatest characters I've ever seen ... He was just a gnome and he wasn't mad or vicious, he was just meek and in fact he wore red shorts and sandals ... and an earring ... He was different from the others who were usually big, tough.

Mike Everyone else was sort of -- big flying capes and hats were mandatory ...

Alex He was an existentialist ...

Mike Sort of holier-than-thou.

Phil Kind of nice, though. My character became quite good friends [with Dennis].

(SH21b)

These young men evidence a marvellously visual image and emotional reaction to a character whom they have never "really" seen or met. Their shared fantasy is richly detailed indeed.

After playing a character for a long time, one is likely to form an attachment to it, and strenuously avoid its death within the campaign. Fine notes that players whose characters are killed tend to resent the DM, and of course there is the problem that a new character would not be on the same level as others in the group. Resurrection is a commonly used solution which preserves group harmony (Shared Fantasy 221). Yet sometimes a DM allows a character to die irrevocably as Alex explains, "otherwise there's no fun to it ... no element of danger" (SH19b). Garth points out that "the main mechanism that the dungeon master has for threatening his players, for really putting them on the spot and making them perform well, is to physically threaten them" (SH5a). This threat is only effective to the degree that the players are attached to their characters; this is very high within the group under consideration. Whereas the members will go to great lengths, both by trying to escape death within the game and by trying to cajole the DM, outsiders they know of treat their characters merely as replaceable components of the game. The members of this group have a remarkable emotional involvement with their characters. The following conversation, which focusses upon the members' cooperative roles in group gaming with specific reference to Ted's campaign, also illustrates their engrossment in their characters:

Nelson

Mike'd always be the guy who said, "Okay, now we're moving," and we'd buy rations, blah blah blah blah blah blah blah. Kirk maybe came in when

like technical stuff; when, when things went wrong in battle I'd yell at Kirk, "What spell do you have? Think of something." (ll)

Kirk \ Put me to memorize certain things [magic spells].

Nelson ... I'd be there, ah, we gotta destroy the, you know, a tree troll or something ... "What spells are good against a troll?" Kirk'd bing-bing-bing-bing-bing. And I'd go, "Good, okay" ... Mike'd get us to the combat, he'd be in control, making sure we were all together. And as soon as we'd get to the combat I'd usually take over ... and then I'd look at Kirk and say, "Okay, how many hit-points does he [the monster] have?" Kirk'd be there, "Three to five hit die, probably twenty-five hit points." Ah, "What armour, what spells?" Kirk'd name off all this information, and I'd [use it] -- ah! And when things'd go bad I'd blame it on Mike. (ll)

Phil When in doubt, blame Mike.

Kirk ... We worked quite well together.

Nelson ... Mike would even look after my sheets, cause I wouldn't look after them -- knocking off hit points, arrows, anything like that, I wouldn't mark anything down ... Kirk'd look after all the technical information. I'd be bored when we were travelling, and then when it came to the combat and arguing with Ted about rolls and levels, I'd do that ...

Kirk Yeah, we found that when other people joined in [it didn't work] -- like, Stuart would play his character to excess ... he wouldn't play particularly sensibly. He had a very powerful character, but it didn't fit in with the way the rest of us played ... With hindsight, as a team we worked together quite well ... [Stuart didn't play] how I'd imagine an adventurer would actually play. An adventurer would be a lot more cautious, that's how he would have survived so long. But ah, anyway.

Nelson ... My character would be the one leading the battle, but when things started to go wrong my character would also be the one to retreat.



- Kirk (I) Lead the retreat.
- Nelson Stuart and George didn't key up on mine. They treated it as a game. They didn't care or mind if their character was killed ... "Roll up a new one, get me raised, I wanna go back and fight again." Where you see, if Balin was killed I'd cry. I die, scream, yell, die just to get my character from being killed. And if he was [killed], oh I'd just -- ahh, total terror. And that's what made it work, was the fact that we were afraid to die. It's no good otherwise.
- Kirk ... That's how an adventurer *would* work.
- Nelson Stuart wasn't afraid to die, but we were.
- Susan *Took away the reality.*
- Nelson Yeah, exactly. We were -- it was real. If my character died, that last five hit points were the same as me dying. I mean I cried, screamed, do anything to get that character from being killed. And the same with Mike, and same with Kirk, only thing Kirk wouldn't yell, you know, openly scream at Ted.

(SH28a)

The varying skills of each individual have been used and appreciated by the group as a harmonious whole. The harmony was disrupted when outsiders temporarily joined the campaign but acted independently on all fronts. Although Phil joined the gaming late, he adroitly moulded his style to that of the others, and by cooperating with the other members passed one of the unofficial tests necessary for group membership.

Not only does *Dungeons and Dragons* involve group cooperation, but also it has brought the members closer in other ways. It gave them a focus after they had lost enthusiasm for war-gaming, and also gave them a reason to continue socializing together. Furthermore, the game strengthened the group bond through the intensity of its play:

There was a bonding process there [with *D and D*] ... It was a good process. Yeah, it made, made us closer ... well, now we have this whole field of shared experience. (Richard, SH8a)

For a group of people who prefer not to express their personal feelings directly, and yet wish to communicate meaningfully together, *D and D* has been a rewarding source of emotional expression.

Well, it brings everyone together, just like a bar or music, you know? So that's -- but it's something more than that as well because, more than just bringing you together it gets you involved together. So you get to know each other through the game almost, you know? And it's something else in common as well. I mean, when you get together with someone, you've gotta have something to talk about, right? And *D and D* provides a lot to talk about as you probably know. (II) I mean, music does the same thing, right? It's a medium for communication. (Alex, SH15a)

Even now that the group no longer plays *D and D*, the game continues to perform its communicative function in member's conversations, and the campaigns they have shared still bond them.

Although *Dungeons and Dragons* fosters cooperation, it is also a forum for competition and argument within this group. Garth states that the members altered the game for their competitive purposes. On a related tangent, Richard states that members resisted the cooperative overtones of the game in favour of independence and the opportunity to create the supreme character:

Having the bigger character, higher experience points, the more spells you had, the more prestige, that type of thing. The more power you were able to wield. Basically what it came down to was the ability of your character to operate alone. (SH8a)

As characters reached higher levels and became increasingly powerful, the group would split into two or three subgroups seeking separate adventures within a

world. They began empire-building, and brought international diplomacy to *D* and *D* to resolve conflicts between their regional interests. This became increasingly intense, the competition peaking during the *civil war* of Ted's campaign:

The game does not really in its design foster competition between players. However, as we played it ah, it very much did. That's one thing that ah, made our style of play so interesting, because we ... didn't so much play as one group for one thing. After awhile there were ah, maybe just a few too many players...more than really could get along amicably within a [single] group. And more than could function effectively within a group. So we, we split up ... we played as different groups and the dungeon master, in an exceptionally brilliant way, ah, played us off against each other ... As it developed, what we were fighting was not artificial threats posed by the dungeon master. We were working against other human players whose calculations were intended not to make for an interesting game, which is the dungeon master's motivation, but were ... to advance themselves by getting rid of you. So they -- within the context of the game they posed a very real threat ... This contact only occasionally occurred in face-to-face situations where the characters were actually facing each other ... the dungeon master was very good about keeping us apart. It was in his interests to do that ... Most of the competition did take the form of political maneuverings, raising of armies. Sort of indirect -- indirectly threatening each other .. Both groups really considered themselves threatened by the other group, um, but the ... whole thing was a construct of the dungeon master, he played us off against each other and made us believe that this oth- that these other groups were working against us, and made them believe that we were working against them. And really, by combining genuine competition between individuals with his own ability ... to manipulate us and keep us from actually destroying each other, he made for a very, very interesting game. Um, the competition within the context of the game ... became very intense, more-so than *Dungeons and Dragons* is supposed to be, and that's one element of our style of play. (Garth, SH5a)

With hindsight, they realised that much of this conflict was due to Ted's clever manipulations. Nelson compared notes with Mike afterwards, only to discover that each had been misled by Ted about the other's intentions and activities (Nelson, SH25b). Meanwhile, the conflict resulted in Mike's character killing

Nelson's beloved Tim the Magician. Kirk, whose character was on Tim's side, recalls:

That was a surprise attack, without any warning. There was some justification for it because we were sort of half-considering an attack on them, you know, the rivalry had grown fairly intense. But essentially they were the aggressors ... And we'd played so long, and we'd developed our characters and our possessions so much, that to do something like that was a serious move (SH10b)

Resentment concerning this episode did not subside for some time, and the members avoided repeating such disastrous conflict. They never played quite as intensely again. The game had become, at least for a time, dysfunctional to the group.

Sometimes the competition within *D and D* has ranged towards teasing and other humour:

We just did as many wicked things to each other as we could. We ... often didn't follow the game at all, we just cracked jokes or did ridiculous things to the DM's plans, just made the DM mad, and things like that. For a long time that appeared to be the main purpose of playing *D and D*, which wasn't really very constructive anymore ... That was what I guess you would call the irresponsible phase of *D and D* playing. (Kirk, SH11a)

Thus the players were sometimes opposed to the dungeon master and the principles of order within the game, rebelling against and competing with the limits placed upon them. This sort of competition dissipated tension between players, just as competitive kidding has been found to alleviate tension among miners (Green 55), although it created frustration for the dungeon master. It also temporarily lessened their involvement in the game.

### Traditional Role-Playing Games and their Relationship to the Group's Gaming

To play a role is both to escape from and to find oneself; when the everyday boundaries are temporarily exchanged for different ones, people express hidden sides of themselves in new ways. Although this sounds like a very radical thing to do, it is so necessary to the human psyche that our folklore has traditionally accommodated the role-playing urge in children's games, rites of reversal and mummering. Modern creations are strongly influenced by and linked with these traditional outlets. One such parallel is to be found between traditional children's role-playing games and *Dungeons and Dragons*. The exploration of such parallels produces an awareness of folk antecedents to popular culture forms, and helps validate folkloristic research in popular culture. The following discussion will focus on traditional role-playing games collected in Newfoundland, as they compare to *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Robert A. Georges distinguishes traditional play activities from other play in the method of transmitting its rules, which is of course face-to-face interaction ("Recreations and Games" 184). He also observes that game structure is frequently related to the structure of verbal folklore (185). Although *D and D* rules are partially transmitted through face-to-face interaction, their final source is in written manuals. It is interesting to note that, just as traditional games have a parallel in verbal folklore, so does the popular culture *D and D* in mass-marketed science fiction paperbacks.

Georges surveys folklorist's work on children's games, which he finds to have focussed on collection to the exclusion of analysis ("The Relevance of

Models 1-6). He maintains that analysis is important if only because games are highly functional in the socialization process:

Through play activities, then, children can be said to learn to imitate reality objectively. By simulating everyday activities, projecting themselves into familiar social roles and dramatizing intriguing but incomprehensible rites of passage, children learn to deal with realistic experience through planning and experimentation. (6)

Role-playing games are probably the most direct way of fulfilling this function.

Georges proposes a folkloristic approach to games on three levels. The first is that of social events, which involves, among other things, play roles entitling participants "to certain mutually agreed upon social identities for the period of the play activity;" certain rights and duties are also associated with this status. The second level is one of cognitive experience: each participant is aware that this is play, entailing a set of interrelationships and limitations within the "system" of play. Thirdly, there are certain common elements among all traditional play activities in that they occur at specific places and times, and possess related rules and objectives (10-12). These levels will be taken into account in the following analysis.

Role-playing or dramatic play is not, of course, confined to games. Huizinga states that one of play's charms is its secrecy, the most vivid expression of this being to disguise oneself and temporarily become another being (13). Children play at animals and machines as part of an identity process which moves from becoming the subjects to mastering them (Roger Abrahams, "Man as Animal" 17; James Fernández 121-122). Redl et al. argue that "some games demand different actions for different players" and call this a matter of "role taking factors." The

roles may differ according to function or fantasy content (411-412). The fullest discussion of role-playing available is Caillois', with reference to his play category of *mimicry*.

[In mimicry, the player] forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another .... The pleasure lies in being or passing for another ... the mask disguises the conventional self and liberates the true personality .... Mimicry is an incessant invention. The rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor's fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell. The spectator must lend himself to the illusion ... which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself. (19-23)

According to Fine, role-playing can function to help one overcome the deficiencies of one's *real self* (Shared Fantasy 61).

A survey of traditional role-playing children's games in Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) reveals strong links between *Dungeons and Dragons* and these games. There are three forms in which games are recorded in MUNFLA: questionnaires, survey cards, and student papers. The brief descriptions required by the first two formats have discouraged people from recording role-playing games, which are less structured and more complex than many others. Therefore, my efforts were concentrated on the student papers, from which I extracted a total of thirty games in sixty-one versions from twenty-eight collections. The bulk of these were recorded between 1967 and 1973, but to allow for recent trends, a dozen are taken from 1980 collections.<sup>64</sup> Among other things, I wished to discover whether males

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<sup>64</sup>The accession number, community in which the games are played and the sex of the collector is given in the MUNFLA source list in Appendix D.

predominate in other role-playing games as they do in *Dungeons and Dragons*. The collectors in most cases double as informants in the student papers of MUNFLA, for they are recalling games played in their childhood. Twice as many females as males made these collections (twenty to nine), although males collected about half of the game versions. Table 1, below, indicates whether the game is restricted to one sex, and for how many versions of the game this is true (for example, half of the descriptions of *house* include a restriction, while some make no mention of it and others specifically note that it is played by both girls and boys). Twelve are listed as "exclusive to girls and fifteen to boys"; thus about half of the versions are segregated, but not predominantly by one sex or the other.

Upon analysis, seven game elements appeared to be especially significant to the games in this sample. These are indicated in Table 1. Four of these elements are activities within the game: chasing (in ten games); fighting (six); performance of a task (eight); and traditional dialogue, that is, prescribed lines to be said by the players of certain roles at the appropriate phase of the game (ten). The other elements searched for have been stressed by other scholars. Only a third of the game types require equipment, and just a fifth involve an uncertain outcome with the possibility of winning. These facts indicate that this subgroup of games has its own character distinct from most. A striking conclusion is that fully a third of these games are relatively unstructured, that is, lacking the definite form, aim and set of rules which characterizes most other games. Role-playing games may form a link between formal games and free play.



Table 1: Characteristics of Traditional Role-Playing Games

Game #	No. of Versions	F	M	Chas- ing	Fight	Task	Trad. Dialogue	Equip- ment	Winning	Loose Structure
<b>A. ANIMAL GAMES</b>										
1	1				*					
2	1						*			
3	1				*		*			
4	2		1	1	*		*			
5	2			2						
6	1			1						
<b>B. GAMES IMITATING FAMILIAR ADULT ROLES</b>										
7	2		1		*		*			
8	5					*	*			
9	1					*	*			*
10	3			3		*	*			*
11	1					*	*			*
12	1					*	*			*
13	2					*	*			*
14	1			1		*	*			*
15	10			5		*	*			*
<b>C. GAMES INVOLVING EXTRAORDINARY OR FANTASY ROLES</b>										
<b>(i) games with frightening figures</b>										
16	1			1	*		*			
17	1				*		*			
18	5			1	*		*			
19	1					*	*			
<b>(ii) games involving performance for others</b>										
20	1					*	*			
21	1					*	*			
<b>(iii) games dramatizing a story</b>										
22	1					*	*			
23	1			1			*			*
24	1			1			*			*
25	1					*	*			*
26	1					*	*			*
<b>D. GAMES OF WAR</b>										
27	3			1		(*)	*	*	*	
28	7			5			*	*	(*)	(*)
29	1					*	*	*	(*)	
30	1			1			*	*	*	

The key to this table is on the following page.

NOTE: F=played by females only; M=played by males only. The numbers listed for (F) and (M) indicate the number of versions of each game for which this holds true.

\*=This characteristic applies to this game.

(\*)=This characteristic sometimes applies to this game.

Game Titles for the games listed in Table 1

**A. ANIMAL GAMES**

1. Cat and Mouse
2. What time is it, Mr. Wolf?
3. Sheep, sheep come home
4. Fox and Farmer/Hen
5. Rooster Fighting/Horseback Riding \*
6. Race Horse

**B. GAMES IMITATING FAMILIAR ADULT ROLES**

7. Boiler, boiler
8. Station
9. Passenger
10. Cars and Trucks
11. School
12. Doctor
13. Store
14. Dressing Up
15. House/Cobs

**C. GAMES INVOLVING EXTRAORDINARY OR FANTASY ROLES**

(i) games with frightening figures

16. Monster
17. Old Faye
18. Ghost in the Well
19. Old Witch and the Weekdays

(ii) games involving performance for others

20. Television Channels
21. Concert

(iii) games dramatizing a story

22. Murderer
23. Queen
24. Nancy Drew Mysteries
25. Get Smart
26. Rocket Robin

**D. GAMES OF WAR**

27. I Declare War
28. Cowboys
29. Star Wars
30. Who Can Die the Best?

The games in this sample fall very naturally into four distinct groups, as indicated in Table 1. These are: animal games (six games in eight versions); games imitating familiar adult roles (nine in seventeen); games involving extraordinary or fantasy roles (eleven in fourteen); and games of war (four in twelve). This categorization is loosely based on the different sorts of roles played in the games. *Games of war* is a special case in that the activities involved span two kind of roles, the familiar adult ones and the fantasy ones. This subgroup is thus distinguished by activity rather than role.

The animal games are the ones most likely to involve chasing and traditional dialogue. They are all well-structured and likely to involve one predatory animal attacking others. There is evidence that the players are not merely using convenient role titles, but really getting involved in their role characterizations: the "mouse" in *Cat and Mouse* (#1) "screams in mock terror" when chased by the "cat"; the popularity of *Fox and Farmer* (#4a) is partly attributed to the fact that "everyone had the chance to be the good guy and the bad guy". The activities of the players also correspond to their role titles: the "cat" chases the "mouse", the "wolf" chases the "sheep", the "roosters" fight one another and the "horses" race. The dialogue also complements the roles; although animals cannot talk, if they did so one could imagine them carrying on the following conversation:

Mother Sheep    Sheep, sheep come home.

Sheep            I'm afraid.

Mother Sheep    What are you afraid of?

Sheep            I'm afraid of the wolf.

Mother Sheep     The wolf is gone to Devil's Cove and won't be back for seven years -- sheep, sheep come home.

(#3)

The relationships between mother and offspring and between hunter and prey are familiar to children. The animal games bear least relation to *Dungeons and Dragons* among the categories of games examined here.

Games imitating adult roles have more versions in this selection than any other group, although not more game types (seventeen of nine). They are by far the most likely to involve performance of a task, require equipment and be relatively unstructured. The first two, *boiler, boiler* (#7) and *station* (#8) are reminiscent of the animal games, being highly structured and involving traditional dialogue. The task performances range from charades, as in #8: "perhaps they would make out they were making flap-jacks or chasing cows," to actual performance of the task, in an arduous if scaled-down way, as in *Passenger* (#9), in which the player would row her friends to different wharves about the harbour which had been designated "Boston", "Toronto" and so on. The kinds of tasks always correspond to those performed by the adults who carry them out in daily life: driving a taxi (#10b), selling food (#13b), or baking bread (#15h). The equipment used may come in one of three forms. It may be a specially designed imitation of adult role equipment, such as miniature cars and trucks (#10a), a toy cash register (#13b), or a doll pram (#14). Thirdly, the materials used may resemble the actual equipment on a large symbolic level: a boiler cover for a steering wheel (#10c), buttons for money (#13a), or a piece of board for a stove (#15f). As Caillois states with reference to mimicry, for most of these games the

only rule is to behave as though one believes in them (22). Although special spaces may be reserved for these games, such as "a little clearing in the woods" for playing *house* (#15g), there are no temporal restrictions beyond those of the children's daily lives (for example, at night their parents expect them to be sleeping) and attention span. This is not to say that there is no time element within the games; in one version of *house* wherein both sexes participated, the players would go through the prescribed daily tasks at an accelerated rate and then pair off for bed in an abandoned henhouse for a relatively long night (#15b; this parallels the ballad characteristic of leaping and lingering).

Not surprisingly, the game with most versions to be found is *house*.<sup>65</sup> Almost every girl in our society plays this game sometimes, if only in playing with her ubiquitous dolls. This game is dominated by girls, which follows from the fact that the housewife role is dominated by women. That is not to say that boys never play it, as demonstrated by the above example, but male participation is rare. One former player frankly admits:

Our biggest problem was in finding husbands. We usually begged some of the boys to be our husbands but they never stayed at home. They consented to play house only if they were permitted to go to work. Work consisted of riding their bicycles. As they passed we would scream and holler [sic] to get them to come home to a good mudpie supper -- but usually to no avail. (#15j)

*Dungeons and Dragons* involves the imitation of adult roles, although most concrete aspects of these particular roles, such as sword fighting and spell casting, will never be experienced by the players in their own lives. However, they learn

<sup>65</sup>This game is also called *cobs* in some of its variants. The OED defines *cobs* as walls built of straw and mud, and as the houses of the poor in Devon and Cornwall. The term thus is probably derived from the resemblance of a child's clumsy construction of a house to her ancestor's homes.

to be courageous, cooperative, resourceful and aggressive, all qualities which they will need in their adult lives.

More kinds of games involving extraordinary or fantasy roles were found than any other category; enough, in fact, to warrant further subdivision. The first four games have frightening figures. As with the animal games, chasing and traditional dialogue are the predominant characteristics. In his discussion of roles in traditional children's games, Sutton-Smith comments that the central figure of a game may take on the "role-clothing of a fearful character;" these games exemplify his point ("A Formal Analysis of Game Meaning" 18). The fearful character may be a monster, witch, ghost, goat or devil. The significance of the role lies in its power to frighten, the characters being interchangeable. *The Ghost in the Well* is particularly interesting by virtue of its evident popularity and the possible interpretations of it. The "children" in this game are repeatedly disbelieved by their "mother", who minimizes a potential threat. It is common for children to experience parental belittling and disbelief of things which are important to them; perhaps this game is a vindication of all the times children are not proved right, as well as an expression of these fears. The game also lends itself well to Proppian analysis, as Alan Dundes demonstrates ("On Game Morphology" 336). This sort of game is also functional and enjoyable from the point of view of the player of the frightening figure:

to be the old witch ... was always an honour because we'd love to invent all kinds of chores and before they escape, the [people playing the roles of] "days" would have to all act them out. Also it was fun to be the witch because she was mean and dominant, and everyone had to do what she ordered. It was also a lot of fun to rant and rave on in a witch's voice and to pretend you were flying your broom. (18a)

Thus, this role gives players the opportunity to be creative and powerful, to vent anger, and to do unusual, magical acts. Frightening figures correspond closely to the monsters of *D and D*, and the enjoyment of the child playing this role parallels the enjoyment of the dungeon master manipulating a monster.

A few games in category C involve performance for others. This is an appropriate juncture at which to point out that there is some inevitable overlap in the different groupings; *television charades* (#20) bears strong resemblance to *station* (#8). However, in the former case the players are imitating unique celebrities from the media rather than familiar adults, as in the latter. #20 and other following games (#24-26, 28-30) are the sort of thing Sutton-Smith is referring to when he speaks of modern mass media influence on game symbolism; rhymes and character references ("A Formal Analysis of Game Meaning" 10). Present day versions of *Concert* (#21) are doubtless influenced by television also. Like these performance-centred games, *D and D* is at times audience oriented, and influenced by the mass media.

The final subcategory of traditional fantasy role games is that of games dramatizing a story. These all show the influence of popular literature or television. Like a few of the games already dealt with, these games owe their style and existence greatly to individual groups; this explains why only one version was found of each of them. It is highly likely that other versions exist, but this is due not so much to the diffusion of the game as to the widespread influence of mass media. Children not exposed to this media do not play these games. Even though the games themselves are not traditional, however, the fact that they are derived from media and played by folk groups in customary ways,

indicates that there is a traditional pattern or template in existence. *Queen* (#23) is especially interesting for the folklorist in that it is apparently based on *märchen*, as it involves princesses being rescued by princes who subsequently marry them. It is also an appropriate example with which to challenge Caillois' statement that girls' games are necessarily realistic and boys' fantastic in nature; *House* (#15) and *Cars and Trucks* (#10) are both realistic, *Queen* (#23) and *Cowboys* (#28) are both fantastic. Another characteristic of these games is that the roles may take on the names of media heroes which they are patterned on. For example, in *Get Smart* (#25)<sup>66</sup> the players "adopt the characters of Chief of Control, 99, Ziegfield of Chaos etc ... they especially like to copy Himey the Robot, because so many interesting things happen to him" (#25). This role-naming custom is taken up in other games, including *Dungeons and Dragons*. *D and D* also dramatizes a story, one that is created as the game progresses but has identifiable plot elements from the beginning. These are often derived from popular culture in the form of science fiction novels.

The final category of traditional role-playing games is *games of war*, and this is the group most closely related to *Dungeons and Dragons*. These games usually involve fighting and winning, and all use some form of equipment. While *I Declare War* (#21) is tightly structured and probably traditional, the other three games in this group are more dependent on group ideas and initiative. *Star Wars* (#20) is very similar to *Rocket Robin* (#26), except that it is based on a

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<sup>66</sup>*Get Smart* is a 1960s television series which has been repeatedly re-broadcast over the years due to its continuing popularity. It satirizes detective and espionage depictions in other television series as well as movies and pulp novels. The names cited below are all those of regular characters from this series.



different media, a science fiction movie rather than television cartoon series, and involves two playing sides rather than one group against imaginary foes. *Who can die the best?* (#30) is also influenced by the media; as the informant says, "this was one of my favorite games because ... I wanted to grow up to be a movie star." One informant recalls that when he played this game with his friends, they too believed that knowing how to "die" spectacularly was one of the necessary skills for a screen actor.<sup>67</sup>

The most interesting, varying and exclusively masculine game in this cluster is *Cowboys* (#28). Female outsiders to this game generally do not appreciate its complexity and fun. One student declares that it did not interest most girls when she was younger, and that:

all it ever really involved was running around houses, trying to shoot each other. As soon as anyone was shot, he or she was up and shooting again so that no one ever really won. (#28g)

Male descriptions of this game are uniformly long, complex and enthusiastic; they also vary a good deal. The above summary indicates that *cowboys* is played within the community, but three of the versions here are played outside the community boundaries (*a*, *d* and *e*). Furthermore, anarchy does not prevail; the players are usually organized into teams, possibly chosen by two leaders in the same manner in which childrens' sports teams are chosen (*a*, *d*). The teams might both represent cowboys, or one team may function as "the bad guys," playing outlaws or Indians. The game may indeed be played so that the players never really die:

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<sup>67</sup>Personal communication from Philip Hiscock, December 1984.

when someone got shot ... a partner simply made as if to pull the bullet out and declared that the victim was "fixed up". The wounded man thereupon underwent an immediate recovery and went on shooting it out in the same fight. (e)

Usually, however, players are considered dead when shot, and must wait till the present game finishes and the next begins before participating again (a, b, d, f). Since this can be rather boring and also because the players may be very involved in the game, the matter of whether a player has actually been shot dead can be one of dispute:

This often resulted in arguments and strong inferences that one of the players was actually shot, but didn't fall down; while the other argued just as vigorously that the shots fired had missed and that he wasn't supposed to be dead. (a)

One of the other reasons for "death" to be disputed in *cowboys* is that a team which has had all its members killed, loses. Despite what is said above in #28g, there may well be winning involved in the game (b, d). Sometimes, however, the boys may be so faithful to the models for their game that the "bad guys" necessarily lose:

I remember my fascination with the bad guy's part and my frustration over the necessity of the bad guy's always losing ... It never did sit too well with me that no matter what trick or ambush a crook attempted in the movies and comic books to get the good fellow, he was never successful. (e)

This brings us to the point that media has a strong influence on *Cowboys*, through movies, television western series, popular fiction and comic books:

Each person had some fictitious name, modelled after some comic or novel hero of his: Cisco Kid, or Johnny MacBrown, for examples. It didn't take long for each person to become acquainted with other's hero name. (d)

The same is true of *Dungeons and Dragons*, except that its names come from science fiction and other sources rather than Western movies.

The equipment and its technology is another matter for consideration here. In order for "shooting" to occur, the guns must be designed and used in a particular way. The equipment may come in one of three forms: it may be specially-made commercial imitations, such as toy guns and a holster (a); or it may be a homemade imitation: "each member sawed and then shaped with a knife, a model of a gun from a piece of board" (d); or it may be merely symbolic, such as a pointed finger (a). As well as guns, other equipment such as cowboy hats and feathers might be used as part of the role equipment. Because the players have no way of safely representing bullets, whether or not a player has been hit when a gun is "shot" is, as we have seen, a matter of dispute. That is not to say there are no skills involved; "quite a few boys in my circle were quite good at various gun play, such as the fast draw, and the cowboy twirl on the finger" (e).

It is revealing to consider *Dungeons and Dragons* in the light of the seven game elements which characterize traditional role-playing games.

*Dungeons and Dragons* may involve chasing, fighting and the performance of tasks but it is the imaginary characters which do these things, not the physical presences of the players. Traditional phrases and a manner of speech reminiscent of medieval times may be used, but not in as fixed a way as in the traditional games. As already mentioned, one cannot win at *Dungeons and Dragons*, nor can one lose; although one's character may be killed, one can soon acquire another, just as, in one version of *cowboys* (#28e), the players are always

resurrected. *Dungeons and Dragons*, like many other games, involves some equipment, although rather less than related popular hobby games. The game is, for the most part, relatively unstructured in that it is unpredictable and free flowing. However, certain aspects, such as battles and the gaining of power by players, are highly structured.

Many gaming groups are all-male, like this one. Richard suggests that females do not participate because:

Little girls didn't play war games and little girls didn't make models; little girls played with dolls. *Dungeons and Dragons*, when we started playing it, was a *strange* game ... fantasy, foolishness ... They would have had to have been real tomboys. (SH7a)

While *Dungeons and Dragons* is a product of popular culture and the other games in this discussion are products of traditional culture, each has been influenced by the culture of the other. Many of the roles in twentieth-century role-playing games are derived from mass media, such as Western movies and TV series concerning spies. The roles of *D* and *D* fit in the moulds of heroes and supernatural villains introduced to our culture in myths, folktales and legends.

The relationship between the gaming patterns of *Dungeons and Dragons* and traditional role-playing games is meaningful on more than one level. Firstly, as mentioned at the outset of this discussion, the traditional games show a folk precedent for a modern, popular culture game, and thus underline the relevance of folkloristic analysis of popular culture creations. This perspective can be narrowed to the lives of the gamers themselves, who played traditional children's games in their own childhoods.<sup>68</sup> These earlier gaming experiences formed a

<sup>68</sup>The group members' memories are unfortunately vague about which games they played, but they did recognize some of the games in this selection.

template in their approach to games which persevered into adolescence. *Dungeons and Dragons* is essentially a role-playing game such as they were accustomed to, except that it was brought indoors and made more complex to provide intellectual stimulation. The same perspective can also be widened when we consider that both types of games are played by small groups, and that the human is a playful animal.

*Dungeons and Dragons* functions like other role-playing games except that it involves greater intensity and intellectual complexity than most of them. It can be a mechanism for the release and control of aggression, and an escape from everyday controls and conventions. It is an opportunity for fantasy. Although it does not overtly concern the usual adult roles, this game improves its players' ability to reason, make decisions and relate to other people through exploring very adult problems such as choices between loyalty and personal gain, entering into life-threatening situations, and dealing with one's own power. *Dungeons and Dragons* bears clear relation to traditional children's role-playing games, and is a natural progression from such games. A crucial distinction between it and children's games is that it is not played, except in drastically simplified form, by children. Rather, it is played in adolescence and post-adolescence, precisely during those years when personal identity is most ambiguous. Although not in itself traditional, it has very traditional elements and functions. It is also an essential part of the oral history and folklore of at least one friendship group.

**Summary**

Games and the competition they entail are central to the identity of this group. Two games have dominated: war-gaming in the first period, and *Dungeons and Dragons* in the second period. Although these are not often played by the group members at present, they continue to live in the folklore of the group. Both are popular culture games which draw extensively upon history and folklore, as well as imitating the patterns of traditional games. When traditional role-playing games are compared to *D and D*, specific parallels emerge.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

The ultimate aim of this study, and indeed all the folkloric research I have ever conducted, is to show that the culture of ordinary people is both significant and fascinating. The folklore of the young male friendship group which has been analysed in this study is distinctive and even, in its overall pattern, unique. As a result these "ordinary people" no longer appear very ordinary, but I submit that any group subjected to folkloristic analysis would undergo the same transformation. No individuals or groups are completely ordinary and without interest.

The four research objectives stated at the outset of this study have been fulfilled. The study group has been examined to demonstrate that elements of informality and modernity may co-exist with folkloric patterns of behaviour. Thus the first stated objective, to discover whether such a group possesses folklore, has been answered in the affirmative. The genres in which the study group's folklore concentrates are conversational genres, humour, and games. Group history and intra-relationships, mass-mediated culture, family, and educational institutions have been the main sources for the folklore of this group. The analysis of this folklore and its sources helped to provide evidence for the second research objective, which was to discover how this friendship group

established its identity. The main identifying factor for this friendship group is its humour content and style, which is particularly embodied in unique word usages which they call *Nelsonisms*, after the group member who coined them. Expressions of masculinity, and especially competitiveness, were also found to be an intrinsic part of this group's identity, being expressed in everything from casual conversation to complex games. The friendship bond central to the definition of such a group is overtly ignored but covertly affirmed in the group's folklore; paradoxically, closeness is expressed through the exchange of insults. This avoidance of direct expression of intimacy was shown to be part of the male culture this group is part of. The influence of all-male membership on group folklore and identity, which is the focus of the third research goal, was thus shown to be linked to the first two aims. The manner in which this group transforms mass-mediated culture into in-group folklore, being the final objective, was shown to involve competitive collecting and conversation. For example, the members have made a point of favouring different rock groups, and often debate their relative merits heatedly. Mass-mediated culture is also utilized in group humour.

The group's folklore was found to have two central themes, which contributed to its identity and directed the style and content of its shared activities. These are shared fantasy and competition, which, interestingly enough, are both elements of play. They are intensely brought together in the fantasy role-playing game of *Dungeons and Dragons*. These themes are to be expected within the folklore of a leisure group, which is naturally centred upon play.

Friendship groups do not exist in isolation. Their members inevitably belong to numerous other groups, including other friendship groups. The broader



cultural environment of the outside world forever impinges upon group interactions. Whether the group under consideration gathers at a downtown bar, a family home or a university cafeteria, its members are faced with other groups claiming their attention and allegiances. Therefore, folklore must be developed to create and maintain boundaries. These boundaries cannot keep everything out, but whatever passes through them becomes transformed. Creative transformation, therefore, is a continual part of the life of a friendship group or any folk group. The transformations which occur within the history and folklore of the group under consideration are: social maturation; outsiders/strangers into insiders/friends; vulnerable individuals into people in control, if only through shared fantasy; low-status people into high-status people; outside culture into in-group folklore. The characters which the members play in their gaming, the teasing and ridicule they constantly engage in, the quantities of record albums and science fiction books which they collect, are all part of this process of creative transformation. The rules governing the transformations comprise the group paradigm or worldview, and the result is group folklore.

This thesis points the way to several rewarding avenues for further folkloric research. Ethnographies of a variety of friendship groups should be conducted, and compared to this and other male groups. The question of the centrality of humour to friendship groups can be fruitfully explored. Other fantasy gaming groups would also provide valuable study material. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate the possibility that mass-mediated humour stems from the wellsprings of friendship groups similar to this one in their use of humour as a forum for folkloric in-group expression.

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## Appendix A

### Excerpts from Interview Transcripts

This appendix contains excerpts from interviews with group members. Each passage is in some way representative of the group and its folklore. Each section represents a different interview, although not every interview is represented here. Arranged in chronological order within each section are subsections, each an excerpt from the interview. Every subsection is prefaced with a brief precis and any necessary contextual information.

#### A.1. Garth Ramsey

##### A.1.1.

SH6b

Garth talks about how the group uses the media for its humour.

Myself and Mike used to scour the TV guide for signs of ah, sixties spy movies being shown. And that was something we really liked to see, I still like them, so stupid ... James Bond period but even stupider. Matt Helms, all this kind of stuff.

*Susan: So you could sit and laugh at them?*

Yeah, we did a lot of that. Laughing at the media ... In fact, come to think of it ... something that we used to do a lot is sit down and watch TV, um, not any particular show, just say, "How's about ... we watch TV and criticize the shows" ... We'd sit in front of the TV and just, sort of use what we were seeing as a taking off 'point. And we'd be rolling around the floor in stitches ... it would be just a taking off point for satire, for our own unique brand of satire. And we used to do that explicitly for the purpose of criticizing what we see, laughing at it.

**A.2. Group Interview A****A.2.1.**

SH21a

This conversation concerns the role of dungeon master, the development of characters, and some examples of how the group has performed each.

Mike I'm not that comfortable being a DM, I don't like it that much, I don't enjoy it particularly.

*Susan. How come?*

Mike I don't like the responsibility of being -- I like to design a world, in fact I still do it. Exercise in imagination ...

*Susan Well, what do you do as DM? ... What do you do to create a world?*

Mike Well you create it -- I always create it long before I even suggest it to other people. You don't just create it, it's this process of creation, just ideas.

*Susan So, it's sort of, it's a creative process that goes on very much on your own, individually, quite a lot?*

Alex Oh always, yeah.

Phil Not always. (l)

Alex Just about always.

Phil [Not] In Stuart's games.

Mike [disapprovingly] Oh, in Stuart's games, they'd get together and design the world themselves ...

Alex You get, you do that on your own, you spend hours and hours and days and days and weeks and weeks, writing up all this stuff about a world. All the information, you know.

*Susan Like what, you made maps?*

Alex Yeah. And you detail countries and towns and cities and villages, things like that, depending on how detailed you want to get.

*Susan And you try to have something available, an adventure available at every turn, kind of thing?*

Alex Yeah, at least one. It's nice for their characters to have a choice of where they want to go. So it'll be -- like they can go to one village, have another adventure there ... It's nice to have lots of choices for the characters, so they feel that they have some freedom, and they're not being pushed to do certain things ...

Phil I know a lot of people who don't even use worlds, they just go from one thing to the next.

Alex But that's not -- that's not a campaign ... Sometimes it's nice just to do a dungeon, and play a dungeon, something like that, one scenario.

Mike I never enjoyed that at all.

Phil I think character development goes by the board, you can't really get good character development.

Alex No, you can't.

*Susan How do you get good character development?*

Alex Well, they interact with NPC's, non-playing characters. If it's a good DM, they [the NPC's] have a lot of character themselves And therefore your player character will build up character by interacting with them.

[Susan recalls that Nelson's character hates elves.]

Alex Not very subtle though.

Mike Well, it's not supposed to be. It's supposed to be exaggerated. He used to have anti-elf rallies and stuff. He would give speeches and play Nazi marching tunes and stuff. Ah, he'd go nuts ... (ll) Just says, "Ted, I'll hold an anti-elf rally," ... everyone laughs. It's like, it's like when he enslaved all those hobbits. He just went to Hobbitland and for no good reason, descended on all those villages and enslaved the hobbits, he carried them off. What happened to them in the end? I think they were set free or something. Maybe he sold them, all those -- all those disgruntled hobbits.

Alex I can only vaguely remember that.

Mike They were all sort of pissed off.

*Susan I guess so!*

Mike *That* was funny. I was there and that was hilarious. Nelson was really good.

Alex But at the same time you can have subtle character development.

Mike That's no fun ... All my characters are like Nelson's, they're -- I mean, Malagate for instance, you know, really --

Alex But not everyone's are, some people -- like Kirk especially, I think he, he goes in for really subtle characteristics. I don't know if you guys realised ~~it~~, but for my campaign he had books written out on what his characters were like.

Phil Yeah. I -- I played his character once, just full of --

Alex All kinds of weird things, that no-one else found out.

Phil Other people don't realise.

Susan *It's just like, all their little hobbies and stuff?*

Alex Yeah, all kinds of weird things.

Phil I mean Kirk -- Kirk had boxes where different things were kept. And that would be described.

Alex He had covert operations going, and no-one would ever know about it. No-one did ever know about it.

*Susan Not even the dungeon master?*

Alex The DM knew. No, not necessarily, the DM doesn't even know sometimes, about the characters. Subtle characteristics!

Mike What was he doing?

Alex Oh, he was all around the Wild Coast with all these spies and demons.

Mike What was he doing with Nelson?

Alex Oh, well Nelson went on the Wild Coast, and he had some towns there, and Nel- and Kirk was in the towns with his covert operations, and then Nelson once set up a thieving guild, so there was a big rivalry. Kirk moved out after awhile, he didn't want to make a war.

Phil But did Nelson know it was Kirk?

Alex Oh yeah. Cause they, you know, they had the same manor.

Mike Why did they have that dinkey little manor?

Alex It was a great place.

Mike It was always fun. I remember when Nelson hired me to kill all those people, great.

*Susan He hired you to kill?*



Mike Yeah, that was really interesting ... I was Malagate ... [an] assassin ... He was a half-orc. Oh, he was vicious. Probably the most vicious person I have ever met.

Alex Give a couple of examples of just how vicious he is.

Mike Oh, I set fire to a baby ...

Phil I had a spy in one of his organizations, and he -- and he got into my castle and served it up roasted.

Mike To him.

Phil To me.

*Susan Your spy!*

Phil Yeah. And I ate him.

Mike Yeah, he didn't know. He didn't know for awhile ... There was that one time captured that sage, and I burnt down his house, and I cut off his nose and his mouth. Cut off everything and poked his eyes out, and mailed him to Nelson in a box. And when Nelson opened it up or something, (ll) the guy jumped up and ran off. And Nelson ran after him.

Alex He was really mean.

Mike Oh, I just -- I killed so many people it was great.

**A.3. Group Interview B****A.3.1.**

SH25a

The group recalls a practical joke which Nelson once played on Alex, in order to embarrass him in front of a couple of girls.

Mike We were in the mall, and we saw Alex Hastings there with two girls going to the movie, right. And he [Nelson] went, he went up to Alex and said, "Who are you with, Alex?" ... sort of sidled over and said, you know, "Can I borrow your knife when you're through with it?" (ll) ...

Nelson I wanted a loan of his pocket knife.

Mike Oh, it was great.

[Ted laughs appreciatively]

Phil I don't think it was great, but it was silly?

Mike Oh, it was silly but great. Anyway.

Phil Alex's never got over it (l).

Mike, Yeah.

## A.3.2.

SH25b

Here Mike, Ted and Nelson discuss the conclusion of their two-year campaign in Ted's world.

Nelson The last night we played that campaign ever, me and Kirk's character was alive, and everyone else was dead. And Kirk sent the ... aerial servant to get everyone else's body down to the thing. And we brought 'em all back to life, and it ended. Except Stuart was still dead. But we brought your [Mike's] character back to life, and we brought Garth's character back to life. There was four of us in the end ...

Ted All I can remember is, we said that everybody got resurrected and they walked off and they gradually separated ... Cause I was going off to Basic Training.

Mike That was Ted's decision. We didn't like him doing it ... It was just getting good again, although I don't know if we could have stuck together again that much. We were all really powerful.

Ted If we'd kept playing that though, we would have eventually stopped, because the characters were just so high level.

## A.4. Group Interview C

## A.4.1.

SH27b

The group has a *fantasizing conversation* using a favorite *Nelsonism*, *hygenics*.

Kirk I'd like to announce at this point that for the last two summers, I didn't hang around with anyone, too busy [in the naval reserve] learning *hygenics*. (ll)

*Susan Hygenics?*

Kirk *Hygenics*, yes. I should mention, now that I've mentioned the term, that I would not want this to get out.

Phil [in background] This is another word that Nelson coined, it's another one.

*Susan That's right, last summer they were saying something about hygenics and they refused to tell me what it was.*

Nelson ... It's a military secret. I found out about it once; and --

Kirk yeah. I think Nelson detected the aura.

Phil Kirk could be in deep trouble if it got out.

Nelson Being a lot into military combat and that, reading about it, I -- I picked up these little hints ... So I put it together .. there's a word you're not supposed to know about, it's called *hygenics*. *Hygenics*, it's a bit of a self-defense, [like] karate.

Phil Is it Canadian navy or the whole armed forces?

Nelson It's the Canadian ... the Americans, they use *kung fu*, we use *hygenics*, which is an alteration of both, you know.

Kirk I certainly hope this portion of the tape is erased.

Nelson ... I'm gonna be sued!

Susan *Why is it so secret?*

Nelson Absolutely noone knows about it. (ll)

Phil It's for the Canadian armed forces specifically ... If other people learnt it, it could be dangerous.

Kirk I have used it on a couple of occasions too -- well, around Churchill Square, if you remember, I appeared behind Phil.

Phil (l) It was amazing ... Next thing I noticed, Kirk is behind me ... I was looking for him, and then I turned around, and there's Kirk.

[Nelson relates how he saw on the news that a talk-show host had been injured by a wrestler demonstrating his moves.]

Phil See that -- that's why things like that have got to be kept secret.

[Conversation ensues about the idea that the tape should be restricted because of the confidentiality of the term *hygenics*. In her earnest protestations that MUNFLA is a safe place for it, Susan misses the fact that this is all a joke.]

Nelson ... By the time this tape is published, it'll probably have been public, because I think the government is making an announcement on it.

Phil. Who's that guy who was found in that bar in Germany. Wasn't he talking about that [*hygenics*]?

Nelson He mentioned it. Yeah, that's what got him in trouble. A guy, one of his so-called bodyguard heard him say this word: [hygenics] ... They didn't release this, they didn't say it on the radio, they just said, "a military secret" and that's probably what it was ... That's what got him fired. That's deadly, you know ... I only guessed the word, and all of a sudden Kirk looks at me, and he's in shock.

Phil My taxpayer money paid for that Kirk, so you'd better be careful.

#### A.4.2.

SH29b

These are the concluding words of the final interview, wherein group members sum up their enjoyment of their shared conversations.

Phil It's all glorious. That's what it is, Susan, it's all glorious. I can sense the power in this room right now. It's like a volcano about to erupt.

Nelson (I) Get off volcanoes, Phil. We know what you think of when you go into volcanoes.

Phil I'm sorry. I have this problem. It's like an earthquake, rumbling below the surface ... I think this has been one of the best sessions we've had, I think.

Susan Yeah, I think so.

Nelson Lots of good bleeding went on.

## Appendix B

### A Record of Group Social Life

This is a record of the social life of the group during July and August of 1984, as complete as possible but doubtless with omissions. Ted Spencer, Kirk Hastings and Garth Ramsey were out of town for most of this period.

#### July --

##### Friday 6

Mike, Phil, Alex, and a friend of Alex's see a movie -- *Pope of Greenwich Village*, and afterwards go to a downtown bar, *Kibitzers*. Later, Mike and Alex end up drinking tea in Mike's kitchen while they talk the night away.

##### Saturday 7

Nelson has a barbecue, attended by Mike, Richard, Phil and Alex. Afterwards they attend a late night play at the *LSPU Hall* (a downtown progressive theatre) -- *Live Soap*. From there they move to nearby *Kibitzers*, where they meet up with Susan. Finally, Mike, Phil, Alex, and Susan walk home together.

##### Sunday 8

Mike, Alex and Phil attend the "Downtown Heritage Festival" (an afternoon of traditional music near the waterfront, sponsored by several downtown bars). In the evening Mike and Alex visit the *Ship Inn* to hear some live blues music (Peter Narvaez and Denis Parker as guests of the St. John's Folk Music Club).

##### Wednesday 11

Phil drops by on his bicycle to visit with Mike.

##### Monday 16

Phil and Mike go for a steak supper at downtown bar *Cock 'n Bull*. Afterwards they return to Mike's kitchen for a chat.

**Monday 23**

Alex drops by to see Mike. They go to *Kibitzers* to see Jim Payne perform (a local musician who does original compositions in a traditional style).

**Saturday 28**

Mike and Phil visit the *Grad House* (a bar on the edge of downtown) to hear *Da Slyme* (a rock group) and *Riot* (a new wave group). They are not impressed and leave early.

**Sunday 29**

Phil drops in on Mike; they listen to Frank Sinatra and Aretha Franklin records. Later they go to *Kibitzers* with Alex. When Mike goes home, Nelson is there (having just been interviewed by Susan). The two chat.

**Monday 30**

Richard drops in at *Kibitzers*, where he encounters Paul playing chess. Mike and Phil go barhopping and end at Mike's for tea around 1:30 am.

**Tuesday 31**

Mike and Phil go to *Kibitzers*, where they meet up with Paul. The three chat together.

**August****Friday-Sunday, 3-5**

This weekend the *Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival* is held in Bannerman Park in central St. John's. Mike and Alex are volunteers and audience members.

**Tuesday 7**

Richard drops by to see Mike and talk about Ted's upcoming visit home. Mike goes off to see a movie with Paul (Richard does not wish to go). Richard helps Mike's mother hang houseplants and goes home with a clipping in reward.

**Wednesday 8**

Susan invites Mike, Richard, Phil, and Alex to *Kibitzers* for a drink -- she buys.

**Friday 10**

Mike and Alex see *Figgy Duff* (well known local trad. rock group) at *Garbo's*, a downtown pub.



**Saturday 11**

Phil and Alex go to Mike's to watch the Olympics and drink beer. Ted arrives, to be met at the airport by Nelson, who works there.

**Monday 13**

Phil, Mike and Alex visit Susan in hospital (in for a minor operation).

**Monday 20**

Phil, Mike and Alex go to a Monty Python film festival at the LSPU. During a movie they don't mind missing, Phil and Mike drop by *Kibitzers*, where they meet Susan. Paul shows up to play chess, but socializes with them first. Phil, Mike and Susan return to the film festival.

**Wednesday 22**

Phil and Alex go to Mike's, where they all sit in the kitchen imbibing wine and cheese and talking for Susan's tape recorder. Although formally arranged by Susan, this turns into an informal social occasion.

**Saturday 25**

Mike, Nelson, Ted and Kirk sit around in Mike's living room, in the same situation as above.

**Monday 27**

Mike, Phil and Alex meet at Mike's and go downtown.

**Thursday 30**

Nelson and his girlfriend drop by Mike's during a bicycle ride. Mike is out so Susan entertains them and serves lemonade. That night, Phil, Mike and Susan go to see a play at the LSPU, *Agnes of God*. Afterwards they wend their way to *Kibitzers*.

## Appendix C

### Tape List and Concordance

The following is a list of the interviews conducted for this thesis, showing the labels assigned them for this study as well as their MUNFLA shelf numbers, where applicable. The MUNFLA accession number is 86-171. Tapes on which Michael Knox's voice appears are not deposited in MUNFLA, at his request. These include SH1 and SH21-26, a total of seven tapes.

Every tape is sixty minutes in length, although not all this space is used.

SH1		Michael Knox, 22/7/84.
SH2	C8550	Philip Whitney, 29/7/84.
SH3-4	C8551-52	Philip Whitney, 5/10/84.
SH5-6	C8553-54	Garth Ramsey, 3/1/85.
SH7	C8555	Richard White, 7/8/84.
SH8a & b	C8556-57	Richard White, 14/5/85.
SH9	C8558	Ted Spencer, 22/8/84.
SH10-11	C8559-60	Kirk Hastings, 17/10/84.
SH12	C8561	David Neison, 26/7/84.
SH13-14	C8562-63	David Nelson, 10/10/84.

SH15	C8564	Alex Hastings, 26/7/84.
SH16-18	C8565-67	Alex Hastings, 12/9/84.
SH19-20	C8568-69	Alex Hastings, 21/9/84.
SH21-24		Michael, Philip, and Alex, 22/8/84.
SH24-26		Michael, Ted, Kirk, Nelson, and Philip, 25/8/84.
SH27-29	C8570-72	Nelson, Kirk, and Philip, 29/3/85.

## Appendix D

### MUNFLA Games Source List

These are the references for the traditional role-playing games discussed in Chapter Five. The following pieces of information are given for each source: the MUNFLA accession number; the place in which the game is played; the sex of the collector(s) (F=female, M=male) -- in most cases, the collector doubles as informant; the number(s) of the game(s) provided by this source. For the title of each game, see Table I.

67-15	St. John's	F	1, 18a
67-30	St. John's	F, F	6, 7a, 16
Q67-190	Dunfield	F	17
Q67-868	St. John's	M	8
68-2	St. Joseph's	F	24
69-5	Roddickton	M	3
69-6	Bay D'Espoir	M	4b, 5a
69-14	Creston North	M	28a
69-26	Wareham	M	28d
69-28	Lamaline	M	27a
70-9	Shearstown	M	10, 15a, b, 28e
70-11	St. John's	F	7b, 18c
71-119	St. John's	F	14, 15j, 21, 28g
71-124	St. John's	F	18d, 27b
72-194	Tilting	F	15c, 18e, 28f
72-227	St. John's	M, F	15, 23, 27c
73-116	Barred Island	M	28b
73-133	Lourdes	F	4a, 18b, 19, 25
73-143	(not given)	F	2
73-181	Bonavista Bay	F	11, 15h
80-113	(not given)	M	28c

80-185	Bishop's Cove	F	12
80-190	(not given)	F	15j
80-216	Glovertown	F	13, 15g
80-227	St. John's	F	20
80-242	Port aux Basques	F	9, 13
80-249	Fogo	F	30
80-250	St. John's	F	22, 26, 29

## Appendix E

### Record of a Dungeon Master's World

Ted Spencer's *Dungeons and Dragons* campaign was the longest and most intensely played by this group, lasting two years and eight months through many, many sessions. It is highly praised by the entire group, and remembered as a sort of "golden age". Ted made extensive notes describing his world, as well as designing the necessary map. He has preserved these in a black binder, in five exercise books and on random scraps of paper. Here is a summary of their contents, along with representative excerpts. The reader can achieve some understanding of the form and elements of a *Dungeons and Dragons* campaign world from these selections.

Each exercise book is labelled with Ted's name and a title.

#### **Dungeons and Dragons: World Events and Populations**

On the inside cover is a list of lifespans for men, hobbits, dwarves, and elves, and a time chart of world history in "Elven Reckoning" (both reminiscent of Lord of the Rings).

On the first page is the heading "Where the races come from," and the following pages give some background for dwarves (from Kon-iki, an island

inhabited by dinosaurs), men (from Pontia; they call themselves Minoans), and elves (from across the sea).

The book also contains a history loosely modelled on LOTR, a list of armour prices, a list of world populations. On loose-leaf pages at the end, are two appendices: I "What actually happened to the Holy Grail," and II "Forging of the Holy Grail and the Magic Belt, 'Ring of Richard'."

### **History and Events After Overthrow of Onka by White Council. (Human Perspective: Rennar of Miscellania) "The Red Book"**

On the inside cover is a time chart for the third age, and a note to players:  
 NOTE TO TSMEC PC's: Any DM reference to any TSMEC historic or social thingee will not be explained by the Great DM who is up to his ears in shit *anyway*, so Nyaaah!

This book contains a history supplement, a series of descriptions of world peoples and their present states, and a series of descriptions of regions, their populations, important places, government, and language. In short, it resembles descriptive cultural geography. An example is the description given for the land of Miscellania,

#### **Miscellania**

This famous country has long been the guardian of the Freelands. The people here are very similar to Byzantians in dress, and temperament: proud, with humility, unlike the boisterous Nomidians.

#### Village

A Miscellanian village will be totally walled, with one gate facing north and another south. The town council will be headed by a NPC party of 9th-14th level. Apart from supplying and recruiting regulars

for the town defense (usually mercenaries) they are obligated to train and equip one full maniple for the famed Miscellanian legion & it is 40% probable that a fully-trained maniple will be present. (part of this may be farmers pressed into service). Levies = 5%, peasants = 20%

city A city will not be walled, but, the people, in times of war or attack will flee to the huge castle walls. There will be one full legion based here, with a maniple or two out patrolling. City government will be a council of elders, served by an NPC party of 12th-15th level. There will be mercenary regulars to fully man the castle along with the legion. It is 10% probable that a legion will not be here. There is a 2 s.p. [silver piece] tax on all foreigners entering here. Levies = 5% Peasants = 10%

Fortress, citidal:

2 full legions will be stationed here. 2 here will be huge, fortified communities also have about 5000 other regulars & mercenaries to man the walls. There will be a great warrior of 15th-20th level, who, although old, will be very rich and also the king. He will have also a council of elders who do most of the governing, but he can do what he pleases. Legionaries guard entrances.

Trade & Commerce: towns & cities often depend very much on the rivers in order to irrigate the alluvial soils by the mountain and river valleys in the summer. This produce is traded at the Fortresses for industrial goods. There are Safana groups on seacoast towns & cities.

Language: Miscellanious (very similar to common.)

Henchmen [potential helpers]: 1 in 1000. King: Endock the Endless of Evenly. (advisor is Rennar the Wise)

Miscellanian legionaires are not "rented" as mercenaries.

Taxes: 1 sp/entering city. foreign coins exchanged at 5%

The "New" Miscellanian legion

2000 men (training has deteriorated so that they are normal guys) divided into 8 cohorts of 300 men -- each maniple-w/100 men, the triarii are all the equivalent of 1st levellers. In addition, there will be 6 levellers in each cohort: a 5th-7th level commander & 4th-6th level lieutenant (on foot) for each Hastati & and principes, and the triarii captain & lieutenant will be one level higher & command the cohort. A maniple consists of 100 men in leather and large shield with a dadina



(short sword, 2-7 damage) a javelin & a pilum. The two first ranks (20) are armed with short bows. The extra 200 men are cavalry: 100, leather, lance, shield, 50 ring, mid warhorse, mace shielded, 50 chain, chain barding (medium warhorse) longsword, shield.

#### Landmarks of Miscellania

The old Evenly Road. An ancient road once a badlands, filled with old tombs and such. It was the route taken by the 2 parties to Haragreis castle in 900 ER [Elven Reckoning]. Shadeek's tomb has become a hostel and farmer "H.Q."; crop wholesaler run by Belos, reputed to be a wizard.

At the end of this there is some miscellaneous information concerning patrols, levies, bandits, mercenaries, the safety of roads, and so on.

#### **Orders and Institutions of the Freelands. Events, Place histories. "The Green Book"**

The book details the fighting groups, peoples, places and things listed on the inside cover. These are as follows:

##### **Fighting groups & organizations**

Norrodrim, Ahrekarkar, Tempits, Shourqum, Chadrin, the Magi, the Sea Kings, Celas, the Mëek, Housecarls, Uruk-hai \*, the White hand, the Council of the Magi, the Safana.

##### **People**

Mitcah, Shadeek, Fudimi, Char-col, the Mountain King, the Five, Ronald the lich, Borgatron, Jonas, Faustustus, Persesus, Gandalf \*, Radagast, Saruman II \*, Frig, Zhygman, Rachmanof, Perran, Catlif, Aocrare, Mestanown, Emmanuel, Grisnalth, Glacteri, Levonia, the Grey Council \*, Igor, Gunsray, Pharas, the Black, Keraptis, the guardian of the wood.

##### **Places**

Realm of Crag, Abbeth's tower, Metabo, the Great Wood, Hall of the Mountain Kings, Cliffs of Crag, Creel's Rock, Door of Meeting, Mitrail Fist, Ice Kingdom, Elrond's Palace \*, Fortress of Gobkii, Monolith of Magyar, the Roads of Mojave, the Southern Most Homely, House of the Freelands, forges of Somata.

### Things

Mace of the sentinel, the Ancient Green Scripts, the Holy Grail, the Magic Belt, the eyes and hand of Onka, the Weapons of the Freelands, Council's staff, Dwarf Ace, Brocan Hammer, the Gladius, the Great Bow, the Chadrin Scyth, the Qrbs of Dragon Kind, the wand of Orcus.

\* Starred names are directly drawn from LOTR.

Some excerpts from the Order and Institutions book follow.

### The Magi

These people believe that they should explore beyond the continent and find new places to spread their knowledge. Most people in this lawful good religious group are tall and wear glass helmets resembling space helmets. These help them communicate with their god.

### Char-col of Kon-tiki

The great traitor of elvenkind...The Battle of Trag, in the death mountains. Char-col's forces were defeated for the last time. Char-col was chained and shackled and brought before the White Council. They sentenced him to be hanged. At this Char-col grinned malevolently and said "you'll never hang me!" As he was about to fall thru the hole, a black cloud covered the scaffold & both he and the executioner disappeared. From then on he became singularly planar and people occasionally saw his ghost until Gandalf imprisoned him, on one of the planes. Unfortunately he was released in 2000 ER...

### Cliffs of Crag

This is the location of the magical gold dragon Geld. There were 3 stone statues of monstrous height carved into the cliffs by a long-forgotten race. One of these statues was the one Onka caused to come to life. There are now only two of these statues.

### The Mace of the Sentinel

"Ye evil ones who behold the mace shall die into dust", so spoke Catlif the Cleric during the battle of Trag. This fabulously magical mace was mysteriously lost, along with Catlif during the battle.

### The Evil Serpant of the Eastern Wood

In the easternmost Minoan villages on the great island of Pantia, there are horrible tales of a great serpant-like spirit which wanders in the forests beyond the mountains.

The Hall of the Mountain Kings

The place where most of the Mountain Kings were buried. It was once a great fortress, razed by Smaug and goblins. The lich Arcane is supposedly beneath the ruins of the castle that was once there.

**Particulars on Morana, Particulars on General Stuff.**

This book contains descriptions of the Goblin Races of the Dark lands, deities and priestly orders, and the Servants of Satan.

**Freeland Country Book: A Totally Unreliable Book.  
Published after Dark Flood.**

This contains yet more cultural geography concerning the various regions of the world.

At the end of the binder are a few loose-leaf pages detailing non-playing characters (NP's). One of these follows.

**Sir Wilfred, Earl of Toast**

strength: 16  
 intelligence: 17  
 wisdom: 14  
 constitution: 14  
 dexterity: 15  
 charisma:  
 Level: 3 (4)  
 A.C.: 2 (1)  
 Alignment: lawful good  
 hit points: 18 (22)

**Equipment:** heavy war horse, saddle/saddle bags, backpack, rations, holy symbol, garlic, wolvesbain, rope/twine, fling, torches (3), oil (5), hooded lantern, small silver mirror, wax candle, 10' pole, grapple hook, water skins (2), goat horns.

Armor/Weapons: platemail/shield, extra armor (leather), heavy lance, longsword/scabbard, 2 handed sword/scabbard, throwing axe, Bec de Corbin, long sword, potion of speed.







