



Rules and Roles in Midian City



Midian City role-play

- a former leper colony island and nuclear test site forgotten by a surrounding world preoccupied with the aftermath of yet another world war. Radiation created a wasteland and the surrounding waters became a “chemical soup of decaying seafood.”
- dark and violent role-play set in a not too distant 21st century future



Contrast between roles and rules

Although the role-play itself might seem violent and disruptive, the organization enabling it is not. Midian City, its rules and its leadership are described in detail side by side with role-playing instructions in the welcoming area. The interplay between rules and role-play is thus foregrounded as soon as a visitor arrives to the sim.

Hypothesis and research question

My hypothesis is that leadership and rule formation in this digital environment is forced to build upon, but also reconsider, terms such as anonymity and artificiality, as well as transparency and interaction/communication. I would argue that this has led leaders in role-playing communities to constantly negotiate opposing ideas about presence, role-playing, and decision-making processes, as well as conflicting notions of the essence of the medium, and it is this discussion I will try to describe.

What is it about the role-players' performances that distinguishes this community from other communities and how does that influence the structure of their community?



The aim of Midian City

Inspired by the cityscape of Hard Alley and with a Sin City-like roleplay, the main aim of Midian City is to provide a stimulating and versatile platform for people who choose to role-play in this type of environment and contribute to the evolving story of Midian.



The levity of the medium

“Levity is related to the use of avatars and the displacement into a virtual context and manifests itself as a kind of lightness in the way participants approach the interaction” (Mikael Jakobsson).



Different approaches to the medium

- 1. Offline life as reality and online life as fantasy. Interaction inside SL might be seen as irrelevant and even worthless.**
- 2. Second Life is primary, the place where the most important interaction and communication happens.**
- 3. Interaction is interaction regardless of the medium.**

Categories of role-players – Lourdes Clibon*

- **The “hobby writers,” who only want to have some fun after work, without taking the role-play too seriously.**
- **The “serious role-players,” are their opposite in the sense that they are online “24/7 with no understanding of people ‘not taking care of storylines’ or for being inconsistent.”**
- **The “communitarians” are mainly interested in meeting real friends and the building of a real community. These are “most inclined to hit drama due to that thinking and false hope of things being ‘real’.”**
- **A fourth group is mainly “in for their ego-boost, plain out to replace things they are lacking in RL.”**

*** Pseudonym**



Lawrence Lessig – Rules and regulations

- **Laws (enforceable rules; such as age play, identity verification, adult classification)**
– governments, laws, policies
- **Norms in the Midian City community**
- **Market considerations – Linden Lab**
- **Architecture and code – Linden Lab**



Role-playing and community norms

- **Create a character/role within the framework of the Midian City story.**
- **Ask for consent when role-playing.**
- **Emoted interaction is encouraged.**
- **Keep IC and OOC apart.**



What is good role-play?

A role-play in Midian City can be described as a collaboratively written story, in which thoughts, dialogue as well as battles are described rather than enacted visually. The goal is not to “win” but to tell, and be a part of, a good story.

"Biomass reclamation" – role-playing scene

[11:23] Nell Slaight* nods in return and somehow manages to set her half-empty coffee cup down on the window sill. "Great. Encouraged. Sure. Maybe you'd like to come back later when the Mayor is in? Or I can just take the message now and let him know..." She tries smiling. "Just tell me what it is.. ummm...Manager. And I'll pass it right along."

[11:25] Silver Coddington* nods again. "BUDGETS WILL NEED TO BE AMENDED. THE PARK SERVICE REQUIRES AN INFLOW OF FIVE THOUSAND CREDITS FOR THE INITIATIVE. WE WILL PAY ONE CREDIT PER KILOGRAM OF UNWANTED BIOMASS. CITIZENS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO BRING THEIR UNWANTED FETUSES, INFANTS, TODDLERS, AND PRE-TEENS TO THE PARK SERVICE FOR RECLAMATION AND COMPOSTING."

[11:28] Nell Slaight* ...just....stares. She stands there for a long, long time with her jaw dropped down....staring. "I see. You propose that the Park begin to take excess ...flow...from the City Morgue? IS that what I am hearing here? Just to be clear? You wish....to fertilize...with decomposing...human...corpses? Just to be clear?"

*** Pseudonym**

Murray Lazotte*:

“A game player wins so that others lose. A storyteller can lose, but still win, because they have an interesting story to tell. A game player might accept losing, because playing the game is a reward in and of itself. And know that he has the opportunity to win later. Good sportsmanship. A storyteller will accept losing for the same reason I just gave. But likewise, both archetypes often can break down. If a game player decides to win at all costs, or isn't a good sport, then he can create a competitiveness that isn't productive to the community. Likewise, if a storyteller tries to exert too much control on his environment in order to further his own story, he'll get a significant backlash, and won't be able to tell the story he wants, or, worse, become a pariah, and lose the ability to participate in the story-telling process.... It's a case of people not wanting to compromise. In both cases, both for game players, and for storytellers, the best results come from active collaboration. The drama cycle, I think, is a result of people failing to collaborate.”

*** Pseudonym**



Jade Steele's leadership philosophy:

"I made it clear that I do not want to be some sort of dictator. And I have stated over and over that Midian City belongs to everyone who actively contributes there.... I realized that the more people can take ownership and pride in something, the more they will want to be involved.... I just make sure we keep to the initial vision, while allowing room for things to grow and evolve."



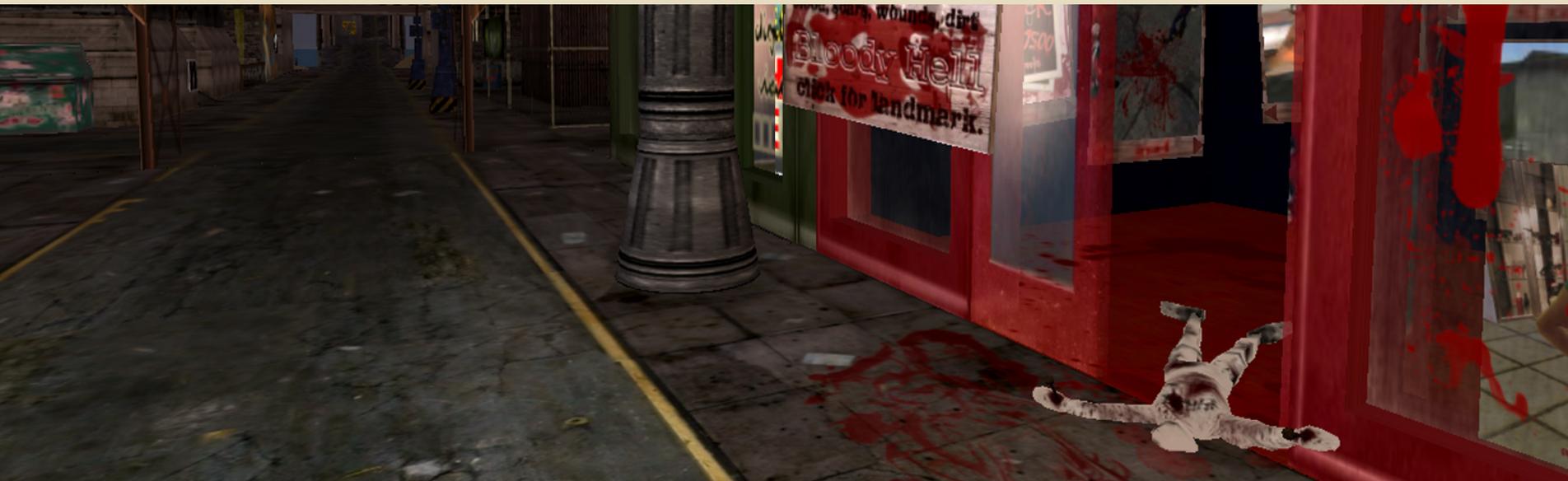
A new leadership structure

Sim Managers “retain Estate Manager roles and are responsible for technical related issues to the sims. As a group will review issues brought to them by the DM team and if needed make a final resolution on any potential issue. This group includes the sim owner and decisions made here are final. Their word as a group counts equal to that of the sim owner” (Steele, notecard).

Ciaran McCarthy*:

“[A good leader needs to be] more than a figurehead. A good admin needs to be there. Every day, if possible. That's not to say that they need to be there 24/7, and for the times they can't be, they need to have a good support structure.... But the moderators are the advisors. They're there to help the leader stay informed about the role-play in the sim, to offer input on changes and sim-wide decisions – but at the end of the day, the deciding vote should always be the head honcho, the person in charge. And that means that making decisions can't wait weeks and months for a solution.... Are people having fun?... “You can tell when the complaints are the same old temper tantrums, and when they're issues being raised by level-headed people, and when the latter stop having fun, it's time to pay attention. And think through a solution.”

*** Pseudonym**



JC Mellott*

accuses Jade Steele of nepotism. “[This] approach, the exclusivity, and the incapability of senior admins rubbed players and junior admins up the wrong way, who questioned why they put in effort to roleplay and develop the sim when the only roleplay that matters is those of a select bunch, seeking to shape sim storylines, and the only people who matter are those that are friends with the owner.”

*** Pseudonym**



Lourdes Clibon*:

“The way everything was done in the past was a fairly lax form of ‘let people do things with utmost freedom’ — eventually it led to more and more issues and problems piling up, as everybody has their own viewpoint on ‘how things should be’ — and added the ‘anonymity’ of internet on top of that.”

*** Pseudonym**

Conclusions

- **The role of the leader(s) in Midian City is just as debated as the role-playing styles are, which mirrors the role-players' emotional and social investment in both the performances and the Midian City community.**
- **The norms, as well as the leadership, in Midian City encourage the role-players to take literary or emoted role-play seriously, whereas action-filled role-play is not favoured.**
- **“Drama” is often a result of IC issues becoming OOC issues, which often originates in differing role-playing styles or priority clashes.**
- **The role-player's attitude towards the aspect of levity influences both how they role-play and how they interact within the community. Whereas being IC often involves a certain playful distance, it becomes clear that the OOC interaction often does not.**



Thank You!

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