Hello, my name is Dr. Alan Meades, I'm a senior lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University, and my research area is play and misrule. Lords of Misrule is a game that I've developed to help me learn more about how we play, and the situations where we choose to break rules when we do play. I hope that it is a game that you find enjoyable, that you customise it for the ways that you play, and that you consider sharing some of your ideas and game responses with me.

**STEP 1: THINGS YOU'LL NEED TO PLAY LORDS OF MISRULE**

- **Name/Rule Cards**
- **Paper & Pens (same colour)**
- **Answer Cards**
- **Some Merry Players**

**STEP 2: PICKING AN IDENTITY - BECOMING A LORD OF MISRULE**

Because Lords of Misrule is about confessing to misrule you'll probably want to do this with some level of anonymity. Think up a name and write it on a blank name/rule card. Keep it a secret and keep it hidden about your person.

**STEP 3: CUSTOMISATION**

Have a look through the stack of rule cards (at first they'll likely all be blank). Think about how you see play and the ways you play. What rules, laws, expectations or etiquette are relevant? What games do you play? What types of ways of playing are important or scandalous?

Write down key words on as many cards as you want - what's written on these cards will drive your version of the game. How far you go is entirely up to you. However, according to how you play, there may be plenty of opportunities to add more or refine your deck.

**STEP 4: AGREEING TO PLAY**

Shuffle the customised rule cards, dealing out three so all potential players can see what they say. Their task is to write a confession of misruly play that touches upon as many of the rule card topics as possible.

The confessions can be things you've done or things done to you - but remember, if other players figure out what you wrote it's almost certain that they will think that you did what was written.

Check that the players are willing and able to play with those cards - if fewer than three people are ready to play deal again.

**STEP 5: SETTING THE STAKES**

Some players might want to include stakes to the game with entry to each round needing players to 'buy in'. I'd not recommend this at first, but stakes that accumulate lead to very interesting and entertaining gameplay dynamics. This is probably at the expense of strict truthfulness of the confessions, but it certainly escalates things.

Others say that Lords of Misrule works as a good drinking game...

However you play, you'll need the answer cards and a bit of privacy.

**STEP 6: WRITING YOUR CONFESSION**

Making sure that nobody can see what you're writing, or identify you from what you put down, start writing down your confession of misrule. Remember, you're writing about something fun and playful that also bends or breaks rules.

Put your secret identity on the answer card and the three rules that you're attempting to write about in the respective boxes. Then hide somewhere to write out your confession, make it as detailed and as theatrical as you can.

**STEP 7: PERFORMING THE CONFESSION**

When a player completes their answer card have them fold it in half. When all are finished, collect them up, shuffle them, and hand one to each player. Each player then opens and familiarises themselves with the confession of misrule...

Of course, it might be yours.
STEP 8: INTERROGATING THE PERFORMERS

After the performers have presented their confessions, each player takes it in turn to ask them a question or query a part of their tale of misrule. Perhaps something doesn't make sense, or would be worth talking about... or perhaps you want to make other players squirm and think you might be able to identify whose confession it is by their responses and behaviour.

STEP 9: SCORING AND RECORDING TOTALS

Each answer card has space to write down the rule cards that have been dealt. Each of these have five dots printed underneath. Use these to record how well the other players feel the confession deals with or responds to the subjects on the rule cards.

STEP 10: DECIDING WHAT TO DO NEXT

Once all players have been scored, and you've recorded the totals you've got some choices:

- **CROWN A WINNER... WELL, INVITE A WINNER TO STEP FORWARD...**
- **PLAY ANOTHER ROUND WITHOUT RAISING THE STAKES — GO BACK TO STEP 4**
- **PLAY ANOTHER ROUND AND RAISE THE STAKES: ADD NEW CARDS? ADD MORE TO THE BUY IN STAKE? WHY NOT TAKE OUT THE RANDOMNESS AND AGREE THE QUESTIONS BEFORE HAND? GO BACK TO STEP 5**

SO, THAT’S KINDA HOW TO PLAY LORDS OF MISRULE, BUT IT’S A GAME ABOUT BENDING AND BREAKING RULES FOR FUN THOUGH. THIS MEANS THAT YOU SHOULD BREAK THESE RULES OR THINK OF...

**STRATEGIES**

Decide what kind of play you want to do. I, for example, prefer toying with players rather than winning. So these are things I’d do: pick another player’s name as an identity; tell a story involving other players; change my identity each round; score everyone 5 stars; pick one player’s identity and score them high all the time; steal another player’s identity; form an alliance; wind people up and just misrule.

Yeah, fine... but what’s the point of all this? Aside from lords of misrule being an entertaining game it is a way of thinking about play and the differences between how we play and what is understood as ‘good’ play.

Dutch historian and cultural theorist, Johan Huizinga, came up with the following description of the character of play. It’s by no means the only one, but it gives us a good idea of how we regard ‘good play’ even today:

**Play is free, is in fact freedom.**

**Play is not “ordinary” or “real” life.**

**Play is distinct from “ordinary” life both as to locality and duration.**

**Play creates order, is order. Play demands order absolute and supreme.**

**Play is connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it.**

**Johan Huizinga 1872-1945**

**Homo Ludens (1938)**

But over the last 15 years I’ve been studying the ways that people play (videogames mostly), and I’ve found loads of examples of play that include:

- Rule breaking, disorder, deception, profit, risk and power

And these don’t fit into these ways of thinking about play... instead the players are seen as bad, juvenile, criminal or many other names and labels. The point is that these kinds of play are seen as:

**ABNORMAL...**

And I’m not convinced that’s the case.

Dr Alan Meades, 2015
**PSSST! OVER HERE!**

**HAHAHA! The messages were just so full on!**

**here's an example based upon confessions of misrule and play in alan's book 'understanding counterplay in video games'.**

- **Identity: Zakhaev**

Now, the rule cards that Zakhaev was responding to were all about videogames and counterplay (that was what my PhD and first book were about), but Lords of Misrule is intended to be fully customizable, feel free to make changes to any bit of it.

**WHAT ACT OF MISRULE OCCURRED?**

Me and a few friends set up a specially modified version of a Call of Duty game on the Xbox. We then tricked other players into playing it, and when they played it the game stripped them of all the stuff and unlocked through months of play - or had paid people to add to their games, ruining it for everyone else playing properly.

**WHO DID THIS ACT OF MISRULE?**

It was me and some of my mates from back home, probably five of us. All seventeen year old blokes at the time.

**WHO OR WHAT WAS THE TARGET OF THIS ACT OF MISRULE?**

We picked on *d*cks - other players who obviously had hacked their games to make them look better than everyone else and giving them weapon unlocks they didn't deserve or know how to use properly. These idiots ruin the game for everyone.

**WHEN DID THIS ACT OF MISRULE TAKE PLACE?**

It was a fair few years back now when we were still at school - three and a half years ago, in the summer break.

**HOW OFTEN DID THIS ACT OF MISRULE TAKE PLACE?**

We probably did this five or six times, catching about forty of these players and robbing them of their ill-gotten unlocks.

**WHAT RULES WERE BROKEN?**

All of the ones above, but when I thought about it there were loads. The rules of the game, rules about how to use Xbox Live, and rules about hacking Xboxes too. I didn't do that bit, but I reck'on it's probably against the law.

**DID ANYONE GET IN TROUBLE?**

No! A few free accounts got banned (I think) but none of us got any grief about it.

**THE RULE CARDS ARE DEALS:**

- **Modding** - modifying technology, software or hardware;
- **Videogames** - games played on computing technology;
- **Deceit** - deceiving someone by concealing or misrepresented.

**HOW WAS IT DONE?**

It was so funny, so just like a lot of people we'd been playing around with modded games on CoD because one of my friends had a hacked Xbox. So we found out that someone had made a game that took people's unlocks away. So, we got hold of the files and set up a match and then started playing a normal game looking for six players with loads of good unlocks. Players who didn't deserve it and were running the game. Then, after we'd written down their names we invited them to play a special unlock game, but we used accounts that we'd made specially in case they got banned. Loads of them took the bait and played in the game. We then made messages appear on the screen saying ‘adding all mega unlocks’ and shit like that... then boom! At the end of the match the lost stuff it goes MINUS INFINITY experience points and they lose EVERYTHING!

**WHAT WERE THE REACTIONS?**

HAHAHA! The messages were just so full on... people were just screaming, you couldn't make out what they were saying because they were so angry... We wouldn't say anything back most of the time, but sometimes we said we were Microsoft employees that had had enough, saying ‘this is payback, you've brought this on yourselves’. While other times we'd just say ‘you didn't earn that stuff properly and you can just start again you d*cks’! And then that's when all the funny messages start - and they're like What are you doing. Leave me alone!... they send you hate mail and rubbish. And I like that... it's very enjoyable.

**WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?**

You spend a lot of time nurturing your account and then it's your pride... and then on the leader board you're just wiped out by someone who's hacked their game. This was payback for all those scumbags... and besides it was really, really funny.

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT ALL?**

It was the funniest thing I've ever done on a videogame, it was totally hilarious. I don't feel guilty or anything, these people deserved it, and beside at the end of the day it's just a videogame. So what, a few lost a couple of months worth of unlocks, guns and icons. So what? Get over it. I'd do it again at the drop of the hat.
I found that so many people played occasionally in mean, sneaky, aggressive, profitable and even illegal ways, that this made me think that misrule in play is pretty normal...

Other scholars have made the same observations, such as performance studies theorist Richard Schechner with his idea of ‘dark play’, that people often engage in:

*dark play*: "playing with fire," "breaking the rules," "getting away with murder," playing that emphasizes risk, deception, and sheer thrill. "Playing in the dark" means that some of the players don’t know they are playing — like in a con game. Dark play involves fantasy, risk, sex, daring, invention, and deception.

Richard Schechner
Performance Studies (2013)

If that is the case, then play and misrule aren’t different — or competing things, but are elements of the same thing. This suggests that misrule play is as important to us as obedient play. If this were the case we’d probably be able to identify situations we create to enable us to occasionally misrule.

*This is speculative and subjective historical interpretation of the ways that misrule was expressed and enabled through play.

...but that they recognised that there was a need, felt by everyday citizens, to break rules, and that this was felt so strongly that festivities were arranged to enable this.

The rise of Christianity throughout Europe did away with the festivities associated directly with Dionysus, but not the desire or need to occasionally be misrule. Instead festivities appeared throughout the calendar that allowed similar misrule to take place, but these sat against and alongside Christian religious ceremonies, including the ‘lenten carnival’.

The lenten carnival took place just before Easter, in medieval Europe. It was a festival run by the people, and consisted of feasting, drinking, hurling abuse at those in power and breaking normally important rules.

Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin wrote about the lenten carnival as depicted in the work of French author Francois Rabelais. Behaviour taking place in the carnival, the ‘carnivalesque’, included an awful lot of misrule, against the church, the monarchy and the powers that ruled over people in medieval Europe...

Mikhail Bakhtin
Rabelais and his world (1968)

...and break rules and other established structures.

The ancient Greeks, (and Romans) worshipped Dionysus, a god of culture, play, revelry and drunkenness

Dionysus was worshipped with unruly drunken feasts, known as bacchanal; these were popular but worried those in power, as they allowed people to behave in misruly and unacceptable ways. The Roman Senate passed laws to control bacchanal in 200BC. However other similar celebrations took over, including the Saturnalia.

The point is not that our ancestors believed in unruly and playful gods...

...but that they recognised that there was a need, felt by everyday citizens, to break rules, and that this was felt so strongly that festivities were arranged to enable this.

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**CARNIVALESQUE:**

PERIODIC COMMUNAL MISRULE;
Feasting, drinking, rudeness, obscenity, anonymity and disguises
The crowning of fool kings and lords of misrule; attacking everyone — the powerful and weak.

People together, being mischievous, breaking rules, being mean to each other and the powers that be.

This is the pleasure of play and misrule, occasionally going far beyond the normal restrictions and expectations. It also is dangerous — it can go too far and become risky to everyone involved.

The point here is not that the carnivalesque is play, but that play is unpredictable, anti-structural and takes advantage of opportunities for misrule like the carnival.

In pre-industrial revolution Britain communities created their own varied and unique festivities, rituals and celebrations that allowed groups of people to come together in play, fun and misrule.

E.g. mummers, lords of misrule, gladman’s riding, masking.

We have to be careful about relying too heavily on Bakhtin’s work due to its distance from the original carnival events...

However, it is generally agreed that the carnival was restricted by those in power until it lost much of its dangerous misrule, much like a modern carnival.

Despite this there are many examples of other similar, but smaller, events and festivities that enabled people to break rules, often seen in English rural communities that can be seen as connecting with elements of the bacchanal.

E.g. mummers, lords of misrule, gladman’s riding, masking.

David Myers
Play Refux (2010)

*Others, such as David Myers, have gone further to explore play’s anti-structure, this is the idea that part of what play does is challenge, undermine and break rules and other established structures.*

*The misruly pleasures aren’t therefore unique to dark play, but pleasures of play more broadly. Misrule and play are deeply interlinked.*

David Myers
Play Refux (2010)

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*This is speculative and subjective historical interpretation of the ways that misrule was expressed and enabled through play.*
The arrival of the industrial revolution in the 18th century had an enormous impact upon our cultural understanding of play. People left small rural communities (with their own festival forms and calendars) for the cities to work in dirty and dangerous factories. Factories treated workers as a commodity, with the emphasis being on keeping factory output up—accidents were frequent and workers’ rights and holidays were almost non-existent. New forms of leisure and entertainment developed in order to serve the factory populations, supported by the spread of train travel. seaside holiday resorts, such as Margate, took on the spirit of the carnival, all season long, and just a few hours from the factory.

Gradually there was increasing employment reform, including the introduction of bank holidays, where all factory work ceased, and paid holiday leave.

This led to huge growth of seaside holiday resorts, and later foreign charter holidays. These holidays brought back some of the morally dynamic seen within the Saturday and Carnival, but instead of taking place in the centre of a town or city, this newfangled shifted to the seaside. Seasonal seaside resort’s coastline edge, or the edge of a far-flung sun-kissed foreign destination, the edge-ness meant that these spaces offered partial anonymity and a sense of unreality – they became ideal spaces for play and misrule. Groups of people were able to mingle and to play.

We can trace this scrutiny of play into bomb-sites and destruction that covered the UK after the Second World War. People became concerned with the nature and environment of children’s play, especially about children playing in dangerous bomb sites. This fit with a national initiative of modernisation and slum clearance, and playgrounds were designed into the fabric of post war town planning.

These new playgrounds offered safer spaces to play in, but also represent a definition and control of the correct ways of playing. While this was no bad thing it marks a modern obsession with the protection and control of play.

From this perspective play should be safe, useful, and only really for children. We’re back at Huizinga’s definition of play...

Despite this confrontationalism, play’s anti-structure finds new locations and forms to enable its full expression. Play that is more misruly simply seeks edge-spaces that allow it to take place.

In England over the last 50 years there has been a process where geographic edge-spaces (the scrub land, bomb sites, abandoned factories etc.) have been used for play and misrule. In my own childhood and adolescence I played in the woods on the outskirts of town, abandoned tanning tunnels, the empty out-of-season beaches, and the dark and alluring videogame arcades...
I've even spent time rescuing, restoring and digitally preserving arcade machines, including locating, restoring, and then dumping onto mame (multiple arcade machine emulator) the only known example of a street fighter 2 whack-a-mole game called ken sei mogura. It's now in Margaret's streamland and I hope that it will be on public display when the park reopens.

As I've done more and more work looking at games I've begun to question how important they are to my research, and how much of what I'm thinking and writing about is about something broader - play, and this partially explains my loose use of the concepts of play, leisure, anti-structure and misrule.

In the U.K., over the last 20 years there has been a national dynamic of urban development, resulting in the rapid shrinkage of edge spaces and increased policing of behaviour through CCTV and private security companies. scrub land, vacant sites and other spaces that would normally have been used (often by adolescents) of edge spaces and increased policing of behaviour through CCTV dymanic of urban development, resulting in the rapid shrinkage in the U.K. over the last 20 years there has been a national perception of public risk (traffic danger, stranger danger etc.), play has shifted into digital spaces in order to cope with the rapid shrinkage of edge spaces and increased policing of behaviour through CCTV, and private security companies. is as alluring as ever. and the pleasures, the risky thrill of anonymity: there are crowds of people online we still have a partial perception of edge spaces and increased policing of behaviour through CCTV and private security companies. of edge spaces and increased policing of behaviour through CCTV dymanic of urban development, resulting in the rapid shrinkage

In the U.K., play has become less and less a visible, free-form, and collective activity. instead it is often now done in specified places, many such as skate parks or amusement parks requiring an admission fee. inside these spaces play is subject to regulation and control - play has become a commodity. without opportunities to express the misruly aspects of play these play environments fail to support the full spectrum of what constitutes play, and this element is diminished and goes left unexpressed. however, the anti-structural nature of play makes even this kind of well-meant restriction and control only a temporary barrier, and it is my hypothesis that play has shifted into digital spaces in order to once again reconnect with misrule. taken from this perspective, the various problematic activities that we see online: trolling, abuse, grief, scamming, pranks, harassment, subversion... etc. lose none of their objectionableness but become much more normal.

...they could be seen as people reconnecting with a well established view of play that recognises the pleasures of occasional misrule and rule-breaking. digital spaces are edge-spaces in their increasing presence in physical geographical space. of course, this is precisely the same predicament that videogame publishers and community support teams have; they need to keep play within unstructured frameworks (the game), but it is a constant and expensive battle, sometimes a new videogame release that adapts and responds to the evolution of play is needed.

In the U.K. actual video games are often designed to make people feel a sense of completion but become much more normal.

I've also reached the conclusion that attempts to restrict play, whether in the shape of a game, or a set of playground rules, is at odds with the character of play. as play is anti-structural, its natural state is one of constant change: I think this explains why people will continually challenge rules, develop new strategies or move onto new types of play.

I hope this gives you some idea of the background to Lord of Misrule, the game is really a way to get me to start thinking more about the relationship between play and misrule, and hopefully encourage a few people like you to get in touch and help me understand your perspectives.

My plan is to use what I learn through Lord of Misrule as part of the foundations of a book that does a couple of things:

1) traces the relationship between play and misrule from a historical perspective;
2) offers real life examples of misrule in play in a range of different contexts - i.e. not just in videogames;
3) challenges the idea that misrule in play is something done by bad/mean/abnormal people;
4) explores whether digital spaces do enable a return to carnivalesque play - the digital carnival.

Hope it makes sense.

Alan Meades, 2015

Please consider sharing your rule decks and answer cards with me once you’ve finished playing Lord of Misrule!

lords-of-misrule.com or lords-of-misrule.wetransfer.com

So, what happens when I submit my Lord of Misrule game cards to you online or via the post?

1) you submit your game cards via post or as image files uploaded at lords-of-misrule.wetransfer.com
2) the submissions don’t go straight to me, instead they are processed by a CCC research assistant, only the assistant can access the upload folder.
3) the assistant removes any information that could identify you or other players. if it is an upload, it then uploads and edit the images, rename files and delete the original uploads (and any email address data). original files are securely deleted.
4) when the assistant is confident that everything is anonymous it is then passed to me. I then try to make sense of the data and feed it into my research.
Printing and making Lords of Misrule

The quickest way to get laying Lords of Misrule is to download this PDF from www.lords-of-misrule.com and print it onto thick paper or card. It’ll need a little bit of assembly, but nothing too major.

The rule cards and identity cards (the ones with the grinning face on the reverse) need to be cut along the dotted lines. This gives you eight cards per printed sheet. You need a decent amount of cards to get started. I’d recommend a minimum of 30 rule cards, some spares to allow you to add more in new rounds, and enough spares to make sure everyone gets somewhere to write their Lords of Misrule identity.

The answer/confession cards are larger and more complicated. They should be printed double sided (the officially printed packs used for workshops are – get in touch if you’re interested). Because not everyone has a double sided printer available the sheets in this PDF have both sides on one page. To make a single answer/confession card simply print the page and fold along the dotted line, with the print on the outside. The bonus here is that it’ll give you even more space to write a really detailed confession. If that’s what you want!

As everyone plays differently, and because some people will need more of certain cards depending on how and how long they want to play, you can download PDFs of just the rule or answer/confession cards from www.lords-of-misrule.com too. Lastly, here’s an address label to stick on an envelope if you decide to send Alan your finished game cards.

FAQ: Dr Alan Meades
Lords of Misrule
Canterbury Christ Church University
Broadstairs Campus
Northwood Road
Broadstairs
Kent, CT10 2WA
United Kingdom

So, please do give the game a try, think about submitting your game rules and confessions, let me know of suggested adaptations and changes and get in touch if there’s anything that you’d like to add help with, or if you’d be willing to be interviewed about play. Just go to the website and make contact. What you submit will be used to create new academic articles, book chapters and (hopefully) books.

www.lords-of-misrule.com

If you find this interesting why not check out some of my writing about videogame glitching, modding and hacking. I’ve a book out that subject published by Routledge: ‘Understanding Counterplay in Video Games’ by Alan F Meades (2015). My journal articles and chapters can be found by looking at my Academia.edu profile (it’s like LinkedIn but for researchers).
### Our Lords of Misrule Identity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule 1</th>
<th>Rule 2</th>
<th>Rule 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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#### What act of misrule occurred?

#### Who did this act of misrule?

#### Who or what was the target of this act of misrule?

#### When did this act of misrule take place?

#### How often did this act of misrule take place?

#### What rules were broken?

#### Did anyone get in trouble?

#### How was it done?

#### What were the reactions?

#### Why was it done?

#### How often did this act of misrule take place?

#### Why was it done?

#### How do you feel about it all?
what act of misrule occurred?

who did this act of misrule?

who or what was the target of this act of misrule?

when did this act of misrule take place?

how often did this act of misrule take place?

what rules were broken?

did anyone get in trouble?

how was it done?

what were the reactions?

why was it done?

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