

Author: Phil "the Real" Rejmer

Title: Nerds With Athletic Capability: An Unregistered Student Organization

Course: ANTH285 Section 1 (Ethnography) Fall 2007 -- Gina de Bessa

About the Author: The author is a devilish rogue with a penchant for pranks, a craving for chaos and a sweet tooth for sociology. Rumour has it he was born of Soviet experiments attempting to brighten everyone's day. He is a Libra and his favorite thing is traveling to visit an old friend.

Keywords: student community, CtF, capture the flag, unregistered student organization, student organization, Illinois State University, Bessa, Ant 285

Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the results of an ethnographic project about an Unregistered Student Organization (club) which plays games of Capture the Flag on the quad of Illinois State University twice a week and how the club is used by members for personal and social purposes. I show that members use the group to get enjoyment from the physical and mental exercise required in the game, gaining fame among a group of peers, and as a social reservoir from which can be drawn a variety of social wants or needs. Based on these preliminary findings the only conclusion I can think of is that the group is important to the people associated with it and I have several recommendations to the university. Create a common space for students to congregate such as a student union, use the universities Resident Assistants to bring in new members to CtF which would also give the RAs an easy program to attend, and to provide some form of counseling service for organizations that are having internal problems.

Initial Exercises: M1: Analysis of University Text Looking through the Dean of Students section of ISU's website it takes a while for me to travel a maze of links to get to the RSOs, nestled among student government, Greek Life, and volunteering opportunities. The site advises students to pick an RSO to attend in very strange ways. There are sometimes business like advice like "determine the goals and objectives of the group and what affiliations it may have with off-campus organizations" and "figure out what commitments are expected of you" combined with some strange ones like "Will membership mean isolation from family and non-member friends?" Not sure what to make of that last one. The site recommends students to attend on the quad events where RSOs set up tables, to check out fliers and chalkings on the sidewalks, and simply to look at the list of RSOs on the site. I think to myself already that this is almost too much work to find a place to belong at in school. Freshmen coming in are already swamped with all sorts of information and this slew of RSO information they're expected to process and analyze could only make things more complicated. The list itself is nicely organized into categories such as "recreation" and "social issues" and looking through

some of the groups they can all pretty much be found where I expected them to be. The site also says that if there is not anything a student wants they should make their own RSO. Along with some pointers such as making sure an Organization doesn't already exist the site tells the student to find people who are interested in the subject of the club since to be an RSO there must be a 5 person minimum. Already I know this must not be geared towards freshmen since they are unlikely to know enough people to draw upon to do this. Also, I think that to know if someone is interested in a particular subject one must know them to some degree, so a student will start this potential RSO with friends and acquaintances. The only other possibility would be to post fliers asking people if they were interested in starting an RSO, and I believe that students can only post fliers if they are already part of an RSO. Students starting an RSO must also find a faculty advisor to support their group, draft a constitution, and attend an RSO orientation sessions. This all seems like a lot of work for just a club. The deans office seems to treat an RSO almost like a business or governmental organization, expecting the students to be extremely involved and committed to the club. This is understandable since the students that are most involved and committed are the ones most likely to create a stable organization.

M4: Campus paths and places. As Nick Thompson says, "White men need paper maps, we have maps in our minds." This is the case with my maps of the campus, they exist in my mind. If I were to draw my map on a piece of paper it would be covered with writing about each place. "This is the big black bowl, I remember me and some of my friends went in it during the winter and slid around in the snow. I almost wasn't able to get back out it was so slippery. And then my old roommate, I remember he wanted to someday in the summer fill it with milk and cereal and sit in it all day as an art project. Then there was that one day a couple of, oh, maybe high school aged kids, skateboarding off the edge, doing jumps. I yelled at them to skate inside the bowl but they weren't stupid and said 'no'. Silly kids." Or I would say, "This is the Old Sage. Probably the biggest tree on the quad and its trunk is bent and twisted in such a way that you can sit down against it and your back fits perfectly against the trunk, better than a couch. And if you want to lie down that's cool too because there are little grooves covered in moss that you can lay your down on. There are a lot of ants near it though, and some of them are bigger than any ant has a right being. It has real big leaves and what look like lima beans hanging from its branches, during the spring. It's like a tree from another dimension, the Old Sage is. When the weather is warm I sit under him and read or write." And then there would be the descriptions that are simply, "Fell Hall." They have no story behind them, they are just inanimate objects. The paths I take also change Monday and Wednesday nights when I play capture the flag, when shadows become cloaks and walls become hiding spots or ways to lose someone chasing me. This all is in my mind. I don't know how to draw it on a piece

of paper and have it make sense.

Question: How do students make use of the quad? I am usually on the quad reading or climbing trees and since I spend so much time there I might as well see what other people are up to. This turned into a my second question: How do people who play capture the flag out on the quad make use of the quad and the group? Why do they participate? I chose that since it is a group I have been a part of but also not a part of since my freshman year. While I have played the game I haven't become too connected or involved in the social aspect of the group. While that is the case I can still use the connections I have to delve deeper into the group. Final question: how do players socially make use of the group/game of capture the flag?

Plan:

Data: Introduction to the Uninitiated: Capture the Flag is a game that is based around two teams vying over the control of their respective flags. Each team tries to defend their own flag while at the same time capturing the enemies'. The game at ISU is played on the quad with the sidewalk going from Fell Hall to Stevenson being the neutral ground separating the rival territories. If a player is tagged (physically touched) on his rival's territory he is escorted to jail and is unable to continue playing the game until a teammate successfully reaches him and tags him out of jail. While this is the overall way of playing the game ISU's CtF group has added many rules onto this over the years with the intention of making the game more fair. M9, Interview Transcript: This interview segment was with a relatively new member of CTF codenamed Piper, who had been playing in between a year and a year and a half. At this point Piper had been asked by the interviewer codenamed Mudbear about how other players' obsession with rules and obsession with winning was making the atmosphere of the game less fun (in response to something Piper said earlier.) "Piper: Um...I think... like... well... during the actual, like, during the experience of actually playing the game I... don't... notice things like that at all, but the overall attitude of the game has made it less fun. Like it's not as much of a... a... jovial community feeling as it was — like now it seems very clique-ish, people tend to group together about things... [Mudbear: so, uh] ...it's almost, it's almost political. Mudbear: Alright... so are you having less fun then? Piper: No. Mudbear: No? Piper: [indistinguishable] Mudbear: [laughs] But then what do you mean the overa— okay so you mentioned, you know, it's clique-ish and, but, what you mean by that the overall attitude is less fun if you're still having just as much fun? Piper: Well, it's like, my view, I guess, towards a view of CTF the, the, members and community of CTF... is slightly... more negative... now then it was last year, but when I like, my, like... the activity of playing CTF is just as fun. Mudbear: I see ... so uh, what is the deal with these kind of political atmospheres,

these kinds of cliques that are forming, what have you noticed about that? Piper: Well, I don't think it's as much cliques as it is a lot of people that hold certain... like... like opinions about certain other people

Mudbear: So, like, it's personal [piper: yes] issues? Piper: Some people tend to be a little bit... uh... controversial... in general... like Bowser, I know that a lot of people don't like Bowser... just because his, his attitude... Mudbear: So what attitude is that, that makes people not like him? Piper: um... it's not a... let me rephrase this, not his attitude, its more of his approach to the game, like he just goes off on his own, he is like more-so than any body else a loner, like every single game he'll go off on offense, no matter what anyone else says, and then like, he is a catalyst for the offense, but... that's... like, him being catalyst is secondary and his priority is just like to just actually going after the flag. i'm sure he doesn't think about 'hey, this is going to open up some holes [in the defense]' he's thinking more 'hey, I'm going to get that flag,' you know. Mudbear: So, well, I know me... me and Ivanhoe have often gone solo, off on our own, and pretty much... and I know you usually go solo but no one seems to... does any one have a problem with us then because we go solo? Piper: Um... not that I know of.

Analysis of Interview Segment: What I think is most important about this interview is how it shows the duality between the game of Capture the Flag and the community of Capture the flag and how a negative opinion of one isn't necessarily connected to the other. Piper, here, shows one of the important things I found in my interviews and observation, how some players will focus on the game and how they play it to so they don't have to deal with a negative community atmosphere. However, this negative community atmosphere seems to scare off newcomers and prevents them from getting invested in the game itself, something I noticed in my conversations and observations. And these concepts are illustrated well in this section of Piper's interview.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH CHIMERA: Chimera is a long time veteran, the only person who has played longer than me and still plays to this day. (This is the first nine minutes of the hour and fifty minute long interview.) Mudbear: To start things off tell me how you got started in CtF. Chimera: Um... it was founded on the floor I moved into my freshman year. And because of that I knew the guys who were going out to play and so they brought me along. But it was founded by my dorm floor. M: So was this just, ah, wa-was this literally something started up by the guys on your floor or was it something going on by - between their friends and then they (Chimera: Uh..) got the rest of the people on your (Chimera: It was...) floor (Chimera: It wasn't an entire floor thing, Chimera: , it was just a group of people who were on the floor who started it, and then, uh, they brought me along. Actually, they were actually, most of them weren't living on the floor at the time, only, um, actually only two of them still were living on the floor. Everybody else had moved to an apartment together and so, ah, I went with those guys, because, they asked about

capture the flag, because my RA, my RA knew about it, he was the RA from the previous year as well, se he, uh, told me about [indistinguishable] he told the one guy, he came by, and I went with him. M: Allright, cool, so, ah, it was basically... did, did you know these gu— did you... were these guys , people, your friends before capture the flag or did they become friends after they started inviting (Simultaneously: [M:people to] [C: Uh...]) capture the flag? C: I would say became friends, because, uh, I didn't really know anyone, it was the first, I think it was the second week here, so I didn't really know anyone until they finally came by, 'cause they were looking for people to go out, but yeah, they didn't, uh, yeah I didn't know 'em really before that. M: Allright, cool... C: But I didn't really know anybody at that time. M: Gotchya. So, um [4 sec pause] so, basically what kept you going back to capture the flag? C: Um, I needed to run around (laughs) and that, uh, offered a lot of just running around for no point whatsoever except to just do it, so, uh, 'cause, uh, otherwise I'd go nuts, sitting in a, a cubicle my entire life (single laugh) next four years (single laugh). M: So to just get out of the dorm basically. C: Yeah, basically get out. M: So what, the running around didn't have anything to do about, ah, feeling the need to exercise? C: Uh, no, it wasn't th-, it wasn't exercise, it was, yeah, just I needed to get out (M: Allright) get out, run around otherwise I'd go crazy. M: Allright cool, so, ah, tell us, tell me about (M: Or more crazy.) (both laugh) M: Uh, so tell me about... those like first couple (Chimera says something indistinguishable) I guess weeks, because back then if I remember capture the flag was just Wednesdays only. C: Yeah, it was Wednesdays only, uh, ten to midnight till, um... M: Just tell me what it was like basically for you. C: Very unorganized, uh, and uh, a lot mo— had a lot mor— there was a lot more profanity than I was used to (laughs) uh, yeah, and since most of 'em were Juniors they were, turned twenty one so most of 'em were drinking (laughs)... (M: Out at...out at capture the...) at capture, or, yeah, or before they came to capture the flag and after they left. Occasionally some would still be drinking as they came to capture the flag. M: So, very unorganized, but, uh, I guess, aside from being unorganized what was your own personal experience with it, was it fun, was it, uh... C: I enjoyed it because it had... I guess there was a lot going on.. uh, I also [indistinguishable] dodgeball which at the time I actually liked better, because, uh, it was, you know, more organized people were working together to you know, get something done at the actual games rather than just, you know, running around, so it was more running around but with a goal intended. So then capture the flag became more organized later, so, I ended up sticking with it and not with dodgeball (single laugh), but, yeah, uh, er, early on... uh, I don't, I don't really remember (laughs) what I liked about it so much, I just, I just went and did because, uh, I guess I could (single laugh). M: I gotcha. Well you said a lot was going on, did you mean in capture the flag in the beginning a lot was going on? C: Yeah. M: What did you mean by that?

C: Like, uh, everybody was kind of doing their own thing, so you really had to pay attention a lot more rather than coming up with like a system to actually play the game (M: A'right) so it was more like, anything could happen, so, because of that it seemed like a lot more was going on. M: Alright, and, uh, so basically, are you telling me, because it was unorganized, everyone was doing their own individual thing, people didn't really act like a team, it was... C: Yeah, it was more individualistic, people just kind of running around, you'd see somebody just, like, just, whoever spotted you first would probably go chase you forever, and like, Cloud would tag me out at Dark Towers [dormitories that are about a quarter mile away from the quad] (laughs) which is completely pointless, in the long run, the games over by the time we get back (M: right) but you know, ridiculous stuff like that. Uh, yeah, so it was really just like, who— if you got close to one person they'd chase you until they got tired or whatever, it just went like that, rather than you know, trying to hold and win the game with a group of people perse. M: Gotchya... so... so, that was the other thing I wanted to talk about, the dodgeball I know, after a couple years both dodgbeball which used to be on Mondays and capture the flag which used to be on Wednesdays both, uh, changed their playtimes to both Monday and Wednesday and they both overlapped, and then a lot of people left capture the flag for dodgeball but, uh, so why did you stay with capture the flag rather than dodgeball. C: Uh, I would say because when I first started going to capture the flag I had, like, no authority, 'cause I was new, and then uh, but as capture the flag had gone on... I gained authority I guess 'cause I had been there for a year, because it wasn't until, uh, second semester of my sophomore year that that happened, where they overlapped, so, uh, by that point, uh, dodgeball had kinda become routine not much, you couldn't—can't really do much, you know, you go, you get the ball, you get the person out, you catch, you know it's, you know, that that maintains itself but capture the flag became a lot more organized, groups, you know, we had groups moving to go attack flag, you know, Thundercats where'd you run around the bridge was invented, so we were doing kind of actual assaults, and that had a lot more potential for a lot more different things to happen every single game, so, because of that I stuck with it, plus, I had, you know, it was a lot more fun to actually be in charge of others, of the younger people, ah, which I wouldn't have gotten, well as— well I had that slightly at dodgeball but that's more a, at dodgeball it's more of a... they look up to you because you know what you're doing and you're really good, whereas at capture the flag it's more of you can, you can tell them what to do and they'll see it and they'll realize 'Oh I should do that so we can win'... and so I, uh, liked that a lot, a lot more. M: So, so you stayed because... it offered less of a team but it gave you more authority? C: Yeah, I would say that. There was more variety and more of an authority for me. M: And, ah, so... hold on I just had an idea and it slipped my mind, um, (cell phone goes off) the authority you had was

that part of the fun I guess that you got out of dodgeball, ordering people around? C: Yeah, I would say so (laughs) (M: alright) I would say that was fun. Uh... M: Or was it literally, was it the authority itself like ordering people around that was kind of fun, like being, I guess playing this kind of military general, or was it literally seeing people make results due to your, your, your actions. C: Uh... probably more of the results, cause I, if I was in command, like if I was leading somebody and then we lost, I hated that (laughs) but if I was leading somebody and it like I, we destroyed the enemy that was brilliant (Mudbear laughs) there's nothing better than that (M: Yeah.) So I would say it was more like seeing the success of it all, knowing that it was something I put together and because I had a bunch of people doing what I thought would work and it ended up working, uh, that was probably the best (laughs). M: Cool, so... C: Cause it was my idea, I'm like 'We should do this thing and we'll win' and then it actually happens occasionally and you're like 'yes, my idea did it' and there's all those other times where it's like 'oh no, my idea got everybody caught, and we lost the game,' and stuff like that.

INTERVIEW WITH PUFF SNAKE: Puff Snake is a veteran of CtF who started playing the same time as I did and quit to play dodgeball.

(Roughly, first eight minutes of the twenty minute interview.) Mudbear:

Just tell me, a little bit, how you got started in capture the flag. Puff

Snake: Uh, my, I think it was my Freshman year, or it was my Freshman year, my RA... took us... to... play capture the flag out on the quad the first week just as like a get to know the freshman social kind of thing...

and... I believe, I can't, I didn't really know at the time but from what I can think of now it was actually like a joint effort between the capture the flag club and my RA bringing his residents to get more people to come. M:

So, basically, uh, were you friends with the people on your floor at the time. PS: Yeah, I mean it was the first week so I mean it's just the

people you've been hanging out with that first week when you have no food and anywhere else to go, so my roommate and couple other guys that showed up that week. M: Cool, so, did you know anyone at capture the flag at that time? PS: Just the RA. M: Alright... and, uh, so was the

RA already someone who played capture the flag or was he just doing this for his, uh, job. PS: He played the year before but he didn't play at all this, the year he was my RA. M: So, uh, what was your first

impression of, uh, of capture the flag, the kind of atmosphere. PS: Uh, it was, it was fun, most of the guys who were in the club at that point were older, so they were Juniors and Seniors, so they have that kind of like...

aura of 'Okay these guys are big and they know what they're doing' and there're a lot of rules, (M: yeah) so there was regulation but it was also like you regulate yourself... so it was very open ended and very, it was fun. M: So, in general it was fun. PS: Yeah. M: So that was your first

experience with it, you just had a lot of fun with it, and is that why you came back, you came back every week. PS: Yeah, it was, it was fun and I was also involved in other clubs, I was, uh, in the Ultimate Frisbee Club

and so... the fact that you were running around capture the flag for two hours was really good exercise and it was good training for the other club which was my... primary club I guess you would say. M: Allright... so, what made it fun, what was it that was so fun about capture the flag? PS: There were, um... there were different groups of guys that hung out together, um, and so there'd be like between five or six people that you'd run with everyday and so you would develop different, uh, strategies and tactics, um, yeah there was always a big strategic element to it which was good for my brain. M: (laughs) Allright... the brain is important. PS: I like my brain. M: Good to know. Um... so in the beginning then you weren't doing, like going off doing solo stuff, you were working with other people, doing strategies. PS: Usually, usually one or two other people, yeah. [one minute of the interview cut out for brevity] M: So tell me a little bit about dodgeball, how you got started there, what you liked about it. PS: I [indistinguishable] my roommate was a big dodgeball guy, um, the fall semester of freshman year and he was always talking about it and he always had a lot of fun, but, uh, I don't know why I didn't go on Tuesday that, it was Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Thursday nights I was involved in something else so I couldn't do it then, um, and then in the spring I don't know what happened but I showed up a couple times and it was, it was really fun, I mean it was the same thing as capture the flag really cause there were a lot of older guys a lot of, ah, like... like they knew what was going on, and so they had their own like, not set of rules, but, a little thing going on it was, it was cool to be a part of that. M: So in both cases... it was kind of these older guys having their own thing and it was cool to be (PS: yeah) a part of that. And so you've gotten kind of the same experience from both these clubs. PS: Yes. M: So, what was it in the end that made you, ah, made you switch over to dodgeball when it came or push or shove, what made you drop capture the flag and switch over to dodgeball. PS: Prob—honestly, probably the biggest thing is that dodgeball is inside (both laugh) and so, and so it wasn't cold. I hate the cold. M: So really tha—but even during the summer, you, I mean, you wouldn't do it like, ah, I know you wouldn't for example play one day a week capture the flag one day (PS: right) dodgeball, so what, why, what, it seems there's more to it than just 'it was inside' that made you choose dodgeball over capture the flag. PS: Well with capture the flag, I don't know, I can't really describe what happened but, um... it seems like as more people graduate and there's a new crowd, um, there was less and less strategy... um, and when there was strategy it was kind of the same thing over and over again, and so it kind— it got very repetitive very fast. (M: mm-hmm) Um... last year especially there was just a lot of new people joining who had very bad attitudes... um... one: towards women and two: towards other people in general... and so it became unpleasant to play with them. (M: Allright) Um... it was very, it was very easy to look back at the past years and been like, 'man, last year nobody would have put up with this crap' but this year they kept showing, or that year they

kept showing up. M: And no one put a stop to it? PS: Yeah. M: And that was after Cyclopes took over right? (PS: mm-hmm) Right. (music plays in the background) PS: Allright I hope that shows up... on the audio recording. M: (laughs) I don't think the recorder will pick up (PS: laughs) the music, but, ah... allright so... so then, aaah, what, what was your feel about the change in leadership, I mean, you mean, you mention you know, people stopped using strategy after the new leadership took over there were some people with bad attitudes... that people, just kind of put up with, was there anything else you can compare the old leadership under Longjohn and the new- PS: Longjohn was an authoritative dictator (laughs) and what he says goes and he'd get mad at people who didn't follow his ways, um, sometimes it make me mad but other times it's like 'okay, this is actually working' because people follow him.... What are you looking at me for, stop looking at me. M: (laughs) What? You were speaking, I was just looking at you, I hope that's okay. PS: (laughs) Yeah (comically?) M: Allright, and so, ah, in dodgeball then, uh, how would you describe the leadership there. PS: Um... it w-well freshman year it was pretty much three or four guys who'd been playing together since they were freshmen, they were actually in leagues together and what not, so... um and they were really good too so that helped, um, yeah. M: And, so, were they kind of the authoritarian dictators that Longjohn was (PS: yes) allright. And are they still the leaders of dodgeball (PS: no) or has... PS: No they (laughs) ironically enough they graduated, um, there are some new people that are leading who aren't that good at leading and I'm thinking of leaving dodgeball (both laugh) and coming back to capture the flag. INTERVIEW WITH THE SCARLET PRINCE The Scarlet Prince is a veteran of capture the flag, although having played the game for much less time than myself. He is considered one of the best players in the game and carries with him the aura of legends. (First seven minutes of 55 minute interview.) Mudbear: To start off with, why don't you tell me how you got started in capture the flag, how'd you first find out about it. Scarlet Prince: Well, it was a couple of weeks into my Freshman year of college when I started going to capture the flag, one of my friends actually told me about it, 'cause I wasn't really involved in any activities at school and she told me about capture the flag, so, I decided to just check it out, and, you know, the first night I actually went to it... it just seemed like a lot of fun, like something that I would wanna do, while I was here... a lot, and I don't know, a lot of the people were just really friendly too. M: So who's this friend of yours? SP: Her name is Docks, but she doesn't go to capture the flag anymore, because she's busy. M: So you knew her before college? SP: Hmmm, I met her through facebook (laughs) because we had the same birthday [indistinguishable]. M: Cool, so, ah, so initially, let's say initially for example Docks didn't come back after that first time she wouldn't come back, would you have still come back to capture the flag? SP: Um... I may have, I may not have... but... I did (laughs). I mean

I still go to it, she doesn't go to it anymore, so I guess I would still go to capture the flag, cause I mean it's something fun, you're actually playing a game and you're getting exercise, so. M: So, uh, what was it about it, I mean, you say it's fun, but what do you mean it's fun, what was it about it that initially attracted you? SP: Well it's not just like mindless games like football where it's just like, oh you throw the ball or you try to advance the ball, you actually have to think while you're playing and you have to like think and you have to run fast and have that physical aspect to it too, it's a lot like mixing the strategies with what you can do and how you execute it. M: Cool... and did you get a lot of that the first time around did you really get a chance to use strategies the first... BP: Y-yeah, I did, I, uh, the first night that I actually played nobody knew who I was... so I had the chance to just sort of pretend I was a commoner on the quad and walk up to the flag and grab it and they're like, 'oh, he's playing' and that was my first taste of it right there, it felt kind of cool, to be sneaky. M: So... so why do you still go to capture the flag, is it still for the same reasons? SP: Well, I made a lot of friends in capture the flag obviously and... plus it's like... my major source of exercise and I don't know, it's, it's pretty much the same reasons, like, that's, it's more than just a sport, you know, it's more like... super activity... (laughs) M: (laughs) Yeah? Super activity? SP: Yeah. M: Because it incorporates strategy, physical exercise, (SP: Yeah) and friendship. SP: And friendship. M: Alright, So, well, okay, I know that in the beginning no one knew who you were (SP: Right) so up to that point did you have any, did you make any friends (SP: uh) at capture the flag really? SP: I have to say that the first friend that I actually made, like, an actual friend that I made would be Chimera, at capture the flag, and then through Chimera I started meeting other people, and basically I started networking from there. M: Cool, so how did Chimera become your first friend? SP: Well, we were both on the same team one night and I was playing defense and he was playing defense and nobody else was there so we were just talking and everything and he, he just started talking about all these different strategies that they would use and I just thought it was the coolest thing that there's actually something like that where you, where people would go into the trench next to that one building. M: So you didn't know about the Trench Run- SP: No, I didn't know about the Trench Runs, I didn't know about Thundercats, and he pointed out who the good players were to me and everything and... I don't know I just got... taken in by him. M: So, ah, was this before or after I gave you the nickname Scarlet Prince? SP: This was before. M: Before, alright... so, so through Chimera you networked with other people, basically. SP: Pretty much. M: So, well, talk to me a little about that. SP: Well through Chimera, like, we started you know Strike Team Philtron and that whole thing and started meeting people like that and eventually, it's, it's kind of funny cause initially, ah, a lot of people at capture the flag didn't know my first name, cause everyone was like it's Scarlet Prince, you know, I'm

like 'hey, they know me' and I (laughs) I tried to add them as friends on facebook but they wouldn't accept it cause they're like 'who is this... who's this kid' and then I'd have to put Scarlet Prince in my name so they'd know who I was, but, you know... just like, going... like through Chimera and doing the Strike Team Philtron and everything, like, people started like, looking at me as, 'hey, it's Scarlet Prince, he's...he plays capture the flag he's pretty good,' so... not to brag. M: No, no, you're a very good player, I think, no one would really contest that. Uh, but, so, basically kind of Chimera, would you say Chimera was kind of your mentor into... SP: For the most part (M: alright) I'd say that I had... multiple mentors through capture the flag... through like, making friends and everything... because I don't think I would have met Indiana Jones if you didn't start the Strike Team Philtron (M: right) so...

Discuss: Nerds With Athletic Capability: An Un-registered Student Organization

Presented with having to do an ethnography on some part of the university I couldn't think of anything to do so I fell back on my Plan B. I had, since my Freshman year been part of a group of people that played Capture the Flag out on ISU's quad. This group was not a registered student organization but managed to hold itself together for the last four years as new members came in and old ones had left. I knew that the members of CtF didn't just use it for exercise or fun, but also used it for social purposes (I remember, long before I began my ethnography, an old player had talked about how he had met his best friend at CtF.) So I decided I would look at CtF and how it was utilized as a social tool by the students in the university. By this time my attendance of CtF had become erratic and I often skipped it because I had become bored and no longer got from it the fun I used to. I was at this time the second longest playing member of CtF and because of my lack of attendance the only other person who had been playing longer than me, Chimera, would accuse me, sometimes jokingly and sometimes sincerely, of being a traitor and abandoning the group. There was never any real pressure to come back though and I didn't feel obliged to, until my ethnography that is. So I prepared to begin attending CtF regularly again and begin socializing with the players, something that I had never really done before hand. I had always been relatively avoidant of social interaction at CtF, but now I'd have to break that old habit and immerse myself among the people. I was not looking forward to this since the majority of the players I didn't really like because, in relation to my standards, they were too socially awkward to bother with. But now I'd have to get to know them better and actually talk to them. I was ready to capture the flag again. And then I fractured my kneecap. While chasing another player, a new player who was considered to be incredibly fast, I tried to preserve my mantle as one of the fastest players by catching up to him, and in my haste I slipped on the wet grass and slid full speed into one of the

cement lampposts that illuminates the quad. So thus my research began.

Some Background Information:

Capture the Flag, the Rules:

There are two teams and the point of the game is to capture the opponents' flag while protecting your own. It gets more complicated. The quad is cut in half (more or less) by a sidewalk that (more or less) runs in a straight line. This line technically circumnavigates the globe and players are allowed to play anywhere they wish, although it's best to stay near the quad. This line is the neutral zone. Here, members of both teams can stand safely without being tagged. Each side of the neutral zone belongs to one team or another and if a player is standing on his opponents' side he can be tagged and taken to jail, while if he is on his own team's side he can tag an opponent and escort him to jail. Jail is where opponents are taken when they are tagged. It is the only method of defending one's territory since a player in jail is "out of play" unless one of his teammates can make it to him and tag him out of jail without getting tagged himself. The specific rules of jail have changed many times, but the current rules state that an offender can tag two people out of jail and then all three get a free walk back to the neutral zone. The jails are usually somewhere in between the flag and the neutral zone. The flag itself is a piece of cloth lying on the ground. Each team's flag is placed in the same spot every game, although the team's switch sides after every game. If an offender picks up the flag without getting tagged by a defender it is his task to run the flag back to neutral zone to win the game. If he gets tagged while carrying the flag he must drop the flag where he was tagged. Defenders must stay twenty feet away from the flag (in practice usually fifteen) unless an offender enters the twenty foot perimeter. Players distinguish teammates and the other team with armbands that must be visible between the shoulder and the elbow. Are these rules complicated and hard to remember? Perhaps a bit. Perhaps no. Well there's more, lots more, rules that get very specific about very specific situations. It was one of the complaints I heard in conversation from someone who had quit playing after a few games. There were too many rules, too hard to remember them all, and you got yelled at when you didn't follow the rules you couldn't remember.

The game is played on Mondays and Wednesdays at ten o'clock (since this is the latest any class will last) and will last usually past midnight.

History and Nomenclature:

Capture the flag started about a year or so before I started playing so at the writing of this ethnography it would be about five years old. It was started by a group of friends who lived on one floor in the Isengard Residence Hall. They eventually moved to apartments but kept playing and inviting people to join them. There was very little leadership at first

since all the friends were equals but as some of these original "bros" started graduating and/or leaving and as there were more new people, leadership fell to Longjohn. Longjohn was a brash, loud, foul mouthed sort of fellow who generally spent his time talking to people in the neutral zone during the game and calling people idiots in between games when everyone was at the neutral zone. Somehow his calling people idiots and his swearing at people came off in a quasi-good natured way. Eventually, academic duties began drawing him away and a steady integration of a new leader began. This new leader was Cyclopes and the older players of capture the flag generally divide the timeline into two eras: Cyclopes' days and Longjohn's days. It was during the transition between Longjohn and Cyclopes that people started playing through the winter and it was during Cyclope's time that people started playing the not just on Wednesdays but also on Mondays.

There are many words or phrases used in CtF that are specific to that community that would help readers understand what's going on.

Veteran: A person who has played an arbitrary length of time until being awarded veteran status by other veterans. Usually this involves playing through the winter.

Newb (newbie, newcomer): Internet slang; used to refer to someone new to the game.

Capture: 1) A successful score with the flag. 2) Also can refer to capturing a person for jail. 3) Also can refer to picking up the flag, without necessarily scoring with it.

Jailbreak: An offensive mission to get teammates out of opponents' jail.

Bumrush: An offensive act of rushing at the flag up the middle of the quad in the hopes that superior numbers will overwhelm the defenders.

Solo: Going on offense by oneself.

Stealth: Going on offense with teammates or solo with the intention of not being seen until close enough to the flag to capture it.

Off the quad: Going outside the bounds of the quad marked by the academic buildings.

On the flag: The act of guarding the flag.

Strike Team: A group of skilled, fast, usually veteran players that go on a coordinated assault on the flag. Usually stealth (rarely used now).

Trench: A trench between a sidewalk and a campus building used for an offensive maneuver.

Trenchrun, Thundercats, Art Girl Make Out Session: Offensive maneuvers specific to a certain area of the quad (rarely used now).

Dragonriders, Elephant Riders, Phalanx, X-Wings: Offensive maneuver not intended to capture the flag but meant to entertain the offenders after a series of boring games.

The Demographics:

The title of my ethnography is the description of the main type of people that play CtF. It comes from an interview with Chimera in which he said,

"We're just nerds with some athletic capability." The majority of people that play are nerds, in some way or another. Nerds is a difficult term to define but here are some things that should help the reader understand. Almost every single person who plays CtF also plays computer and video games and these are often the topic in the conversation of members. Players are familiar with comic book characters and super-heroes as well as sci-fi and fantasy topics such as Star Wars and Lord of the Rings, which are also topics of conversation but not as much so as video games. Many of the jokes made in capture the flag are based off of recognizable aspects of these topics. Several players also are part of a club that plays the video game Dance Dance Revolution. This should give a general idea of the genre of people meant by "nerd."

Also, the gross majority of players, are Caucasian-American Males, and this has been the case throughout capture the flag's history. Currently, if you were to play capture the flag you would most likely see one or two African-American male, several Asian players, no Latino/a players, one to three female players, and the rest (10-20 players) being white Male. The majority of players are residents in the University Residence Halls. This makes sense since the quad, where CtF is played, is located roughly in the middle of all the residences (except one that is located further away than the rest.) Generally, but not always, players that move into apartments are too busy with jobs and high level classes or live too far away to make the trip to the quad worthwhile.

The Methods of Research:

I interviewed four veteran members of CtF from whom I gathered the majority of my data. I also relied on my own memory, of both playing and conversing with people about CtF, as well as a few casual conversations with people who had played CtF. The four interviewees had played for various lengths of time and had participated in a variety of ways.

Chimera, had played longer than anyone who still attended Capture the Flag. He was a primarily a defenses player, often guarding the flag or jail and keeping the troops in line. Puff Snake had played Capture the Flag almost as long as Chimera and I, but had quit to play in a dodgeball club. The Scarlet Prince had been playing, not quite as long as I, but long enough to be a well respected veteran, he was a primarily offensive player, specializing in solo stealth missions. Anger Bloodthirst had not been playing for very long, only a year compared to my three, and was primarily on offensive player who liked to run fast and goof around. All four interviews were people I enjoyed talking to at CtF and were people I consider friends. I did not interview anyone I disliked having conversations with. Also, my four interviewees are considered very skilled players at capture the flag and are well respected.

Along with the interviews I attended CtF with open eyes and with crutches. I had to observe the game differently than before. I couldn't tune out other peoples' interactions but now had to pay attention. I

couldn't run off by myself to try to capture the flag, I had to stick with people, usually on defense. I supplemented these observations with my own memories of playing and my own memories of conversations of capture the flag, before my ethnography.

How it begins:

Everyone who started playing CtF began their Freshman year. This occurred while living in the residence halls. People found out about capture the flag from either roommates or floormates who played CtF, from their RAs who used the club as a social program, or through discovering the club by seeing people playing on the quad. All my four interviews mentioned that their first impression of the game was that it was "fun." Their explanations of fun included a jovial and friendly atmosphere and being able to "run around outside." Something else that several of my interviewees mentioned was how they were involved in what older students were doing. They, as freshmen, were allowed to participate with these much older Juniors and Seniors. Puff Snake mentioned how he went on offensive missions with some of the older players and it made him feel good, like he was an important.

Why People Play, Why They Come Back:

There are four aspects that make CtF attractive to players: the physical exercise, the mental exercise, personal recognition, and that it is a social reservoir.

Physical exercise does not mean that players are interested in becoming more fit or healthy, it merely refers to physically strenuous activity, usually in the form of running. Running gives people a chance to be able to unwind or just let loose. Chimera mentioned that running around at CtF was his only way of not going crazy sitting in the dorms all day. Anger Bloodthirst and the Scarlet Prince mentioned how it was fun to chase and be chased by people. All my interviewees talked about how it was simply fun to "run around" and in Anger Bloodthirst's case to "just act immature." The very act of running within the context of a game, running with a "fun" goal in mind, not just running for health, is considered fun for the people that remain at CtF.

Mental exercise refers to the strategizing that people partake in when playing. Players will organize defenses where they set up traps for the enemy offense by hiding in trees or behind hills. Offensive groups will organize maneuvers and tactics to get the flag or to make a jail break. Mental exercise doesn't just refer to the pre-thoughtout strategies but also refers to on the fly thinking that will occur during a chase or an attempt to stay hidden by an offender. It is a thrill to be able to match wits against someone you are chasing or someone who is chasing you, trying to outmaneuver them by jumping over walls or fences or bushes, or trying to cut them off before they can escape. It is the chase that epitomizes these two aspects of mental and physical exercise. Running

fast and also thinking fast are important in being able to either win the game or merely stay out of jail.

If someone attends capture the flag long enough they become recognizable to the other players and CtF becomes a place where everybody knows your name. Players will greet each other amiably even if they have nothing to talk about simply because they recognize each other. Even players who have not played in a long time will be greeted with tremendous excitement if they return for a day or two. There is a feel of a welcoming community because of this which bleeds over into the fourth aspect of a social reservoir. But first I have to mention the higher levels of recognition such as fame and notoriety. Players who have exceptional skills develop clout in the community and "legends" are spread about them. Veterans can be heard telling newcomers, "That's Chimera, he's really, really good. He once defended the flag by himself against three offensive guys," or "The Scarlet Prince once had about five enemy defenders chasing him in deGarmo and he didn't get caught, and because he had these five guys distracted his team was able to win the game." Players with notoriety will also experience extreme reactions from other players, usually newcomers, such as a story the Scarlet Prince had told me before I began my ethnography. He was on the defense and he was going into the trench to prevent any sort of trenchrun that might occur. He ran into a group of (he says) six or seven enemy attackers. Now because the Scarlet Prince could only capture one of them the rest could just run past him and onto the flag. However, what happened was that one of the attackers pointed and said, "Oh sh**, it's the Scarlet Prince," and all the attackers turned and fled. These kinds of esteem-rocketing experiences undoubtedly bring players back every week.

Social reservoir is somewhat of a difficult concept to describe in just one sentence. Players will use capture the flag to find out about classes or professors, which ones are good to take, which ones are bad. They will find out from each other what the newest video games are like and whether they're worth buying or which movies are worth seeing. Another example of how capture the flag is a social reservoir is the case of the Scarlet Prince and Anger Bloodthirst. They both wanted new roommates and since they knew each other through capture the flag and got along they agreed to room together. They told me that while they got along before sharing a room, it was when they roomed together for a while that they actually became good friends. The point is that they used capture the flag as a place to find roommates who they'd get along with. This apparently worked so well that they recently found someone at capture the flag to share an apartment with. Something that came up before I started doing my ethnography was how some romantic relationships had formed between a few members of capture the flag. While there are two examples that I and my interviewees knew of with people finding partners at capture the flag there were something else that came up. A

by now gone player mentioned to me how he thought that a lot of the old players weren't showing up anymore because of all the "hooking up" that had gone on and that people were avoiding their ex's by not coming to capture the flag. I asked him why I never knew about this and the answer was that I was crawling through bushes actually playing the game instead of talking to people. I and my four interviewees don't know anything more than that as to what was happening, but apparently some of the players were using CtF to find sexual partners. What I am trying to demonstrate is how players will use CtF for social purposes in other parts of their life and as a tool in other aspects of their lives. But how far each player dips into the reservoir varies. The Scarlet Prince told me that the majority of his social life and social contacts comes from people he knows in capture the flag. In contrast, Chimera told me that capture the flag barely fits into his social life, that he rarely interacts with capture the flaggers outside of capture the flag itself. Before this ethnography I looked down upon the nerds whose social life was based in CtF, but, after some observations and interviews I began to investigate my own debt to capture the flag for the social life I had. Of the people I considered friends throughout my college career almost half of them were due to my participation in CtF, and almost the whole other half of my friends was due to my job as an RA. Before I became an RA the number of people that were my friends because of CtF directly or indirectly was well over 75%. Most of these friends I knew indirectly because of CtF, i.e. I know this friend because I went to a party at his house which I was invited to by someone I knew at CtF. The numbers vary slightly depending on how I define "friend," but the point is clear: CtF provides access to a social reservoir of other fellow students who can become movie critics, academic counselors, lovers, or friends.

Types of Social Interaction:

There were three types of social interactions I noticed: conversing, social strategizing, and goofing off.

When conversing, talking about capture the flag replaces small talk since it is an obviously common ground that players who don't know each other can discuss. Players will often make analogies between the game and some video game or some movie such as referring to an attack as a "zergling rush" or advising someone when they're being chased to "press R twice to do a barrel roll." (Both are references to popular video games.) Conversations will range in topics from video games to finals to relationship problems to philosophical meditations to current affairs and national policy. Conversing takes place mainly in two places: the middle neutral ground and at each flag. At each flag defenders will converse to pass the time until the enemy attackers arrive. At neutral ground, conversing takes place either during the game between rival attackers waiting to make a move, or when games are not taking place. This includes before any game has started, after the last

game of the night has ended, and in between games since both teams regroup in the center neutral ground after each victory/loss. Depending on the night conversations can be mostly about capture the flag, players regaling each other about their exploits or failures, or about other topics mentioned earlier. There is a third location that conversations sometimes occur and this is the jail. When there are many people in a jail they will sometimes converse to pass the time. The jail guards rarely talk because they are looking out for anyone trying to break their teammates out of jail. Sometimes jail guards will talk to the prisoners and attackers will use this distraction to get past the guards. This kind of conversing in jail occurred more often in preceding years than when I did my ethnography. Currently, those in jail, instead of conversing, simply yell at their free teammates to get them out of jail or to go capture the flag so the game will end and they can get out of jail that way. Sometimes players in jail will even yell to their enemies to go capture the flag, preferring to lose the game than to wait in jail any longer.

Social strategizing occurs mostly during offensive maneuvers. On the defense there is generally either chaos or one person ordering the others into formation. On the offense however there is much more socializing and consultation with teammates about how the attack should take place. Teammates will scout ahead and relay enemy positions to their offensive squad. This description is short but the actual activity is important. Asking someone to join you on an attack is a sign of respect and sometimes admiration for that person's skill and the attack itself is an event that all members can draw upon to converse and feel connected by. As one of my interviewees said, "It's cool to go with these guys because you're like, 'These guys are good.'"

Goofing off is generally anything that doesn't necessarily break the rules but isn't done with the intention of winning the game but rather the point is to have fun and/or break the monotony. This includes running across the quad while holding a large, fallen tree branch pretending to use it as camouflage, or building snowforts around the flag during the winter. It also includes organizing attacks with no serious intention of winning such as Phalanx, where the entire (defenders and attackers) all march in a Phalanx at the enemy. Another example of goofing off is when Anger Bloodthirst first started playing he would sometimes scream like a "school girl" when he was being chased and even after he was no longer being chased he would still run around in circles sometimes and scream. Anger Bloodthirst said it was fun to "just run around and be immature."

Some Problems That Arose:

As I had mentioned before I had stopped attending CtF regularly because I had found it to no longer be fun. Part of this was because people were not playing the game in a way conducive to what I found to be fun. I liked to go off the quad on stealth missions but the games were happening so quickly that they were over by the time I got back on the

quad. Attackers would run en masse at the enemy flag in the hopes of outnumbering the defenders. I hated that. The other part of why I didn't enjoy capture the flag as much was because of all the complaining people were doing. People were complaining about the games being too short, about people not being successful at certain strategies, about other people complaining, about people not following the rules, and about newcomers (not following the rules and not being successful at winning.) I had also noticed the way some people would deride and verbally abuse the newcomers by yelling at them for not following the rules or by doing something the particular veteran thought was stupid. I was sick of this environment and instead of trying to change it I simply started going less often.

Going into the ethnography I assumed that my interviewees would have seen the same things, especially after my interview with Chimera. He corroborated everything I had already thought. People were complaining too much, there was too much negative attitude, and too much bad treatment of the newcomers. He agreed with me that this was undoing CtF and might be its demise. Chimera blamed himself. He told me how he would organize defenses with the new people who didn't know what they were doing. He would order them to hold positions and fill in gaps when a defender left to escort someone to jail. Chimera believed that other veterans and newcomers who would become veterans saw him do this and began mimicking it themselves later on. This mimicking of Chimera's order-giving came off as aggressive and abusive especially when veterans would yell at newcomers for not following orders. Along with this Chimera believed that because he had created such good defenses it discouraged tactics other than simply overwhelming the defense with numbers. "I'm the downfall of capture the flag," lamented Chimera.

However, my other interviewees didn't seem to agree with Chimera and my own point of view. Both Anger Bloodthirst and the Scarlet Prince said that they were still having fun playing the game. The Scarlet Prince he didn't really notice the mistreatment of newcomers. Anger Bloodthirst said that he thought it was the veterans breaking the rules not the newcomers and that was what people were complaining about. Neither of them thought capture the flag was going to fall apart.

That's when I started looking back to when I was a Freshman playing capture the flag. I remembered that the veterans above me did complain a lot to the leader Longjohn just as now people complained to the leader Cyclopes. When I first told Puff Snake I wanted to interview him and why he didn't play anymore he said, "Because nothing's changed. Sometimes change is good." Perhaps very little changed but some things had.

Anger Bloodthirst mentioned that the mistreatment of players he saw was mainly at the beginning of the fall semester when huge influxes of students would come to play, at one game the total players numbered

over a hundred. There had been some problems with sexual harassment going on and some general insults. With that number of people I couldn't imagine being able to find out who had done it, but Puff Snake said that there was some resentment of the brand new leader Cyclopes for not taking a harder approach. Puff Snake mentioned that Longjohn was an authoritative leader and would not have put up with that kind of behavior. Because Cyclopes did nothing it created a hostile and uncomfortable environment at CtF. The problem of sexual harassment left apparently when most of the newcomers left. Every semester less than ten newcomers, of the eighty or a hundred total, remain to play capture the flag

There had been other problems with Cyclopes. Apparently at one point even before the incidents of sexual harassment there had been arguments and complaints about him. I was told by Chimera that there was some altercation between Cyclopes and a very well respected veteran which ended with Cyclopes screaming and storming off and the veteran leaving the game (not for good but for that night and several after.) Apparently some players met secretly had discussed overthrowing Cyclopes and replacing him with someone, or just starting a whole new club of capture the flag altogether. As Anger Bloodthirst said, Cyclopes was simply "not a strong leader." Here I felt guilty as Chimera had earlier. Both Chimera and I had been offered to take over the leadership roll after Longjohn was gone, but we both turned it down and it went to Cyclopes, the only person willing to do it. Would things have gone different if I had accepted the leader role?

Conclusion (of sorts):

Despite the friction that occurred and occurs, there is obviously enough value in CtF for people to return every week, and a few newcomers to remain to become veterans. The bonds of friendship people form there last a long time and are quite strong. The Scarlet Prince told me that he was still friends with people who used to play CtF but didn't anymore. Puff Snake, the interviewee who had left capture the flag to play dodgeball, said that he was now thinking of leaving dodgeball and that it would be a lot easier to leave dodgeball than it was to leave CtF because of the friendships he had formed there. Taking place in ISU's quad, an area belonging to all students, it is a place for students who would normally never meet because of where they live on campus to form a hub of social activity among similar minded people. It is also a place where incoming Freshmen, who are confused and alone in a new environment, can find some community to become a part of and form their initial social networking. It is a crucial part of the university for some of the students here.

EUI Links: <http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1880> The ethnography discusses another community of nerds who use video games for

socializing both in the physical world and the online digital world. They engage in similar activities (Dance Dance, Guitar Hero, World of Warcraft) as the people in CtF when they aren't capturing flags.

Reflect:

Recommendations: Recommendations to the University: 1) Provide students with a common area, such as a student union, where students can get together and congregate. 2) Make Resident Assistants aware of the Capture the Flag group and its potential use as a social program. 3) Provide some sort of counseling service for groups on campus that are experiencing some internal problems.