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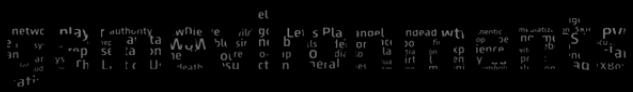

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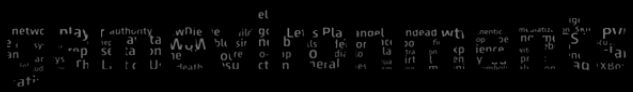

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Ghosts, Spooks, and Martyrs. Historical Hauntings in *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands*

Megan Ward

Abstract
In 1985, a United States undercover Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent, Enrique Kiki Camarena, was abducted, tortured, and murdered in Guadalajara, Mexico by an alleged drug cartel. The ensuing international murder investigation saw breaches in extradition procedures, accusations that Mexican officials had destroyed key evidence, and allegations that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had targeted Camarena to cover evidence of CIA covert involvement in Nicaragua. Camarena's death and subsequent martyrdom took form in national anti-drug campaigns, DEA awards, and the drug war foreign policy. More recently in 2017, French video game company Ubisoft released a massively popular video game, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* (2017), which fictionalizes Camarena's death and draws its players into a history of the United States drug war, complete with CIA Spooks, agrarian militias, and Mexican drug lords. In conversation with historical epistemologies, game studies, and with close attention to the obscured record of covert operation, this article investigates how cultural artifacts, specifically interactive ones, not only create history, but place their audience within in a history only now freshly unearthed and resurrected. Camarena's many resurrections in popular politics and media are salient examples of the participatory nature of history and the narratives we use to place ourselves within murky pasts.

Keywords: Hauntings, Drug War, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands*, Historical Epistemologies, Game Studies, United States History, Border Security, Kiki Camarena, Empire, gamevironments

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In 1985, a United States undercover Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent, Enrique Kiki Camarena, was abducted, tortured, and murdered in Guadalajara,

Mexico. In the years that followed, Camarena's death sparked an international, high-profile, and complicated murder investigation involving breaches in extradition procedures, implications that Mexican officials had destroyed key evidence, and accusations that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had colluded with drug cartels to silence Camarena. In the 1980's Reagan Administration would use Camarena's suffering as an effective foreign and domestic policy weapon, bullying the Mexican government into cooperating with decades of costly drug war operations and spurring anti-drug campaigns across the United States (Bartley and Bartley 2015). Enrique Kiki Camarena's death was not only a watershed political event for the United States and Mexico in the brewing drug war, Camarena's many resurrections – the ways in which he has haunted elementary schools, the border, and now popular entertainment industries – is a salient example of the participatory nature of history and the narratives we use to place ourselves within murky pasts. Engaging narrative history epistemologies, game studies, and scholars who have approached the haunting nature of the half-remembered, this article investigates how the victim of a politically-charged murder has never been entirely interred. Resurrected as a martyr for Nancy Reagan's anti-drug campaigns and named the *Jesus of the DEA* for his death's effect in deterring the future targeting of United States federal agents, Camarena's name recognition may have faded over the decades, but his death continues to resonate in law enforcement circles and the remembered history of the drug war as a pseudo-religious martyr (Feess 2017). In 2017, Kiki Camarena returned again in one of the largest video game releases of the year, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* (2017). Produced and created by Ubisoft Entertainment, this game is the newest franchise installment in the military shooter series, titled Ghost Recon, and enjoyed an active player base across the United States, the European Union (EU), and in Japan more than a year after its release (Wildlands Statistics 2018.) In the game, Enrique Kiki Camarena is fictionalized as Ricardo Ricky Sandoval, an undercover DEA

agent tortured and murdered by fictional representatives of drug cartels, terrorists, and corrupt Latin American states. Players form part of a United States covert team charged with avenging Sandoval's death. With this personally charged scenario, the game simultaneously acknowledges a history of foreign intervention and justifies it through retributive action that redeems the state actors involved. The narrative of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* is deeply historical, but just as it engages with specific people and conflicts from the drug war, it obscures and disables other, perhaps more troubling narratives. This is a game that engages deeply with the history it hides.

Why choose a DEA casualty that occurred more than thirty-years ago as the narrative cornerstone of a military shooter game? The 2017 release of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* follows 2013 public accusations from retired DEA agents and a former CIA pilot that the CIA was entirely behind Camarena's abduction, torture, murder, and cover-up (Bartley and Bartley 2015, 405-408). With its initial drafting beginning in 2012, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* was created in the midst of the unearthing of this covert history (Ubisoft 2017). Though the developers set the game within the broad context of the drug war, the games development occurred during a very specific period of early 2000s drug war allegations and unearthed information. These historical developments shaped the game's creation and eventually its player's experience playing the game. The game itself is a participatory experience that reckons with the realities of ruthless United States intervention and violence, allowing the player to relearn a more palatable and justifiable history through the interactive narrative of the game.

This article takes on this interactive piece of constructed history, viewing *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* as an avenue through which audiences experience the history

of covert involvement in Mexico and Latin America. Through experiencing and reacting to Camarena's death through their revenge of the fictional Sandoval's death, players are introduced to a history of CIA covert action in Latin America and the ruthless tactics on the part of the United States, but ultimately they find peace with the historical violence through the redemptive narrative constructed by the game. To investigate this phenomenon, this article addresses how cultural artifacts, specifically interactive ones, not only create history, but acknowledge the now unignorable, and contextualize their audience in a history that has remained half-buried and half-remembered.

History, Games, and Hauntings

Scholarship regarding Enrique Camarena's death, trial, and legacy has largely been found in the socio-legal field, as these discussions focus on international legal ramifications and precedent the murder investigation and trial created (Kansas City Law Review 1993, United States 1992). The case of Mexican citizen Humberto Alvarez-Machain set a precedent for decades of heightened United States international jurisdiction and enforced extra-legal procedures in service of the drug war across Mexico and wider Latin America (Lutz 1992, Feess 2017). However, little has been said about Camarena's effect on public historical memory or how the uneasy details of his death have failed to settle into any real obscurity as Camarena continues to be resurrected in law enforcement circles and popular entertainment.[i] These details have been narrativized through United States anti-drug campaigns and law enforcement awards for excellence and fictionalized in popular media. To investigate this treatment, this article uses historical epistemologies that address the integral place narrative holds in the construction of the past and the forays scholars have taken to explain the haunting effect that hidden and missing histories have on memory. To

understand the medium that creates *authentic* experiences of drug war intervention and interactive imagined history, this discussion looks to game studies scholarship that addresses immersivity, incorporation, and embodiment, as well as representations of Latin America and war within video games.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands is a cultural artifact that possesses its own historical narrative. This narrative while explicitly fictional, is no less historical. As Hayden White (1987) argues, narrative matters deeply in the construction of history itself and how the past is remembered. History is not about obscuring, but about endowing events with *a plot* that can be understood and contextualized in human experience.

> "The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does, is test the capacity of a culture's fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of patterns of 'imaginary' events." (White 1987, 45)

White challenges the idea of a *real* history, arguing that any historical narrative, no matter how seemingly factual, is itself an intertwining of different types of narratives. These narratives, and the eventual historical record that results from them, are deeply shaped by historians themselves as they record the past and then reconstruct its details to give the past intelligible meaning. For this reason, White (1987, 48) states that to omit the figurative element from an analysis of narrative "is to miss not only its aspect as allegory but also the performance" of chronicle being transformed into narrative. Therefore, the creators of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands*, as they pursue authentic though fictional representations of the locations, people, and conflicts within the drug war, are part of this history-creating process.

While for White the search for an entirely factual history is impossible, other scholars still argue for an investigation of the truth behind drug war narratives. Literature on the drug war is complicated by the hidden and covert nature of the historical record, as state continues to restrict information on its operation and actions. As more once-classified documents are released historians call for new historiographies of the drug war and cold war violence in Latin America, and the scars both have left behind (Grandin 2006, Grandin 2011, Huggins 1998, Livingstone 2013, Menjívar and Rodríguez 2005, Rabe 2006, Toro 1999). The United States has been politically and militarily involved in policing Latin America for at least a century; the pervasive and long-running "war on drugs" interventions began in the cold-war 1960s and continues to this day, though these efforts are now in the post-9/11 landscape linked ideologically and operationally with the "war on terror" (Vaicius and Isacson 2003, 1-13, Ward forthc.). These United States efforts run the spectrum from now acknowledged – if rarely spoken about – backed coups of democratically elected leaders in support of economic interests to *good neighbor* police internationalization through training, information-sharing, and militarization in Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, and Guatemala to name only a few (Huggins 1987, Huggins 1998, Qureshi 2008, Toro 1999). United States acknowledgment and reports of these interventions were declassified years after the fact and are still obscured in the popular historical imaginary of United States history. Scholars argue that the constructed narratives of the state are a necessary, although frustrating, object of study and understanding and reconstructing the state-suffused history of the drug war poses its own challenges, not only for scholars, but for those who inherit that history (Astorga 2003, Bunck and Fowler 2012, 7, Robinson and Scherlen 2007). Luis Astorga comments that understanding the drug war means contending with narratives the state has created and then let loose into popular historical memory:

> "if the Law of Transparency and Access to Information had not invented the padlock of 'national security,' we would be better able to reconstruct the history, rife with myth, fantasy, police, political, and media labels and clichés, of ordinary discourse about drug trafficking and traffickers." (Astorga 2003, 12)

Because of the silences *national security* has enforced, understandings of the drug war often come from fictional narratives – specifically from the myth, fantasy, and ordinary discourse that are both state-sponsored and publicly constructed in popular media and news. Both scholars and the public are constrained by the narratives created to fill the silences, but these narratives and the cultural artefacts that transmit them also provide an entry point into understanding how the public contends and interacts with the unseen, but nonetheless, felt history of United States interventionism and drug war violence.

Critical scholarship has worked to reconcile these silences and turn them into productive lines of inquiry (Farmer 2018, Gordon 2008, Stoler 2009). Despite the absence of something from the narrative – whether it stems from violence, power, or lack of empirical or traditional sources – that absence agitates social and national histories with visible effects. These visible effects, which articulate themselves in cultural artefacts and discontent, can provide new methods through which to approach purposefully erased or hidden histories. Avery Gordon utilizes Foucauldian frameworks to discuss the hidden ways these haunting ideas, peoples, and events disappeared from history yet are present nonetheless as their absences affect and grate against society and culture (Gordon 2008, 46). Silences do not always stay silent. The death and instability caused by more than fifty years of United States involvement in South and Central America has been "rendered ghostly" in popular memory, to use Gordon's (2008, 18) phrase. Yet, the effects of the death and instability are continuously felt and may articulate themselves in culture nonetheless. This "ghostliness," defined as the grating of an absence in the historical record by

Gordon (2008, 86), is evident in Wildland's fictionalization of Camarena's suffering, and the game's subtle acknowledgment and attempted justification of United States legacies of covert foreign involvement. Gordon (2008, 7) argues that

> "to study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production."

When addressing the hidden and covert history of United States intervention in Latin America and its highly mythologized role in the Western Hemisphere's drug war, cultural artefacts like *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* can be an entry point in understanding these gaps and silences.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands belongs to a wide genre of *military* or *tactical shooters* where players assume the role of soldiers, militia members, mercenaries, or law enforcement agents to secure militarized objectives and complete political missions. Military shooters create representations of foreign intervention, arms culture, narcotics interdiction and policy, and other forms of state and para-state violence across historical, present, and futuristic settings – all of which becomes interactive through the medium of a video game (Mantello 2017, Robinson 2019, Ruch 2021). Players bring their own "playful subjectivity" (Payne 2016, 10) to the virtual conflicts represented in the games, allowing otherwise heavy subjects of war, violence, and death to become entertainment; this prior subjectivity generates the game's meaning to its audience as much as the sensory and interactive elements of the game. As the players' subjectivities, prior knowledge, experience, and expectation contribute to the meaning of the game, the game's attempted representations of a subject will in turn affect the player's understanding of that subject. This interplay affects how players place themselves conceptually within the game and any real-

world events and conflicts represented within the game (Mantello 2017). Despite video game studios shying away from what they call *political statements*, military shooters remain deeply enmeshed in hegemonic colonial projects of race, gender, and Western control of others both through the game's design and the subjectivities of its player base (Blackburn 2018, Donald 2019, Ruch 2021, Stahl 2006).

Video game studies as a scholarly field arose in the last thirty years and scholars have made key observations about how the media intersects with concepts of alterity, historical memory, and geopolitical violence (Johns 2006, Kapell and Elliott 2013, Penix-Tadsen 2013, Schut 2007, Seiwald 2020, Sims 2014). Video games provide interactive, immersive, and emotional engagement with otherwise positionally or temporally distant subject matter. Beyond agreeing that video game play is an engaging activity, game studies scholars have understandably struggled to pin down concepts of immersion and embodiment within the field (Bayliss 2007, Farrow and Iacovides 2014, McMahan 2003). Some have broken the concept down into *criteria* for a player to experience another location or perspective, such as engagement, engrossment, and presence within the virtual space (Brown and Cairns 2004, McMahan 2003). Others have posed alternative terminology, such as Calleja's (2011, 219) use of the term "incorporation" to signify "the subjective experience of inhabiting a virtual environment facilitated by the potential to act meaningfully within it while being present to others." Games are immersive in the way that their digital environments are made present kinesthetically, narratively, affectively, ludically and spatially to a player's consciousness and this incorporation allows a player to exert agency within a virtual world (Calleja 2011, Farrow and Iacovides 2014). That combination of factors is what allows video games more interactivity than a film or novel.

> "Videogames demand an embodied, situated audience that looks and listens, but to this demand they also add the requirement for this audience to physically touch and move" (Keogh 2018, 9-10).

The last two requirements are what set video games apart from other forms of media like literature or television. The act of touch by the physical player allows them to act and have presence within the virtual, though bounded, space the game provides (Keogh 2018).

Many video games place a player within a narrative, having them exercise and experience agency in fantastic and fictional scenarios. Video games like the Ghost Recon series take place in a historically informed context, drawing the player into a specific historical time and place, not just in narrative but in participation into those narrativized events. They create a space through which modern players may participate in the historical process and discourses both physically through their in-game avatar, as well as emotionally and ideologically as their past subjectivities engage with the game design (Schulzke 2013). In this way video games have a capacity to represent history participatorily, not just narratively (Power 2009). This narrative incorporation is just one way a video game may immerse a player and *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* presents its historical representation as authentic, and it explicitly asks players to place themselves as agents in that history (Calleja 2011, Ubisoft 2015). That authenticity – meaning that something *feels* accurate – is another significant factor which affects player immersion and successful embodiment within a game (Bowman 2018, Majewski 2018, Mochocki 2021). Though experiencing a digitally *embodied* event is still inherently different than experiencing that event in real life, videogames, and particularly video games that represent historical conflicts, have the ability to reveal and affect how people relate to the past, present, and future (Bayliss 2007, Mochocki, 2021). If a player's immersion hinges upon them perceiving a

virtual space as authentic and representational of reality, the game must present conflicts, challenges, and setting in ways that conform to a player's understanding of reality to fulfill that immersive experience. In this way, popular video games that engage with historical conflicts and settings are rich texts that communicate how players understand or wish to understand the world and their national, social, and political place in it.

Scholars have also addressed how the military shooter genre reflects real geographies into fictionalized reflections with distorted levels of alterity and violence designed to create accessible stakes for the player (Chan 2005, Šisler 2008, Huntemann 2010, Penix-Tadsen 2013). These reflected violent geographies are used as generic set pieces in the service of creating dynamic challenges for players to overcome. *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* represents Latin America's political turmoil and drug violence as part of what Penix-Tadsen (2013, 182) calls a "broader geography of chaos" where a setting provides the player with challenges, exciting antagonists, and dangerous stakes through seemingly specific and regionalized details. However, these superficially authentic details and locations are actually vague imaginary settings that easily stand in for one another:

> "Latin America is inscribed within what I would call a broader geography of chaos, an imaginary Call of Duty world in which the Brazilian favela is a virtual neighbor to war-torn Afghanistan, and the streets of Havana or a fictitious Cuban nuclear-weapons production facility border the wasteland of Chernobyl and Vietnam's infamous 'Hanoi Hilton' prison camp." (Penix-Tadsen 2013, 182)

These geographies of chaos make use of drug war narratives, with players fighting fictional drug smugglers, kingpins, assassins, and other personas pulled from drug war imaginary. Jaramillo (2014) observes how drug war narratives function to draw *normal* white characters into fraught, sometimes humorous, but always high-stakes

situations filled with dangerous black and brown characters as antagonists. Cultural and borderland studies scholarship show that drug war narratives and narcoculture – a term used to denote the popular culture associated with the drug trade – in television, movies, dress, music and literature have the capacity to provide context, comfort, and agency to communities affected by drug violence, at least when created and expressed within those communities (Cabañas 2014, Haidar and Herrera 2018, Muehlmann 2013, Naef 2018, Rojas-Sotelo 2014). However, drug war narratives like those in Wildlands are products of large studios and state agent consultants, resulting in justification for large-scale, state-led drug war violence – as opposed to narcoculture's nuanced ability to help those trapped at the trade's low levels process that violence (Britto 2016, Jaramillo 2014, Ubisoft North America 2015). The military shooter genre overwhelmingly presents Latin America, and in fact, all broader geographies of chaos, as "barren wastelands devoid of civilians and infrastructure in need of saving and U.S. intervention" (King and Leonard 2010, 91). By depicting these settings as ill-used and generically chaotic, the game's narrative forgives foreign efforts to *fix* the space. The poverty, disorder, and turmoil displayed in the game is itself weaponized, used to justify the violence of the player characters and rationalize their presence as a United States covert team in Latin America. These drug war geographies, in both video games and other forms of popular media, are depicted as *non-state* or *anti-state spaces* in which the drug trade rules and cartels and terrorists war for dominance. The characterization of Latin America countries as this lawless frontier, ripe for conquest by illicit powers, opens the door rhetorically for *just* invasion, domination, and military action by hegemonic law and order, whilst obscuring the hegemonic systems that allow real world illicit economies to flourish (Donald 2019, Goodhand 2021). The invitation to United States intervention that King

and Leonard (2010) note is explicitly invoked in *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* through the setting, mechanics, and the emotional crux and plot of the main narrative.

Many historians that have followed Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) example, questioning the silences and obfuscations of history. However, what happens when audiences are confronted with muddied inconsistencies and contradictions in the historical record? As Kiki Camarena's death unearthed allegations of CIA involvement and the anti-drug campaigns were tarnished by exposé and lengthy ineffective decades of drug war spending, how did people reconcile the death of their *DEA Jesus*? (Bartley and Barley 2015, Feess 2017). The silences of the record are still at play, but they are not as effective as they were before and they become noticeable, sometimes resounding. These gaps begin to *haunt* in Avery Gordon's words. *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* uses its narrative potential to rewrite the past and current histories of United States intervention, covert violence, and specific messy deaths into something perhaps more palatable. Through the use of participatory media, the game engages with a historical narrative that takes its cues from actual events, conflicts and people to ground its audience in a very specific and constructed history. The gaming experience Wildlands offers places the player into this interactive history as active participants in it. They *are* United States covert involvement; they *are* the gaps in the historical record.

The Game

The *Ghost Recon* series, pulled from the popular works of author Tom Clancy, is a video game franchise where each game revolves around a singular group of covert United States agents who work around the globe in different countries and conflicts,

always operating as agents who *do not exist*. Four fictional individuals with the code names Holt, Midas, Weaver, and Nomad make up the United States covert team. A key aspect of the franchises mythos is that while the United States denies their existence, the Ghosts work and cooperate with many United States agencies including the CIA, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and DEA as well as the military in their varied missions around the world. There are currently sixteen games in this franchise, the second most recent one being *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* in 2017. The game tasks the players with combating a Mexican drug cartel that has taken over Bolivia and corrupted the government into a *Narco-State*. *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* is one of the most popular video game titles of 2017, topping charts in both North America and Europe (Gamecentral 2017). It continues to release downloadable content and has a large online multiplayer base. Though industry reviews of the games content and play have been tepid, the popularity of players is reflected in its high sales, particularly in North America, Europe, and more recently Japan. Following a highly successful beta release, the game had been played 55.17 million times in the first year since its release in March 2017 (Saed 2017, Wildlands Statistics 2018). There are currently an estimated 423,000 active players worldwide and reviewers attribute this success to the game's expansive open-world setting and support for an active player base (Gamecentral 2017, Mikolić n.d., Wildlands Statistics 2018).

The French studio that produced this game, Ubisoft, is upfront about their aims for *authenticity*. In efforts to create a "living, breathing, open world," members of the development and design teams not only lived in Bolivia, but also worked step-by-step with both United States and Bolivian military special forces units, following the units on the ground and getting motion capture data so the protagonist and enemy motions were "as accurate as possible" and created an immersive, realistic, experience

(Ubisoft North America 2015). Ubisoft also hired active and retired military personnel as advisors. The game's writers onsulted with CIA officers at the agency's Headquarters in Virginia, representatives from the DEA in the United States Mexico Borderlands, members of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), and spoke with cooperating Mexican drug smugglers to inform the game's content (Rath 2017). The studio discussed their direct engagement with the drug war's *complex* history when asked in a promotional interview with Sam Strachman, the Ubisoft Paris Narrative Designer, how much their knowledge of the drug war impacted the plot and story of the game. This excerpt is posted on their official website:

> "The story of Ghost Recon Wildlands is of course a work of fiction, but is heavily influenced by the "War on Drugs", in terms of recent events but especially in regards to the past fifty years. What makes Bolivia so interesting is how the War on Drugs has affected its cultural and political development. It has a long and difficult history involving numerous dictators, an ancient relationship to the coca leaf, and even Nazi captain Klaus Barbie. The War on Drugs is a massively complex issue with no clear solution or end in sight. We do our best to explore as many angles as we possibly can." (Ubisoft 2015)

The Bolivian government has since filed a formal complaint with the French Embassy over the harmful depiction of their country and the implication that they require United States intervention to effectively combat the drug industry (Grammer 2017). Bolivia has rejected United States intervention in the drug war, expelling the DEA in 2008 and legalizing the agrarian production of coca leaf in 2005. These efforts have resulted in a decrease in coca production and violence against rural farmers, though the United States has been vocally displeased over their expulsion and Bolivia's "failures" and "insufficient law enforcement efforts" to disrupt the narcotics trade (Guidi 2015). The development of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* was steeped in these politics. Announced at the 2015 E3 video game industry convention, the game itself was in development years before in 2012, placing its early drafting during the

breaking allegations of the CIA-led assassination of Enrique Kiki Camarena (Bartley and Bartley 2015, 411-412, Karmali 2015, Ubisoft 2017). The entwined histories of the game's development, its plotted narrative, and the political climate of its release are set within the real events and uneasy unveilings of the drug war that continues to inherit the violence of the past forty years.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands is an open world, tactical military shooter game, meaning that the player(s) are free to explore the virtual world and are not *railroaded* through a specific linear plotline. As they explore the open world, the player(s) take on military-like missions, securing strategic sites, assassinating key enemies, rescuing hostages, and generally operating as a covert military team. Despite its open world, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands*' single player campaign does have a main plotline in which the player character avenges the death and torture of murdered DEA agent Ricardo Ricky Sandoval. The game's progress and immersive emotional appeal is structured around this revenge mission. The main antagonist is El Sueño, a Mexican druglord and leader of the fictional Santa Blanca cartel who has at the start of the game established a narco-state in Bolivia and killed Ricky Sandoval, who had been working undercover to combat them from within. It is up to the Ghosts to prevent El Sueño from invading the United States' southern border through the druglord's extensive network of narco-terrorists, and personally avenge the death of Ricky Sandoval. Throughout the game they take direction from a CIA covert operative and colleague of the late Sandoval, Karen Bowman. Their allies, introduced through Bowman, are a rebel group who work to free Bolivia from the narco-terrorists who have infiltrated and taken over the Bolivian government. Throughout the non-linear storyline, Bowman's voiceover explains the torture, pain, and humiliation that Sandoval would have experienced at the hands of each Santa Blanca member the Ghosts encounter. The player's missions revolve around intimidating or eliminating

these fictionalized narcos, who range from torturers, traffickers, corrupted beauty queens, pro-narco bloggers, cult leaders, and assassins. Each are explained, either through the CIA agent Bowman's voiceover the role they played in Sandoval's death or the direct threat they pose to the United States through the weak Mexican border. Each of these enemy characters are then killed or intimidated by the player character on the way to El Sueño, the main antagonist of the game, and the man who personally killed Ricky Sandoval. As with Catholic saints, Ricky Sandoval's painful trials and suffering are part of his death and the prerequisite for his martyrdom. And like many Catholic saints, Ricky Sandoval knowingly accepts his suffering and death. At the end of the game, as the non-linear missions stop and the main plot wraps up, the Ghosts learn that Sandoval knowingly sacrificed himself so that the proper agents [The United States, Bowman, and the Ghosts themselves] would have the justification to move decidedly against the cartel-suffused Bolivian government and El Sueño, successfully saving both Bolivia and United States from the Santa Blanca Cartel. The fictional DEA agent altruistically went to his death so that the United States would step into Bolivia without the sins of past interventions. Ricky died so that United States interventionism could live on.

Intertwined Narratives

If history-making is the art of creating plots from the past, the studio's visions for authenticity combined with the explicitly fictional cast of characters and imagined narco-state creates a very distinct history of the drug war with Kiki Camarena as its cornerstone. The narrative beats of the game follow many of the real-world plots of the DEA agent's life, death and its aftermath. The character Ricardo Ricky Sandoval's name, history and his death parallels that of Enrique S. Kiki Camarena. Like Sandoval, Camarena served in the Marines and went on to become an undercover DEA agent,

working until he was abducted on 7 February 1985 near the United States Consulate (Feess 2017). Sandoval's character is abducted near the United States embassy and undergoes hours of captivity and torture, just as Camarena reportedly did. The first enemy characters that the player is charged with finding and eliminating are the pair of doctors La Yuri and El Polito, who, as Bowman the CIA agent explains, were responsible for keeping Sandoval alive throughout his lengthy torture. This mirrors the incriminated doctor and Mexican citizen Humberto Alvarez-Machain in the Camarena case, who would be abducted in breached extradition procedures by United States forces and brought to trial in Los Angeles County (United States 1992). Like La Yuri and El Polito, Alvarez-Machain was accused of being present and keeping Camarena alive and awake during interrogation with the use of amphetamines. Though they do not always occupy as pivotal a role in the plot, the world of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* is populated with fictionalized versions of other real-world individuals and groups, some involved in the Kiki Camarena case, and others that have been drawn atmospherically from popular news reports, media, and myth of the drug war. El Sueño and his religiously motivated cartel finds parallels in La Familia Michoacana and its spinoff the Knights Templar, a major antagonist of the game is a Mexican beauty queen-turned-narcotics trafficker based off the now infamous Maria Susana Flores Gámez, and the many religious motifs used by the Santa Blanca cartel are fetishized versions of devotion to Santa Muerte, a real and controversial Mexican folk saint. Just as Latin America becomes a part of a broader *geography of chaos* for the purpose of video game entertainment, the violence and politics of the drug war are reduced down to accessible plotlines and caricatures. The last forty years of United States state intervention, international policing, and political rhetoric are concentrated into a fictional narrative that takes place in 2017. By drawing the player into this narrative through a participatory medium, the game acts as a vehicle through which players find themselves in history as an American covert

actor. The game underscores its pursuit of authenticity by referencing real-world characters and plots, but it entirely divorces these aspects from their temporal context and provides its own narrative and moral one.

Despite the deeply political setting and the Ghost team's presence as a covert American military team dealing with a corrupt government and significant threat to their home country, the game's revenge mission to avenge Sandoval's death is framed as highly apolitical. Dialogue within the game highlights the Ghost's unwillingness to align themselves emotionally or ideologically with Kataris 26, the rural rebel fighters that combat Santa Blanca and the corrupted Bolivian government. One of the supporting characters complains that the socialist rebels and their ideology "always ends up with more bodies in the ground" (*Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* 2017). To which the main character the player operates as, Nomad, explains that at the "end of the day, this is a revenge mission. We need to focus and get this done quick before we get stuck between local politics and a firestorm of cartel bullets" (*Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* 2017). What the Ghosts explain away with this dialogue is the United States covert involvement which characterized the late 1980s and 1990s and shaped past and current anti-narcotics efforts. Because of declassified documents and the work of journalists, historians, and activists making them intelligible, the United States is now known to have routinely manipulated themselves between "local politics and a firestorm of cartel bullets" (*Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* 2017) as Nomad phrases it. The game informs its audience of this later in conversations with the team's CIA contact Karen Bowman (Marcy 2010, Villar and Cottle 2011). In the game the Ghosts themselves, as covert agents, are fictional echoes of this history. Throughout the many games in the franchise, this fictional covert operations team instigates intense amounts of death and destabilizes foreign governments and organizations, only to withdraw silently as ghosts with only their collateral damage and the effects of their involvement visible. This is the legacy

the player falls into as they take on the role of Nomad, the leader of the Ghosts. At one point, Bowman the CIA agent and the player character/Nomad acknowledge the history the game weaves itself into.

Bowman:	"Are you afraid the Socialists are going to get too big for their britches? You're such a Cold War antique"
Player character:	"Says the CIA spook in Latin America"
	(*Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* 2017)

Here the player character – a Ghost – labels a non-player character as a Spook. *Spook* is a colloquial term for an undercover agent, particularly one working for the CIA and this slang is common in fictional and nonfictional representation and coverage of the agency and its agents. Spooks and ghosts are also words that signify entities that are usually unwanted, powerful, unseen presences that once lived but are now dead and yet have the ability to affect the world of the living in palpable ways. Here, the two characters directly acknowledge and tease one another about their respective place within the distasteful yet often unseen history of United States intervention. This is effective *lamp-shading*, a writer's trick of acknowledging uncomfortable or implausible elements within a story by calling attention to it, and then quickly moving on. The creators of Wildlands understand that their audience will probably be familiar with the hints of United States' reputation for interventionist violence and militarism, particularly in Latin America and the drug war. The narrative *nods* to this reality allow players to continue playing a role that continues, glorifies, and redeems this violence within an imagined and engaging narrative that fills unearthed gaps in the historical record.

Despite taking place in fictionalized Bolivia, and made by a French studio, this is a game that is deeply entrenched in United States security perspectives and imagined histories. It is the main antagonist, El Sueño the Mexican cartel leader, who opens the

game with a monologue explaining, with visual religious and expansionist visuals, that Bolivia was a promised land for his narco-state, free from United States intervention. This United States, depicted in the visuals as an enraged, hammer-wielding, *Uncle Sam* flanked by military jets, presents the only real threat to this fictional drug lord. Though the game is set in Bolivia, the antagonists are uniformly of Mexican origin and threaten the United States with drugs and crime at its southern border. Bolivia is characterized as merely the battleground between Mexican cartels and United States state agents, a weak state that had previously ejected those that could have prevented what happened to it. Despite Bolivia's real-world track record of the past decade in successfully limiting United States policing and military involvement and their significant reduction of coca production, the choice of the game's setting is an interesting alternate reality where the lack of United States intervention made the country ripe for a Mexican drug-lord's dystopic narco-state. This speculative history of positive and necessary intervention has clear ideological purpose and becomes participatory through the medium of a video game.

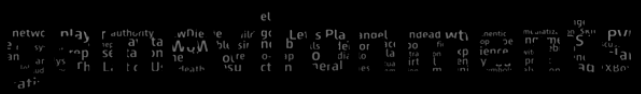
Within the narrativized history of the game, United States non-intervention allowed a Mexican drug lord to grow large enough to threaten the United States and the entire Western Hemisphere. The player solves this conflict through covert operation, CIA spooks, and Ghost teams. Throughout the game American excellence, and therefore the excellence of the player, is highlighted despite the winks and nods to a violent and imperial history. It is the American State, through the Ghost team's covert operation, that take over for Kataris 26 once the campesinos have been revealed as too reckless and disorganized to handle the cartel themselves. It is then that the Ghosts are able to combat the Santa Blanca cartel successfully, effectively disabling the criminal organization and its hold on Bolivia's government. The moral imparted by the game's narrative is that only through foreign and militarized intervention is the

United States – and the world – safe from the brewing threat that Mexican narcotics and crime pose. The initial apolitical nature of the player's covert team shows that they, as agents of the state, are reluctant to meddle in foreign politics and only do so through necessity. The personal and intimate death of one of their own provides a guiltless entry into the conflict, redeeming the subsequent violence and stretched jurisdiction that plagued the real Camarena conflict and case. The player is introduced and more importantly, invited into the historical legacy of United States intervention as not just a viewer, but a necessary, reticent, and justified participant in that history. Historical memory may have smoothed over Kiki Camarena's name, replacing him it with anti-drug slogans and fictionalized counterparts, but Camarena persists because his death may provide an affecting justification for years of state violence and intervention across borders.

In 2013, as allegations surfaced that the CIA had silenced Camarena, participating in his interrogation, death, and the cover up, the *Jesus of the DEA* became news once again (Bartley and Bartley 2015.) Camarena's martyr's death in the 1980's had motivated years of anti-drug sentiment and drug war operations, providing safety for United States state agents posted in the United States Mexico borderlands (Feess 2017). The possibility that the United States had a hand in murdering their own savoir would have called a cultivated and lasting historical memory into question, especially as it was suspected Camarena was silenced before he could interfere with the CIA's operation in Nicaragua during the Iran-Contra affair (Scott 2009). In *Ghost Recon Wildlands*, it is the CIA who brings the Ghosts in to avenge the death of their friend the DEA agent, it is the CIA contact, Karen Bowman who provides the emotional notes to the narrative explaining the horrors the Santa Blanca cartel has done to her personally, Bolivia, and will soon do to the United States.

Conclusion

This is a game that engages deeply with the history it hides. The fictional antagonist El Sueño acknowledges the history in the opening of the game, Bowman and Nomad acknowledge the silence that has been created (as they themselves are ghosts and do not exist) but rationalize and necessitate their covert involvement through their discovery of Sandoval's sacrifice. The humor and emotional engagement of the game depends in part of a cursory understanding of history throughout the United States, Mexico, and larger Latin America. Camarena was killed in 1985, and the heyday of CIA covert political action in Latin America ran from the 1950s to the 1990s. Moreover, the modern discourse on narcos supplies the game's antagonist and plays upon post-9/11 fears of *narco terrorists* arriving from all over Latin America through a weak United States Mexico Border. The sensational and utilized coverage of Kiki Camarena's death in the 1980s began an effective drug war theatre that continues to this day, complicated but not at all silenced by the allegations of CIA involvement and assassination. Wildlands allows its players to work through this narrative as Ghosts, unseen but powerful forces that redeem the violence of American actors by uncovering the willing martyrdom of one of its agents. By acknowledging through fiction this constructed and conglomerate history, players are allowed to justify their country's involvement through the death of Sandoval, to rewrite the real death of Enrique Camarena. The game's narrative smooths over the messy and tangled historical record by first acknowledging the gaps and then providing a redemptive narrative to fill them, creating a palpable alternative to the decidedly more complicated and unpleasant possibility that Camarena was killed by his own country and the ill-conceived drug war he justified was just heavy-handed interventionism. More so than other mediums that depict narratives of the drug war, games like *Wildlands* can immerse its audience deeply in past and current histories of United States intervention by providing its players with the ability to move within the



authentic representations of violence covert operations of the drug war. The interactive nature of video games allows players to intimately facilitate this redemption of United States interventionism themselves, even as they embody the unseen agents at the heart of the conflict.

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[i] In exception, see Toro (1999), Bartley and Bartley (2015). Both discuss Camarena's impact on US foreign policy and policing. In addition, see Britto (2016) for a discussion of the streaming television show Narcos: Mexico and its uncritical use of United States Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) sources in portraying the events surrounding Camarena's death.