Emergent Perspectives on

Multiplayer Online Games:

A Study of *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft*

Faltin Karlsen

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Introduction

The first time I entered a Multi-User Dungeon, a MUD, I remember being baffled by the fact that someone had actually constructed such a complex universe. One of the aspects I found intriguing was the way the different rules and functionalities were designed with very few perceivable inconsistencies. The sensation of awe was amplified by the fact that the game was persistent, that the life in the game evolved without me being present. The social community added another layer of complexity to the already enormously complicated game world. In this thesis, my ambition has been to describe and analyse some of this complexity.

My thesis is a study of gaming in multiplayer online games. On the overall scale, it focuses on how the players, the game medium and the producers work together as a system. On a more concrete level, it consists of smaller empirical analyses, primarily focusing on the players' use of the games and the developers' strategies when creating them. The study is comparative and consists of two cases, the MUD *Discworld* and the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*. My methodological approach is a combination of media ethnography and structural analysis of the games.

Relevant research

Academic research on computer games consists of a patchwork of different methodological and theoretical approaches. Some of these approaches have their heritage in other fields and are related to different academic traditions. I will now present some research areas that have been important for my work.

One approach concerns mediated communication and socialisation, with early contributors such as Amy Bruckman (1993, 1994), Julian Dibbell (1998), Annette Markham (1998) Sherry Turkle (1995), Allucuére Rosanna Stone (1991, 1995) and Elizabeth Reid (1996, 1999). Most of these studies cover issues concerning social behaviour and misbehaviour in online communities, gender bending and questions related to the identities of the users. They explore topics like power and surveillance, and how ordinary social mechanisms are challenged or altered when people enter digital social fields. These studies vary in method and quality, from Turkle's thorough analysis based on an enormous body of interview material, to Dibbell's participant approach reported from a more impressionist journalistic angle. They are mainly concerned with issues other than gaming, and have mainly been important as examples of analyses of the interrelation between people and technology. In this respect, the early works of Bruno Latour (1987) and Sherry Turkle (1984) have also been an inspiration.

During the 1990s, several studies concerning the structural qualities of new digital media were also being carried out. Some researchers pointed out that the interactive character of new media placed the user in a dramatically different position from the mere interpretative activity we find in traditional media like novels, films and television.[1] Early theoretical contributors who discussed interactivity in connection with digital media include Espen Aarseth (1997), Jens F. Jensen (1998), Brenda Laurel (1991) and Janet H. Murray (1997). It should be noted that these contributors were mainly exploring new media from a theoretical and not from an empirical perspective. Aarseth's work on ergodic texts, for instance, discusses the user's position to a certain extent, but does not include any reference to actual, empirical users.

During the last decade an academic field recognised as *game studies* has emerged, and for some time this field has struggled to establish an episteme based on the idiosyncrasies of its specific medium, the computer game. Game studies are not

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[1] With regard to television, although the audience traditionally had little impact on the content, audience participation was always part of the production strategies, for instance as contestants in game shows. Over the last 5 to 10 years, new forms of interactive television have arrived, where larger parts of the audience can participate through return channels like SMS. Some programme formats centre exclusively on these newer interactive features and are therefore in large audience driven. See for instance Enli 2007, Beyer et al., 2007, Karlsen et al., forthcoming.

unified by any overarching theoretical or methodological approach, but rather by the common object of study. Aarseth is regarded as one of the early contributors to this field, and part of the branch more generally referred to as the 'ludological approach'[2]. Its focus has been mainly on the medium's structure and its aesthetic, functional qualities, partly in an attempt to describe what separates the computer game medium from traditional linear media. In some respects, ludology might be regarded as the most theoretically ambitious part of game studies, where general structural traits and concepts are being discussed. Their theories, however, are relatively narrow in scope, focusing mainly on the computer game as *medium*, and not on the larger social and cultural gaming *phenomenon* of which it is part. The field has revived the ideas of older game theorists, like Johan Huizinga (1950), Roger Caillios (1961) and Avedon & Sutton-Smith (1971) in order to categorise and describe the specific type of usage we find in computer games – playing or gaming. This predominant focus on the medium could be seen in relation to the novelty of the field and as a result of the general need to describe, categorise and theorise around the idiosyncrasies of this particular medium. This would include the ambition to avoid incorporating theories that are developed in relation to other media and which therefore might do more harm than good if applied blindly to the computer game medium. Another reason empirical players are not visible in the ludological approach could be that single-player computer games give the illusion of being used in solitude. The single-player computer game is not as easily framed as a social tool as are cultural artefacts with a more obvious social function, like a board game or a watch. This might be the reason the ludologist often approaches and analyses computer games as aesthetic objects, with little attention given to actual players. Despite the explicit desire to fend off imperialistic attacks from older fields (Aarseth 2001), the ludologists have duplicated one very central feature of film and literature studies: that the text can be approached and analysed from the researcher's perspective alone. Despite being aware that the users play a configurative role in a computer game, and that each traversal of the 'text' is unique, they still often use themselves, the researcher, as the only empirical reference of the text reading.

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[2] Who adheres to this approach is a matter of definition, but Espen Aarseth, Jesper Juul and Gonzalo Frasca are often mentioned as central characters, see for instance Klastrup 2003: 158.

This predominant interest in media structure in the ludological approach can be compared to earlier stages in other parts of media studies, where an initial focus on the medium gradually shifted or widened to also include its audience or users. The cultural studies tradition originally played an important role in this shift in orientation from text to user, for instance within television studies. An effect of this reorientation was that television studies incorporated a more nuanced notion of the media user as an active participant who not only interpreted the media content, but also largely filtered or subverted it, based on social or cultural context (Hall 1973; Morley 1992; Ang 1996). This focus on the audience and their social situation also had methodological ramifications. Reception analysis based on in-depth interviews was, early on, the preferred method of user studies, but the greater awareness of the social and cultural context of the user paved the way for a more comprehensive methodological approach – ethnography (Schrøder 1994). Goodwin and Wolff offer this explanation for the shift:

> Scholars of television and popular culture have increasingly realised that the meaning of a text, including its progressive or reactionary ideology, cannot be ascertained by textual analysis, but only by a knowledge of situated audiences and readers – hence the turn to ethnography in cultural studies recently (Goodwin and Wolff 1997: 142, in Hine 2000: 36).

Kirsten Drotner explains the 'ethnographical turn' within media studies by stating that reception studies in reality only replaced the media text with a larger text to be decoded and interpreted; one that included the audience (Drotner 1994: 343). In contrast, ethnography offers the researcher a more extensive contextual canvas to underpin his or her analyses.

It is, of course, partly a question of analytical aim whether a study should focus on the media content, the user or some selection of a larger context. At the same time, these different approaches will, in some way, have to confront the question of what kind of medium the analysis refers to. With regard to digital media, the central configurative position of the user is a palpable argument for having a keen eye on the user's activities and behaviour, regardless of analytical aim. When we approach the phenomenon of multiplayer online games, the relevance of *empirical* users, or players, can arguably be even more imperative. Here, the players not only explore the

non-linear qualities of the medium by employing different gaming strategies, but we also see the advent of different socially instigated gaming conventions (Taylor 2006b; Mortensen 2003). In fact, most parts of the gameplay have a social aspect, and an analysis without reference to this might severely limit the understanding of the game. On the other hand, in order to understand gaming from the player's position, and gaming in all its social and cultural complexity, we need also to assess how the computer game is structured and how it functions. We need to know, for instance, how game mechanics influence gameplay. Without mapping basic structural features of the game medium, the gaming will be impossible to fully comprehend. In my analysis, it has been vital to uphold the dual perspective of game structure and applied use.

During my research I became increasingly bewildered by the lack of studies where these two perspectives were seen together. The social and ethnographic approach from studies on online communities seldom mentioned structural elements, and *gaming* as a type of social enterprise was rarely explored. There are of course studies where both aspects are described, or even conjointly analysed, but the large majority tend to lean heavily on only one of these perspectives. This is even the case in studies of MUDs, where the social mechanisms and processes are most often the object of analysis. One example of this is an ethnographic study conducted by Lori Kendall (2002). Kendall analysed the community on the MUD *BlueSky* from a gender perspective. This is a MUD where the participants were mainly chatting and not much game-play was happening. Not surprisingly the study focuses almost exclusively on the social interactions and communication between the participants. The mechanics of this MUD are hardly noticeable in her analysis, and much of it could probably have been conducted on participants in a chat room or in any other kind of multi-user medium where chat is an integral feature. Lisbeth Klastrup has commented on this general neglect of the structural aspects of game worlds: 'Whereas sociology, communication- and performance studies can tell us much about how people behave and interact with each other when online, these traditions tend to be more or less oblivious to the fact that users are moving around in a world' (Klastrup 2003: 157)

On the other hand we find studies that are more or less oblivious to the social aspect of the game. Ragnhild Tronstad's (2004) analysis of the MUD *Tubmud* can serve as an

example of this. In her analysis, the focus is on how the player, or rather the researcher, approaches the world and how the mechanics, for instance concerning quests, influences the interaction. This analysis, which is interesting on its own terms, hardly shows any evidence that the interaction takes place within a multiplayer game and little is explained about how the social interaction might influence the way players approach the game. In effect, much of this study could probably have been conducted on a single-player game.

This researcher-as-player-approach seems to be common in several branches of game studies. Both within ludology and narratology, which for a while were two of the most vocal positions within game studies, this approach is predominant (see for instance Harrigan & Wardrip-Fruin 2004; Harrigan & Wardrip-Fruin 2007).[3] From my perspective, both these positions appeared rather alienating as they, in their struggle to get a definitional handle on the aesthetics and structure of games, were, relatively speaking, neglecting the position of the players. By that I mean empirical players other than the researcher, and also distinct from concepts like model, implied or ideal players (Aarseth 2003). The players in my empirical material show a complexity of playing strategies and motivations that in many ways are in contrast to the general notion of the player within ludology. This has incited me in my analyses to focus more exclusively on the player also as a theoretical construct. To avoid a general criticism of a large and unquestionably varied field, I have targeted two theorists more specifically: Jesper Juul (Juul 2005) with regard to his classic game model and Richard Bartle and his taxonomy of player motivation (Bartle 1996, 2003). For my analytical purpose, Juul's contribution is the more important of these, as his notion of the player is part of a general conceptualisation of what a game is. Juul's theoretical position is therefore discussed, in chapter three, in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis. The general aim has been to contrast the concept of the player found in both these models with findings in my empirical material. This has resulted in an oscillation between concrete analyses of my empirical data, and discussions of more overarching theoretical and methodological matters.

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[3] In general, the positions of the narratologists and ludologists differ on an ontological rather than methodological level. While the narratologists mainly highlight the resemblances between computer games and narrative media, the ludologists focus on aspects unique to the computer game.

Research question

My initial research question focused on the relationship between the players and the medium, and the medium as a social gaming environment. My approach was to employ an analysis where game structure and game mechanics on the one hand, and the players on the other, were analysed separately and then combined. Regarding players, my focus was primarily on their *gaming persona* and their activities within the confines of the game and not other aspects of their life, which is more common in ethnographical studies. This has in turn had implications for what I have considered as relevant contextual elements. In general, only elements that influence the player's presence in the game have been analysed. As my research developed, it became clear that the developers played an important role in this respect. The relationship between the producer and the audience is often commented on in media studies, although the relationship is seldom the main object of study. With regard to digital media, the player's configurative presence is often referred to as a kind of co-production, and the users as *prosumers* (Jenkins 2006; Taylor 2006b: 145). The presumably new and intimate relationship between producers and players is usually framed as a development where the users have entered the arena of the producers. However, in multiplayer online games, the developers could just as well be said to have entered the arena of the *players*, as they are present after the release of the game through surveillance of the player community and by gradually changing the gaming arena. Both *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft*, typically for the game genre they represent, are constantly being supervised, altered and updated. The analysis of the dynamic structure of my cases has therefore included the developers as a third aspect of my research objects. A research question that encompasses the thesis can therefore be formulated as:

What is the relationship between the players, the medium and the developers in the two cases Discworld and World of Warcraft?

The word relationship is central here, as my aim is to explore how these three aspects, the players, the medium and the developers, are mutually influencing each other. I have not been able to find a theoretical framework within game studies or related fields that handles this dynamic relationship on a general level. By searching for theories concerning dynamic systems I arrived at a general framework of systems

theory and complexity theory as the basis for my thesis. This theoretical approach will be addressed more in-depth in chapter three, *Emergence, game rules and players*. Empirically, the relationship between these three instances will be analysed from different angles throughout the thesis. Theoretical questions with a more limited range will be addressed during these excursions.

The comparative approach

Comparative method is used within several academic disciplines, like linguistics, political science and comparative religion. In one sense, all scientific inquiry has a comparative aspect, as new findings are always seen in relation to knowledge already acquired. In a more formal methodological sense, the comparative approach seeks to generate general knowledge about related phenomena in contrast to, for instance, a historical approach that normally focuses on specific, or even unique, contextual elements. Theoretically speaking, the comparative approach aims for general claims and will in its most extreme form seek to develop essentialistic and structuralistic models. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of linguistics is the main foundation of the 20th century structuralistic school, which inspired scholars in a large range of disciplines. Mircea Eliade's work, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957), and Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949) are early examples of this approach where cultural artefacts, ideas and practices are compared, regardless of their position in time and space. Structuralism influenced several academic fields in the 1950s and 60s and was, for instance, introduced to literature studies by Roland Barthes and to psychology by Jean Piaget. Structuralism has since then been criticised as being based on an overtly deterministic view of human nature, and for neglecting historical, contextual elements in their theoretical reflections. A *leitmotif* within postmodernism has, for instance, been to discredit these types of 'grand narratives' where one theoretical construct is established to encompass all human phenomena of a certain kind. A more relativistic, fragmented and multi-perspective approach has been offered as an alternative to these all-embracing theoretical constructs.

My comparative approach does not lean on this kind of essentialist, structuralistic framework as I am reluctant to engage in generalising too broadly, based on limited empirical data – I simply do not have any theoretical ambitions on this scale. On the

other hand, and as already explained, my analysis will touch upon general theoretical issues, as I will use my cases to evaluate the soundness of existing models and theoretical concepts within our field. My main motivation for employing a comparative approach is due to analytical concern, as one goal is to uncover some of the *variety* within the game genre to which my cases belong. An important reason for exploring more than one case is the possibility of seeing how a set of factors might influence each other differently when the overall contextual setting differs. As such, my approach is closer to the notion of the comparative method we find in grounded theory. Grounded theory was largely developed as a reflection on the practice of participant observation in field work within anthropology and sociology. The sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss originally described this as an approach where theoretical reflections should be developed from empirical data, in contrast to an approach where empirical data are analysed through an already existing theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This is a methodological approach where *sensitivity to cases* is the crux. The sociologist Lars Mjøset explains that the motivation also in grounded approaches might be to generalise, but according to him, in grounded theory the concepts *general* and *context-specific* have a peculiar relationship:

> 'General' is not regarded as the opposite of 'context-specific'. New cases are added and studied systematically, but the value of the new cases is not simply to confirm or reject earlier explanations. These may be revised, but comparison may also show that there are distinct differences. (Mjøset 2005: 384)

As such, the comparative and grounded approach should be case sensitive and not overtly focused on the similarities of the cases at hand. My interpretation of this position is that a comparative analysis should aim at highlighting resemblances where they exist, but also be aware of aspects where the objects of study diverge. With regard to my cases, I consider it important to establish data on why and how they function differently, and why they are perceived and approached differently by the users. This leads to a related question regarding generalisation. The highest level of generalisation I aim for with this study is at the level of game genre and cultural practices related to multiplayer online games. Some of my findings may have a wider range of application to related media forms. Parts of my findings, however, may not even be typical of the genre, but, rather, typical for my cases.

Methodological concerns

This project was initially a single-case study of *Discworld* (Karlsen 2004) that got expanded into a larger comparative study including *World of Warcraft*. The empirical data is therefore derived at different periods and are partly of different nature. The comparative approach has implied that the contextual description of the cases has become less 'thick' than originally planned. The framework I initially developed for *Discworld* had to be adjusted in line with this comparative approach, which again has had analytical and methodological implications. This research design has been theoretically rewarding, but also presented some methodological challenges. The greatest concern has been that my data is asymmetric. Some of the data collection is equal in both games, but some of my ethnographic data on *Discworld* has not been duplicated on *World of Warcraft*. My interviews with *Discworld* players and developers have been an important source in my *Discworld* study, and are matched with a different data set in my *World of Warcraft* analysis. Instead of interviews, I have utilised player forums and web sites dedicated especially to *World of Warcraft*. The voice of the player is, therefore, also represented here. Regarding the developers, I have consulted official press releases, interviews of representatives from Blizzard as well as from the official web site of the game. My general methodological approach has been to acquire as rich material as possible.

One general methodological consideration regarding my cases is their difference in size. *Discworld* consists of one single game server with an upper limit of 225 players who can be logged on at any one time. If we count both the most active and more casual players, the player community probably still does not exceed a few thousand players. On *World of Warcraft*, the total number of subscriptions is now more than 10 million. For the time being it is not technologically possible to host 10 million players within the same game universe and the players are therefore divided between different servers that are copies of the same game universe – each with an upper limit of 20.000 players. A player community spread over hundreds of servers is, in effect, a fragmented community. The players amplify this fragmentation through different types of social organisation. On *World of Warcraft*, player-run guilds form the most significant organising tool to which the players have access. In *Discworld*, a basic difference is built around the types of avatars the game comprises. The different avatar types get access to specific talker channels and have buildings with training

NPCs and other commodities dedicated to them. Confusingly, the avatar types on *Discworld* are called guilds, which is the name of the club function in *World of Warcraft*. The most significant social structure of the two games therefore shares the same name, but has quite different constitutions. In *World of Warcraft*, avatar types are normally referred to as *classes*.

Despite of this difference in scale, in neither of the cases has it been possible to study the totality of the gaming community. In both games, but particularly regarding *World of Warcraft*, I have found it important when analysing smaller portions of the gaming community not to lose sight of the larger social and cultural weave it is part of. With regard to both cases, I have made observations within different factions of the player base. Besides participant observation and interviews, I have also made use of a range of other empirical sources. In general, my empirical data can be sorted into the following four categories:

1. Interviews with users and developers
2. Observation within the games and at game meetings
3. Player forums and web sites
4. Aggregated data concerning game mechanics

I will, in the following, give an overview of my data and the different methodological considerations concerning it. Some methodological questions will be addressed more in depth in the different chapters of the thesis.

Interviews

My eleven interviews of *Discworld* players were undertaken early in the project, and conducted on two different occasions in Sweden and England. When choosing informants, I wanted to capture a cross-section of the MUD's population with regard to the role or position they had on the MUD. I also wanted to interview developers of the game as I wanted informants that had had experience with the player community over a long period of time, and had preferably been involved with different strata of the community. I decided to find informants among participators in so-called *MUD-meets*, where usually both players and developers are present. MUD-meets of players

are gatherings of various sizes, usually in a pub or in private venues. Some MUD-meets last for a few hours, but the larger ones can span several days. Interviewing players in such gatherings meant less travelling and fewer logistical problems for me, gave me the opportunity to observe how players interacted outside of the MUD and to talk informally with a large number of players. The largest MUD-meet arranged by players of *Discworld* is an annual event that takes place each February in London. Players from different parts of Europe, and sometimes also players from other parts of the world, attend. This meet lasts for a weekend and around a hundred people normally show up. In addition to the arrangement in London, I interviewed players in a smaller MUD-meet in Sweden. The interviews were conducted during 2002 and 2003. With regard to selection of informants, my study did not have any specific gender focus, but I wanted to have a gender balance that did not deviate too much from the MUD population and ended up with 5 female and 6 male informants.[4] Age was not a criterion for selecting informants and my informants were between the age of 22 and 32, which probably is a bit higher than the average on the MUD.

Interviews with users and with producers present the researcher with different methodological challenges, concerning reliability, for instance. Researchers interviewing users may for instance meet informants who are unsure about the nature of the research and may be reluctant to share information, or, on the other hand, try to say what they perceive that the researcher wants to hear (Kvale 1997). On the other hand, researchers interviewing leaders or decision-makers of media corporations can meet informants that are drilled in presenting a specific version of their company: as Gunn Enli comments, 'a typical trait of media professionals is that they are experienced communicators, and familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of exposure' (Enli 2007: 24). Hence, it might be difficult to get beyond the 'official' version of the company and make the informants reveal more sensitive information.

In my interviews, the distinction between these two groups of informants was present, but not very distinct. One reason for this is that the developers I interviewed are part of a non-commercial enterprise with little exposure to the general public. They do not have the training in presenting their organisation compared to more professional

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[4] There are no existing statistics about the gender count on the MUD, but there was a common impression that there was a preponderance of male players, maybe as much as 70%.

organisations. However, a certain reluctance regarding information about the future development of the MUD, and what techniques they had for surveillance of the players was perceptible. This is, most likely, a reflection of their policy of not revealing such information to players.

With regard to the players I interviewed, few of the problems often encountered in interview situations were visible. First, most of my informants had higher education and several were familiar with the methodology I used. Many of them had even undertaken research interviews themselves during their studies. Conducting the interviews at a MUD meet where we already had met as players contributed to a relaxed tone during the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and based on an interview guide. The guide consisted of six categories of questions.

1. Playing and alts
2. Communication and in game public sphere
3. Creativity and fandom
4. MUDs, games and fiction
5. Socialising
6. Development and administration

Since all of the developers had been players, the questions were largely similar for both groups. Only the final section of questions targeted the developers specifically (see appendix I for a detailed list of questions). In general, my questions were specific, as I wanted the informants to narrate from their own playing rather than try to reason around it or categorise it. The only exception from this concrete approach was the part dedicated to the developers. Here the questions were more abstract, such as: 'What is the balance between individual creativity and overall design goals?' The reason for this was that I wanted to uncover the ethical reasoning behind some of their policy decisions and rules on the MUD; for instance the prohibition of multiplaying. However, with regard to the developers as well, the concrete approach was the one that was most revealing. The accounts of how they handle the player community on a daily basis were often more telling then their policy statements concerning the same issue.

Before the interviews, I asked the informants to fill out a three-page form with several questions concerning their involvement with the MUD (appendix II). This gave me a first impression of their playing style, and I was able to adjust my questions accordingly during the interview. Using this form also saved me from asking a lot of yes/no questions during the interview, giving space to a more in-depth and fluent conversation.

Both my criteria for choosing informants and the procedure for selecting them were responsible for giving me a sample of informants that does not represent an average of the player base. Basically, my sample of informants will be slanted towards the most dedicated player base and towards players that find the socialising part of the game important. This relates well to my research questions, where socialisation and organised gaming are key issues. Here is a short profile of the informants:

Rincewind, 26-year-old male. He is a clerk with 5.5 years of higher education. He started playing in 1998 and had accumulated 175 playing days by 2002 (over 4 years of playing). This equals approximately 2.9 hours of playing each day on average, or 20.1 hour a week. He has 7 alts. He does not hold any position on the MUD, but runs one of the most visited information pages about the MUD.

Cutangle, 30-year-old male. He is a teacher with 7 years of higher education. He started playing in 1997 and had accumulated 375 playing days by 2003 (over 5 and a half year of playing). This equals approximately 4.5 hours each day on average, or 31.4 hours a week. He does not hold any position on the MUD.

Aliss, 26-year-old female. She is a student with 6 years of higher education. She started playing in 2001 and had accumulated 80 playing days by 2003 (over 2 years of playing). This equals approximately 2.6 hours of playing each day on average, or about 18.4 hours a week. She has 6 alts and is a play-tester.

Magrat, 24-year-old female. She is a student with 5 years of higher education. She started playing in 1997 and had accumulated 100 playing days by 2002 (over 5 years of playing). This equals approximately 1.3 hours of playing each day on average, or 9

hours a week. She has 3 alts and was, earlier, a magistrate and play-tester. She is currently a developer (creator).

Detritus, 29-year-old male. He is a teacher with 6 years of higher education. He started playing in 1996 and had accumulated 95 playing days by 2002 (over 5.5 years of playing). This equals approximately 1.1 hour of playing each day on average, or 8 hours a week. He has 3 alts and is a developer (creator).

Eskarina, 22-year-old female. She is a student with 4.5 years of higher education. She started playing in 1997 and had accumulated 180 playing days by 2003 (over 5.5 year of playing). This equals approximately 2.2 hours of playing each day on average, or 15 hours a week. She has 2 alts and is a play-tester.

Angua, 26-year-old female. She is unemployed and has had 5 years of higher education, which she had just finished. She started playing in 1996 and had accumulated 230 playing days by 2002 (over 5.5 years of playing). This equals approximately 2.7 hour of playing each day on average, or 19 hours a week. She has 6 alts and is a developer (senior creator).

Mort, 32-year-old male. He is a clerk with 4 years of higher education. He started playing in 1994 and had accumulated 365 playing days by 2003 (over 8.5 years of playing). This equals approximately 2.8 hours of playing each day on average, or about 20 hours a week. He has no alts and is a developer (senior creator).

Esme, 29 year old female. She works as a manager and has 3.5 years of higher education. She started playing in 1996 and had accumulated 380 playing days by 2003 (over 6.5 years). This equals approximately 5.5 hour of playing each day on average, or 38.9 hours a week. She has 2 alts and is a retired developer (director).

Lipwig, 24 year old male. He is a student with 4 years of higher education. He started playing in 1999 and had accumulated 120 playing days by 2002 (over 3 years of playing). This equals approximately 2.6 hour of playing each day on average, or 18.4 hours a week. He has 7 alts and does not have any positions in the MUD.

Twoflower, 29 year old male. He works as a manager and has 3 years of higher education. He started playing in 1999 and had accumulated 270 playing days by 2003 (over 4 years of playing). This equals approximately 4.4 hour of playing each day on average, or 31 hours a week. He has 1 alt and is a developer (creator).

In general, my informants were steady, long-term players of this particular MUD. All of them had several years of higher education and most of them had fulltime occupation with employment or studies. They were all of European origin and were residents in Norway, Sweden, Spain, Greece and England respectively. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian/Norwegian, Norwegian/Swedish or in English. All excerpts from the interviews are translated into English.

Participant observation within the games and at game meetings
Observational studies have been invaluable for my research, primarily because it involves playing. Playing is important to get on terms with the basic functionalities of the game, and also because it involves becoming familiar with the social structure and lingo connected to the game, which in turn makes the interpretation of the in-game conversations easier. In contrast to most methods where the researcher's hypotheses are determined before the data collection is initiated, participant observation means that the research design remains more flexible, both before and throughout the actual research. (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984: 16) This certainly rings true with regard to my study. During my research I have been part of a wide range of different social constellations, some of which I had very little knowledge about in advance, like the raiding guilds in *World of Warcraft*. In addition to this long-lasting guild membership, I have been in a large range of different ad hoc constellations and have had countless encounters with individual players. The more stable groupings I have been part of, like clubs in *Discworld* and guilds in *World of Warcraft*, have had a particularly strong impact on my study. Being part of such groupings gives an insight into the dynamic of the social life and team play that is hard to fully grasp without such first hand impression. Meeting the players in real life, through MUD meets, has also given me the opportunity to see how the players act in real life, compared to their online persona.

Alongside the more general understanding of the game arenas acquired through playing, I have also recorded information more systematically. The basic method in this regard has been to log play sessions. In some cases I have logged longer sessions of play indiscriminately, but I have usually only logged specific playing situations, for instance while grouping, questing or talking with other players. Also, conversations between the players on public channels have been the target for these logs. The logs on *Discworld* consist of storage of text displayed during playing. On *World of Warcraft*, the main part of the observational data consists of screenshots.

Aggregated data concerning game mechanics

Analysing the game structure and game mechanics has been important, primarily for two reasons. First, it has given me a more in-depth understanding of the games' mechanics than playing alone is able to provide. This has broadened my understanding of ways to use the games, especially with regard to the more dedicated gaming types. Secondly, it makes more comprehensible some of the issues that the developers are dealing with, for instance balancing between different avatar types. This approach implies a different type of observation as described above, as the game, and not the players, is the main target of observation. Players have been important in a more indirect manner, since being part of the gaming communities have given me access to players knowledgeable about game mechanics.

Methodologically, this approach is similar to the more systematic aspect of participant observation, as it involves observation and logging of specific play activities. In general, I have focused on three loosely-defined game mechanical aspects: avatar statistics, interaction between avatar and environment, and tools the players have for communicating and organising play. The first two of these aspects are primarily covered in the next chapter, where the cases are presented. The relationship between game mechanics and social formation will be discussed in more depth in other parts of the thesis. My methodological approach has been to conduct inquiries within the game space by compiling available statistics or data. This approach is sometimes referred to as *reverse engineering*. According to technology researcher Eldad Eilam, reverse engineering is the process of extracting the design blueprints from anything man-made – an activity that might be as old as the industrial revolution (2005). The

computer engineers Elliot Chikofsky and James Cross define reverse engineering as: 'the process of analyzing a subject system to create representations of the system at a higher level of abstraction.' (1990) Wikipedia offers a more elaborate definition: 'Reverse engineering (RE) is the process of discovering the technological principles of a device or object or system through analysis of its structure, function and operation.'[5] Reverse engineering, as a term, is probably best known in connection to computer software where it describes the activity of uncovering parts of the codes or algorithms of software programs. The term is used differently here, as it is conducted on a higher level of the system; on the level of game mechanics.[6] The main motivation for players to be involved in this activity is to generate information about the game mechanics in order to enhance their playing. This information is often shared on the Internet and I have consulted some of these player-developed sources. With regard to *World of Warcraft*, the web sites wowwiki.com, wowhead.com, wow.allakhazam.com and wowguru.com are among the sources I have consulted on this matter.

Both my participant observation and the aggregation of data concerning game mechanics are quite time-consuming methods. One of the reasons for this is that all playing involves long stretches of routine activities that are mostly devoid of analytical value, but necessary to access other parts of the games. The prime example of this is raiding in *World of Warcraft*, which requires having a decently equipped avatar at maximum level before being able to apply to become a member of such a guild. After becoming a member, you will have to spend a large, and steady, amount of time in order to stay in the guild. This can be vital, as some of the social dynamics of these guilds will only become visible after several months of membership. In retrospect, it is quite clear that other methods, like more extensive research interviews, would have provided me with some of the same data. However, 'going native' and by analysing the games from within, has provided me with a keener knowledge of specific aspects of the games than other methods are able to provide. My academic assessment of this issue was that it would also be more fun.

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[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reverse_engineering, last accessed June 27, 2007.
[6] There are probably players that are also conducting reverse engineering on a program level but in my experience, the large bulk of it is performed through legitimate testing within the confines of the game universe.

My studies of *World of Warcraft* were initiated in the autumn of 2005 and ended in the spring of 2008. During my game mechanical enquiries I have played a large range of avatar types, most of them between level 20 and 40, and two of them to maximum level. On *Discworld*, the largest part of my studies took place between 2002 and 2004, with some updates in 2007. Also on *Discworld*, I have developed avatars of different types, two to a considerable extent. Also here, the avatar needs to be played quite extensively in order to get access to specific functions and parts of the game. My highest ranked avatar, a wizard, is more than 50 days old and there are still areas that are dangerous for him to enter. A rough estimate of the total number of hours spent on playing both games that are related to my academic interest probably exceeds 3000 hours.

Player forums and web sites

With regard to the player forums, it is a matter of definition whether or not they are to be considered as part of the games. On *Discworld*, the forums, or *boards,* can be read both from within the games and on the net. The *World of Warcraft* forums are only accessible on the net and hence are only part of the game by being hosted on the developer's web site dedicated to the game. This illustrates the plasticity of online media and the interconnectedness that games often have with related media. The player forums have a particular position in both games by being intimately tied to the public arenas of the games. Player forums are the place where any criticisms about the game are often most aired.

In both games the different classes, or guilds, have dedicated boards. In *Discworld*, due to its smaller size, it is manageable, in practice, to follow all discussions of the boards, even at times when several hundreds are posted each day. At times, I have read all the boards, and followed specific topics more closely over a period of weeks. In general I have followed boards that have most impact on the general public, like the main board named *Frog*. I have also followed boards of the different guilds, as they are places where questions concerning game mechanics and balance are often raised. In addition to the official forums, I have read different web sites or forums created and maintained by players.

In *World of Warcraft*, the boards, or *forums,* are structured differently than those in *Discworld* and partly mirror the game's server structure. Beside some boards that are common for all the players, there are boards dedicated to each server. In addition, most guilds of a specific size have their own web page, with their own forums; most of them only accessible for members.[7] There are probably millions of posts posted every month on a forum dedicated to *World of Warcraft*. Players can follow discussions at guild level, server level, on a regional level and finally on a global level. The impulses that might influence decisions made in one specific guild may come from another continent, just as much as from a fellow guild member. Also on *World of Warcraft*, I have undertaken strategic, thematic reading of the forums but to a lesser degree have I tried to follow specific boards over time, as the large number of posts makes this method less fruitful. My main approach has been to search for different topics in relation to my research.

The web sites of which the official player forums are a part have also provided me with other types of information. As the developers host them, they naturally include information related to the development and management of the game. Since I have not conducted an institutional analysis as such, documents such as annual reports and internal policy documents have not been part of my empirical data. My main focus has been on how the developers handle the player community and how they conceive of the players. The most important type of document has therefore been the help files or FAQ information from the games. The explicit motivation for creating help files is to guide players in issues related to the game. More interestingly, they also describe the developer's stance regarding different policy issues, for instance concerning bug abuse and harassment. As such, these files illustrate how the developers both meet and conceive of the playing community.

Ethical considerations

In studies involving people, there are different considerations to make concerning the potential effect of the study. Within most disciplines, a central issue is to secure the

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[7] Non-members will usually have access to two parts of the web site: a news section, where raid progression is reported, and a recruitment page, where prospective members can apply to join.

anonymity of the people involved. In media studies or ethnographical media research, some researchers anonymise the informants as well as the medium or channels involved. This level of anonymity will inevitably weaken the contextual aspect of the study, as for instance the online forum being analysed often includes elements and qualities that are unique for that medium or channel. I have chosen not to anonymise the games of my study mainly because both games have a large number of participants, which makes it possible to secure the identities of my informants even when the game titles are known. With regard to my informants, I have in general chosen full anonymity by giving them fictional names. Since it is impossible to use names of fictional characters from *Discworld* books in the *Discworld* MUD, I have chosen nicknames for my informants that stem from the books. This will ensure that, as long as this naming policy is upheld, there will be no confusion between current and future players of the MUD. Some of my informants hold positions in the development team that might make them recognisable to other developers. In these cases I used excerpts from my interviews that do not describe in detail what kind of involvement they have in the development process. Observations of other players, as well as observations at player meetings, have also been anonymised. In cases where I have used information that is publicly available online, for instance from player forums or privately run web sites, I have kept the avatar names. A general concern regarding Internet research is that: 'the greater the vulnerability of the author/subject – the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the author/subject'.[8] Relatively speaking, the informants presented in this study are not captured in a particularly vulnerable situation. In general, my focus does not concern any particularly vulnerable aspect of the informants' lives and does, for instance, not involve elements like details of their real-life occupation or family situation. My analysis, first and foremost, has been concerned with their gaming persona and gaming activities.[9] With regard to my interviewed informants, they were also all adults.

During my observational studies, my general principle when approaching the player communities has been to be open about the fact that I am conducting research on

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[8] From the ethical guildelines of the Association of Internet Researchers, available at http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf, last accessed June 27, 2008.
[9] The interviews had more emphasis on the connection between real life occupation and their gaming interests, but these elements have not been included in the thesis.

these games. In the many short and ephemeral encounters I have had with players, it has not been practical to pass this information on, but when I have entered more stable social groupings like guilds, or have met players in real life, I have introduced myself as a researcher. When joining guilds, I have stated my involvement with the game on the guild forums. This open strategy has raised remarkably few questions from the players. The most common response is amazement at the fact that something as trivial as a game can be the object of research and that I actually get paid for researching it. I have chosen not to remind my environment too often about the fact that I am a researcher, as my impression is that this does not bother the players and therefore doesn't seem necessary.

The only time I have been in doubt about whether openness has been the right strategy has been when I applied for membership in raiding guilds. To have my application considered properly, I needed to pass as a dedicated player. A player with a research interest might be considered to be less dedicated or to have the wrong focus on playing. Because of this, and to be able to keep up with a raiding schedule, I avoided the most hard-core guilds. I also chose not to mention that I was a researcher in my applications, but rather let the guild officer know sometime during the period when my application was being considered. This made it easier to answer questions about my research, while also making sure that the leaders were comfortable with my dual role as player and researcher. When I joined the guild, I made the other players aware of my researcher activity through the guild forums.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters, including the introduction. Some of the chapters are based on papers or articles published earlier, but all are reworked for this thesis. My two methodological approaches, ethnography and structural analysis, are not equally represented in all parts of this thesis. At times, one is dominant while, in other places, the two approaches are more integrated, albeit not always with equal emphasis. This approach is mainly a reflection of the subject at hand. For instance, chapter two, which gives a basic comparative description of the cases, is predominantly a structural analysis. In chapter four, where the social structure and dynamics of *Discworld* are explored, the analysis is closest to a traditional

ethnographical analysis, where participant observation and excerpts from my interviews are the main source of data. I will now give a short description of the structure and content of the thesis.

Chapter 2, *Cases,* introduces my cases: the *Discworld* MUD and the MMORPG *World of Warcraft*. This chapter mainly serves two purposes. First, it explains some of the structure and game mechanics of the two games. Secondly, it intends to draw the reader's attention to some of the aspects where the games diverge, especially with regard to interface and gameplay. The range of choices concerning the avatar is often emphasised as a prominent feature of the role-playing genre. Some of the game mechanics embedded in the avatar will therefore be analysed. This exploration will also serve as an example of the game mechanical complexity we find in this game genre.

Chapter 3, *Emergence, game rules and players: A systemic approach to computer game studies,* introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis. Systems theory, complexity theory and the concept of emergence are the theoretical starting points of this chapter. The main argument is that the *player* of a computer game is an integral part of the system, the game, and therefore can be crucial for analytical purposes. This chapter also represents a criticism of Jesper Juul's classic game model, with emphasis on its notion of the player and its strict definition of rules. I argue that we need a better understanding of how the player contributes to the game and, in general, a more nuanced concept of the player. Concerning my particular cases, the influence of the developers is also part of the dynamic, representing an element partly furnishing and partly restraining the influence of the players. The chapter argues that the triad of the developer, the game and the player should be regarded as parts of the same dynamic system.

Chapter 4, *Developers and players: Social hierarchy and dynamics on Discworld,* mainly concerns findings from my interviews with players and developers from *Discworld*. This analysis has an empirical focus and concerns the social organisation of the game. Based on a mapping of the social structure, it explores the power relations and mutual dependency of the players and the developers. One finding is that, commonly, players climb first a hierarchy among the players and then another

hierarchy: that of the developers. To some extent the players and the developers represents different doxa or fields, especially with regard to playing ethics. In other aspects, the two spheres are intimately related. My analysis investigates three different ways the developers influence the player community: through game mechanical means, rules of conduct and through the liaison (game master) function. This chapter also discusses how the different levels of the game, the micro, meso and macro, influence each other. This chapter is related to the next chapter, *High-end game*, as both discuss the interrelation of game mechanics and socially instigated rules. While this chapter explores aspects of *Discworld*, the next are exclusively based on finding from *World of Warcraft*.

Chapter 5, *High-end game,* concerns a highly dedicated part of the player base in *World of Warcraft* – the raiders. Raiders organise in guilds that have many resemblances to organised team sports. They are highly achievement-driven, they are organised in clubs and involved in activities that require long-term planning. A general difference between *World of Warcraft* and team sports is that most of the logistics that usually surround sports are part of the gaming arena in *World of Warcraft*. Preparation for raids, as well as most of the organisation connected to the raids, is conducted within the game space, often with the aid of different web solutions. Most importantly, however, the *rewards* for the playing are also acquired within the game space. My investigation explores how this all-embracing game space influences the organisation of the raiding guilds. From this perspective, I explore how individual and collective goals are negotiated. On a general level, the chapter discusses game conventions emerging within the gaming communities of MMORPGs. Raiding is an example of a play convention that originated within the player community and was gradually incorporated into the game design. In relation to this, I discuss another convention, the Dragon Kill Point system (DKP), that also emerged within the player community but, in contrast to raiding, is still organised and developed by players.

Chapter 6, *Player motivations and scientific classification,* is a conceptual analysis of player motivations, with *Discworld* as the main case. I describe players that are involved in gaming activities that incorporate many different types of motivation. This is contrasted to Bartle's player taxonomy where different types of motivation are

regarded as being mutually exclusive. As an example of a different type of categorisation, I describe an assessment model of player motivation developed by Nick Yee, based on psychometric methodology. This model shows how individual players score in many different motivation categories at the same time. Bartle's taxonomy is based on a discussion among players on one specific MUD and is basically a taxonomy grown out of a self-reflective gaming community. I argue that the concept *folk taxonomies* better describes Bartle's model, as his model is based on a discussion within one specific gaming community and not on any specific academic approach.

Chapter 7, *Quests in context* is a comparative study of quests in *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft*. Earlier analyses of game quests have been mainly concerned with purely aesthetic or structural aspects, while I focus on contextual elements of the quest. More precisely, I discuss three different contextual elements: the producers, the players and the overall game environment. My analysis shows that quests in general have different functions in *Discworld* than in *World of Warcraft*. In *World of Warcraft*, they are an easily accessible part of the game content and can be regarded as a temporary occupation while levelling an avatar. When reaching the maximum level, other activities like raiding will usually occupy the player. In *Discworld*, the quests are hidden in the environment and hard to solve. There is no maximum level for the avatar, and no other game content replaces questing as it does in *World of Warcraft*. As such, the quests occupy different positions in the *content hierarchy* within the two games. In *Discworld*, quests represent the most embellished and complicated game content, whereas in *World of Warcraft* they represent an average part of the content with regard to difficulty. The raiding and the different bosses in the raiding instances are more akin to the complexity and uniqueness found in the quests in *Discworld*.

Chapter 8, *Games as dynamic systems: Concluding remarks,* will assess to what degree my research question has been answered. I will further position my study in the field of game studies and highlight some of the theoretical concepts my thesis contributes to this field. This will include the introduction of system theoretical terms and how this vocabulary describes vital characteristics of multiplayer online games as dynamic cultural systems.

2

The cases

This chapter mainly serves two purposes. First, it provides a basic description of the two cases of this thesis and in order for readers without prior knowledge of the cases to take full advantage of the analyses, it is predominantly descriptive. Secondly, my goal has been to direct attention to some of the aspects where the games differ with regard to interface and gameplay.

My cases are related by belonging to the same broad genre of games. MUDs and MMORPGs are inheritors of the fantasy role-playing games of the 1970s and can be regarded as a chain of successors, representing different stages in the evolution of the genre. The computer game researcher Torill Mortensen has described *World of Warcraft* as the 'new MUD' and she lists game structure, story and fiction, character development, questing, and social interaction as some of the elements where this heritage becomes evident (Mortensen 2006: 397). There are, arguably, many different types of MUDs, and those that are designed especially for gaming and not solely for socialising or building, are largely inspired by role-playing games. MMORPGs, as the latest incarnation of role-playing games are also, besides fantasy role-playing games and MUDs, influenced by different graphical computer games.

As MUDs and MMORPGs originated at different periods, they also have differences with regard to technological functionalities and refinement. The first MUD was launched around 1980 and the first true massively multiplayer games about 15 years later. *Meridian 59* (1996) and *Ultima Online* (1997) were among the first titles in this genre with some commercial success. *Ultima Online* was also the first game to reach 100.000 subscribers (Bartle 2003: 21).

MUDs and MMORPGs have significant differences in scale, and where MMORPGs can have players in the tens of thousands on the same game server, an average MUD has less than a hundred. The most commercial successful MMORPGs have also made it into the mainstream culture, whereas MUDs have always held a rather obscure position, culturally speaking. With regard to my cases, the aspects where they differ are quite extensive. Below is a list of some of these aspects.

Table 2.1: Dichotomising Discworld and World of Warcraft

	Discworld	World of Warcraft
Interface:	Discworld is multimodal, primarily text based.	World of Warcraft is multimodal, primarily graphical.[10]
Scale:	Discworld has a relatively small population of players with a few thousand users.	World of Warcraft has a large population of players with more than 10 million subscribers.
Fictional setting:	Discworld is an adaptation of a fantasy book series.	World of Warcraft is a fictional universe designed by Blizzard.
Financial model:	Discworld is not based on commercial interests.	World of Warcraft is commercially driven.
Development:	Discworld has grown organically over many years without any initial design plan.	World of Warcraft was thoroughly designed from the start.
Cultural impact:	Discworld, as well as MUDs in general, is culturally speaking a marginal phenomenon.	World of Warcraft has contributed to bringing MMORPGs into the mainstream culture.
Accessibility:	Discworld is free for the users and without any age limits.	World of Warcraft is based on payment from subscription and has a 12 year age limit.

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[10] MUDs are usually referred to as 'text based' and MMORPGs as 'graphical'. A more precise description would be to label both multimodal, as there are more than one mode involved in both cases. In *World of Warcraft*, graphics, sound and text are among the most prominent modes, while in *Discworld* the most prominent mode besides text, is colour. Different types of text is coded differently, which can be crucial for orientation in large amounts of text.

This table shows a rather varied menu of aspects ranging from the users, to game aesthetics, the developers and the surrounding culture. None of these will play the main part in my analysis, but to varying degrees they will be called forth as explanatory factors. Some of them are merely contextual factors that have an indirect influence on the games, not instantly traceable in the interface and gameplay. Several aspects also influence each other, which implies that a complete investigation of the causality at work can be complicated.

From an institutional perspective, it might be argued that economy is the most decisive difference between the games, since only *World of Warcraft* is a commercial product. If we were to compare an MMORPG like *World of Warcraft* with single-player computer games, it could be argued that it is the difference in economic logic that accounts for the difference in playing time: developers of single-player games depend on players buying new games regularly. It is equally sound for developers of MMORPGs to encourage their players to stay in that particular game for as long as possible in order to retain the income from their subscriptions. MUDs, however, have players that play just as extensively as in MMORPGs, regardless of the fact that they are almost exclusively non-profit based. Whereas single-player games seldom provide more than 50 hours of playing, both MUDs and MMORPGs have players that spend months or even years of their life residing inside these games. Some of the oldest players on *Discworld*, for instance, have been logged on for several years full time and been part of this game community for more than 15 years. Hence, economical structure alone gives no satisfactory explanation of why players are involved in these games over such extensive periods. Some of the elements that spur this type of involvement are more likely related to the game genre and game mechanics. These are elements that will be described in more depth in this chapter but first, a brief description of the cases.

World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft is a massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), developed by Blizzard Entertainment, which was launched November 23, 2004. On January 22, 2008, Blizzard reported having reached 10 million subscribers, 2.5 million of which were located in North America, 2 million in Europe and 5.5 million

in Asia.[11] These subscribers are distributed over a large number of game servers. Each server is a copy of the same game universe and has a player base with an upper limit of approximately 20,000 players. All players are divided into two factions called the Alliance and the Horde. Players can only have friendly interaction (talking, trading, sharing guild etc.) with players of their own faction.

There are four types of servers that differ according to how the players interact. The most common is Player versus Environment servers (PvE) where players cannot kill other players, except in specific areas and with each player's consent. The second most common type is Player versus Player servers (PvP) where players from the different fractions can kill each other throughout the whole game world. Finally, there are two types of servers that are a combination of role-playing and the types already mentioned. The role-playing servers are identical to the others in terms of game mechanics, but have an additional rule section that states that the players must stay in character on general chat channels and name their avatars according to the fictional universe of the game. Blizzard explains that the basic motivation behind their role-playing servers is to create an immersive world that holds true to the story line of their game universe and clarifies that: 'While other servers allow you to play *World of Warcraft*, these servers are intended to let you **live** *World of Warcraft*'[12] The only other difference between servers is language. Globally, there are servers in a total of seven different languages. In Europe there are French, German, Spanish and English servers. My analysis is based primarily on the English speaking PvE server Bronzebeard located in Europe.

Upon entering the world, the player can choose between 10 different races and 9 different classes of avatars. Not all races and classes can be combined, so the player is left with a total number of 52 possible combinations. The differences between the races are basically physical appearance (gnomes, dwarves, trolls, humans etc.). The classes on the other hand differ substantially with regard to their abilities, for instance what type of weapon or armour they can use and how they fight. The classes currently available in *World of Warcraft* are druids, hunters, mages, paladins, priests, rogues, shamans, warriors and warlocks. Some of these classes are constructed purely for

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[11] http://www.blizzard.co.uk/press/080122.shtml, last accessed June 27, 2008.
[12] http://wow-europe.com/en/policy/roleplaying.html, last accessed June 27, 2008.

fighting, like rogues and mages, while others can specialise in a wider range of playing styles and are referred to as hybrid classes. The paladins and druids, for instance, can both specialise in damage dealing, healing and tanking. These playing styles will be described in more detail in chapter five.

The game consisted initially of two large continents, the Eastern Kingdoms and Kalimdor, located on the planet Azeroth. On January 16, 2007, a new planet consisting of one single continent, Outlands, was introduced. The maximum level of the avatars was, at the same time, raised from 60 to 70. A new expansion called *Wrath of the Lich King* will be issued some time during 2008 and the maximum level will again be increased, this time to level 80.

World of Warcraft could be called the quintessence of MMORPGs as it has clear resemblances to earlier games within the genre, for instance *EverQuest*. The fantasy theme of the game and the avatar types that inhabit it is also typical of the genre. A core activity in *World of Warcraft* is gaming and it has therefore fewer similarities to synthetic worlds where gaming is only a marginal phenomenon, like *Second Life*.

The Discworld MUD

The *Discworld* MUD was launched in 1991 and originally consisted of one street and some surrounding houses. Over the years, the game has steadily grown. The main city, Ankh-Morpork, has expanded enormously and now comprises many thousand single spaces or *rooms*. The surroundings of Ankh-Morpork consist mainly of open areas, with a few smaller towns scattered throughout the landscape. At present, the *Discworld* MUD comprises two continents the last of which was added in 2002.

Discworld draws its geography and theme largely from Terry Pratchett's novels of the same name. The *Discworld* book series play on the fantasy genre, and genre elements are often portrayed in humorous ways. The MUD has in many respects followed suit, and much effort has been made to create an environment which is humorous in line with the books. During the time of my study, around 180 people were coding and administrating the game and it held a player base consisting of several thousand players. There is an upper limit of around 225 players who can be logged on

simultaneously. The coders and administrators are usually referred to as 'creators' rather than wizards in this MUD, as wizards is one of the avatar types of the game.

The players can choose between six different avatar types, called *guilds*: witches, wizards, assassins, thieves, warriors and priests. Most guilds also have several specialisations that further shape the development of the avatar. Priests, for instance, have seven different gods they can worship, and wizards have eight different orders they can join. These specialisations give the player access to special abilities, like the resurrect command, or give advantages in specific skills. Normally, avatars can't hurt or kill each other, but it is possible to become a so-called *player killer* after taking a specific test. A player killer can only attack other player killers.

Compared to *World of Warcraft*, *Discworld* is a blend of all of the server types Blizzard offers, as role-playing, player killing and ordinary gaming are viable options. The relatively large player population compared to other MUDs, combined with an abundance of game functions, makes *Discworld* a complex game area. Functionally as well as socially, *Discworld* represents a rather broad range of the MUD genre. Both games provide the players with the possibility of pursuing a large range of activities. It should be noted that not all of these will be analysed in this thesis as my focus primarily is on the relationship between players and environment, and gaming activities that demand the cooperation of players. Aspects that are not analysed include Player versus Player, role-playing and the fictional universes on which the games rely.

My cases have several features in common, but as mentioned, they also have several aspects where they differ substantially. In the following section I will give a short description of one of the aspects where the games stand farthest apart, the interface, and show some examples on how this might influence gameplay.

Interface in Discworld and World of Warcraft
World of Warcraft has a conventional three dimensional game space, as shown in the picture below. The player can control the distance to the avatar as well as the camera

angle, but the camera normally follows the movement of the avatar automatically. The player moves the avatar either by using the mouse or arrow keys.

Figure 2.1: Interface of *World of Warcraft*

A group of avatars inside Stormwind keep in Stormwind City, following an NPC as part of a quest.

The interface is a mix of game space, information bars and function buttons. In the upper left corner of this picture we see the avatar icon, with smaller icons of the avatars he is currently in a group, or *party,* with, below him. In the upper right, we see a mini map displaying an overview of the surrounding area. Around the edges of the screen are several buttons for different functions and special attacks that can be accessed by both the mouse and keyboard.

In *Discworld*, space is displayed in quite a different manner. Here the player moves in a space that is arranged in some sort of grid pattern with exits linking the different grid cells or *rooms*. The player moves by writing abbreviations of the directions, for instance 's' for south or by pressing '2' on the numerical keyboard. Below is a room description from one of the most common meeting places in the city Ankh-Morpork.

Figure 2.2: The Mended Drum bar

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The bar of the infamous Mended Drum (built on the ruins of the
Broken Drum) is not what you would call high class. The bar has
never seen a washcloth before, and probably never will. The
patrons of this bar are equally seedy characters to fit the
proper colour scheme. People huddle around the bar talking to
each other in very loud voices probably because there is always
the noise of clashing swords here. Just above the bar you see a
tattered menu stained with beer and other unsavoury things.
This place has seen some use of magic.
There is one obvious exit: south
A helpful street urchin is sitting on a chair.
Lilyth is sitting on the bar.
Hera L'Femmes and Carlix L'Femmes are sitting here.
A bulletin board [ 60 notes ] is mounted on one wall.
A blue lever is sticking out of the bar.
A peanut tray is on the bar top.
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Following the description of the room, the avatars currently located in the room are listed. The bulletin board, the blue lever and peanut tray are objects that can be further inquired with the 'look' command. The player can normally only see what is in the same room as the avatar, which makes it difficult to navigate, especially in larger cities. Several players have therefore made maps over parts of the MUD's geography and made them available on the internet. Below is a map over the city Bes Pelargic.

Figure 2.3: Player created map of the city Bes Pelargic

Each of the small circles indicates an outdoor room in this city and the lines between them, the possible exits. The houses on the map, indicated by small squares, usually have several more rooms that are not shown on the map due to space limitations. The *room descriptions* in the MUD always include what street or part of the city the avatar is located, but it is still very easy to get lost, as the player has to visualise the game space in his mind. To be able to move quickly, players therefore often navigate by looking at a map on the web, disregarding the written description in the MUD. This is quite different from movement in *World of Warcraft*, where navigating is much closer to the real life experience. In *Discworld*, as the game space is represented in a more abstract manner, movement simply requires more effort to master.

Other aspects of the games are to a smaller degree affected by the different interfaces. Fighting, a central activity in both games, can serve as an example of this. The following excerpt shows a fighting scene from one of the first times I was in the city Khot-lip-khin, in the Klatch area in *Discworld*. The texts in blue following the '>' sign are the commands I enter, and the subsequent text the execution of these commands. As we see, it starts by my avatar moving into a new room by taking one 'step' south.

Figure 2.4: Fighting scene from *Discworld*

```
> south
This is possibly one of the busiest places in the city. Just
south of Temple Street and just north of Market Square, this is
a prime location much prized by traders. On either side of the
road are shops and stalls although the press of people moving
into and out of the square makes browsing difficult. It is a
very hot summer prime's afternoon with almost no wind and a
beautifully clear sky.
There are two obvious exits: north and south.
A thrifty trader and a humble priest are standing here.
> consider all
The thrifty trader is a lot weaker than you are.
The humble priest is a lot weaker than you are.
> kill trader
You prepare to attack a thrifty trader.
You miss the thrifty trader.
Hp: 1762 Gp: 159
The thrifty trader dodges out of the way of your old staff.
Hp: 1762 Gp: 158
A lady bumps into you and her escort gives you a look of utter
contempt.
The thrifty trader misses you.
> wield katana right hand, long sword left hand
You put down an old staff from your right hand and left hand.
You hold a katana and a long sword in your right hand and left
hand.
```

```
The thrifty trader's cloth robe absorbs some of your blow.
You jab your long sword into the thrifty trader.
You shred the thrifty trader's skin with your katana.
Hp: 1762 Gp: 159
The thrifty trader misses you.
You feel like the language djelian is less confusing.
The thrifty trader exclaims in djelian: sap-lat-ghot lat! khin
khot-ghot-nut-khin-lat than-bibh !
The humble priest exclaims in djelian: Hail lip-prin-lip-prin--
khot-mit-prin--mit-prin-what-phin-what-phin!
You miss the thrifty trader.
> slash trader with katana
You jab your katana into the thrifty trader.
You chop the thrifty trader's skin with your katana.
Hp: 1762 Gp: 119
You killed the thrifty trader.
> get coins from corpse
You get some Djelian talona and one Djelian toon from the
corpse of a thrifty trader.
```

Beside the initial 'kill' command, the execution of the fight is generated automatically in real-time by the computer. The player can affect the fight by performing special melee attacks or magical attacks, which costs guild points and are indicated by the 'Gp' in the log. This is similar to the mana, energy or rage resources in *World of Warcraft*. In this fight I discover that my avatar is wielding a staff that is useless for fighting and therefore replace it with a katana and a long sword. The fighting text is scrolling by rather fast and the reason I manage to get the sentence 'wield katana right hand, katana left hand' down this quickly is because I use a three letter macro for changing weapons. The macro is self-made and does not show in the text log. The trader I attack is much weaker than my avatar and does not affect my avatar's health at all, which stays at 1762 health points during the whole fight. It can also be noted that this trader speaks djelian, and the text stating: 'You feel like the language djelian is less confusing' indicates that my avatar has gained one skill level in spoken djelian by listening to him. As his spoken djelian improves, more and more of the gibberish text will be replaced by English. Both written and spoken language are important skills in *Discworld*, as this makes it possible to understand what the NPC's are saying as well as accessing signs and other written information.

A fight in *World of Warcraft* is also instigated by an attack of the player, but through a mouse click instead of a written command. The execution of the fight is, however, quite similar. The computer will generate a fighting event based on real-time calculations of the abilities of the avatar versus the abilities of the monster. Also here

the player can use special attacks in order to do more damage. Below is a fighting scene from *World of Warcraft*.

Figure 2.5: Fighting scene from *World of Warcraft*

The temporal aspect that was evident in the *Discworld* excerpt is more or less lost in this picture, except in the text box on the bottom left side that reveals the latest blows in the fight. Torill Mortensen has noted that the text that comprises the MUD universe in *World of Warcraft* is '…reduced to a small box somewhere around the edges of the screen, carefully positioned so it will not obscure the view of the animated game images.' (2006: 397). The fighting statistics are also displayed in coloured numbers floating around the avatar. As in *Discworld*, the avatar's health and mana is monitored during the whole fight, but indicated on the avatar's icon on the upper left by bars instead of in raw numbers.

As this brief description has shown, the spatial representations in the two games are different, while some of the game mechanics are still quite similar. The interface also involves two very different ways of manipulating the games. The text-based environment of *Discworld* not only implies that the player has to learn a relatively large number of commands and much syntax, it also introduces the risk of simple

spelling errors or sloppy writing becoming major obstacles to playing. As one player lamented her early playing experience on one of the boards:

> I remember mudding on Telnet for ages and not having discovered the use of such things as aliases and nicknames. I always viewed it as a balancing issue, that wizards had to type out 'cast Kamikaze Oryctolagus Flammula' or whatever to attack anything.[13]

All spells in *Discworld* have quite long and fanciful names and making macros for casting them improves playability greatly. This still leaves the player with the job of learning the syntax for creating them, programming them and then finally remembering them. In *World of Warcraft*, players can also create quite complicated macros, but the execution of them is mainly done through mouse clicks and shortkeys.

In the next section I will delve further into the interior of the games and describe in more detail some of the game mechanics on which they rely. Before I describe how avatar creation is handled in the two games, I will give a general overview of some of the contextual elements in which the avatar is embedded, starting with the geography of the games.

The level regime of World of Warcraft

As in most role-playing games, the creation of an avatar and advancement of its abilities are central to the gameplay. The further honing of playing technique and development of avatar abilities are core activities when playing. The avatar's development is normally mirrored in the environment the avatar traverses. In *World of Warcraft* this is achieved by distributing the areas, monsters and items according to a thoroughly designed level regime. This game structure is often illustrated with reference to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow is a mental state of enjoyment that can be reached by activities like rock climbing and chess playing. This state is reached when the challenges at hand match the abilities of the person who is dealing with them (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Within computer game studies, this concept is often used to describe the interrelation between the player's state of mind and the structure of a game (see for

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[13] Posted on the board *Frog*, September, 24 2002.

instance Jesper Juul 2005: 112). In the flow model, the activities where flow is experienced are always balanced between being too difficult on the one hand, and too boring on the other. As the player's skills improve, in order to keep the player in the same state of mind, the game has to provide the player with more challenging tasks. In computer games in general, this is achieved by making the environment increasingly more difficult. In *World of Warcraft* every skill and ability of the avatar, as well as items, quests, monsters and areas, are shaped around this escalating level structure.

Regarding areas, in *World of Warcraft* a new player starts out in a safe *zone* where he or she can learn basic playing techniques without being in any great danger. The area provides the player with some simple quests, mainly of the type where the player has to kill a specific number of monsters and return to a quest-giver for a reward. The monsters in this area do not have any special abilities, are easy to kill and in most cases do not attack unprovoked. When the player masters the basics, he or she will usually have gained a few levels and will move on to more challenging areas. This starting area is surrounded by adjacent zones of an increasing difficulty.

Below is a screenshot of area recommendations for one of the continents in the game, the Eastern Kingdoms. In this illustration we see that the Eastern Kingdoms consists of 24 zones, most of which are accessible to players of both factions. Most recommendations are of a range of 10 character levels – a recommendation mainly based on what types of monsters the player will encounter in those areas.

Figure 2.6: Level of zones in the Eastern Kingdoms[14]

Region	Level Range	PvP Status	Note
Elwynn Forest	1-10	Alliance	Human Starting
Eversong Forest (BC)	1-10	Horde	Blood Elf Starting
Dun Morogh	1-10	Alliance	Dwarf/Gnome Starting
Tirisfal Glades	1-10	Horde	Undead Starting
Ghostlands (BC)	10-20	Horde	Blood Elf Favored
Loch Modan	10-20	Alliance	Dwarf Favored
Silverpine Forest	10-20	Horde	Undead Favored
Westfall	10-20	Alliance	Human Favored
Redridge Mountains	15-25	Contested	Alliance Favored
Duskwood	18-30	Contested	Alliance Favored
Hillsbrad Foothills	20-30	Contested	
Wetlands	20-30	Contested	Alliance Favored
Alterac Mountains	30-40	Contested	
Arathi Highlands	30-40	Contested	
Stranglethorn Vale	30-45	Contested	
Badlands	35-45	Contested	
Swamp of Sorrows	35-45	Contested	Horde Favored
The Hinterlands	45-50	Contested	
Searing Gorge	43-50	Contested	
The Blasted Lands	45-55	Contested	
Burning Steppes	50-58	Contested	
Western Plaguelands	51-58	Contested	
Eastern Plaguelands	53-60	Contested	
Deadwind Pass	55-60	Contested	

Monsters give experience points according to how hard they are to kill, which again is a reflection of the relationship between the level of the avatar and the monster. If the monster's level is above that of the avatar, they give more points. Monsters between five and eight levels below the avatar stop giving experience points.[15] For most players, to kill a monster three or four levels above the avatar, for instance, is hard and can easily take several times longer than killing a monster on the same level. On the other hand, killing a monster three or four levels below the avatar is much faster, but also gives fewer experience points.[16] These factors combined make it most time-efficient to kill monsters at about the same level or a few levels below the avatar.

What monsters the player decides to kill will also be influenced by other factors. Some monsters drop special items that are used for crafts and can therefore be hunted

[14] Map from the official web site: http://www.wow-europe.com/en/info/basics/regionlevels.html, last accessed June 27, 2008.
[15] The avatar acquires experience points from monsters five levels below the avatar at the lowest levels, increasing to eight in the highest levels.
[16] The penalty for killing a monster four levels below the character is twice the number of experience points as the gain for killing a monster four levels above.

down for reasons other than experience points. Another factor is the possibility of getting other kinds of *drops* from the monsters, like armour and weapons. The item level of these drops is usually some levels less than the monster's, so for the player to get loot that is commensurate with the avatar, he or she will have to kill monsters that are higher in level than the avatar. If two or several players are grouped, they can more easily bring down monsters that are above their own level, somewhat widening the range of accessible levels.

This taken into account, the players, on average, will focus on killing monsters quite close to their own level. The effect of this on server level is that as long as the players are distributed over the whole range of levels, they will not compete for the same monsters. Normally, the only period where players will gravitate around the same levels is when a new server goes online, or when the maximum level increases, as it did when *The Burning Crusade* upgrade was released on January 16, 2007.[17] Other elements of the game also follow this structure. For instance *trade professions* like mining, fishing and herbalism are in congruence with the general level of an area and offer the opportunity to harvest the appropriate type of material for these professions. In short: the advancement path of the avatar in *World of Warcraft* guides the player to successively more advanced areas, with the appropriate types of monsters, items, materials and quests.

The open-endedness of Discworld

In *Discworld* a new player arrives in a special area where he or she can train for fighting skills and practice some of the basic commands of the game, much like the starting area in *World of Warcraft*. To get out of this area, the player has to complete a quest. This ensures that the player can use basic commands like 'search' and 'give' before entering the game proper. From the *newbie area* the player will get teleported

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[17] After a period without any increase in the level cap, the majority of the players will reach maximum level. The general player population census on warcraftrealms.com shows that level 70 avatars are by far the most played, but that the largest part of the population is distributed on the other levels. See http://www.warcraftrealms.com/census.php for more details. Last accessed June 27, 2008.

to a bar in the city of Ankh-Morpork[18]. The cities in *Discworld* are generally safe areas, as long as the player does not engage in fights with too difficult monsters. Outside the large cities most areas are dangerous for low-level avatars, as more and stronger monsters will attack unprovoked. The areas in *Discworld* are not clearly graded with regard to difficulty, as in *World of Warcraft*, and there are few restrictions about which areas a player can enter. There may be warning signs placed at the edges of dangerous areas, but since the player only can see one room at the time, it is hard to assess the outline of the area, and just how dangerous 'dangerous' means. Areas may also be inhabited by monsters with a large range in difficulty levels, or even having a varying monster fauna. An area that is safe in the daytime can, for instance, be lethal at night. A common experience for new players in *Discworld* is, therefore, to end up in dangerous places and die a dreadful death. The underlying game mechanics around dying often make the loss of a life a frustrating experience. Unlike *World of Warcraft*, where the avatar can resurrect in a safe spot, in *Discworld* the player has to find an altar where he or she can resurrect the avatar and then travel back to the corpse to retrieve items and equipment. The chances of encountering the monsters that killed you the first time are quite high, and this time without any of your weapons to fight them off. It is in moments like these when many players make their first contact with other players for help. As this player recounts:

> I remember dying in the Ramtops because I thought I could run past the yetis with my ikkle wizzie, running all the way to OC to get raised in the temple, going back to try to get my stuff, dying again of course. Almost crying at the keyboard I at last gathered the courage to ask a passer-by for help. Which I didn't get if I remember correctly and her corpse had to rot away among those nasty hairy beasties.[19]

The basic avatar development on *Discworld* has many similarities with that of *World of Warcraft*, but the environments are not consistently in sync with the avatar's abilities. Monsters on *Discworld* don't have visible levels as in *World of Warcraft*, but the *consider* command will in most cases give sufficient information about the

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[18] This observation was made in 2003. Since then, new areas have been introduced into the game with the addition of new starting areas.
[19] Post on the board *Frog*, September 24, 2002.

possible outcome of a fight.[20] In *Discworld*, more difficult monsters also give more experience points but, unlike *World of Warcraft*, all monsters give a fixed number of experience points, regardless of the level of the avatar that killed it. In *Discworld*, monsters around the same difficulty level as the avatar are most time-efficient to farm, but the range of monsters that yield an adequate amount is much larger than in *World of Warcraft*. These circumstances may at first sight seem convenient, since the player will easily find prey regardless of which area he or she is visiting. However, these mechanisms, combined with the fact that some areas have a high density of monsters, make players from a wide level-range gravitate to the same areas, farming monsters for experience points. A game mechanical feature that adds to the competition is the opportunity to *kill steal*, or to get the experience points by delivering the final blow to a monster another player has almost beaten down. On a micro-level, the absence of level restriction with regard to monster slaying seems like a way of broadening the opportunities for individual players and hence being a good design solution. On a macro-level, however, the picture is rather the opposite, as these mechanics, combined with the uneven monster distribution, make players cluster around a few areas with a high density of monsters. There are specific monsters and areas that are more farmed than others in *World of Warcraft* as well. The absence of kill-stealing here, however, makes this competitive situation less hostile.

Espen Aarseth has argued that *World of Warcraft*, structurally speaking, can be compared to an amusement park (Aarseth 2008). From a player's perspective, the occasional visit to an amusement park is a very different activity from playing a game where you build up an avatar over long stretches of time. However, this comparison might illustrate the developer's concern for player distribution. The developers of *World of Warcraft*, like the constructors of an amusement park, can design the game area from the bottom up, avoiding bottlenecks where players fight over the same attractions or resources. As pointed out by Mattias Ljungström in the paper *The use of architectural patterns in MMORPGs*, the designers will also create areas specifically targeted for player interaction, like the towns or cities which are distributed carefully

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[20] Using the consider command will return a description of how hard the monster is to kill. An extremely hard moster will for instance be describes thus: 'The small blue light is into the don't-even-think-about-it region'. The descriptions are also colour coded, ranging from green for the easiest monsters to red for the hardest.

throughout the game area (Ljungström 2005). *Discworld*, due to its more organic growth and patchwork design, is more akin to an ordinary city, where the demographic distribution might not be equally optimised. The difference from constructing an ordinary city is also quite obvious, as the game can be redesigned more easily. Despite involving many programming resources, the MUD has undergone several geographical alterations over the years, for instance when the city Ankh-Morport was redesigned from the bottom up in 2003.

On the surface, both games have an 'emergent' structure, offering an open-ended world the player can traverse after his or her fashion. A closer look shows that the level of open-endedness differs a lot between the two games. In *World of Warcraft*, due to its consistent level design, the players are normally ushered into appropriate areas where they can engage in activities that provide further development of their avatars. Even if they enter an area that is too dangerous, the cost of this adventure is just a few minutes of lost advancement while running for the corpse. In *Discworld*, the areas' levels of difficulty are not clearly indicated and neither are they as consistently designed. The higher cost of dying contributes to making an entry into an area too difficult; a frustrating experience.[21] In general, *Discworld* offers a less-orderly structured environment than *World of Warcraft* and demands a more careful approach from the individual player.

Avatars and game mechanics

Compared with other computer game genres, the avatars we find in multiplayer online role-playing games are fairly plastic and the possibilities for augmentation can sometimes seem unlimited. Both the avatar's abilities and looks will often be subject to adjustments and improvements. The intimate relationship between the player and the avatar is a natural focus of attention, since the avatar is where the player's agency is manifested. As Rune Klevjer explains in his PhD thesis *What is the Avatar?*

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[21] It should be added that a new avatar in *Discworld* initially have only seven lives at its disposal. If it dies a seventh time, the avatar is irrevocably lost. The number of lives can be increased fairly easily but this costs in-game money. The increasment of lives is done by throwing Royals into a specific well in the city Ankh-Morpork.

The relationship between the player and the avatar is a prosthetic relationship; through a process of learning and habituation, the avatar becomes an extension of the player's own body. Via the interface of screen, speakers and controllers, the player incorporates the computer game avatar as second nature, and the avatar disciplines the player's body (Klevjer 2007: 10).

This describes the reciprocal relationship between the player and the avatar and is a reminder that the attributes of the avatar always restrain the way the player can interact with the game. To what extent the avatar might be enhanced is to a large degree a game mechanical matter. As I intend to show, *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft* offer quite different means for avatar enhancements, while the overall effect might still be quite similar. In multiplayer games, the player community often influences how players choose to develop their avatars, as certain playing styles are encouraged for team-play purposes. This is an important issue, which will be dealt with in chapter five, where the raiding guild in *World of Warcraft* is the main object of analysis. For now, I will put the social aspect in brackets and focus solely on the mechanics, the raw numbers, on which the avatar is based.

The avatar enhancement in this game genre is more complicated than in others and is partly the reason why players are willing to spend months or even years playing them. I will therefore spend the last part of this chapter focusing on the avatars in *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft*, and unravel some of their internal mechanics. This exploration will be quite technical, which is deliberate; I wish to demonstrate the complexity of the avatar to illustrate why enhancing them and mastering their abilities requires a great deal of effort and knowledge.

Avatar creation in World of Warcraft

In *World of Warcraft*, all avatars start out as level 1 and can, by gaining experience points, advance in level to the maximum level of 70. The two main ways to acquire experience points is through killing monsters and by solving quests. The highest levels require more time and effort to reach than the lower levels. While it might only take 5 minutes to get from level 1 to 2, to get from level 69 to 70 could take as much as 12-24 hours, depending on the playing style, skills and effort the player puts into levelling. Duchenaut, Yee, Nichell and Moore, in a quantitative study of *World of*

Warcraft users, have estimated that the average time for a player to reach level 60 is 15.5 days, or what approximates to a total of 47 normal 8-hour working days. In this study they also report that the average time spent on a level can be separated into three phases in the character advancement:

> It is interesting to note that players move very quickly through the first 10 levels. The game is designed such that the players experience rapid progress and frequent rewards during their first play sessions—an important design strategy to encourage continued play. The rate of progress is then fairly stable up to Level 50, at which point it drops precipitously (Duchenaut et al., 2006b: 290).

This study was conducted when the maximum level was still 60. Reaching the current maximum level of 70 originally took a few more days of playing. In the patch 2.3 that was launched on November 28, 2007, the number of experience points needed to gain a level was reduced for avatars between levels 20 and 60. Also the number of experience points gained from quests was increased between levels 30 and 60, so the total time it takes to level a new avatar is somewhat reduced.

Four enhancement types

Every avatar in *World of Warcraft* has 5 different basic attributes or *stats* that affect their performance: strength, agility, stamina, intelligence and spirit. Stamina affects the number of health points the avatar has, and intelligence is important for increasing the number of mana points. Mana is a spell resource that will normally replenish after some minutes of inactivity or after some seconds when drinking mana-regenerating liquid. Mana is also used when an avatar is healing, as healing is a form of spell casting. Strength and agility increases physical fighting abilities, whereas spirit influences how fast an avatar regenerates health and mana. There are several other abilities that are affected by these attributes, like the chance of dodging an attack and how much mitigation the armour of the avatar makes when hit, but for clarity, I will leave these out of this description. The different classes benefit from different combinations of these skills: a rogue, for instance, will primarily focus on advancing agility; a priest, on the other hand, will be more interested in having a great amount of intelligence and spirit.

There are four ways in which an avatar can be enhanced in *World of Warcraft*. First, as a result of the increase in stats that follows the levels. This increase is permanent, cannot be reversed and cannot be manipulated by the player in any way. Secondly, through advancing different skills, for instance weapon skills or trade professions. While weapon skills cannot be unlearned, trade professions like leatherworking and alchemy can be, in order to make space for a different profession. The avatar can further be enhanced through distribution of talent points. From level 10 and onwards, the avatar gains one talent point for each level, to the maximum of 61 points. These points give the avatar access to new abilities, or improvement of abilities already acquired; they can be reversed by the player by paying game money. Lastly, the avatar's stats can be enhanced by equipping with certain items. Most items have level restrictions and some also have class restrictions. Below is an overview over these enhancement methods.

Table 2.2: Avatar enhancements in *World of Warcraft*

Enhancement type	Restrictions	Alterability
Stats due to level	Cap at level 70	Permanent
Skills	Cap according to level	Some are changeable
Talents	Cap at 61 points	Changeable
Stats due to items	No clear cap but a practical maximum limit	Changeable

As this table indicates, the enhancement method offering the largest flexibility is by increasing stats through items. All other methods have a defined maximum limit and only talents offer the same level of changeability. I will now describe in more detail these different enhancement methods and how they also influence each other.

Levelling and items

The aspect of the five stats is the most important when avatar enhancement is considered. Each of the classes in the game gets a specific increase in stats when they progress from one level to the next. When, for instance, a rogue reaches level 65 the following message will appear in the chat screen:

'Congratulations, you have reached level 65!
You have gained 224 hit points.
You have gained 1 talent point.
Your Strength increases by 1.
Your Agility increases by 1.
Your Stamina increases by 2.
Your Intellect increases by 1.
Your Spirit increases by 1.'

The avatar will now become a little stronger and healthier and can use a talent point in his talent tree. This specific level gave the rogue increases in all stats but normally just a few will be increased. During my research I registered every level gain and bonuses for different avatars; below is an overview over the increase in levels and stats of a night elf rogue between the levels 1 - 70. In this table, the five different stats strength, agility, stamina, intellect and spirit are shown with a five-level increment (see appendix VI for a complete list).

Table 2.3: Skill distribution for a Night Elf Rogue level 1 - 70

Lvl	Str		Agility		Stamina		Intel		Spirit		Health		Armor
	Level	Item	Level	Item	Level	Item	Level	Item	Level	Item	Level	Item	
1	18	19	28	28	20	20	20	20	20	20	45	45	58
5	21	21	33	33	23	23	21	21	21	21	113	113	233
10	24	24	40	40	26	26	22	22	23	23	198	198	280
15	28	28	47	55	29	29	23	27	25	25	283	283	426
20	32	44	54	67	33	53	24	24	27	33	383	583	595
25	37	49	62	93	37	73	25	32	30	43	506	868	675
30	41	51	71	106	41	106	26	30	32	63	656	1308	860
35	46	63	80	142	46	105	27	31	34	54	831	1423	1011
40	52	70	89	172	51	123	29	33	37	55	1031	1753	1130
45	58	102	101	199	56	125	30	34	40	55	1256	1948	1253
50	64	109	112	214	61	141	32	32	43	52	1506	2298	1315
55	70	118	123	257	67	159	33	33	46	51	1781	2693	1438
60	77	121	135	276	73	188	35	35	50	50	2081	3223	1587
65	84	121	150	386	81	355	37	55	54	72	3119	5859	2578
70	92	98	166	423	88	332	40	45	58	84	4404	6844	2378

Below each attribute are two columns. The first shows the accumulated amount due to levelling. The other one shows how much this specific avatar had when bonuses from the items he was wearing or wielding were included. As we can see, the increase due to levelling is quite steady, whereas the stats from equipment increase more rapidly, especially stamina and agility. It is important to remember that these numbers only reflect what was available for this specific avatar and that there will be both better and more poorly equipped avatars around. I have, however, not done anything special

while levelling it, besides getting hold of equipment from the auction house, usually of uncommon quality. What I find interesting with this overview is how it shows the increasing importance of stat bonuses from items as the avatar rises in levels. If we look at the agility attribute, for instance, we see that at level 10 this avatar had no bonuses from items at all. This actually goes for all five stats. At level 20 he had 54 points in agility due to levelling, and 67 when bonuses from equipment is included. This means that roughly 20% of his agility comes from items worn. At level 40, almost 50% of his agility comes from items (89/172) and finally at level 70, more than 60% of his agility comes from his gear (166/423).

Figure 2.7: Items equipped by Castronova the gnome mage

To the left is the avatar information of a mage level 35. Each avatar can equip with gear in 19 different spots. Two of these (shirt and tabard) only hold items that change the appearance and do not include any statistics. The aggregated amount of the different statistics is shown under the avatar image. Above, we see the statistic of the rare dagger this mage is currently wielding.

One factor that influences this is the fact that the levelling process takes increasingly more time. A player will therefore have more time at each level to replace lower-level and lower-quality gear with better. At this point a player will normally also be more aware of where to get hold of good items. More importantly, it reflects the fact that items gain an increasing number of stats at the higher levels. The overall effect of this is that it makes reaching the maximum level less of a final goal, as the player's attention will normally be steered towards acquiring specific items. This also

represents a learning curve, where the player will gradually be exposed to gear with a larger range of stats, as well as other types of bonuses, and will normally learn more about how this affects playing performance.[22] For most players, getting hold of high quality items becomes the prime goal when reaching maximum level. While a full set of armour of uncommon quality costs some gold, and can be bought through the auction house in five minutes, collecting a set of gear of epic quality can easily take half a year of playing.

Items generally play different roles in the two games. In *World of Warcraft* they have a large impact on playing performance, as the avatar has 17 slots where armour, weaponry and jewellery can be placed, all of which can enhance the avatar's stats. Besides having level restrictions, the items are colour coded to indicate the quality of the item, ranging from poor (grey) to legendary (orange).[23] Items of epic quality represent the highest level of quality attainable to most players. In *Discworld*, only weapons can enhance the avatar's fighting abilities, while some armour protects the avatar against damage. Most clothing is worn merely for looks.

Talents

During the levelling process the avatar can also distribute so-called talent points. These points can be distributed in three different 'talent trees' where points are spent in order to gain new abilities, or to improve abilities already acquired. The different talents are arranged in such a manner that the most beneficial abilities are placed furthest down the tree, requiring the player to spend at least 41 points in that tree. This means that the player has to choose which tree to specialise in. For almost all playing styles, there will be talents that would be beneficial for the player, but are distributed in such a fashion that they are impossible to acquire at the same time. Talent point distribution as such always involves some kind of trade-off. A rogue, for instance, has to sacrifice better stealth abilities to increase damage output. A mage specialising in

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[22] It is both an increasing amount of gear with better quality at the higher levels, but also a large number of armour *sets* with high quality. Having two or more items from these sets usually gives the avatar a so-called *set bonus* represented by additional statistics.

[23] The quality levels are: poor (grey), common (white), uncommon (green), rare (blue) epic (purple) legendary (orange). On most servers, only a handful of legendary items exist, as these are crafted from materials, some of which are very expensive and some are very rare drops in end-game dungeons, called *raiding instances*.

fire spells will gain more damage output, but will also lose some *crowd control*; the ability to control several monsters simultaneously. Talent point distribution is important, but fairly easy to change.[24] For each class there are usually two or three playing styles that are dominant. At the forum dedicated to the classes, there is advice on how to distribute talent and which item combinations to go for. There will always be deviant playing styles, but the circulation of hints about the same specialisations, tactics and gear limits the actual choices players make use of.

Avatar development in Discworld

Avatar development in *Discworld* follows the same general structure as in *World of Warcraft*, though with some interesting differences. First, in contrast to *World of Warcraft*, the avatar does not reach a new level when a specific sum of experience points is reached. Avatar level only reflects an average of the so-called *primary skills* of the avatar, which in turn are advanced by spending experience points. The avatar level as such is just a measure of the avatar's average skill level, with no practical effects.[25] Another difference is that the avatars in *Discworld* do not have a maximum level. All skills can be raised indefinitely, but the cost for each level increases geometrically, and will therefore be increasingly hard to achieve.

In *Discworld*, an avatar has attributes, or *stats*, that have a function comparable to both *talents* and *stats* in *World of Warcraft*. The *Discworld* stats are constitution, dexterity, intelligence, strength and wisdom, resembling the five stats in *World of Warcraft*, but with a more indirect influence on performance than these. Instead of increasing the effect of, for instance, attack power, they influence the effect of another set of statistics. A greater amount of intelligence will, for instance, give higher bonuses in magic skills and hence a better performance in magic. The avatar starts with 13 points in each stat, and is able to rearrange these once by distributing from 8 to 23 points to each stat.[26] *Talents* in *World of Warcraft* and *stats* in *Discworld* are

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[24] See appendix V for an example of a talent tree distribution.

[25] There are a few exceptions from this, for instance a few weapons require the avatar to have a specific level.

[26] For several years the players complained about not being able to rearrange their stats more than once, as several changes in the fighting mechanism made earlier arrangement less fortunate. To amend this, the developers eventually introduced a special NPC into the game,

therefore similar by involving the same element of trade-off, as maximising some features will impair others. Below is a table showing the two enhancement methods in *Discworld*.

Table 2.4: Avatar enhancement in *Discworld*

Enhancement type	Restrictions	Alterability
Skills	No cap	Can not be reversed
Stats	Between 8 and 23 in each stat	Limited

Skills in Discworld

In addition to stats, avatars in *Discworld* have six different categories of *skills* that they can develop, sorted into the main categories crafts, covert, faith, fighting, magic and other. These skills are similar to the *stats* in *World of Warcraft*, as all avatar types have access to the same set of stats, despite having different uses for the individual statistic. The biggest difference from *World of Warcraft* is the large number of skills available in *Discworld*. Counting all skills and sub-skills there are 230 skills that the avatar can advance. The effect of one specific attack or spell can be based on a number of different sub-skills. The command *spellcheck* will reveal what skills and materials a spell uses: for instance the spell *Myrandil's Mask of Death* uses the sub-skills of enchanting, healing, summoning, binding and abjuring when executed.[27] If the avatar is too low in one or more of these skills, the spell will fail. To ensure that the avatar has access to a wide menu of attacks, the player will have to spread the resources – the experience points – accordingly. Below is a list of the skills available in the category magic (see appendix IV for an extensive list of skills).

Zorgo the Retrophrenologist, who made it possible to rearrange one stat point every few months.
[27] It actually also requires the wizard to draw an octogram on the floor and to hold a human head.

Figure 2.8: Magic skills in *Discworld*[28]

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=======SKILLS======Level/Bonus=============================
spells............. 267  295 | | enchanting......  237  293
| offensive........ 300  316 | | evoking.........  238  294
| defensive........ 329  326 | | healing.........   85  206
| misc............. 230  282 | | scrying.........   65  195
| special.......... 210  258 | spiritual.........  127  214
methods............ 144  243 | | abjuring........  170  237
| elemental........ 119  215 | | banishing.......  135  218
| | air............  73  190 | | conjuring.......  103  201
| | earth.......... 51  174 | | divining........   50  168
| | fire........... 302  315 | | summoning.......  180  242
| | water.......... 53  176 items...............   74  191
| mental........... 166  279 | held..............   93  201
| | animating...... 188  293 | | wand............  115  213
| | channeling..... 245  328 | | rod.............   76  192
| | charming....... 135  259 | | staff...........  130  221
| | convoking...... 136  260 | | broom..........    50  173
| | cursing........ 130  256 | worn..............   50  173
| physical......... 166  253 | | amulet.........   50  173
| | binding........ 277  315 | | ring...........   50  173
| | brewing........  50  181 | scroll...........  106  208
| | chanting....... 240  295 | talisman..........   50  173
| | dancing........ 136  236 points.............  250  284
```

*The levels indicate how many times the avatar has increased the sub-skill, and the bonuses
how well he or she will perform in that specific sub-skill. The bonus level in magic is affected
by the amount the avatar has in intelligence.*

Confusingly, all avatar types have access to the same skills, and a warrior without any use for magic skills will still be able to advance them. This is different from *World of Warcraft*, as each avatar type here has its own set of talents, spells and abilities. The five universal stats in *World of Warcraft* also work differently for each avatar type. The downside of this is that knowledge gained from playing one class will not necessarily be adequate for another. Below is an example of this, where the relationship between attack power, avatar level and the stats strength and agility are listed. From this table a warrior will learn that he or she only needs to focus on strength to increase attack power, whereas rogues and hunters will see that they also need to focus on agility.

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[28] Skills of my wizard avatar at January 19, 2003.

Figure 2.9: Abilities related to attack power[29]

Attack Power		
Class	**Melee Base**	**Ranged Base**
Druid	(Strength x 2) - 20	Agility - 10
Druid (Bear)	(Strength x 2) + (Character Level x 3) - 20	
Druid (Cat)	(Strength x 2) + Agility + (Character Level x 2) - 20	
Druid (Moonkin)	(Strength x 2) + (Character Level x 1.5) - 20	
Hunter	Strength + Agility + (Character Level x 2) - 20	(Character Level x 2) + Agility - 10
Mage	Strength - 10	Agility - 10
Paladin	(Strength x 2) + (Character Level x 3) - 20	Agility - 10
Priest	Strength - 10	Agility - 10
Rogue	Strength + Agility + (Character Level x 2) - 20	Character Level + Agility - 10
Shaman	Strength + Agility + (Character Level x 2) - 20	Agility- 10
Warlock	Strength - 10	Agility - 10
Warrior	(Strength x 2) + (Character Level x 3) - 20	Character Level + Agility - 10

Flexibility in avatar development, and hence in playing, is reached in different ways in the two games. In *World of Warcraft*, the player can change playing style by rearranging talent points and by having the avatar equip with different types of gear. This means that one kind of specialisation does not close the door to other playing styles. In *Discworld* the flexibility lies in the large number of skills the avatar can advance. If the player changes orientation towards the game, rearrangements cannot

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[29] Table acquired from: http://www.wowwiki.com/Attack_power, last accessed June 27, 2008.

be made as quickly as in *World of Warcraft*, but over time, by advancing different sub-skills, the avatar will gain flexibility. For the player, this flexibility also represents complexity, as having a clear picture of how all of these attributes and abilities work together is vital to be able to perform properly. This gives depth to the avatar, but also demands more effort from the player.

In general, avatar development in the two games has many similarities, but also structural differences. *World of Warcraft* has more ways to enhance the avatar, and three out of four methods also have a maximum limit. *Discworld* only has two methods, of which one has no maximum limit. In both cases, some of the variation and complexity we find in the avatar is the result of the large number of combinatorial possibilities when cross-tabulating two or more types of statistics. The description of the game mechanics regarding avatar development will probably seem complicated, but it should be noted that this still only represents a small fraction of the underlying mechanics of the games.

The complexity of the mechanics sometimes makes it hard for the players to establish solid facts about which enhancement strategy to go for. This is the reason many players are conducting research about these games and share it on wikis and research pages on the net. This is an example of what Henry Jenkins calls collective intelligence, where the sum of testing and research from a large number of individuals gives a more complete picture than any individual can hope to acquire alone (Jenkins 2006). On the developers' side, the challenge is to ensure that one particular way of developing the avatar is not superior to others, as this would reduce the enormous number of possible choices embedded in the avatar to just a few viable development trajectories. One effect of this is that the developers are holding back information about parts of the game mechanics in order not to make the system too transparent. Sometimes the players make a breakthrough in the research by having results confirmed by the developers. For instance on the research site wowwiki.com the following was posted:

> As Hyzenthlei (Tauren Shaman 60 on Zul'Jin first found out, and was later confirmed by a presentation at Blizzcon, Blizzard uses a formula to calculate item level from the item's stats. The following is an attempt to reverse-engineer this formula. This text is based on a forum post by Hyzenthlei (the

original author) in the Blizzard forums, but that post has disappeared from there since.[30]

What follows is a complicated mathematical exploration concerning what elements are affecting the quality of an item, and how the hidden *item level* could be calculated. In this case the player uncovered the fact that items that appeared to be of the same quality, by showing the same colour coding and level, were in fact different. This is arguably not the most crucial aspect on which to uncover exact data, but it illustrates the eagerness in the player community to come to terms with how the game system works; to open up the black box, as it were.

A mesh of goals

Since it can be difficult to understand the attraction of constantly enhancing the abilities of an avatar, I will say a few words about how the avatar interacts with the environment. Both *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft* are structured in such a manner that you can pursue several goals simultaneously. For instance, during a specific period when I was advancing my wizard in *Discworld*, I used to travel to the city Khot-lip-khin to kill soldiers and other monsters in order to gain experience points. This killing also provided me with money and items I could sell. At this time I was saving money to buy a larger backpack. The long-term goal with experience points was to get my subskill *fire* to level 250 and the subskill *points* to 200. When searching for monsters to kill, I also took the opportunity to read signs in the environment, which improved my skill-level in written djelian. Hence, my killing activity in Khot-lip-khin was part of different projects of varying length. From killing monsters to advancing my skill in written djelian, to the long term goals of getting the *fire* and *points* skills to level 250 and 200, respectively.

The same layered goal structure is evident in *World of Warcraft*, but in this case it is more elaborate. I will illustrate this by recounting a specific playing session with my undead rogue when he was level 68. In this session I was solving the quest *Returning the Favor* in the zone Nagrand, the object of which is to kill 20 ogres and to plant Kil'sorrow banners in their corpses. Each kill also provided me with experience

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[30] http://www.wowwiki.com/Formulas:Item_Values, last accesses June 27, 2008.

points, money and cloth, and, additionally, had the chance of bringing me the occasional uncommon or rare item that *dropped* from the corpses. In this situation I was saving money with the prospect of buying myself a flying mount when I reached level 70. I used the cloth to create bandages and sold the surplus at the auction house. If I had been a tailor, it would have been possible to craft garments or bags from the cloth. While undertaking this quest, I got two uncommon item drops from the ogres, which I sold at the auction house later on. These ogres also dropped a special kind of bead, which could be used to improve my avatar's reputation with the Mag'har faction of NPCs. Improvement with this faction was important to me, as I was aiming at getting hold of a pair of rare shoulder armour that would be available for purchase when my avatar's status reached *revered*. The quest I was on was also part of a chain of quests where the last instalment had a rare belt as a reward, which I was aware of, having fulfilled the quest-chain earlier with another avatar.

With regard to goals, I am obviously looking beyond the prospect of solving this single quest. The different goals, of which this ogre-killing activity is part, can be broken down in different ways. They can, for instance, be divided into major goals and subgoals, or into major goals with beneficial side effects. In my situation, gathering experience points to eventually reach level 70 would be one major goal. Having enough money to buy a flying mount would be another. Increasing my reputation with this faction of NPCs would represent another long-term ambition and finally, to get to the end of this chain of quests would also qualify as a long-term goal. The reason I, as a player, don't consider this ogre-walloping to be monotonous can be explained by reference to its contextual diversity. First, the mesh of goals, including the side effects while pursuing them, makes it possible for me to shift my attention from one aspect of the activity to others. Instead of slowly counting down the number of ogres killed, I can focus on how far I am from the next level, on how many beads I have acquired, or take a closer look at an uncommon item that just dropped and try to figure out if this should be put in the auction house or if I should rather *disenchant* it, or just sell it in a regular shop. The monotony of pursuing one single short-term goal is reduced by the goal being clustered together with a large array of different long-term projects. My avatar is simply improving along several axes at the same time: experience points, money, the loot, the quest, the quest chain and the reputation.

Another reason this activity might be experienced as varied is that it includes elements of randomness. The quest I am currently undertaking has few random elements as the goal is simply to kill 20 ogres, by which I am currently surrounded. The beads they drop involve a higher level of randomness, as not every ogre drops them. An item-drop of uncommon or rare quality, or even the extremely rare occurrence of the dropping of an item of epic quality, represents an even higher level of randomness. As such, while part of the activity is unfolding along a predictable trajectory, there is also the possibility of being surprised by finding rare items of high value or usefulness. The game structure, providing a mesh of goals combined with an element of randomness, creates, at least for me, a diverse playing experience. The complexity of the avatar is in this case complemented by a variety of activities and goals in which the player can engage.

When comparing these activities in the two games, the diversity is arguably larger in *World of Warcraft* than in *Discworld*. There are normally fewer parallel activities available in *Discworld*, due to the substantially lower number of quests and trade professions there. *Discworld*, to a lesser degree, also accommodates the integration of different activities as, for instance, solving quests and killing monsters are mainly done separately and not conjoined as in *World of Warcraft*. It must be noted that this comparison focuses on how single players interact with the game, and not on activities that are socially instigated. This aspect arguably represents an important diversifying factor in both games and in this respect, as I will demonstrate later, *Discworld* may provide an even more substantial range of activities than *World of Warcraft*.

Summary
In this chapter I have compared some of the basic aspects of *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft* with regard to interface, gameplay and game mechanics. The most noticeable difference is how space is represented and subsequently how the player navigates. Concerning gameplay, we see that some of the basic game mechanics are quite similar, but that the interface handling is much more complicated in *Discworld* than in *World of Warcraft*.

The possible ways to enhance the avatar to suit the player's preferences is quite extensive in both games. In both cases there is more than one method for enhancing the avatar, and the combinatorial possibilities by cross-tabulating several methods creates a large array of choices and specialisations. The complexity of the avatar's make-up will require the player to invest time and effort in learning how different aspects of it affect play performance.

The general structures of the games also show some interesting differences. *World of Warcraft* is designed according to a strict level regime where monsters, quests, items and the avatar are thoroughly coordinated. In *Discworld*, the avatar is developed along a similar enhancement trajectory to that in *World of Warcraft*, but other aspects of the game, like the geography, is not as thoroughly organised. This chapter has mainly been devoted to aspects of the game medium. In the following chapter the focus will be widened to include the players and the developers. Game mechanical elements will also play a part, but my focus will be on theoretical aspects concerning how these instances influence the use and development of the game. The main theoretical perspective will be systems theory, including its application of the concept emergence.

3

Emergence, game rules and players:
A systemic approach to computer game studies

This chapter is an exploration of computer games as systems, and particularly the positions of the user – the player – as part of such systems. It also represents the theoretical framework of this thesis. In order to follow my grounded approach, I will refrain from a purely theoretical exercise by supplementing the theoretical investigation with empirical examples from my research. The main theoretical input will be systems theory and complexity theory, combined with theoretical concepts from ludology.

My investigation of the role of the player represents a breach with the concept of the player normally found within the theoretical framework of ludology and, to some extent, other branches of game studies[31]. My criticism partly accords with Ian Bogost's criticism of Espen Aarseth in his book *Unit Operations* (2006). Aarseth apparently attributes a significant position to the user in his theory of ergodic literature, assigning the user a 'configurative function' when traversing ergodic texts (Aarseth 1997: 64) and states that the concept of cybertext centres the attention around the consumer, or user of the text, as a more integrated figure than even reader-response theorists would claim. Bogost comments on this by stating: 'However, where reader-response theorists, deconstructionists, and other poststructuralists privilege the position of the *reader*, Aarseth's cybertexts privilege the position of the *work*.' (Bogost 2006: 130). Bogost further criticises Aarseth for having an essentialistic and functionalistic approach towards computer games. My criticism concerning ludology resembles Bogost's, but my general concern is that the

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[31] I am here mainly thinking of approaches where the game is analysed as an aesthetic object, operating with some kind of notion of an implied player, as for instance narratology.

ludological approach puts more weight on theoretical excursions than empirical ones, and that they emphasise the medium more than applied use of it. While Bogost focuses his criticism on Aarseth, I will mainly centre mine around Jesper Juul and his classic game model (Juul 2005). The aim of my criticism is to describe why to focus overtly on the game's structure can give a limited picture of games, singleplayer and multiplayer games alike. In addition to empirical data from the current study, I will employ data from an earlier research project concerning players of singleplayer games (Karlsen 2001a). The main focus will be on multiplayer games, but my ambition is to show that we have to look at actual use in order to grasp some of the dynamics in both game types. Following an exploration of the concept goal or outcome, I will look more generally at rules in games. I will also discuss Juul's and other theorists' use of the concept of *emergence* within computer game studies as part of the discussion of games as systems. Systems theory will be the venture point of this discussion.

Emergence and systems theory

Central to most definitions of emergence is the notion of a system where all parts are governed by rules that, by interaction, generate a complex system or behaviour on a higher level (Fromm 2005). Emergence is sometimes referred to as a self-organising system and illustrated with references to phenomena found in biology, like anthills or schools of fish (Urry 2005a: 247, Johnson 2001). What is important for this concept is that one doesn't find a central entity that leads or organises the overall behaviour – the macroscopic structure is solely a result of decision-making or the existence of rules on a local, microscopic, level. In some systems, causality from the lower to the higher level can be difficult to trace. This can be illustrated, for instance, by the human mind. Even though we understand much of how our neurons function, they only partly explain properties of the system at the higher level, such as the existence of thought and consciousness. As the writer Stephen Johnson explains: 'No individual neuron is sentient, and yet somehow the union of billions of neurons create self-awareness' (Johnson 2001: 204). Some thinkers argue that there are difference types of emergent phenomena, and that complex systems are able to generate kinds of emergence other than simple ones. The philosopher Chalmers, for instance, claims that the phenomenon of consciousness is the only clear example of a strong type of emergence

(Chalmers 2006). Others will claim that the same basic components and mechanisms can be identified in all kind of systems (Bertuglia & Vaio).

The concept of emergence is often used within a larger theoretical framework, for instance within the fields of systems theory, complexity theory and non-linear theory. These fields are closely related, employing many of the same general concepts. In complexity theory, emergence is regarded as a fundamental quality of systems. As social theorist John Urry phrases it: 'Central, then, to complexity is the idea of emergence. It is not that the sum is greater than the size of its parts – but there are system effects that are different from their parts.' (Urry 2005b: 5) Complexity and emergence are, hence, both important aspects of systems theory, of which disciplines as disparate as physics, biology, economy, meteorology, psychology, philosophy and sociology have, at some point, been affected. As the complexity theorists Bertuglia and Vaio explain:

> The identification of systems is common to all sciences, whether natural or social: from the mechanical systems of classical physics, whose base is, or at least appears to be, relatively simple, such as a planetary system, to those of quantum physics, whose basis is more elaborate, such as atomic nucleus, an atom or a molecule, to systems of biological science, such as cells, apparatus, organisms, and again to those of social science, such as economic environments, populations, cities and many more (Bertuglia and Vaio 2005: 3).

Along the same lines, Urry reports that, in 1996, the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences advocated breaking down the division between 'natural' and 'social' science by defining both as characterised by 'complexity' (Urry 2005a: 236).

Within the social sciences, the interrelation between parts and the whole concerns one of the most central issues within the field – the relationship between the individual and society – micro versus macro. The social scientist R. Keith Sawyer (2005) writes that the concept of emergence plays a central role in social science within different types of systems theory, of which he identifies three loosely defined schools. The first is normally referred to as 'structural functionalism' and is associated with the works of Talcott Parsons. His work was inspired by mathematics and cybernetics and was

primarily concerned with questions related to structure and stability within social systems. This can be contrasted with the second school of emergence theory, which centred on questions concerning the dynamics and rules leading to emergent phenomena. This second school of systems theory is also known as 'general system theory' and had its strongest impact during the 1960s and 1970s (Sawyer 2005: 14). The third emerged from computer science and sociological theory, and is also known as 'complex dynamical systems theory'. These theories are fundamentally concerned with emergence, interaction of components, and relations between levels of analysis. In Sawyer's view, this is superior to the former two schools, as it allows for the incorporation of thoughts developed within symbolic communication theory and is hence more apt at dealing with complexity in human societies (Ibid: 23). The epistemological transgression of the boundaries between culture and nature found in these theories suggests that the same law of change, the same laws of nature, applies to both. For a researcher in the human sciences, such ideas are both interesting and slightly disturbing. Earlier attempts within social sciences and humanities to apply theoretical concepts from nature or biology to society have been extensively criticised. Theories like functionalism, vitalism and social Darwinism have all been regarded as being based on a reductionist view of society and culture. Sawyer is obviously aware of this risk when he states that '[i]nteraction between individuals is much more complex than synaptic transfer; semiosis, meaning and intersubjectivity become important' (Sawyer 2005: 26). Although he sees similarities between systems, he points out that there are important differences between the biological and societal that must be taken into account.

One social theorist who has dedicated much of his work to social systems theory is Niklas Luhmann. He was initially influenced by Parsons, but eventually developed his own theory, or rather 'grand narrative' of social complexity. In his theoretical work, he also developed a communication theory, which is often referred to within media studies (see for instance Rasmussen 2003). With regard to computer games, reflections concerning social systems are only one possible application of systems theory. Games can also be analysed as a *structure* or technology with emergent properties. It may be possible to employ concepts from social theorists like Luhmann and Parson also on computer games, but I have chosen rather to derive concepts from more general theoretical disciplines like systems theory and complexity theory, as this

provides a level ground for analysing both social and technological complexity. Social theories are also often concerned with the macro level of the social system, while my analyses primarily cover elements on lower levels.

Emergence within game studies

There exists a specific affinity between computer games and the concept of emergence that seems to stem from a notion of simple transparent rules that are yet able to produce a totally unpredictable outcome. As Will Wright, the creator of *Sim City*, once stated:

> … what really impresses me about Go isn't so much the abstraction as the emergence. The fact that it's one of the most amazing examples of emergent behavior I've ever seen. And it's so clear and simple and you can just see before your very eyes that these simple little rules give rise to this incredible strategy. I mean it's just so apparent. They pulled away everything that has nothing to do with emergence, and all that's left is the emergence of the game (Pearce 2002).

The concept of emergence is also used within game studies and mainly in this popular use, without much theoretical scrutiny being devoted (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 164, Pearce 2002). However, some attempts have been made to give the concept a more analytical framework. For instance, Jesper Juul has tried to establish a theoretical distinction between two different game types; emergent and progressive games (Juul 2005).

Systemically speaking, a game can be described as a complex system, comprising *rules* on the micro level of the system, resulting in *emergent* phenomena on a macro level. According to Juul, games of emergence consist of simple rules that, when combined, give a high number of possible outcomes and consequently complex game play (Juul 2005: 73). Chess and Go are two examples of this kind of game. The sheer combinatorial possibilities of the pawns make it impossible to give detailed advice about what to do in every possible stage of a game. You simply have to resort to general strategy. On the other hand, progressive games are, in terms of Juul's use of the concept, a newer, linear form of game where the player has to traverse a specific route with few or no real choices. The adventure game genre is an obvious example of

this kind of gameplay. Juul further states that MMORPGs, in general, employ an emergent structure, and that they have embedded progressive features represented by quests. He also observes that:

> In a game of emergence, a large percentage of the rules and objects in the game can potentially influence each other; in a game of progression most rules and objects are localized. Strategy games are highly emergent and have a large degree of connectedness, since every move and unit can potentially matter to every other move and unit in the game. (Juul 2005: 81f)

A strategy game like *Sim City* is clearly more complex than Chess and also has a more complicated ruleset. Juul does not explicitly explain the relationship between the complexity of the ruleset and the emergent qualities of a game; whether, for instance, a more complicated ruleset will give a more or less emergent game. His emphasis of the rules' and objects' *connectedness* seems to imply that the extension of the rules is more important than their complexity. Salen and Zimmerman, on their hand, state that:

> Even a game with a much more complicated ruleset, such as Warcraft II, contains emergence. Although the game seems very complex compared to Pong, in essence Warcraft II only has a few dozen different kinds of elements, and the ways that they can interact are quite limited. If two enemy units meet, they will either fight or not fight. Despite the complexity of the code, there is still arguably a 'modest number of rules' applied to a 'limited collection of objects'. (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 159)

What is interesting here is that they synthesise parts of the game mechanics and label them 'rules'. This seems to imply that the complexity of the game is only apparent, and in reality can be distilled down to a few fighting elements. A timely question here would be to ask where, specifically, the emergence is. Is it a part of the game or is it rather in the eye of the beholder, as a result of the viewer's wish to categorise his or her observations? This question echoes an old and well-rehearsed epistemological dichotomy between the classical natural sciences and a humanistic approach, for instance represented by the debates following the positivistic approach in the last century (Feyerabend 1975, Kuhn 1962, Popper 1963). For the purpose of our discussion, a more confined question would be to ask how, exactly, do we define or identify complexity? The Danish media researcher Lars Qvortrup seems to support an

idea that complexity is first and foremost a way to approach a phenomenon analytically.

> At first glance, one might think that complexity could be defined as a fixed figure. One would think that complexity is 'more' than order and 'less' than chaos. However, complexity is a relative concept. Whether something is complex depends on the capacity of the observer. (Qvortrup 2006: 352)

This stance is also recognisable in social theorist Helga Nowotny's account of complexity when she states:

> The climax of high modernity with its unshakeable belief in planning (in society) and predictability (in science) is long past. Gone too is the belief in simple cause–effect relationships often embodying implicit assumptions about their underlying linearity; in their place is an acknowledgement that many – perhaps most – relationships are non-linear and subject to ever changing patterns of unpredictability. (Nowotny 2005: 16)

Nowotny here points towards a generally increasing awareness regarding the fact that non-linearity, emergence, chaos and complexity are integral to both societal and natural phenomena. She explains that: 'Complexity points to something which is just beyond our ability to understand and control, yet we presume it is densely packed, ordered and structured in some way that we fail to comprehend as yet.' (Nowotny 2005: 15) Our general understanding of complex and emergent phenomena is, inarguably, far from complete. While phenomena with emergent properties can easily be identified and described on a general macroscopic level, our understanding of exactly what rules or mechanisms the systems are made up of is limited. Complexity theorist David Byrne has warned against the impulse to identify a set of rules as all-embracing in order to make the complex phenomenon comprehensible. Describing this as 'simplistic complexity' he states:

> Write a few rules – the selfish gene, the territorial imperative, profit maximization, rational choice, or, preferably, a combination of all of these, and away we go. Simplistic complexity does deal with a kind of complex emergence but it remains reductionist. (Byrne 2005: 103)

If we return to Salen and Zimmerman's statement concerning rules in Warcraft II, their position seems to fit Byrne's description as a reductionist analytical position.

Although this singleplayer game lacks the social complexity of a multiplayer game it is still structurally far more complex than games like Go or Chess. Go and Chess, unlike complex phenomena often associated with emergence, consist of very few rules. With regard to most contemporary computer games, not least MMORPGs, structural complexity is a trait of the media form. Whereas it is uncontroversial to agree that Chess and Go, or *Pong*, for that matter, are based on simple sets of rules, this is hardly the case with a game like *World of Warcraft*. The complexity of *World of Warcraft* can be illustrated in many ways, for instance if we look at the website wowwiki.com that is developed as a source of information about game mechanics. On June 27, 2008, the website had 56,354 *articles* about *World of Warcraft*[32]. Not all of them concern rules, but quite a few of them explain basic game mechanical aspects of the game, such as the different races and classes, and how equipment and spells work. Compared to a game like Chess, where the rules could be written on a small piece of paper, the difference is striking. I fully support Juul's statement that MMORPGs have emergent properties, but there is no obvious simplicity in the building blocks of this system. How then do we define the basic component of a computer game and how is it related to the overall emergence? Andreas Gregersen has tried to define rules in computer games as follows:

> I take it as a defining characteristic of a rule that it is actually possible to state the rule in natural language, but I would also like to hang on to the idea that *game* rules are fundamentally conventions: Players are supposed to understand, acknowledge and follow these rules, as emphasized by both Caillois and Huizinga. Following this, a modern game world is governed by mechanics that I would rather call simulated laws, since they do not regulate what is allowed, but rather what is *possible* in that universe (Gregersen 2005: 48).

Gregersen further suggests that we should regard modern computer games as simulated worlds that share traits with, for instance, sports. Like sports, these games have explicit rules, but they also rely on being executed in an environment that limits how the activity might be carried out – the law of physics. I think Gregersen highlights the complexity of modern computer game rules in an interesting manner,

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[32] On October 25, 2006 the site had 17,814, on March 19, 2007 it had 25,761 and on October 9, 2007 it had 44,209 articles. The growth rate is therefore quite remarkable. An article is what the site describes as 'probable legitimate content pages'.

but I find it hard to identify exactly how to distinguish a rule from a law in an arbitrary game world, analytically. It might be that Gregersen is placing the player in a decisive position here. The concepts of law and rule that Gregersen mentions are, on the one hand, parts of the game structure. On the other hand, it is the *players* that are crucial in distinguishing between them, as they 'are supposed to understand' what the rules mean. This brings me back to one of the objectives of this chapter, which is to explore the role of the player. Lets take a look at how the player's position might be captured in the definition of games.

Most definitions of a game include a notion of rules and goals. A classic definition is that of Avedon and Sutton-Smith and states that games are: '*an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrial outcome*' (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971: 7). The outcome is the goal of playing, and the state where the process of playing ends. The rules are, on the other hand, crucial guidelines while the game lasts; breaking the rules will violate the game or break the 'contract' the player commits to when he or she plays a game. By combining several older definitions of games, Juul has constructed what he calls a classic game model. In this more elaborate game definition the role of the player is given more emphasis:

> A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable (Juul 2005: 36).

Juul states that this is a definition that first and foremost covers traditional games, as well as older and simpler computer games. At the end of his book he states that newer features of games, such as the ability to save the game during play, give us games that will deviate from the classic model, and hence warns us of the limitations of his game model (Juul 2005: 199) In the following, I shall demonstrate that this model might have an even more limited validity than this reservation suggests.

Game goals and game sessions

I will start this theoretical exercise with a reference to an aspect of rules described by Juul: goals or outcome. According to Juul's classic game definition, we see that the concept of quantifiable outcome is central; it is important that there is a criterion for success in a game – a goal – and that this goal or outcome can be clearly defined. Common types of outcomes in computer games are where the player's name gets on the high score list, or that he or she defeats the last boss in an adventure or role-playing game – the equivalent of defeating the king in a Chess match. He writes: 'Since playing a game where the participants disagree about the outcome is rather problematic, the specification of the outcome develops like the rules of a game, toward becoming unambiguous' (Juul 2005: 39). In my view, the term outcome or game goal is not necessarily unambiguous when it comes to actual play.

In some types of games, the *game session* can be described as an activation of the total game structure. The game session ends when the *game goal* is reached. This is a playing structure that we find in most traditional games, such as card games and board games. The game structure and the game session simply correlate. In arcade games, the player will normally play as long as he or she is able to, and the game ends when the player fails to continue. However, the ability to save the game in various game states, as can be done on a computer, matched with the ability to create various forms of game-play and massive amounts of game space, changes this. In contemporary computer games, there is often no obvious end-state or final goal. Structurally speaking, if we take the whole game into account, the prior smaller obstacles and quests that are overcome and solved serve as preliminary stops on the road to defeating the final monster. However, the player will often not reach this end. And certainly not in one single playing session.

I will back this up with some empirical observations. In an earlier research project I interviewed players who had played the game *Carmageddon*. The main object of the project was to evaluate how they interpreted the violent elements of this game. I also asked them how they preferred to play in general. Of my 15 informants, most of them told me that they seldom finished computer games, but rather moved on to a new one when the game they currently played became too difficult or too boring. (Karlsen 2001a: 72) Through friends and siblings, some of them had access to a plethora of

games, which seemed to encourage this mercurial playing habit. Some stated that it was a mark of a game's outstanding quality if they actually finished it. Some of my informants told me that they *never* finished a computer game, with reference to the escalating level of difficulty in them. As this 17 year old boy phrased it, when asked how important it was to finish a game:

> It's not often I have, like, bothered with that. It can take a very long time and it gets harder, and eventually it just becomes too difficult.

Another of my informants, a woman aged 31, pointed to the fact that intermediate goals often gave sufficient motivation. This informant usually played arcade or puzzle games:

> Researcher: Is it important to get on the high-score list? Or to finish a game?
> Informant: In some games it might be important. In a game like Realmz it is not. I can't even remember if there is a high-score list there. In other games the goal can be just to finish a puzzle or get to a new level. That might be enough in it self. But … it is really hard to say something, um, general. In some games the driving force can be to just perform better than I have done earlier. Even if you are just competing against yourself so, yeah, that can also be a goal.

Several types of goals are identified here, like solving a puzzle or finishing a level. To improve yourself is another. It is quite obvious that what structurally speaking marks the end of the game, to finish the last level or get to the point where the adventure ends, are of little or no importance for these players. Espen Aarseth has illustrated how the final goal of a game might even be counter-productive for the playing experience. When he played the adventure game *Morrowind*, he was for some time under the illusion that it was completely non-linear and without any final goal, and that the player could explore to his or her own heart's content. After playing for a while, he came to realise that the game actually did have some kind of final goal to reach. He said: 'My free, improvised play had not helped me to discover essential parts of the game. In failing to discover the main quest, I failed as a model player, in spite of my great enjoyment in the game.' (Aarseth, 2003: 5) After this, the game lost its enchantment with the result that he stopped playing. An interesting aspect of this quote is that it reveals how Aarseth conceptualises the player. The term 'model player' is obviously a reflection of the game structure. Aarseth implies that the player's objective primarily should be to uncover the final outcome of the game and

play in accordance with it. Instead of defining his initial play activity as a different but an equally sound way of approaching the game, Aarseth dismisses it as a mistaken approach. This illustrates quite clearly that operating with a theoretical concept of a player, or a concept of a player that merely reflects the structure of the game, might give a limited notion of possible player approaches.

As shown, the major goal of the computer game might not be of much interest for the players. What they normally experience is that they have to progress through increasingly more difficult challenges, solving minor goals, and overcoming different obstacles. In most computer games, the game session and the final game goal are separated both practically, because of the amount of time needed to reach a closure of the game, and conceptually, as the ultimate goal of the game is not an important motivation for finishing a play session. Players may have a concept of an end to the game, but what motivates the playing is more likely a concept of continuous progress, and the obstacles or puzzles at hand. The concept of the game session is analytically important, as this is recognisable from a player's point of view; it describes how computer games are actually being used, more than the structural outline of the game.

The relation between game goal and game session can also be reversed. In a Chess tournament, for instance, each Chess game will only be partly conclusive. Even though the Chess game is encompassed by Juul's classic game definition, the main goal transcends the individual game. Not until the last game in the tournament is finished will it be possible to declare a winner. This demonstrates that a main goal is a context-dependant term. The main goal will in many traditional games correlate with the game session, but even in games where it is embedded in the structure, like Chess, the larger context that surrounds the game might influence what is conceived as the main goal.

Another weakness with Juul's classic game model is that smaller parts of a computer game might also fit this definition. For instance, a quest in *World of Warcraft* will fulfil Juul's classic game model, even though an ordinary player will not recognise it

as a separate game.[33] To reiterate Juul's definition (Juul 2005: 36): a quest is rule-based (based on the general rules within the game and specific rules related to the quest); it has a variable and quantifiable outcome (the player receives currency, experience points or other artefacts when he completes the quest); the player exerts an effort in order to influence the outcome (the player has to execute the quests as required), and he feels emotionally attached to the outcome (the player 'wins' something and makes his avatar more powerful, richer or better equipped); the consequences of the activity are negotiable (players can, for instance, sell currency earned from questing with real life currency). In effect, if we follow Juul's definition of a game, a quest can, structurally speaking, be defined as a game on its own. However, the solution of a quest is certainly not an overall goal in *World of Warcraft*, or in hardly any computer game that has incorporated some form of quest element. The simple question is: does a game need to have an overall goal to be characterised as a game? In my opinion, this is not required and I will provide a few more examples of how players might define and construe game goals, this time in multiplayer games.

In her book *Play between worlds* (2006c), T.L. Taylor describes how the most dedicated part of the player base, the power gamers, organise their playing. She states that:

> Power gamers seem willing to endure much more than many other players and are particularly adept at breaking down the game – dividing the challenges into discrete parts and then working on each area like a puzzle – to meet their personal goals, which they are constantly revising and developing as they progress (Taylor 2006b: 76).

One of the power gamers she interviews describes his gaming goals like this: 'Those individual goals you set determine what kind of player you are. I want to be level 50. I want to be 50 first. I want to be 50 in three weeks. How am I gonna do that?' (Ibid). My own research confirms this observation, and in this case it is not only hard core players that set themselves goals. During the interviews with *Discworld* players, I asked whether they had clear goals when playing. The answers varied as to what

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[33] A typical quest will be handed out by an NPC and can consist of killing a specific number of beasts and returning to an NPC for a reward.

degree they set themselves goals, but all of them had a clear notion of setting goals as part of the play experience, as can be seen in this exchange:

> Researcher: When you play in general, do you set yourself overall goals?
> Informant: I usually set myself goals, mostly small or partial goals rather than a major goal. I can for instance aim at getting better in some skills or mastering the technique of killing a specific kind of monster, or something like that.
> Researcher: But do you sometimes run out of objectives, or goals, for your play?
> Informant: No. I wouldn't put it like that. If you check out my player info you can see that I've listed a few rather impossible goals.
> Researcher: I think I've actually seen that, that you want your skills back to…
> Informant: To where they were before the skill cut. That will involve, with full focus on experience points, at least 20 years of playing.
> Researcher: Okay, so the long term planning is done with then.
> Informant: Well, I know that some of those skills I'll never get back, but when I get most of it back, I guess I'll drop the rest and set myself another goal that is actually possible to achieve. But I don't think I'll ever run out of goals.

This openness with regard to gaming style in *Discworld* gives the player many options, but also demands a certain amount of focus and decision making. A developer (a so-called creator) I interviewed, who still played the game, talked of this:

> Researcher: Do you have any goals? Do you set yourself goals when playing?
> Informant: Yes, short goals. I sort of make smaller projects. Now I'm going to advance my *other.health* skill so it reaches 2000 for instance. And that'll probably take a month to accomplish. And then later on I can decide to make guild max on stealth, and run that until I am done. It's that sort of minor goals I set for myself.
> Researcher: But do you ever run out of goals?
> Informant: Well, sometimes. It may happen.
> Researcher: What do you do then?
> Informant: Then I…if I don't really know what to do, log onto another character. If I'm online with my play character and do stuff, I can suddenly feel that things are getting boring, like: this doesn't lead me anywhere. Then, for instance, I log on my creator character. And then I start checking around a little bit, do some bug reps. Then that's the goal instead.

As we see, setting goals is important to a degree that it seems like an intrinsic part of the playing. In the last example, the lack of a goal makes the play lose direction, and, as a result, the player gets bored. Paradoxical as it might seem, the player resolves his

boredom by logging onto a programming avatar and starting to work instead. This could be a good introduction to a discussion about the relationship between play and work, but my aim is to highlight that a game goal needs only partly to be embedded in the game structure. As long as the game includes elements for which progress and development can be monitored and registered, the player can easily define his or her own goals for playing. It should also be noted that the way these players define their own goals mainly corresponds with the description from my informant from my singleplayer project quoted earlier.

World of Warcraft comprises thousands of quests, as well as many other different activities. The insistence on the importance of a main goal could exclude *World of Warcraft* from being a game, along with many singleplayer computer games that also share this quest structure. It can be argued that a MMORPG is a collection of games, or a playground, rather than a game, but in my view this only confuses matters. It might be easier if we define one (of potentially many) general gaming goal for *World of Warcraft*, for instance, as being something along these lines: *The main goal in World of Warcraft is to keep developing an avatar so that the player can make further accomplishments within the game space*. A goal like this does not have an end point, and there is no structurally identifiable place or situation in the game where it can be reached; from the player's point of view it is rather an ongoing process and a moving conceptual target.

The analytical point I would claim is that we must acknowledge that the game and the player work together as a system, contributing to shaping and manipulating the rules. The third party of this system would be the developers of the game, as creators and further developers of this system. Analysing the game structure alone will not give a comprehensive understanding of how this system works, or what the game is. The outline of the symbiosis can be described as follows: The game developers create a world with basic rules embedded in it. The game provides the player with different ways of measuring the outcome or progress of the avatar, but does not give a clear answer as to what kind of action must be taken. The player, on the other hand, decides what action to take and what goal to pursue. Some players will follow goals easily identified in the game structure, while others might construct their own. I think Juul is right in claiming that a central aspect of a game is that of goals or outcome, but these

goals do not have to be of a singular or finite character. Nor do the goals exclusively have to be embedded in the physical structure of the game; they can just as well be defined by the player, or rather, players.

The reason Juul, in his classic game model, finds that games need to have a single goal is probably that his focus is on the media structure and not on the applied use of the medium. Despite an ambition to the contrary, the player is somewhat lost in the analysis. A singleplayer computer game might very well be played according to Juul's criteria, where the player's ambition is to reach the final goal without cheating or consulting a walk-through on the net. The point is that creating a game model that presupposes an ideal player will be to ignore other, and equally common, ways to approach a computer game. An extreme interpretation of Juul's model would, for instance, render the exact same play activity (for instance solving quests) as being two different things, whether the game being played was a singleplayer game with a proper ending (even if the player never reaches this goal) or an everlasting multiplayer online game. Submitting to Juul's criteria of a game, many normal ways to use a computer game would simply not be defined as playing/gaming, but as something else. In my view, this represents a very important limitation with Juul's model.

Players and rules

Now, I will turn to a more general aspect of Juul's model, its notion of rules. I will initiate this criticism by examining a game type that Juul defines as not being a proper game: fantasy role-playing games. In this game type, the player is highly influential regarding the rules of the game. Juul excludes *Dungeons & Dragons* from his classic game model, as it does not employ strict rules: 'If we begin with the borderline cases: pen and paper role-playing games are not classic games because, having a human game master, their rules are not fixed beyond discussion' (Juul 2005: 43) Juul here seems to imply that because these rules are upheld by a human being instead of a machine, they are negotiable and therefore do not really qualify as rules. My main discussion here will focus on Juul's strict definition of rules, which, in consequence, means that *Dungeons & Dragons* is a borderline case and not a real game.

Gary Alan Fine performed a fascinating ethnographic study of players of fantasy role-playing games around 1980 (Fine 1983). These games are usually played by 5−10 people with the aid of pen and paper and one or several dice. *Dungeons & Dragons* is probably the best-known of this game type. A fantasy role-playing game usually has a handbook of rules with a description of the game universe that can be as much as several hundred pages long. The game commences when the players 'roll a character', deciding what features the character will have, for instance how strong, agile or intelligent he or she is. The character will develop further during the play, and the player can use the same character in its enhanced form the next time he or she enters the game. The Game Master or referee makes decisions during the play on what kind of obstacles the game party will meet.

Fine undertook observatory studies in different playing locations, both at people's homes and at public gaming clubs. The players he observed usually met at weekends and played for several hours on each occasion. Some of them continued to play the same character within the same game universe for several months, sometimes even years.

It is noteworthy that many of the elements from these games are easily recognisable in today's role-playing games and MMORPGs; take for instance the creation of a character and the further enhancement of it during play. Even the concept of 'rolling a character' still exists in MMORPGs and is used by players who probably have no idea of the origin of the expression. What I want to focus on is Fine's findings concerning game rules. Ideally, the handbook of rules and the falling of the dice should be strictly adhered to. In reality, the gaming community seem to have arrived at an agreement that on some occasions it is better to keep characters alive than to follow the rules strictly. In specific encounters in the game, the referee would roll a die to decide the outcome of a situation. Some rolls would be lethal for the character, but since only the referee could actually see how the die fell, he would sometimes moderate the outcome so that the character only got a critical blow, instead of a fatal one (Fine, 1983: 191). Fine states that:

> Two related rationales are suggested for the referee's legitimate right to use
> his discretion: to keep the game plot logical, and to keep the game balanced in

terms of having players-characters face only that level of foe they can reasonably be expected to handle. (Ibid: 103)

The possibility of some characters irreversibly dying created some tension in the D&D gaming community Fine was analysing. Fine quotes a player who had played a wizard for more than three years: 'I'd be, if he died, if the (referee) got him killed off, I'd be very unhappy. Very upset. Because it took a lot of work. It took a lot to accomplish that.' (Ibid: 219). We should notice that this player obviously places a great amount of responsibility for the character's well-being on the referee. Fine explains that:

> Players often feel that death is unfair when they believe that the death is not their fault – when it appears to be determined by unfair circumstances or by the roll of the dice. Deaths typically are legitimate only when the character has brought it on himself. (Ibid: 220)

The players are upset because they identify with the character they play, which is amplified when the character stays alive session after session. In games where the rules are not inscribed into material entities, as in computer games, but are collectively upheld by the participants, they naturally become a matter of negotiation. It may seem strange that Juul takes such a stern view of rules in his classic game model, as he is obviously aware of folk games where rules are not upheld like this. He refers for instance to a study conducted by Linda Hughes of girls playing a ball game called *Fourthsquare*. In this game, the participants have a square each and a ball that must be bounced into the squares. When the ball lands on the square of one of the participants, he or she has to bounce it into the square of another. The ball can only be bounced once in each square. According to Hughes, this game was a good example of a type of folk game where rules are constantly challenged or altered by the participants. Juul's assessment of the game is that '[t]his turns out to be a combination of official and unofficial rules, conflicting success criteria, and rule negotiations' (Juul 2005: 11). In spite of this insight, Juul chooses not to reflect it in his classic game definition. It seems that the relatively strict rules that we find in early computer games, classic board games and sports have, for some reason, been formative for his model, at the expense of games where the rules are subject to more flexibility. Juul also seem to lean on Caillois' distinction between play and game,

where free-form play is regarded as the opposite of orderly rule-based gaming (Caillois 1961). In free-form play, rules are usually volatile, hard to identify clearly and subject to abrupt rearrangements. I would agree that there is a difference between this kind of playing and games with firm rulesets but, in my experience, rules in ordinary games are subject to much more flexibility than both Juul and Caillios are recognising. One of the reasons for this is that some games have rules of a considerably greater complexity and opacity that the ones Juul is describing. As the description of the game universe and the rules in D&D can cover hundreds of pages, there are very few players or referees who actually know all the rules. Rules in fantasy role-playing games are of such a complex nature that they can easily be manipulated by skilled referees or players in directions that favour themselves or the group in any given situation. Salen and Zimmerman have labelled a player that excels in a game as a dedicated player: 'The dedicated player desires to become an expert at a game, and diligently studies the rules of play in an attempt to maximize the chances of winning.' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 269f) Dedicated players are, in their definition of the term, a variant of standard players. In other games, the players will invest time practising tactical or motoric skills but, in a game like D&D, the dedicated player will spend time learning the rules of the game, making rules another element of the game at which the player can excel.

As a rather striking example of a game with flexible rules, I shall briefly mention the game *Nomic*, as does Juul in his book. Philosophy professor Peter Suber created this game in 1982 as a means to illustrate a point within law studies[34]. Suber describes the game as follows:

> Nomic is a game in which changing the rules is a move. In that respect it differs from almost every other game. The primary activity of Nomic is proposing changes in the rules, debating the wisdom of changing them in that way, voting on the changes, deciding what can and cannot be done afterwards, and doing it. Even this core of the game, of course, can be changed (Suber 1990: 362)

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[34] He later included the game in the book *The Paradox of Self-Amendment* (1990). His argument is that a legal 'rule of change', such as a constitutional amendment clause, may apply to itself and thus authorize its own amendment. For details see, (http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/nomic.htm). Last accessed June 27, 2008.

The possibility of changing the most fundamental rules of the game is in clear contrast to Juul's classic game model. *Nomic* is a great example of a game with flexible rules, and it also demonstrates that game definitions tend to be more rigid than the games they are created to define, simply because it is unlikely that anyone can predict every kind of game someone might invent. *Nomic* can be regarded as an exotic specimen of a game, but it is currently being played in several places, facilitated by different web solutions. The *Discworld* MUD has even developed a citizenship feature based on this concept. In the next chapter I will explore in more detail how the citizenship feature is incorporated into the game and what kind of flexibility and rule negotiation this opens up. Now, I will provide a general notion of rules that is able to reflect some of the variation and flexibility I have discussed so far. This notion can be illustrated by two axes that embody different qualities of rules. One of these axes goes from simple to complex, the other from fixed to fluid. These axes can further be put in an axis system as illustrated in the table below.

Table 3.1: Two axes of rules
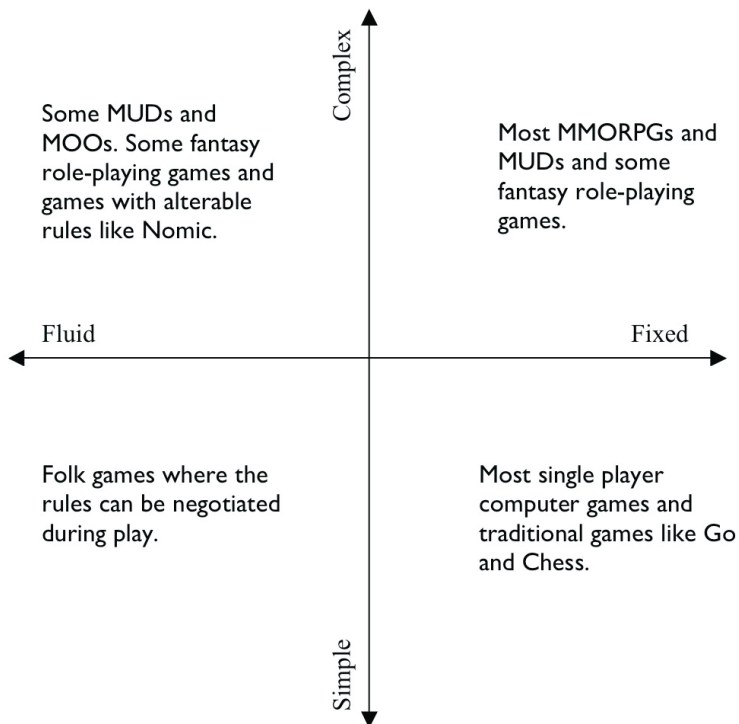
This illustration shows how the rules of these games can be positioned in relation to each other. The exact positioning of individual games is of course open to debate, and there might not be a straightforward way of evaluating, for instance, to what degree rules are fixed or fluid. In the same game, some rules might be fixed, such as the number of participants that can play, while other rules might be more flexible. How, exactly, we define complexity is also a matter of discussion, as it is, for instance, not clear if complexity is a result of a (large) number of different rules, or rather a result of a large number of different entities. As a general rule of thumb, I will suggest that *simple* equals few rules, while *complex* equals many.

Most singleplayer computer games can be placed in the square with simple and fixed rules. Bug abuse, walkthroughs and cheat codes might introduce some flexibility to the rules of this kind of game as well, but singleplayer computer games are, to a large degree, tied to the materiality of a fixed medium. MUDs and MMORPGs will, due to their complexity, largely fit into the square of fixed and complex games.[35] Here, too, the games' materiality limits the flexibility of use. However, having a layer of socially generated rules makes these types of games slide toward the fluid end of the scale. MUDs where the players can construct items within the frames of the game, combined with a layer of socially constructed rules, will place them even further towards the fluid end of that axis. It is probably in this square, that of complex and fluid rules, that we find the best instances of strong emergence. In the square with simple and alterable rules we will find games where the rules are typically negotiated or altered during play. This is also the category closest to free form play.

My ambition, as is reflected in the table above, has been to formulate a more dynamic concept of games; one which is based on a more flexible notion of rules, which again is able to contain a larger variety of playing approaches and game goals. I will underline that the objective of the table is not to replace Juul's model with another structural model, but rather to escape the fixed definition of rules, goals and players embedded in Juul's definition of games. My aspiration has been to indicate that games are dynamic objects where evolvement might be a key mechanism. I will explore this

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[35] Juul would probably place strategy games into this square, as he describe these as being highly emergent (Juul 2005: 82)

topic more fully in the next and last section of this chapter, where also the developer's position will be described more in detail.

Planning emergence

In the book *Rules of play* Salen and Zimmerman address several issues concerning emergence in games, but their focus is on the creation of games and game design, not so much on actual use. They state that game creators can only create the rules, and that the actual play is a second-order creation (Salen and Zimmerman 2004). Because use is unpredictable, it is not possible to plan for all kinds of ways the players will use the game. Harvey Smith, the lead designer of *Deus Ex*, was probably the first to label this phenomenon *emergent gameplay*. Smith explains that the development team wanted to avoid a special-case structure of play or a gameplay consisting of predominantly progressive elements: 'We wanted to do this in a way that did not limit the player to a few predefined choices, but instead allowed the player to come up with his own strategies within the flexible rules of the environment.' (Smith, 2001) This was partly achieved with a three-forked structure, whereby the player could choose between a stealth, a combat or a high-tech hacking strategy. He explains further: 'The moments that I perceive as failures tended to rely on special-case triggering or scripting' (Ibid). A challenge to this open-ended or emergent design is the large number of possibly unwanted types of use this enables, some of which might give the players an unexpected advantage[36].

Salen and Zimmerman describe the process of trying out different rules as some sort of a journey into the unknown, simply because there will always be user strategies that are impossible to predict. They quote the game designer Marc LeBlanc, who describes the design process as 'game tuning: iterative tweaking, testing, and refinement of game rules in order to create a rich play experience' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 166). The complexity theorists Bertuglia and Vaio explain why making emergent design is such a difficult task. In terms of complexity, the difference between a linear and a nonlinear system is dramatic. For instance, in a linear system, a

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[36] In Deus Ex the players learned how to climb walls by attaching series of proximity mines on the wall and climbing them and thus getting access to areas in the game that otherwise were inaccessible or difficult to reach. This is probably one of the most quoted examples of this kind of unforseen advantage due to so-called emergent gameplay.

two-body system consisting of a pendulum and a gravitational mass, movement is simple to predict. The addition of just one more body into this system means that the system is no longer linear, and the mathematical calculations of body movement become far more complicated. Most complex systems consist of substantially more entities than this – entities that have a mutual impact on each other. This is the reason why predictions by modelling, or calculations of nonlinear systems in principle, are close to impossible. As Bertuglia and Vaio explain:

> The behavior of a system made up of numerous nonlinear equations, containing various parameters, is generally unpredictable *a priori*, because it is extremely difficult, or even impossible, to identify the effect of the various parameters in a multifaceted system, whether such are considered individually, or are considered in their entirety. The only way to discover the dynamics that the model envisages is *a posteriori*, i.e. putting the model in question 'into action' (Bertuglia and Vaio 2005: 233f).

Simply put, the nonlinearity of most games is of such a nature that it has to be used and tested to see how the rules play out. The quote gives the mathematical explanation of why the design of games, as well as other networked and nonlinear media, is closely dependent on real-life testing. This also explains why computer programs in general rely heavily on program testers or play testers as part of the development process.

However, there is an important difference between singleplayer and multiplayer online games concerning what factors are influencing the development of the game. In a singleplayer game, the rules are designed by the developers and will be tested before release to avoid simple exploits and unwanted gameplay effects. As mentioned in the introduction, a multiplayer game is also normally changed gradually after launch. T.L. Taylor describes an example of how the players might influence the further development of the game in her study of *EverQuest*. Here, some of the players started to organise raid groups in order to conquer large monsters in the game, an activity not predicted by the developers (Taylor, 2006b). These groups strained the medium in many ways: the players had to use public channels to write messages to each other instead of by the aid of their own group channel and in order to organise such events the players had to use different web facilities. After a while, the

developers recognised raiding as a new form of gameplay and incorporated functionalities into updates of the game that amended some of the earlier losses.

On other occasions, the wishes of the player community might conflict with those of the developers, with the result that changes are not made. One conflict axis runs along issues concerning what is regarded as a reasonable enhancement of the gameplay. In his book *Synthetic Worlds* Edward Castronova comments:

> In the current context, the institutional way of looking at the world delivers an important insight: patterns of behavior are emergent. The rules of the game today evolved from some prior set of rules, which dictated not only play but meta-play, the play of the game that's intended to change what the rules are. While it may be comforting, in the real world, to take some of the rules as stable and unchanging (such as the US constitution), the actual and maddening fluidity of rules has become part of the daily life of those who design and operate synthetic worlds. Every rule they declare, even the ones they code into the world as part of its physics, induces reactions by the user community that may subvert or amplify the rule's effect. Designers and the user community are in an endless tug of war about what the rules actually are. (Castronova, 2005: 101)

Analytically, the 'tug of war' Castronova describes here can be explained in relation to what kind of feedback mechanisms the different groups – players and developers – represent. In general, feedback mechanisms in a system are necessary for it to adjust and not just be static. Feedback mechanisms coupled with (large) amounts of time ensure that systems adjust and evolve – elements that are intrinsically important, both within evolution in nature and in cultural contexts, change in society. An aspect to consider is how feedback mechanisms can produce very different outcomes in a system. Within complexity theory there are, generally described, two main types of feedback mechanisms: positive and negative. The negative feedback is a mechanism that dampens behaviour in a system before it makes too much of an impact and disrupts the system's equilibrium; for instance, the mechanism of a thermostat. Positive feedback mechanisms, on the other hand, enhance processes in the system so that the system reaches a condition where it is impossible to return to the original state of equilibrium. A global disaster that changes the trajectory of evolution on our planet would serve as an example of this. Urry states that the positive feedback mechanism is all the more interesting to study, as it is pivotal to change and development in

nature: 'the "normal" state of nature is thus not one of balance and repose; the normal state is to be recovering from the last disaster.' (Urry, 2005b: 6)

If we relate this to synthetic worlds and multiplayer online games, the players and developers can be said to inhabit the position of these two types of feedback mechanisms. The developers will mainly represent a negative feedback mechanism as, in general, they want the game space to be predictable and manageable, even though they are revising and updating the game. Since the players are in a competitive situation, the developers need to ensure that the different classes or groups of players are balanced. The players, on the other hand, want to maximise their own playing experience, whether their goal is to get hold of more epic loot, more gold or simply more fun. If players find some way to enhance the power of the avatar they are playing, they will often do so. If, for instance, specific types of avatars are subject to some unforeseen advantage due to changes in the game mechanics, over time it might encourage the player community to play this specific type, or to play in one specific way and, in effect, diminish the richness and diversity of the game space. The single player simply doesn't need to, or will often not be in a position to, understand what influence his or her decisions, together with all the other players in the same position, have on the game on a macroscopic level. They might even disrupt the game's equilibrium[37], just so as not to have the fun cut short. The tug of war Castronova describes can be likened to two conflicting feedback mechanisms that are trying to pull the game in different directions.

At the same time, the game developers also want to give the players some sort of influence, or at least a perceived experience of influence, within the game space. In *World of Warcraft*, one of the ways the developers have tried to satisfy their players' desires is by giving them the chance to develop sub-programs that can be directly incorporated into the game, facilitated by net-based distribution. These programs (or so-called *addons*) are not allowed to change the basic game play, but they can dramatically change the interface. With these addons, the player can get information that enhances his or her playing in substantial ways: there are for instance addons that give detailed information about different resources in the game. As with the changes

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[37] And some will say that the gold sellers in *World of Warcraft* are doing just that, on an economic level.

Taylor described in *EverQuest*, this user-creativity gives the developers ideas for further enhancements of the design. *World of Warcraft* is constantly being updated in so-called patches, and one often finds functionalities from earlier user-created addons being incorporated into the design. Cultural evolvement differs from natural evolvement by having actors that, to a greater degree, are conscious about their own position within the system and how they can influence it. In a computer game, conscious decisions and a will to change on both the developer and user's side are important for the evolvement of the game.

Viewed as a system, a multiplayer online game consists of a specific relationship between producers, users and the medium itself. Designing such a game is a collaborative process where the users and the developers work together as a whole, out of necessity. This is not to say that the relationship is balanced with regard to influence, as the designers make, by far, the most important decisions. The users do, however, have two types of influence on the medium: first, the possibility of creating and developing rules of play or codes of conduct within the game space; second, by influencing how the designers plan further development of the game. Multiplayer online games are arenas where the user has a real impact on how the given game is facilitated and, in a wider framework, also on the development of the genre. The largest system we are witnessing here is therefore not singular game 'systems', but the development of game genres, game communities and game culture.

Summary

I have used systems theory to show why players are part of the game system, and I have argued for the importance of including actual play practices in both our theoretical and methodological considerations when analysing contemporary computer games. When the players are included in the equation, we see how they influence several aspects of games, such as rules and goals. My two axes illustrate the variety of ways in which players influence the rules when playing a game. One methodological implication of this is that we need to assess whether the study of a game's aesthetics, materiality and design alone yields an adequate description of it. For some types of games and for some analytical ends, this might be the case, but for multiplayer online computer games, a research design where empirical players are not

included runs the risk of not grasping the mechanisms of the game properly. The fact that most contemporary computer games are so complex that the developers need real-life testing to be able to see how the rules work, should, on its own, be a strong indication that the study of real users is a necessary prerequisite for giving an account of the nature of these games. The same importance can be put on the temporal aspect of the games. To study only the structure of the game, at one specific point in the game's history, the dynamics and slow evolvement of the game will not be captured.

Systems theory, complexity theory and the concept of emergence offer a vocabulary for analysing computer games as systems. In this chapter I have discussed some of the basic concepts from these theoretical fields, such as feedback mechanism, rules, and the dynamic qualities of systems. These are concepts that will be explored more extensively in connection with the following empirical analyses. Other systemic aspects will also be discussed, such as the temporal dimension of games and how the different levels of the game system might interrelate. In the next chapter, *Discworld* is the main object of analysis. Change and development will be central issues here, as well as the social structure of the game.

4

Developers and players:
Social hierarchies and dynamics in *Discworld*

In the last chapter I used systems theory to describe how the players, the medium and the developers of multiplayer online computer games can be related. The players and developers, I argued, sometime battle over how the game should be further developed. In this chapter I will conduct a more detailed analysis of such relationships and describe some of the mechanisms that come into play. The venture point of this analysis is the player and developer community of *Discworld*.

The developers of *Discworld* form a hierarchically structured organisation, consisting of different types of programmers and administrators. I will look more closely into ways the developers are monitoring and serving the player community by game mechanical means, by formulating the game's codes of conducts, and by the position dedicated especially for these tasks – the liaison. The main function of the liaisons is to communicate with the players, ironing out problems and answering their questions. The players, on the other hand, have their own ways of organising, structuring and regulating social activities in *Discworld*, for instance through the club function, which resembles the guild feature in *World of Warcraft*. Another tool with a potentially greater impact is the citizen feature that gives the players the possibility of developing legislation for parts of the player community on the MUD. The primary aim of this chapter is to analyse how these different social tools and the developers' surveillance strategies intercept and influence each other.

Discworld and the public arena

Compared to *World of Warcraft*, *Discworld* is fairly small, but still has a rich public arena to offer its players. I will briefly present some of the communication tools available here. As in most MUDs, players in *Discworld* can talk to others in the vicinity using the commands *say*, *lsay* or *shout*, or talk with individual players, regardless of physical location, using the commands *tell* and *remote*. The players can also chat on public channels, on specific guild channels and on club channels with access only for members of that specific club. There are even special channels that make it possible for players to chat with players on other MUDs. An average player will easily access 10-15 channels that represent different strata or mixes of the player community. In *World of Warcraft*, the communication tools follow the same general structure and range from the possibility of having private conversations, to chatting on large general chat channels. Here, players can also create their own communication channels, but are restricted to only an extra few[38]. Compared to *World of Warcraft*, the chat function in *Discworld* is relatively customisable.

As part of *Discworld*'s public sphere, there are two competing newspapers and a publishing house where players can print in-game books that they write themselves. There is also a complementary bookstore where the players can sell these books. The two newspapers are issued regularly, but seldom more that once a month. They are exclusively run by players who also write the contents. The papers resemble magazines more than ordinary newspapers: they have small sections with news about the current situation in *Discworld*, but they consist mainly of stories concerning the latest social happenings on the MUD, or works of fiction. Occasionally one of the creators is interviewed, revealing changes coming on the MUD.

The newspapers have several functions within the MUD. First, they offer an opportunity for players who enjoy writing to try out their skills as journalists or writers. To a smaller degree, they function as a channel where information about the MUD's design and development is revealed to the public. This function is, however, mainly taken care of by the MUD's official message system. When the administration

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[38] The players have ten channels available in total, including general channels like *LookingForGroup* and *Trade*. Some of these can be exchanged for specially designed channels, but most players tend to use only the standard ones. With raiding guilds each class often has its own channel in order to communicate without interrupting other players.

has something important to tell the public, they alert every player about such news when they log on. These messages are usually about additions to, or changes on, the MUD, especially changes concerning game mechanics. Despite being a news channel, the information can be relatively enigmatic:

> Searching out the deepest secret areas of the disc, a group of explorers have discovered a new village. They found that it's a place where many come from, but no one ever returns.
>
> The villagers of Pumpkin Town are happy to offer a home to those new to the Discworld. To get everyone else familiar with their town, they invited all to come over and have a look. Soon, a visit to Pumpkin Town will be a must before going out into the larger world.
>
> --- Translation: A new newbie area has been created!
>
> To avoid real newbies getting trampled by hordes of one-day tourists who want to check out the new village, you have a chance to visit it before everyone is put in there by default. You can do this by creating a newbie alt and, in the foyer of the newbie area, typing 'pumpkins'.
>
> Enjoy![39]

This news item is rather special, as it is divided into one part that is *in character* (IC) and another that is *out of character* (OOC). Most posts tend to be one or the other, but the majority of them are IC. In this news sample, the administration obviously needed to get the message through without totally stripping it of its role-playing flavour.

The place where the real in-game social and political discussions happen is on the forums, or the *boards*. The newspapers and boards are available both from within the game, and from the MUD's web site. Every player has 19 boards available, and the administration several more. Some are guild-specific boards, and some are dedicated to other topics; among these we find boards dedicated to role-playing and player-killing. The general discussion board is called *Frog* and the players are expected, at least occasionally, to read this board. There is also a special board for heated debates called *Flame*. Every board displays between 50 and 100 posts at any given time. On some boards there is little activity, but on most it only takes a few days for a post to

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[39] http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/news.c?id=512705, last accessed June 27, 2008.

scroll off the board. As of May 13, 2008, there have been about 516.600 posts, counting all the boards.[40]

A recurring topic on the boards concerns recent or future changes of the game that some players or player groups find to be to their disadvantage. A typical example of this is the following excerpt from the wizards' board. In this case it is not aspects that concern the whole guild, but rather the different specialisations, or orders, within it.

> I feel as though logic is overrated, particularly for a game like this. The orders are insanely unbalanced, and from what I read on the boards the creators work very hard to balance the guilds, so why not balance the various 'flavours' within each guild also?
> …
> The magic-using wizards are all very similar. Why? Because there's a core of useful spells and the other spells are mostly rather glorified toys and nothing more. This means that regardless of your order, you need to work on the same skills. Yet some orders have these skills as primaries and others don't.
>
> Some wizards end up spending 25 million XP to get a skill to level 300, and other wizards who have the appropriate skill as a primary have only to spend 4.7 million xp on it. The lack of balance is clearly the amount of xp required by each order to reach the same level of competence for the spells which are most commonly used.
>
> This shouldn't be the case.
>
> While there should be some variances between orders of course, the overall average XP spent to reach the same goals (and the goals are, sadly, the same old core spells) should be the same for each order. We need more descriptive differences and less fewer skill primary differences if we're ever going to keep the orders alive.[41]

As we see, the tone of the post is relatively civil. When players are addressing the developers, they often try to argue their case as thoroughly as possible, aware that a good argument is taken more seriously than angry comments and rude remarks. Occasionally there are also debates about player behaviour. Among recurring subjects is kill stealing and harassment. When the argument is based on incidents in the player community, the tone can often be more heated. The developers can remove posts that

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[40] I checked this number the first time in July 2004, when writing a paper on this subject. The number of posts was then 380.000. This gives an average of about 3000 posts each month, or about a hundred each day.

[41] Posted on the board Wizard December 7, 2007.

are regarded as harassment, but they are generally quite liberal with regard to discussions among the players. A more common approach is to move discussions that are getting too heated from other boards over to *Flame*.

The boards mainly function as a forum where the players can discuss issues both between each other and with the MUD's administration. The administration occasionally asks for comments on future plans on the boards, and the players are usually more than willing to share their thoughts on different subjects. In the following section I will give a more detailed account of the social structure in the MUD.

The social structure in Discworld

Since *Discworld* went online in 1991, it has steadily grown larger, both geographically and with regard to player accounts. As a social structure it has in many ways become more formal and differentiated during this period. An administrator I interviewed, who had been on the MUD for almost nine years, described his experience of the MUD when he was a new player as small and intimate. Only 40 player slots were available, including the developers', and basically everyone knew each other:

> It was all fairly fluid and changeable and we knew the admin, and the admin knew every player because there were so few of us. Now we have a much bigger hierarchy, and we even have hierarchies of players, with guild positions, with councils, magistrates, whatever. So certainly it has been a huge change there, but you couldn't, there is no way you could have done that with 40 people. And there is probably no way you can't do it with 200 – 250 logged in. When we have a thousand, two thousand or five thousand active users. You need some kind of accountability, some kind of management.

The need to differentiate between functions steadily increased as the player and developer community had grown larger.[42] Some of the positions in *Discworld* are reached by more formal procedures than others. Formal positions are by definition something that are either voted or applied for. Other roles, like club membership, are

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[42] The general way of referring to the administrators or programmers in this MUD was by the concept 'creator'. The most common titles among the developers were also 'creator' and 'senior creator'.

accessible to everyone in principle. This distinction will roughly reflect the empirical divide between players on the one hand and the developers on the other, but there are exceptions. For instance, most aspects of the citizenship feature on the MUD imply some kind of formal procedure, and the most prominent position in the citizen system, the magistrate, is voted for by city-state members.[43] On the other hand, some of the positions on the MUD can be reached by promotion without any preceding formal process. The organization of the developers is described in this fashion on the MUD's web site:

> Discworld MUD is a meritocracy – that is, the better the work you do (and in our case, the longer you hang around looking busy), the more projects you'll work on and the farther up the tree you'll advance.[44]

The ordinary recruitment base for new programmers is the player community and therefore the reputation you gain as a player will influence your chances of becoming a developer.[45] It is a requirement for new programmers to have at least five full days of playing experience on the MUD, but normally they have substantially more than that.

At the time my interviews were conducted, the developers and administration of *Discworld* consisted of around 180 people. The Trustees, that is the highest level of the organisation, consisted of eight of the developers. One of these, represented by the avatar Pinkfish, is the founder of the MUD. The developers and administration are organised as follows:

Trustee: A trustee belongs to a group of long-term developers that make general decisions about the further development of the MUD. They also have the final say in questions concerning employment of programmers, even though this is usually dealt with on lower levels in the organisation. Usually, the individual trustee also has some kind of responsibility for one or more domains (departments), either as leader or deputy. They also, as most of the administrative staff, programme for the MUD.

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[43] To become a citizen in one of the city-states on the MUD requires that someone vouch for the player. In every other respect this feature is open to all players.
[44] http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/about/admins.html last accessed June 27, 2008.
[45] Some of the player's conduct is registered in a file attached to the player's character, for instance if the player has been suspended for breaking the rules.

Director: A Director can have three roles: as a domain leader, domain deputy or a so-called developer. A developer usually leads a development team and also programmes.

Senior creator: Senior creators can also be domain deputies and are usually given responsibilities for advanced parts of the development. They can also have leadership responsibilities for other programmers.

Creator: Creators can both write textual descriptions of elements in the game or programme them. Most creators do both. The creators are members of one of the development teams on the MUD.

Liaison: This is a sub-category of the creators. Liaisons are responsible for helping out players that need help in understanding or playing the game. They also mitigate in conflicts between players and can, for instance, suspend players that are behaving erratically or are breaking the rules.

Playtester: These are players that test new code before it is integrated into the game. They can both test the functionality of the coding as well as evaluate descriptions of rooms, items and quests. Playtesters are distinguished from ordinary players by having access to information about coming features of the game, but are otherwise ordinary players.

When I planned my interviews, I wanted to capture a cross section of both the developer and the player base. All of my informants were experienced players and had been playing for between 80 and 375 full days. They had started playing the game between two and nine years before the interviews were conducted. Based on the information I had available, I calculated their average playing extent to be, on average, somewhere between one and five and a half hours every day. It was therefore not surprising that most of them had held several different positions on the MUD. The table below shows a list of the different positions they had held:

Table 4.1: Present and earlier roles and positions on the MUD

Characters	Player	Magistrate	Playtest	Liaison	Creator	Sn Cre.	Director
Lipwig (M, 24)	X						
Rincewind (M 26)	X						
Cutangle (M, 30)	X						
Aliss (F, 26)	X		X				
Magrat (F, 24)	X	X	X		X		
Detritus (M,29)	X				X		
Eskarina (F, 22)	X			X	X		
Twoflower (M, 29)	X				X		
Angua (F, 26)	X				X	X	
Mort (M, 32)	X				X	X	X
Esme (F, 29)	X		X		X	X	X

Many of them had also had more informal roles, for instance as columnists in a newspaper. Their involvement did, however, vary a lot over time, and most of the informants said that they had periods where they did not MUD at all. The player Lipwig had taken several breaks from the MUD and when I asked him why he returned, he replied:

> Now the last time it was because I read about the changes that were supposed to happen August 3rd. Then I became very keen on testing out the new stuff. Because … I used to play quite a lot, until April, but then I almost quit and started again only a month ago. It was a period there where I felt like … the only thing I could do was to talk with people and sure, I know people here, but I know people other places as well (M, 24).

The changes this informant refers to was a major update of the MUD that among other things included the introduction of a new continent with a large city and several new quests. In this case, the social aspect was not enough to keep the player on the MUD – it was rather an upgrade of the game content that reinvigorated his interest. In general, the social aspect, with its social obligations, was regarded as the most important reason for being involved in the game. It was however often not the reason they started playing, as the player Magrat explains:

> It is because I have been mudding for quite a long time. Five years now but it took me … now I'm getting a bit uncertain about that, but I think it took me two or three years before I grasped the whole concept of other people being present. It was then I got stuck. My first two or three years, I possibly managed to pull together 15 days of playtime and then in the latest period I

have played for 85 more. So it was that part that made me start doing it seriously (F, 24).

As this quote indicates, this informant took years to get on terms with the social life on the MUD. Magrat further explained how, at first, she was afraid of asking other players for help because she thought they might regard her as ignorant. When she created a new avatar and started playing in a friendly and socially active guild, she started taking part in the social life on the MUD as well, which again accelerated her involvement and playing extent. Other informants also described the game as difficult in the beginning, but it was usually the unfamiliar interface and syntax that were described as the greatest hurdles. Several informants had only stayed for a few minutes on their first encounter, but had eventually returned, sometimes several months later, and slowly managed to handle the interface and gameplay.

Although gaming is a central activity on *Discworld*, the reason that the players ended up on this MUD in particular might be related to aspects other than the fact that it is a game. Starting to play a multiplayer online computer game normally does not happen haphazardly but involves a considerable chain of willed events. The first step in starting to play *World of Warcraft*, for instance, is to get hold of a copy of the game and install it on a computer. The player then needs a bank account or permission from parents to use theirs, in order to create a playing account. Finally the player has to create an avatar. Edward Castronova has described in much detail all the steps involved in this process, from choosing a character type, finding a name that is not already taken, to deciding on race, class, looks and so forth (Castronova 2005). Starting to play *World of Warcraft* is simply not done on the spur of the moment.

A thread on the forums in *Discworld* indicates that the processes leading up to entering this MUD were the result of quite differing circumstances. In September 2002, a player started a new thread on the main board entitled 'How did we get here?' asking the player community in general how they found this exact MUD. Of the more than 100 responses in this thread, 67 of the players described the real-life circumstances that made them arrive at *Discworld*. These circumstances showed an intriguingly regularity. In all of the 67 cases, various combinations of one or more of the following five elements were mentioned: knowledge of the *Discworld* books; an

internet search for either the author or the *Discworld* series; a friend who already played, experience with other MUDs or games; description of the MUD in a magazine dedicated to the *Discworld* series; and, finally, free access to the internet. In the following example, most of these are present:

> I was on a trip to London via train with my mum and before we left Manchester, she suggested I buy a book to read. I eventually got Soul Music and laughed myself silly on the train, attracting many a stern glance from other traingoers.
>
> I did a search for Terry on the internet and found the mud. It didn't appeal to me much at first but when I went on it at school and one of my friends asked me what it was and got hooked as well, it got more exciting.
>
> I was only at college at the time and lost interest, not having a steady character and getting bored with alts.
>
> I went to university at Liverpool with a head full of good thoughts and working hard work, but soon got bored and realised that I had on my hands free internet access whenever I wanted. Perfect for mudding.[46]

The most common reason for entering the MUD, and reported by 27 players, was an interest in the *Discworld* books, combined with an inquiry in a search engine for either the book series or the author, Terry Pratchett. The second most common reason, and mentioned by 26 players, was that they had friends or family members that already played this specific MUD. Only eight of the respondents, or about 12%, reported other MUDs or games as the reason they had found *Discworld*. The respondents to this post only represent a small part of the player population, and general assumptions based on this material should of course be made with caution. It does however illustrate that many of the players were not particularly interested in games or MUDs before they started playing, but rather the fictional universe of which this MUD is an adaptation.

The MUD is, in many ways, an homage to the *Discworld* universe created by Terry Pratchett. The *Discworld* books are a humorous fantasy series with a literary position resembling that of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*. As of 2008, 36 novels have been released in this series. At the time of my interviews, around 30

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[46] Post on the board *Frog*, September 23, 2002.

had been published. Most of my informants had read all of these books, and several reported having read them two or three times. As one player stated, in response to the question, had you read many of the books before you started to play?:

> Informant: Yes, I had read almost all. Now I have also read the new ones that have come out.
> Researcher: Do you use any other MUDs?
> Informant: No. I have been on some but it's not the MUD, it's not mudding per se that is most appealing, because I tire of that after a few hours. It is Discworld that counts. So no, I have no interest in going anywhere else.
> Researcher: Is it the fact that the players have read the same books or the game that is most important?
> Informant: I think it's the game, but also the players since … if you read Pratchett you have a specific sort of humour. Some sort of maturity. In order to understand Pratchett you'll have to have a bit of … how shall I put it, not intelligence, but you must have read fairly much, because it's often quite advanced jokes (M, 24).

Another informant that worked as a liaison had read all of the books except the latest book in the series:

> Researcher: How important is the books?
> Informant: When I started playing they were very important. Because I really enjoyed them. I have kind of grown out of them, quite a lot. I mean, I probably will read Night Watch at some point. There's no doubt about it but I will probably only read it once, whereas I normally read books quite a lot of times.
> Researcher: Yeah. But had you been to other MUDs before you went to Discworld?
> Informant: No. I have logged on to a lot of MUDs. Just to see how they work. Looked at them for friends, but I have never played, no. That used to be because of Discworld, because I found the concept very interesting. I like the humour. But now it's because I believe that our MUD is far better run than most of the others. And I like the way it works and of course I've got my own life there. It's very comfortable, I've got my job and everything (F, 22).

Many of the players that enter this MUD are avid *Discworld* enthusiasts and interested in fiction and literature in general. This gives the players one important common reference point beside the MUD. As an aside, it can be mentioned that the nature of the conversation on the general chat in *Discworld* is dramatically more eloquent than the one we find in *World of Warcraft*, where statements are often short utterances like: 'lol, ur helmet looks gay'. Also in *Discworld*, while gaming is an important activity, the conversation, the social life and also the humour are important elements. This is a fact many of the player-run web sites dedicated to the *Discworld*

MUD bear witness to. Humorous excerpts from chat or private conversations from the MUD are among the most common contents of such sites. Below is an example of this:

> Ibblek Ookerton tells you: Twiggy! Dogbolter's going to delete me! ;)
> You exclaim to Ibblek Ookerton: I applaud his judgemen- I mean, that's terrible!
> Ibblek Ookerton eeks at you.
> Ibblek Ookerton sulks in the corner near you.
> You tell Ibblek Ookerton: Now now, I'm sure you deserve it.. You tell Ibblek Ookerton: Why's he going to delete you then ;)
> Ibblek Ookerton tells you: He said he was a cereal killer. All I asked was if that meant he was a frosted flake..[47]

Burnout and renewed interest

Most players of online games, however rich in features, will at some point exhaust the game and direct their interests elsewhere. The game researcher Nick Yee has described this as the *burnout* phase of the player career, where the player finally tires of grinding, raiding or the social life of the game.[48] After a period of absence, some of the players will return to the game and enter yet another phase. Yee calls this the *recovery* phase; where the player gets back and continues playing, usually with lower ambitions and a more casual playing style. Many of the reasons the players reach the burnout phase are related to a kind of disenchantment with the game. The experience of the game changes character, from being fun to resembling work. Excitement gets replaced with boredom. Yee explains that: '[k]nowing the situations and guilds that tend to make the game more work than fun, they consciously steer clear of them and make sure that the time they spend in the game is enjoyable rather than stressful.' (Yee 2007) Some of my informants reported a similar burnout experience. However, in *Discworld*, when the game is exhausted, rather than re-entering the game and playing more casually, the player might extend his or her career by joining the developers' side. As this informant explains:

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[47] http://*Discworld*.imaginary.com:5678/~twiggy/quotes, last accessed June 27, 2008.

[48] Yee distinguished between five different phases: Entry, Practice, Mastery, Burnout and Recovery, and presented this as the normal trajectory for a player of MMORPGs. Posted on his research web site October 14 2007. Available at:
http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/archives/001588.php?page=1. Last accessed June 27, 2008.

Toward the end of my playing days I became more and more a social player and not so involved in, you know, killing NPCs sort of thing.[49] And so yeah, in extension of that sort of thing. And if I hadn't become a creator I don't think I would still be playing (M, 29).

This represents a different solution to the burnout phase than Yee talks of, in fact, rather the opposite: instead of only *perceiving* the game as some sort of work, they actually start working for it. A prerequisite of this move is, of course, that game employment is a viable option. All the development of *Discworld* is based on volunteer work and even players without any programming experiences get hired and taught from scratch by more experienced developers. When this informant was asked why he became a creator, he explained that:

'cos I felt that I enjoyed playing so much. I could see the work that got into the place and I just thought I could contribute to this. 'Cos I've got pretty good English skills, you know, writing skills. And that's what I said at the time, I said: I can't code, but I can write pretty good room descriptions. And so yeah, it was to contribute to something that has given me so much. It was like to give something back almost (M, 29).

Also, here, the literary aspect of the MUD becomes visible, reflected in this player's ambition to write. As the MUD is solely based on text, enjoyment in writing as well as knowledge of the fictional universe is important for the developers. Another reason for the players to become developers was of their lengthy involvement in the social life of the MUD. They often described an emotional connection to the game that made it hard for them to break with it completely, even after they had exhausted most of its features. More than 17 years after its launch, some of the founders of the MUD were still a regular part of the community. In May 2008, more than five years after I conducted my last interviews, I ran a check on my informants to see which of them were still playing. Of my eleven informants, three had been online sometime during the last day on their main avatar; eight had been online during the last year, whereas the rest had last been online sometime during the last two years. Several of my informants had then been playing more or less regularly for more than a decade. Two of my informants had started playing *World of Warcraft*, and had migrated there along with a group of other players. One of them had left the following message in his

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[49] The players in *Discworld* normally don't distinguish between NPCs and monsters.

player info file: 'Playing WoW still, but trying to get MUSH client working well to try and play some here.'[50] For many players, interest in the game wanes over the years, but in this case the player displays an attachment to the game even years after being a regular player.

What was most striking about player careers, based on the descriptions of my informants, were the differences in their playing practices and involvement. While some players had an impressively wide range of interests, others had a more stable interest that got moulded into different positions or roles over time. I asked a female player, who had recently become a playtester, if it was hard to get motivated for playtesting. She replied:

> Informant: Oh, no. Because the great thing about playtesting is that you don't have to be playtesting all the time. So when I'm in the mood for it, which is quite often cause I am often exploring anyway, I will be exploring a totally new area. So no, it doesn't even interrupt my way of playing.
> Researcher: Yeah, you write that exploring was your kind of...
> Informant: Yeah, exploring and helping, that's what I do (F, 26).

For others, the change from being a player to becoming a creator could represent a leap in interest or a reorientation towards the game. One of the informants tells me that becoming a creator also had unforeseen consequences and describes the transfer from being a player to a developer in the following manner:

> You just don't care about numbers anymore. (laughs) It's as simple as that. As a player you constantly chase exp and try to improve your character. And when you become a creator you just realize it's not important anymore, and ... and suddenly the most important thing is writing room descriptions that people are going to enjoy, and things like that. And change, all of a sudden you realize it's just a game of numbers. Like I have spent years number chasing or whatever and as soon as you are hired it's just completely meaningless. And that's probably why you find 99% of the creators will say that playing is … you can play but you become more of a social player then because you realize that the numbers just don't mean anything. That's the biggest change I think. (M, 29).

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[50] Comment retrieved from the player's avatar information December 12, 2007. The information was later altered.

This informant describes a rather fundamental reorientation towards the game when he became a developer. For most players that are joining the developers' ranks, the change in position represents a new focus on the game. This is also explicitly mentioned on the application site of the official web site of the MUD, where they write that becoming a creator represents a 'major state change' which might even lead some developers to stop playing.[51] However, becoming a developer does not necessarily mean instant access to the power and prominence associated with this sphere. Another of my informants describes the transition from being a player to becoming a developer as difficult, somewhere between getting a new job and moving to a new area.

> Well, it was really hard at first, because people kind of still see you as a player rather than ... another creator or the person. I was rather lucky because as a player I was quite popular. Because I had been playing for a while. I was a playtester, creators knew me. So in comparison to other people who had it really rough I was kind of known, so it was easier to actually get to, um … get into it. But I think it was really hard to actually learn the code. Getting involved. People are busy when they are online so they are not very helpful at times. You have to find a few people that will actually help you out (F, 29).

This player also tells me that she was in the top ten of the highest ranked witches on the MUD. Joining the developers' ranks made her drop from a prominent position within one hierarchy to the bottom of another.

Since all the developers have been players, these two spheres are in many ways intimately related. When players enter the rank of developers, they will often still have many friends among the players. Their relationship will, however, change, since they suddenly get access to confidential information concerning both the game and other players. In this transition period the new creators will often be struggling to learn both their job as well as the social codes of the developer's field, while losing the ability to share their new experiences and knowledge with older friends. One of my informants who had been a developer for six years described the effect of this as the 'creator illness'. Regardless of what avatar she played on, if a player asked her a question she would never give a straight answer but rather tell the person to 'figure it

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[51] http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/creating/applying.html, last accessed June 27, 2008.

out yourself'. Despite the relative closeness of the players and developers, they are also part of a power relationship that separates them, and regulates how they interact.

Handling the player community

In this section I will look more closely at the mechanisms regulating the relationship between the players and the developers. There are basically three different ways the developers influence the player community: through game mechanics, game rules and the liaison function. The liaisons are a specific group of creators that have as their sole role to handle the player community. In this respect, they serve a dual function. On the one hand they have a combined police and game guide role toward the player community. They uphold the rules of the MUD as they are stated in the rule section of the help files, and monitor players that are in breach of them. They also help players that have, for instance, lost items, got stuck, or simply don't understand parts of the game. On the other hand, they are there to protect the rest of the developers from being interrupted by players with these issues when they are programming for the game. Since most of the developers are visible to the players when they are logged on, there is a considerable chance of being interrupted.[52]

Initially, the liaison function was not held in high regard. The main reason for this is that liaisons at first got hired rather indiscriminately and given very little training before they were sent to liaise. This resulted in many arbitrary decisions concerning the players and, for a while, liaisons had a bad reputation, both among the players and the developers. After several years, the liaisons eventually managed to create more stable and professional routines. A crucial tool for running the liaison domain was the boards:

> We've got three boards. One is the *Liaison* where we talk about general liaison matters, policy you know, what's happening within the domain. And we have two other boards about what we have been doing. *Player help*, which is where we say, oh I replaced such and such for Grim because there was a crash and he lost all his stuff. It is more for keeping in touch with each other and checking

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[52] The developers can make themselves invisible for ordinary players or other developers, depending on rank, with the 'invis' command. On the basis of the few times I have asked a developer to make a count of online developers, my impression is that most developers stay visible most of the time.

that we're not doing anything inappropriate. Checking that everyone is being consistent. There is another one called *Discipline*, which is rather more important, where essentially all the liaisons go: 'so and so is multiplaying. They passed this. I removed the item. I told them they would be suspended. I did this. Someone please suspend (F, 22).

As we see the *Liaison* board covers issues of a more general matter, while the two others are mainly used for coordinating the practical interaction with the players. The liaisons also have access to creator boards and, among them, one where bugs are reported, but often the loudness of complaints on the player boards is the best indication of how much of an issue a bug represents. My informant tells me that she reads the boards three times each day to be sure to be up to speed on every issue related to game mechanics on the MUD. Reading the player boards is also important as they often indicate the attitude to expect from a player, and how carefully they need to handle a request. My informant tells me that the players are often rude and explains that:

being rude is fine as well. I mean, people are rude all the time, you just kind of, ... it's this sort of a broken record technique: No, I'm sorry, I'm not going to replace your things. No, I'm sorry, I'm not going to replace your things. And you just keep repeating it over and over and they get the message. The people that are upsetting, or tough people that have obviously gone through the problem of finding out a bit about you, searching on the internet and saying: I'm going to come to your house. And I am going to kill your parents, and I am going to ... (laughs) They think there is no consequences to their actions so they can do whatever they like. After a while you just start realising that there might be the odd, very dangerous person out there, but most of them are just harmless and young and stupid (F, 22).

The liaisons in many ways function as fire extinguishers, or a running maintenance service that sorts out problems as they occur. This is in contrast to the game rules that are implemented by the developers and very seldom subject to change. These rules are also important as guidelines for the liaisons. Here is a short excerpt from the *help file*:

It is every player's responsibility to be aware of the rules. Ignorance of the rules will not be considered an excuse for breaking them. A fuller explanation of some rules is available in other files – see the list at the end of this file. If you are not sure about any of the rules, ask a creator for advice.

The spirit of the rules is important on Discworld – more important than the

letter of the rules! If you find a way to circumvent a rule, to technically not break it, while still going against the spirit of the rule, you are still judged to have broken the rule.[53]

This gives the liaisons a comfortable leeway with interpretation of the rules. However, the need for being consistent towards the player community limits the range of interpretation a liaison can apply in any given case. The general help file also offers more detailed descriptions of rules concerning different aspects of the game, for instance bug abuse, multiplaying, information about quest solutions and profane language. Most of these rules concern either social behaviour or abuse of flaws in the game mechanics. What these rules have in common is that they cover issues that are not handled through game mechanical means. Players that take advantage of bugs or other weaknesses will be able to enhance their avatars much faster than other players. This will in turn have social ramifications, since it creates an imbalance between law-abiding players and players that cheat. A common way to cheat just before my interviews were conducted was to use walkthroughs concerning quests, as quests at that time gave a substantial number of experience points when completed. This phenomenon will be analysed more closely in chapter seven. In this chapter I will focus on another way of getting an advantage, namely by multiplaying.

In its strictest definition, multiplaying implies having two avatars logged on simultaneously, using an old avatar to help a younger one to solve quests and fight monsters, or by allocating resources to it, for instance in the form of money. Multiplaying was a much debated issue, and one which actually got rules changed after my participant observation ended. Initially, it was regarded as cheating if a player, with the help of an older avatar, helped a newer one indirectly, for instance by sending money or equipment through the in-game mail system. The player community in *Discworld* did not know exactly how the developers supervised their actions, and I often observed players passing money or items to their *alts*, or alternate characters, via other players, hoping that the developers would not be able to trace these transfers. This was, on the whole, a correct assumption, since the main way the players were monitored was through tracking IP addresses. More than one avatar using the same IP address normally resulted in a ban. The reason for this strict multi-

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[53] Last accessed 12 December 2004. The information was later altered.

playing policy was allegedly to avoid players levelling avatars too quickly and using them to harass other players.

Multiplaying is also a known phenomenon on MMORPGs, and it is not usually allowable to play more than one avatar at the same time from one account. Very dedicated players circumvent this by having two or more accounts. This is usually done by the means of two or more computers and referred to as 'two-boxing' or 'multi-boxing'[54]. The prohibition on *Discworld* of helping an avatar by sending items or money is, however, in contrast to the policy in *World of Warcraft*, where players are encouraged to do this, in order to level them faster.[55] One of the effects of this is that you find many low level avatars in *World of Warcraft* that have gear and permanent enhancements (enchantments) that normally would be impossible to acquire at these levels. These avatars are usually referred to as twinks and often used for combating other players in battlegrounds.[56] René Glas has written about twinking in *World of Warcraft* and explains some of the controversy surrounding this issue:

> By levering virtual money from an old to a newly started character, this character's virtual life will have an easier start. Like in real life situations of potentially unfair wealth and power distribution, twinking is not always perceived positively. Is twinking unfair for those without a higher level 'sugar daddy', often newcomers to the game? Does it even exploit game design? (Glas 2007: 3)

In *World of Warcraft* the level restrictions on gear, magical enchantments and other enhancement artefacts like food and potions, limit the ways in which an avatar can be twinked, but with enough resources, and preferably help from friends, it is still possible to hugely overpower a low level avatar. When the level *cap* on avatars was 60, the best enchantments had no level restrictions. A low level avatar with rare gear in most slots and the most powerful enchants on their equipment, was a common twinking set-up. An avatar with such gear would be close to immortal when faced

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[54] In the player community, several terms describe this activity like dual-boxing, 3-boxing etc. See for instance Taylor 2006: 79.

[55] For instance by this startup screen tip: 'You can send mail to other players or even to your other characters from any mailbox in the game.' From screen shot acquired March 14, 2006.

[56] The battlegrounds are special areas of the game where only a certain number of players can enter at the same time. This is normally players from the different fractions that fight against each other. The battlegrounds have level restrictions where only players between level 10-19, 20-29, 30-39 etc. can play together. Twinks are normally at the highest possible level of each group i.e. level 19 or 29.

with ordinarily equipped avatars at the same level, even when outnumbered. Glas describes several motivations the player might have for indulging in twinking; it can for instance be regarded as a form of luxury play. One of the effects of this twinking praxis is that it has created a hyperinflation on rare items, where for instance a level 19 rare weapon can cost several times as much as a rare level 70 weapon.

In *Discworld*, twinking does not have this kind of economic effect, as there is no equivalent to the auction houses of *World of Warcraft*, where all players can offer goods to the general community. One reason for the strict multiplaying rules in *Discworld*, besides the possibility of creating harassment avatars, was that developers wanted to avoid an imbalance between avatars with or without an older donating avatar. The question is whether this possibility should be regarded as an innate aspect of the multiplayer game genre, and hence a fair form of play, or rather a type of cheating. A complicating factor is that there are many other ways to enhance a low level character, for instance by getting help from a friend with a higher level avatar. The original strict policy regarding multiplaying in *Discworld* made the liaison function more of a surveillance job than a service function. One of the developers explains why they eventually changed the rule:

> Over the years successively more restrictive individuals, either through a genuine belief or a need to stamp their opinion on something, tightened and expanded the definition to include many different things that really weren't in the scope of the original spirit and frankly were in danger of turning the liaison domain into a Stasi. So whilst we had a window of opportunity we effectively returned the rule to its original spirit but had to represent it as a policy change because the policy was perceived to be what it currently was, which wasn't correct.[57]

The result of this change was that it became legal to send items or money to an alt, but to play them simultaneously was still conceived as illegal.

As in real life, there are limits to what degree a community can be put under surveillance. This is first and foremost a matter of resources, and secondly a question of what kind of community you are aiming at; if, for instance, you are willing to let a feeling of suspicion permeate the community in question. The need for having some

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[57] Mail correspondence June 7, 2007.

sort of surveillance and control over virtual communities is, on the other hand, documented quite widely as players or participants in online communities often display anti-social and exploitative behaviour when their real life identity can be hidden (see for instance Smith & Kollock 1999, Dibbell 1998).

Beside harassment, an idea of fairness seems to be an important reason behind the multiplaying rules in *Discworld*. A basic challenge with multi-user games is to provide a fair playing arena for different kinds of players. There will always be differences in skills and abilities among the players, but game mechanics should normally not contribute to amplifying differences. Flaws and weaknesses in game design is one element some players will exploit, entailing the risk of unbalancing the player community. In order to plug loopholes and amend flaws in the design, most multiplayer online games employ people to monitor the game and to handle the player community, like the liaisons I have described. However, there exists another way to deal with these shortcomings: by letting the game community monitor themselves.

Citizenship

On *Discworld*, in addition to the general rules created by the developers, the players can create their own. This can be done in several ways, for instance through player run clubs, which will be analysed in chapter six. What I will focus on here is a function called citizenship. In *Discworld* there are four city-states that provide the players with the opportunity to become a citizen, and citizens can vote for new rules and become magistrates. There are 13 immutable rules formulated by the developers that are equal for all city-states, and the first one states that: 'Magistrates may apply punishments to players if they break the rules, at the magistrates' discretion abiding by any current rules.'[58] The players implement rules after a voting process where all citizens have the opportunity to vote. When implemented, it is the magistrates' responsibility to ensure that these rules are followed. The magistrates effect punishment if a player is in breach of the rules, usually by imprisonment, a fine, banishment from the city or by loss of citizenship. Every player can choose freely whether to become a citizen or not, but some privileges, like house renting, require

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[58] http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/secure/nomic_rules.c?type=area&area=Djelibeybi, last accessed June 7, 2008. Player account needed for access.

citizenship, and only citizens can vote on new laws.

It should be noted that a large number of the players are not citizens anywhere on *Discworld*, and that these player-enforced laws do not apply to them. Some of them are fiercely against citizenship and have stated on the public channels and on the boards that they are severely opposed to the possibility of other players 'controlling' or supervising their behaviour in any way. One of my informants put it like this:

> In the beginning I followed the citizenship boards very closely, since I am a bit reluctant to let another online person get this kind of control. There are some people I don't trust enough for this kind of power. But at the same time I … I'm not sure how important it is. At some point I made a conscious decision not to be part of it, because I didn't believe in the idea. I don't think that you in a competition-based game should let players have this kind of influence over the game (M, 24).

The protests from the players did not cause any change in the citizenship feature, however. Before the citizenship feature was introduced, some of the players thought that this would be a way to solve social issues among the players, as it was originally perceived as something that would cover the whole MUD, and not just the major cities. Another of my informants tells me that he was disappointed about the watered down field of legislation they ended up with:

> I was initially in favour of this feature, as we thought this would be some sort of player killing council that covered the whole disc and not limited to the different cities as it turned out. As it is now, it is just nonsense. A group of people suggesting laws that are totally irrelevant. Sitting there and just acting like politicians (M, 30).

The limited application, both geographically and demographically, severely limited the impact of this feature. The most important limitation was however made by placing the council rules on a level lower than the general rules of the MUD. A rule made by a council would in effect be regarded as illegal if it was in conflict with the basic rules of the MUD, as well as with the 13 immutable rules in the council manifest. Despite these limitations, some of the players spent much time developing the legislation, but also reported a sense of resentment. One of the reasons for this was that the rules weren't fully integrated with the game mechanics. A female creator explains that:

We have said that we can't start coding a lot of new features for the councils, and that they have to manage on their own. But there are of course some things that don't work, like for instance the Ankh-Morpork magistrates that can punish players by banning them from the city. The systems for catching people don't really work and people can still move about in the city, as long as they manage to get into town. This is a kind of issue that we should fix (F, 26).

One of the reasons for the limited impact of the citizen feature was the lack of game mechanical solutions to support the legislation. This illustrates the interdependence between game mechanics and socially instigated rules. Legislators simply need power behind their words. As described in the previous chapter, the citizenship feature of *Discworld* was inspired by the game *Nomic*. *Nomic* is a much more radical game, since it includes the possibility of altering every rule of the game. The developers of *Discworld* only partly relinquished the power to the players, a move that was most probably necessary to prevent the game spiralling out of control. System-theoretically speaking, the developers wanted to avoid the situation of players acting like a positive feedback mechanism that pushed the game along a trajectory where order could not be reinstated.

Regardless of these limitations, citizenship had an impact on the interaction among players and more than eight years after its introduction a steady trickle of new laws and amendments is being added to the legislation of the different city-states.[59] One of the issues that got handled by the player community concerns a phenomenon known as *kill stealing*. As mentioned in chapter two, in *Discworld* it is possible for a player to get experience points from killing a monster after another player has initiated the fight. In effect, a player can walk into a room and deliver the final blow, thus getting the experience points, after another player has been working on that monster for a minute.[60] This is different from *World of Warcraft*, where only the person that initiated the fight will get the experience points. The ability to steal kills is subject to much debate among players, and not surprisingly it is subject to player laws in all of

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[59] This feature was first introduced in Ankh-Morpork in 2000, and later expanded to other areas of the MUD. The date when the laws are passed are registered on the web site: http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/secure/nomic_rules.c last accessed June 27, 2008. Player account needed.

[60] A player engaged in a fight will also often have to move to another room to recover during the fight, and hence be out of sight of the monster. Other players that happen to move into the room with the monster will therefore not know if someone is currently engaged in a fight with it.

the city states. Here is an excerpt from the law in *Klatch*, one of the city states on the MUD:

> Kill stealing is illegal within the Klatch domain. Kill stealing is defined as attacking one or more NPCs when a player character was in that particular room before you arrived, and did not leave that room.
> …
> It is considered unlawful to attack a NPC within 2 minutes of seeing it in combat with another player unless permission is obtained from that player.
> …
> Possible punishments for both the original law and the amendment may include fines, jail time, banishment, or loss of citizenship depending on the severity of the crime(s).[61]

One of the reasons for kill stealing being considered such a big issue, beside that of the time spent, is because players often spent resources such as healing tea to get the monsters down. This specific player-created rule indirectly serves two purposes, as it is both a way to make up for limitations in the game mechanics, as well as reducing some of the pressure on the liaison function. As such, it represents a layer of order between the fundamental game mechanics and the general codes of conduct formulated and enforced by the developers. In a social perspective, it might be considered a level of order on a *meso* level of the game system, influencing groups of players in a range somewhere between individuals and the MUD community as a whole.

Within social science, the concept meso is used to describe different mid-level social entities, like institutions, norms, laws and technologies (Foster & Potts 2007). Most social analysis seems to focus on the macro or micro level of the system, rather than on the meso, but there is a branch within the field of evolutionary economics that have put their conceptual focus on exactly the mid-level of the system because, as they state: "The micro–macro framework lacks a meso perspective, and so it cannot deal adequately with evolutionary concepts and mechanisms" (Dopfer, Foster & Potts 2004: 277). These economists describe the meso level as crucial to be able to understand *change* and evolvement in an economic system. They further state that,

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[61]http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/secure/nomic_rules.c?type=area&area=Djelibeybi, last accessed 20 November 2007. This law was later altered.

The economic system is a rule-system contained in what we call the meso. From the evolutionary perspective, one cannot directly sum micro into macro. Instead, we conceive of an economic system as a set of meso units, where each meso consists of a rule and its population of actualizations. The proper analytical structure of evolutionary economics is in terms of micro–meso–macro. (Ibid: 263)

The micro component, in their use of the term, is the agent or an individual person acting in the economic system. In a multiplayer computer game, such an agent would be the individual player. What is interesting with this economic theory is that rules are identified as belonging to the meso domain and not to the micro level of the system. If we return for a minute to the discussion concerning emergence from the last chapter, we saw that computer games were described as consisting of two levels, the micro and the macro. The micro level contains the rules and the macro, the emergent phenomenon, the realization of the game. However, the social implementation of the citizen feature is not possible to explain only with reference to the micro or macro level of the system. It is based on (micro) game mechanical features, but is realized on a social meso level of the game. There is obviously some sort of discrepancy between these two distinctions, the two-level game structure and a three-level social structure of the game. The problem seems to be how to define a meso level of a technological system. It might be that the distinction between rules and laws that Andreas Gregersen has argued for will come to our rescue. As mentioned in the previous chapter, according to Gregersen, rules are the part of the game mechanics that the players 'are supposed to understand' whereas laws contain what is physically possible in the game universe (Gregersen 2005). In a single-player game the distinction between rules and laws can be difficult to apply analytically, but with reference to socially upheld rules in a multiplayer game universe, this makes perfect sense. What is important to remember is that the locally developed rules, the social meso order in the system, cannot solely be explained with reference to its social foundation, as these rules might be dependent on game mechanical features to have any impact. The technology and social structure in this respect forms a functional symbiosis. To understand their relation we would need to define parts of the game mechanics as directly related to the meso level of the system, mechanics used for social purposes.

Summary

This chapter is an investigation of the relationship between the developers, players and the game and hence goes to the heart of my research question. The small size of the MUD and the way it recruits developers contribute to a relatively intimate relationship between players and developers. The need for surveillance and supervision of the player community instigates a layer of distance between these two spheres. Players who become developers climb first a player hierarchy and then the developer hierarchy. It is interesting to note that the transition from player to developer, for some, represents a fundamental breach in orientation towards the game, but for others it represents a new opportunity to act out a preferred way of using the MUD. Starting programming or administrating for the MUD can, for some, function as a kind of recovery phase, after they have exhausted the game arena as a player.

I have described three ways the developers monitor and manage the players: through game mechanical means, codes of conduct and the liaison function. The game mechanics can be described as the basic tool for regulating player behaviour as these influence what actions are possible in the game. The game's code of conduct and the liaison function on their hand can be regarded as ways to amend shortcomings in the game mechanics. The citizenship feature is different from these control mechanisms as it is a tool for social management designed for the players and entirely at their disposal. As such, it represents an attempt by the developers to relinquish some of the power to the player base, but also to turn over some of the responsibilities involved in handling the player community. The citizenship feature illustrates the interrelationship of game mechanics and socially defined rules as it needs programmed features in order for the rules to be effected. The introduction of the meso level has been important in order to capture this dynamic relationship between the technological and societal aspects of the game. Another example of how such meso level entities might function will be further explored in the next chapter, where raiding guilds in *World of Warcraft* are the main object of analysis.

5

High-end game

In this chapter I will take a closer look at one of the most complex social phenomena in *World of Warcraft* – raiding. There are several options for organising collective activities in *Discworld*, but there is no equivalent to raiding encounters. Raiders are organised in guilds, which also represent complex social systems with guild leaders, class leaders and other special positions. Raiding in many ways resembles team sports but, I will argue, also has some interesting differences. My analysis will focus on the relationship between game mechanics and team play. As raiding guilds represent sub-communities of the player community, I will use this analysis to discuss the development on this mid-range or meso level entity within the game environment. To make this analysis accessible also to readers without experience or knowledge of raiding, the first part of this chapter is mainly descriptive, explaining the basic game elements and player roles involved in raiding.

My participant observation within raiding guilds began in the spring of 2006 and ended in the autumn of 2007, with short periods of inactivity. During my research I was a member of several raiding guilds. For two short periods I was an officer in a guild and also, in one period, class leader for the paladin class. Beside my observational study, web sites dedicated to different raiding guilds have provided empirical material for this chapter.

Complex gameplay

Being a member of a raiding guild involved getting exposed to a more instrumental way of playing than I was used to. One great benefit of being in a raiding guild as a researcher is that you get easy access to players that are highly knowledgeable about

game mechanics, and have extensive knowledge of how the different classes can be played. More importantly, it has given me first hand information about the game strategies involved, as well as some of the social dynamics, both in raids and within the raiding guild in general.

Being an officer in a raiding guild gave me another perspective on the raiding enterprise, as I quickly realised that an incredible amount of time had to be dedicated to discussing policy issues, creating long term raiding strategies and simply keeping up with the daily maintenance of the guild. A class leader has responsibility for making sure that avatars of the same class have optimal equipment and have modified, or *specced*, their avatar adequately for the role they play in raids. Class leaders and other officers will often also get enquiries from ordinary members about topics ranging from game mechanics, through policy issues to private life incidents. One of the important roles of an officer is simply to keep the players happy and to pay heed to their needs. On the other hand, the officers have to make sure the players adhere to the guild policy and behave properly.

Most raiding guilds are structured according to a ranking system that gives the members titles and positions according to how often they raid, how generally helpful they are, or how long they have been part of the guild. Initiates in a raiding guild are usually at the very bottom of this hierarchy, and will have to go through a trial period where they have a limited set of rights before becoming full members of the guild. In this period they may, for instance, not get any loot during raids. In one sense, the raiding guilds resemble the social structure of *Discworld*, as there is often a clear divide between the guild officers that are running the guild and ordinary members. The guild leaders have their own chat channel and forums on the web site that only they can access. In my experience, also, officers rarely included the ordinary members in discussions concerning guild policy, promotions or applications from prospective members. Before describing the social life in more detail, I will give a description of the raiding enterprise.

In *World of Warcraft*, there are specific parts of the game that are designed especially for raids. These are called instance zones, or *instances*. An instance is a dungeon that gets duplicated every time a new group of players enters. There is an upper limit of

how many players can enter any instance simultaneously, from five in the smallest to forty in the largest. This prevents the players from overpowering the monsters by sheer numbers. The five-man instances are called party instances, and the larger ones, raiding instances. There are several differences between these. The loot in raiding instances is normally much better than in party instances; in most cases offering high quality, or *epic,* items. A party instance also can be finished, or *cleared,* several times in rapid succession, whereas raiding instances have a timer that allows for clearing only once every three to seven days. This is a mechanism that prevents hard-core raiding guilds from clearing instances repeatedly in a short time span, and in effect slows down their raiding progress.

Instances contain obstacles represented by ordinary monsters and bosses. The monsters, also called *trash mobs*, must be cleared for the group to access the bosses, and this, in effect, prolongs the time needed to clear the instance. Although the monsters can be quite a handful, it is the bosses that represent the real challenge. Every boss has a range of different offensive attacks and often, also, supporting monsters, or *adds*, that complicate the fight. The strength of the bosses compared to individual avatars might seem highly imbalanced, both with regard to health points and the amount of damage they can do. A normal avatar, with the exception of the tanks, usually has between 6.000 and 10.000 health points. Trash mobs can have several times this amount, whereas the toughest bosses might have several million health points. Some of the bosses can kill an avatar, or even groups of avatars, in one single blow. The only way to *overcome* this imbalance is by organising the group play according to a strict division of labour. I will now give a short description of the different roles players have when fighting in groups, namely damage dealers, healers, tanks and crowd controllers.

Damage dealers
The ability to deal enough damage, and the right kind of damage, is important in instances and each avatar class has one or several distinct fighting techniques. For the majority of classes this means specialising in either melee or magic-based fighting. The most fragile avatar classes are the cloth wearers that fight at a distance, using spells and magical powers. Hunters also normally fight at range, but with the aid of more conventional weapons like guns and bows. Hunters also have pets they can send

to distract the monsters while they kill them from a distance. Paladins, shamans, rogues and warriors all indulge in close combat by using melee weapons. Druids are among the most versatile classes and can fight both in close combat by being shape-shifted to cat or bear form, and by using magic when shape-shifted into moonkin form.

Different types of monsters are often immune to specific types of damage. Skeletons are, for instance, immune to rogues' rupture attack, and water elementals cannot be frozen or slowed by a mage. In other cases, a class might have a special advantage over a type of monster. Paladins, for instance, have several special abilities and attacks that only work on undead monsters. Being a successful party or raid leader requires having as much knowledge of the different abilities of the classes as possible, as this affords the widest range of options in the different encounters.

Healers

There are four classes that are able to heal: shamans, druids, priests and paladins. The classes have more or less equal healing capacities, but apply different techniques. Healing requires *mana*, and having a large mana pool and good mana regeneration is important for these classes. Some healing spells work directly while others place a healing *buff* (a spell or effect that increases some of the avatar's abilities) on the target that generates heals for a set amount of seconds. Most healing spells have a casting time, ranging from 1.5 up to several seconds, and will usually have to be cast while standing still. Timing is therefore important when healing, in order to anticipate when the damage will land on the target. In raiding groups with many healers, a mix of different healing classes usually works best, as they all have different strengths.[62]

Tanks

The main functions of the tank are to hold the attention of a boss and to soak up large amounts of damage without dying. This is done by focusing on gear and abilities that give the avatar maximum protection, as well as increasing its number of hit points, or health. The penalty for this specialisation is that the avatar will not be able to do much

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[62] The paladins, for instance, have very mana efficient direct heals, but no healing over time spells. Priests have a large number of healing spells, but being cloth wearers, they are more exposed to random damage.

damage. There are three classes that can tank: warriors, druids and paladins. Before *The Burning Crusade* expansion, warriors were regarded as superior at tanking, being very good at attracting the attention of the monsters as well as having many mitigating abilities. After this expansion, the three classes are more similar in their tanking abilities, even though the playing techniques involved have many differences.[63]

Crowd controllers

Crowd controlling is the ability to incapacitate monsters without harming them or killing them. This ability is very important, as monsters often are grouped together in such a manner that if you *pull* one monster, several others will follow. Tanks are usually only able to tank a limited number of monsters, and the additional monsters, called *adds*, will have to be dealt with by the rest of the group. Crowd controllers cut through all of the three categories already mentioned, as most classes have some abilities to control one or several monsters.[64] When these are incapacitated, the group has to kill some of the other monsters before they get out of stasis. The list of ways the different classes can incapacitate monsters for shorter or longer periods of time is quite extensive, but there are two types of limitations for all of them. The first is that they can only be used on certain types of monsters and secondly, that they have a set time limit. As most of these abilities also have a *cooldown* period before they can be used again, it is important to know when to apply the different methods.

Boss fights – the real deal

In most boss fights the tank's job is to attract and hold the attention of the boss during the whole fight. Damage dealers will do damage to the boss as well as to the additional monsters, called *adds*. Here crowd control is important, as in many cases it will be more efficient or safe to incapacitate the adds rather than killing them. All

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[63] Warriors and paladins can wear both plate and shield, giving good mitigation against damage. Druids can tank when shape shifted into bear form, which gives them a large amount of health as well as armour.

[64] Of the most used crowd control abilities we find the mage's polymorph ability that will render a monster (human or beast) harmless for up to 50 seconds, and the rogues ability to stun, or *sap*, a humanoid target for up to 45 seconds. Other crowd control abilities include the priest's ability to mind control humanoid monsters, making them attack other monsters. Warlocks can *banish* elemental monsters for 30 seconds and *charm* humanoids, whereas hunters have different traps that can both incapacitate or slow monsters down.

boss fights have a timer, which means that after about 10 minutes the boss will get enraged, killing the whole raid in a matter of seconds. Often the boss, or the adds, will do damage on the whole raid, forcing the healers to divide their attention accordingly. It is often necessary to have dedicated healers for the tank and *off-tanks* as well as other particular groups that are subject to damage in periods during the fight.

Most boss fights are separated into different phases, where each phase consists of a new fighting technique on the part of the boss, demanding a new corresponding strategy from the players. The phases are often related to the boss's health, so when, for instance, the health gets down to 75%, a new phase starts. The phases are usually structured in one of two ways. Either the boss goes through a sequence of two or more unique phases, or it will alternate between two states during the whole fight.[65] In most boss fights, there are several strategies that work, and the challenge is to find out what works best with the group of avatars available.

Speaking in terms of game mechanics, each monster and boss has a so-called *threat list*, where every individual avatar will constantly be supervised with regard to how much of a threat they represent to the boss.[66] The damage dealers have to balance their damage output against the threat the tank produces during the whole fight. Also

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[65] For instance, the boss Prince Malchezaar in the 10-man instance Karazhan, has three unique phases. During the whole fight infernals will be summoned at random spots around the boss and deal so-called *area on effect* damage (AOE) which affects avatars within a specific area around them. This means that the avatars will have to move out of the way of the AOE damage several times during the fight, slowing down or interrupting both healing and damage dealing. If the raid is unlucky, they might get boxed in by the infernals, unable to get out of their damage. The boss performs a mix of physical and magical attacks and the most significant is his enfeeble *debuff*, a spell that negatively affects the avatar, reducing the health of five random avatars to 1 health point at specific intervals. If they receive any damage while affected by enfeeble, for instance by the infernals, they will die. The first phase lasts until Malchezaar's health is down to 60%. In the second phase he discontinues some of his magical attacks and increases his melee damage to the tank. This makes it necessary for the healers to heal more heavily during this phase. The third phase starts when the boss' health is 30%. In this phase his damage to the tank is reduced and he also stops using enfeeble. The infernals on the other hand spawn much more rapidly and finishing the boss off is basically a race against the clock. In this particular fight, one important issue is deciding where to position and move the boss during the fight.

[66] To be more precise, each class represents a different amount of threat based on their damage or healing output. Different spells or attacks within each class also generate different amounts of threat. Key knowledge is to understand how to deal maximum damage with the minimum of threat. This is also the game mechanical reason for tanks being able to generate large amounts of threat while doing very little damage.

healing indirectly generates threat, and too many large heals at the wrong moment can attract the attention of the boss. If a damage dealer or healer gets to the top of the threat list, the boss will usually charge that avatar and kill it. The whole fight centres on the issue of keeping the tank at the top of the threat list. Normally more than one tank is at the top, so in case the first tank or *main tank* is killed, another one can take over. A boss can also incapacitate the tank or charge other avatars at random, and if, for instance, the boss runs away from the tank while charging after a mage, the tank might have a problem regaining the attention of the boss. The boss will then go for the damage dealers on top of the threat list, killing parts of or possibly the whole raid. A boss fight in a raiding instance involves a carefully coordinated effort from the whole group and one individual player can easily destroy an attempt to bring down a boss with bad judgement or incompetent playing.

Addons

A boss fight is also a very information-laden experience, where many factors must be monitored at the same time. The healers, for instance, need to monitor the health of the whole raid. Sometimes debuffs that effect the raid will also have to be dispelled by healers or others. To make this monitoring more easy, players have developed a large range of addons that simplify many of these tasks. Some addons are developed especially for boss fights and will alert the players when a boss enters a new phase or is about to perform a special attack. Other basic tools for a raiding guild are programmes that display lists of those who do most damage and healing, as well as who generates most threat. Most raiding guilds make a list of addons that all of their members are required to have. In addition, most classes have addons developed especially for their needs. For instance, the classes that are able to buff the rest of the raid can have addons that monitor the duration left of the buffs. For some classes the normal 3D interface of the game is completely cluttered with different information windows. In the screen below we see how most of this healer's screen is filled with different information windows.

Figure 5.1: Screen shot from a 40-man raid in Molten Core

This player has also altered the ordinary interface in several ways, as can be noticed on the avatar icon and the positions of the buttons. This picture is taken during a break in the raid and even more information windows will pop up when the fighting starts again. This interface transforms the playing experience from being a three-dimensional simulation of a fighting scene, to some sort of control panel. The calculations involved in such a fight, where the actions and abilities of 40 avatars are calculated against the abilities of the boss, are normally hidden from the interface or shown as flashing graphics and sometimes numbers. These addons pull the numbers out of the system and organise them in orderly rows or bars displaying real-time statistics.

During a raid, many different logistical and tactical issues are being dealt with. The raid leader will usually start by explaining the general structure of the coming encounter and give different sub-groups in the raid specific tasks to focus on. The guild will normally use some sort of speech system so orders can be given quickly, both before and during the encounter, as the leader may need to redirect players or give additional instructions. Normally only the raid leader, the main tank and the class leaders or officers will be able to speak during the raid. When practising on a new

boss, ordinary members may be allowed to contribute with tactical suggestions but this is usually done through the chat system.

A raid can be analysed in many ways. It could, for instance, be analysed as a social hierarchy with different positions and functions. Here I will only direct the attention to one structural phenomenon of the raid encounter: the conflict between collective and individual goals. As mentioned previously, different addons are important, sometimes vital, when raiding. The addon *damage meter* is not the typical raiding addon, as it is not really necessary for anyone's performance; it rather gives everyone the ability to monitor how participants in the raid are performing. Many different activities are registered by this addon but, in my experience, damage dealing and healing are the activities that most players comment on. Sometimes, it is a perceivable competition going on between different players. A quite common result of this is that raid members neglect other tasks during the raid in order to stay on top of the damage meter, for instance the task of removing debuffs from the raid participants that can hurt or kill the affected avatars. T.L. Taylor has described how this sociotechnical object might affect raids.

> For some guild and raid leaders damage meters are seen as promoting unhealthy competition that leads to the overall detriment of the group. Individual (over-) achievement (seeking to be top of the damage meter) can be seen as jeopardizing the group's success (Taylor 2006a: 328).

Passive tasks like debuffing can be just as vital for the success of the raid, but will make players perform more poorly in the damage meter. This competitive focus might sometimes also lead players to *overaggro*, meaning that their threat gets higher than the tank. As explained, this can ruin an attempt at a boss. An important task for the raid leader is to simply make sure that the players maintain focus on the common goal and not on their individual achievements.

In sum, the raid encounter is a dynamic and complicated activity that is handled by the players in a number of ways. The raid leader plays an important role, both by arranging the set-up of the raiding group and by deciding on tactics during the different encounters. The manipulation of the interface is another method of simplifying the raid encounter, since it lets the most important information reach the attention of the players. Last, since each new boss encounter is unique and always

seems chaotic or difficult at first, repeating and practising the different encounters is important. The conflict between the individual and collective goals that I have described is also evident on a more general level in a raiding guild, instigating new forms of social management in relation to the distribution of loot. This is a topic I will explore more thoroughly, but first, a short description of the raiders' placement in the overall game community.

Casual versus hard core players

A survey conducted when the maximum level was 60 shows that, during a sample period of one month, 30% of the level 60 avatars did partake in end game raiding activities, but only 5% of the total number of avatars. (Ducheneaut et al. 2006b: 310). These numbers will probably be higher now, as the game has been running for several more years and more of the casual players will have reached the maximum level and be engaged in high-end gaming. There have also been alterations in game content that make it more viable for smaller guilds and more casual players to partake in the end game playing and get access to epic quality equipment. Several game mechanical changes are involved in this but the main change is that the largest raiding instances are reduced in size from 40-people to 25-people. Ordinary 5-people instances can also be played in *heroic* mode, with an increase in difficulty as well as in loot, including epic items on the loot table. After the release of *The Burning Crusade* expansion, we could witness a large restructuring of the guilds on many servers. On Bronzebeard, most of the earlier top ranked raiding guilds disbanded or stopped raiding for a period, as the players devoted their time to reaching the new maximum level. After a few weeks or months, many guilds, as well as a number of new guilds, continued raiding.

Raiding is a form of playing that requires knowledge about the raid encounters as well as the class of the avatar. It simply demands skills and a certain focus on performance. Occasionally you will meet players that are strikingly oblivious to basic game mechanics, including what equipment to wear and what statistics to focus on. With a little attention to basic game mechanics, some players could easily have multiplied damage output several times, and dramatically shortened the levelling time of their avatar. In this respect *World of Warcraft* is a simple game, as it is possible to get on and also play with a limited knowledge of how the game functions. Where raiding is

considered, the bar is raised considerably with regard to knowledge of the game. Some players have an in-depth knowledge about the game's inner workings that average players will never understand. Some calculations are of such complexity that it requires real effort, as well as math skills, just to understand them.[67] This is an interest also observed in other MMORPGs. T.L. Taylor describes an experience where she meets two hardcore players from *EverQuest*. She is at the house of one of the players and the conversation gets increasingly more technical:

> Despite some paltry attempts at joining in, I was essentially unable to relate to their experience of the game. It was unfamiliar. What they focused on and highlighted generally were not the things I paid careful attention to. While I was not an unknowledgeable player – I certainly know which was my best weapon and set of spells, knew where to hunt, even had my eye on a new outfit to upgrade my abilities – their intent and focus had a different quality. Like those nonplayers I had tried to talk to in the past, this time I was the one just listening, somewhat confused, somewhat bemused and mostly feeling like I was peeking at an unfamiliar world. Mitch and Josh played a different *EverQuest* than I did. (Taylor 2006b: 68)

Despite the fact that the game is manageable with just a superficial understanding of its inner workings, the complexity of the game universe seems to encourage this kind of involvement. It is important to remember that this game complexity is not only realised because of computational power. Gary Alan Fine's study of fantasy role-players describes players that could spend several years within the same game universe and hours discussing intricacies of the nature of the universe (Fine 1983). Sherry Turkle has made a similar observation in her studies. In her book *The Second Self* she describes a player that loved to immerse himself into the fantasy role-playing game *Dungeon & Dragons*:

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[67] The following excerpt from a post describing the mage talent ability *ice shards* on wowwiki.com might illustrate this:
Without Ice Shards, the expected amount of damage one does with spells is:
$C \times 1.5 \times A + (H-C) \times A + (1-H) * 0$
With Ice Shards, one expects:
$C \times (1.5 + (T/10)) \times A + (H-C) \times A + (1-H) \times 0$
The percentage difference would be:
$((C \times (1.5 + (T/10)) \times A + (H-C) \times A) - (C \times 1.5 \times A + (H-C) \times A)) / (C \times 1.5 \times A + (H-C) \times A)$
This expression simplifies to:
$T \times C / (5C + 10H) \ \forall \ T = \{0,1,2,3,4,5\}, \ 0 \leq C \leq 1, \ 0 \leq H \leq 1,$ and $(H-C) \geq 0$[67]
For a more indepth explanation, please visit http://www.wowwiki.com/Ice_Shards, last accessed April 6, 2008.

> After reading seven D and D books 'about twenty times each' he certainly
> knows more about the structure of dungeon universes than he does about any
> moment in history. He knows more about the behaviour of magic users than
> about any person who ever lived. What he learns in social-studies class about
> real history is pale in contrast to what he experiences in D and D. 'I mean',
> says Jarish, 'in D and D there is so much data' (Turkle 1984: 81).

In role-playing games, knowledge of the game universe is a prerequisite for both
being able to play properly and getting immersed in the game. Unlike traditional
fantasy role-playing games, in *World of Warcraft* the player does not need to know
anything about the lore of the universe, but can focus on game mechanics more
indiscriminately. Given the complexity of the game, this can still result in the most
erudite inquiries into game design, which the many wikis and resource sites on the
Internet, and also occasionally player forums, bear witness to. Concerning raids, there
are a vast number of descriptions and videos explaining successful tactics regarding
different boss encounters. This general openness with regard to information should be
considered alongside the fact that the players are also in a competitive situation.

As mentioned, there is a certain level of competitiveness within a raiding guild. This
also applies to the relationship between the guilds. On the official forum dedicated to
the different servers, the players organise lists that monitor raid progress on each
server by listing the bosses in the raiding instances.[68] This makes it easy to monitor
which guilds have progressed furthest into the raiding dungeons. It also makes it
possible to monitor which of the guilds have the best raiding *progress*. Since the
different servers went online at different times, there can be large differences in raid
progress from one server to the next. This makes it more reasonable to compare
progress on a server level, and emphasises the experience of belonging to a specific
server. Raiding guilds have an impact on the larger player community in several
ways, both because much of the content is designed to keep this dedicated player
group happy, and because they have an impact on how the rest of the population is
structured. In contrast to hard-core raiding, there are still many players on *World of
Warcraft* that play most of the time alone, in duos or in small groups. They might not
be aware at all that there is an ongoing competition between the different raiding
guilds. They will, however, indirectly feel the ramifications of the raiding guilds, for

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[68] The first time a guild gets a new boss down, their name is put on the list under that specific
boss.

instance by comparing gear with a hard-core raider, seeing that theirs is pitiful in comparison. The big gap in equipment quality between a casual gamer and a hard-core raider was larger in the first period of *World of Warcraft*, but the difference is still quite noticeable. Epic loot from the toughest raiding instances also has the additional attraction of being much rarer than other epic loot.

Utilitarianism

In this section I will narrow my scope and look more closely at the social life within the raiding guilds. In a raiding guild, there is perceivable peer pressure on some of the classes about which playing style to indulge in. The hybrid classes in particular are often forced to specialise in a certain way, in order to stay in the guild. The formative role of the guild also covers other classes, for instance warriors, as most guilds want them to develop as tanks and not damage dealers. The usual argument is that other classes are better at dealing damage than the hybrids and warriors. Edward Castronova has made the observation that healers often are in high demand in online games:

> It is not uncommon, in my experience, for healing characters to be literally forced to use only their healing abilities when teamed up with other players. Healing is much desired and in very short supply (it is an altruistic thing, in a sense), so healers who attempt to do anything but heal are often subject to stigma and outright verbal abuse. If you even reach for your mace, the warrior shouts 'DON'T FIGHT, JUST HEAL.' (Castronova 2005: 102)

Castronova points out that this is not in any way an official rule created by the designers of the game, but a social convention emerging due to the relative shortage of players interested in this playing style. There is also frequently a shortage of healers on *World of Warcraft*. The web site warcraftrealms.com, which monitors the population on the game servers, shows that the four healing classes are the least-played classes in the game.[69] This is a general census encompassing all servers and there will of course be variation from server to server.

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[69] The percentage is as follows: Shamans 8%, priests 9%, druids 10% and paladins 11%. Hunters are the most played class, comprising 16% of the player population, followed by warriors on 13%. More details can be found at www.warcraftrealms.com/census.php. Last accessed June 27, 2008.

In a raiding guild, besides restrictions on playing style, there are often also high standards when it comes to equipment. As the guild progresses further in raiding instances, increasingly better gear is required of the participants. It is therefore often regarded as a nuisance if a player changes playing style from, for instance, healing to damage-dealing since this represents a set-back for the guild with regard to equipment. The same goes for switching from one *main character* to another. In many guilds the players will have to ask permission from the guild leader to do so. One important source of data concerning guild rules is the recruitment pages on the forums of these guilds, where we find explicit formulations of policy considerations and guild rules. The rules may vary in length from just a few sentences to several pages. Regarding priority on the main character, a typical formulation is found on one of the top ranked guilds on Bronzebeard that states that

> [w]e want all members to be playing on their main characters as much as possible, you should be improving the gear on these characters as much as you can both in raids and heroic's. Every piece of raiding gear u wear during the raid must be enchanted and socketed with the best enchants en gems - this also counts or alternative sets (resistance / dps / healing gear etc.)[70]

Another instrument for management in raiding guilds is the raiding schedule. Raiding guilds are usually strictly organised, temporally speaking, with a core playing time in the evenings when the guild is raiding. A raiding guild raids on up to seven evenings every week, with each raid usually lasting four hours or more. Outside raiding time, the players usually spend time collecting materials for potions or other items that will enhance their performance during the raid. They will normally also do runs in groups to easier instances that have loot that might upgrade their armour or weapons. The time outside the raiding schedule is also spent reading guides on the net that describe the different raiding encounters, or by watching videos from other players that have accomplished those encounters.

In a raiding guild a certain level of discipline and focus on performance is necessary to make progress. This might not suit everyone. The different members can have conflicting ambitions and different opinions about how fast it is necessary to progress, or how often they need to raid. Some players might find the game boring at times or

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[70] http://www.echoguild.eu/profanity, last accessed June 27, 2008.

have real-life demands that are incompatible with the raiding schedule. Less raid attendance on average means that some avatars get poorer gear compared to the more eager ones. Less well-equipped avatars will, in effect, slow down the progress of the whole guild. Over time, this might result in a split between the most eager and the more casual members, as the differences in gear and performance get amplified. This is a matter that is usually settled by attempting to set standards for how much the members have to play. One of the more casual raiding guilds on Bronzebeard, for instance, makes this reservation in their application page:

> We will consider how well the character you play 'syncs' with the rest of the guild in terms of the progress the guild as a whole has made. Therefore, if your character is too far behind in progress, or has advanced far beyond the progress we have made so far, we are unlikely to recruit you unless you can provide a convincing explanation of why you want to join us.[71]

A common way to homogenise the member mass of the guild is to have strict rules concerning raid attendance. Some guilds demand, for instance, 80% raid attendance, or that each member must sign up for four or five raids each week. For many players it is impossible to maintain such high playing activity over long periods of time. For others, it is also difficult to allow the needs of the guild to take priority over their own needs. In the following sections I will look more closely into individual versus collective goals with regard to playing. I will start by illustrating this topic with a post made by a hard-core raider called Axira72.

This player wrote a post called 'The Axira-doctrine' describing what he or she regarded as a collection of advice for people who want a raiding guild to run smoothly. The statement was based on having been a member of several raiding guilds and having played the game since *beta*, before the game was officially released. The first points in the doctrine regards the dedication a true raider has to show: 'nothing else but progress raiding has the first priority ingame.'[73] The true raider has to attend as many raids as possible and come well prepared with potions,

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[71] http://www.warofwrath.com, last accessed December 28, 2007. Site later removed.
[72] Thanks to Torill Mortensen for bringing my attention to this post.
[73] This post was posted on the forums to the Moonglade server at http://forums.wow-europe.com, last accessed November 18, 2006.

crafted resistance gear for specific encounters and enough gold for the repair bill. Axira further states that

> [t]he final step of true enlightenment for the raider comes at the point when a person has achieved the state of mind at which he or she purely raids for the raiding itself. Not interested in the drops, not interested how many times he/she has visited the place before, maybe not even caring if all drops would be disenchanted on that run or no DKP would be granted. These people are the crème de la crème for guilds. the superlubricant oil that makes it so much easier to keep the raiding machine rolling. (Ibid)

What is interesting here is how the person describes the raiding guild as a machine, an entity that has its own needs that have to be met in order to function properly. The ideal state of mind of a raider is simply to disregard his, or her, own needs and just be happy to be a cog in the well-functioning raiding machine. Later in the post Axira emphasises this perspective by stating: 'If you recruit too many people in your guild, which priorities don't match with the priorities of the guild (and feel free to regard "The Guild" as a huge living being that has certain desires it badly needs to satisfy) then your guild fall apart, as conflicts of priority WILL arise among it's members.' (ibid) This extremely functionalistic view of the raiding guild also applies to the members:

> The other players you play with are temporary: Doesn't matter who they are, how nice they are, how much fun you had with them in the past. You should regard every person as being someone that could disappear from the scene (...) And I'm using the word 'disappear', because that is how the psyche of a human works when he's busy playing a game... people that don't play the game with you or along you: don't exist. (Ibid)

The policy this player expresses represents an extremely group-oriented perspective on the raiding enterprise. The individual player does not really matter and what is best for the guild will always be more important than what is best for the individual player. This type of group thinking bares some resemblance to team sports, like football. Such resemblances are occasionally mentioned within game studies, but to my knowledge there are no studies exploring this topic empirically. In a study of guilds in *World of Warcraft*, a group of researchers describe large guilds as generally being more orderly than smaller ones. They state that

> [r]ules, probationary periods, and attendance policies become more common, as do formal sign-ups for activities. An apt analogy is that this level of guild is more like a team within a recreational sports league than a small group of friends who play casually (Dmitri Williams et al. 2006: 347).

With regard to raiding guilds, this analogy could be taken a step further, toward more dedicated team sports activities. In order to describe some of the similarities between raiding and sports, as well as highlight some interesting differences, I will provide a brief but telling comparison between raiding and cycling teams. I will use the *Tour de France* race as an example. This race consists of different stages that are regarded as individual races. Different achievements are completed during the race, and I will focus on the most prestigious of them: winning the race. It is usually the captain of a team that competes for this feat, while the rest of the team support him. Even though winning a stage in the tour would be a great individual victory, no one is supposed to follow such impulses, as the captain is the prime focus. This might seem strange, as it is individuals and not teams that are declared as winners. However, individuals without a supporting team would not stand a chance of winning – the team organisation is simply a necessity to win. One of the reasons this kind of group dedication works is that the group effort also has individual rewards. If the captain wins the *Tour*, the group as a whole will be regarded as a success and team members will usually also get a share of the prize money. They will also rise in status within the sporting community and might gain recognition or fame in the larger society. In sum, the reward the individual athlete receives outside of the game – the *Tour* – balances the sacrifice he has to make as part of the team.

Compared to this, *World of Warcraft* is a closed system. The reputation, power or wealth you gain as a player, is a currency normally without value elsewhere. Recognition from fellow players or friends might be important, but what really counts is the epic loot that makes it possible to upgrade the avatar; the avatar's equipment bears the mark of your accomplishment as a player. This is one of the reasons why in *World of Warcraft* we often find a conflict between individual and collective interests. One of the most common reasons for the breaking up of a guild is difficulties in getting people to abide by or identify with group goals. A player who had been a member of a long-standing guild that eventually disbanded gave this as an explanation for the disbanding:

> Too many ppl having a fast buck on the Kara raids wanting all the glory but not putting no effort when it counted. ppl always turned up for the easy raids but shied away or not putting the required effort in when it got tough. so the ppl got tired of carrying.[74]

This is a well-known phenomenon within many raiding guilds. Some of the players will not be interested in *wiping*, or getting killed, repeatedly at the same boss. Not only is this an experience that can be frustrating and tiresome, it is also costly. A player spending an evening wiping at the same boss will have no gain, but a large repair bill.[75] Here, the game mechanics ensures that there is a penalty for not succeeding, as well as a reward for success. Some of the bosses in *World of Warcraft* are called guild breakers, because they are tactically hard to defeat. Even the most dedicated guilds can spend weeks working on those bosses, trying different tactics, building up a considerable amount of frustration within the guild. The leaders will often try to push the players further, but eventually people start leaving the guild to escape the experience of being stuck on the one boss. The cost, both in terms of game gold and in terms of emotional dissatisfaction, will by some of the members at some point be regarded as too high a price to pay.

Often, when tension builds up in a guild, the members start forming alliances, calculating who might be interested in leaving, either to join another guild or to start a new one. As a methodological aside, I can report that these periods were especially challenging for me as a researcher, as fellow guild members were often confiding in me, or asking me to take sides in an ongoing conflict. My approach was, basically, to appear vague and wait out the situation. The conflict would then either be solved, or reach a critical moment, at which the guild disbanded or groups of players started to leave. If a break-up occurred, I usually left the guild to stay unguilded until matters appeared settled and the players had their focus back on their playing. It is interesting to follow these kinds of conflicts up-close, but also quite challenging to keep an observational distance from the matter at hand. In this situation there is no real objective observation position I can retreat to, as my actions will inevitably be noticed. Both staying and leaving the guild would be interpreted as taking a stance in

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[74] personal conversation 21.09.2007

[75] Each time an avatar dies, the avatar's equipment loses 10% of its durability. After dying 10 times, the equipment will become useless, and the player will need to repair, which costs gold.

the conflict. Even if I quit playing, my action could be interpreted as the result of dissatisfaction with the current situation. There is simply no way of lurking within the confines of a raiding guild.

After following several guild conflicts up-close I observed some interesting patterns. A recurring cycle of events is initiated when a prominent player or officer leaves and takes with him, or her, a number of players in order to start out fresh in another guild. This usually disrupts the life in the old guild, as raids get cancelled due to insufficient attendance. Other players might start leaving in the wake of the breakout, either because some of their friends have already left or because they know they are faced with a setback in raid progress and a period when all focus will be on recruiting new members. After a period, the old guild will either be too stripped of resources to continue and disband, or it succeeds in renewing its member base and continues raiding. A third solution is to merge with another small guild and get back into raiding. The benefit of this solution is that the players can continue raiding relatively quickly. The downside is that the officers lose the ability to balance the number of members from the different classes in a proper way and it might lead to a surplus of specific classes that will then have to fight over a few raid spots, which can lead to frustration and a new round of break-ups or high turn-over of players. In my experience, periods without any kind of conflict were relatively rare. The most stable periods seemed to be when the leaders managed to create a friendly, helpful atmosphere and some sort of team enthusiasm. These are qualities that are also reported as crucial within team sports. As the sport psychologist David Yukelson explains:

> Core components to consider in building a successful team include having a shared vision and unity of purpose, collaborative and synergistic teamwork, individual and mutual accountability, an identity as a team, a positive team culture and cohesive group atmosphere, open and honest communication processes, peer helping and social support, and trust at all levels. (Yukelson 1997: 1)

Creating a shared vision and trust at all levels in an organisation consisting of members that usually have not met in real life and might have different overarching game goals, is a daunting task. Making the members of a raid guild identify with

collective goals can generally be difficult. This is a matter that is also reflected in the way loot distribution is handled, a topic I will investigate in the following section.

Collective struggle, individual joy

As mentioned earlier, different from sports, *World of Warcraft* has the rewards integrated into the same (value) system as the game. Game mechanics relating to loot distribution play an interesting part in this, as the most corporeal result of a successful raid encounter is the epic items dropped by the bosses. These items can only be distributed to people attending the raid, by being *bound on pickup*. When given to an avatar they turn *soulbound* with the result that they can be unequipped, but not given to any other avatar or used by anyone else. When a well-geared avatar is leaving a guild to join another one, you will sometime hear sarcastic comments such as 'take care, and just leave the epics by the door'. When a well-geared avatar leaves the guild, not only is the individual player's experience and knowledge lost, but also part of the guild's resources in the form of equipment. This is one of the reasons loot distribution is a very important issue in most guilds. The game mechanics offer different solutions for loot distribution. The most commonly used method in party instances is that all players *roll* on items, if the item represents an upgrade. After rolling, the player that gets the highest number between 1 and 100 wins the item. When applying this method, loot is basically subject to two sets of randomness. First, which item a boss drops is a random function performed by the game, based on a list of items that specific boss can drop. The second level of randomness is the roll that the players perform to acquire the item. *World of Warcraft* also offers another type of loot distribution that reduces the second level of randomness, called *master loot*. When this function is activated, the party or raid leader will distribute the loot, or choose which members of the party will be allowed to roll.

Raiding guilds normally take measures to reduce the level of randomness even further. In raids, some sort of *Dragon Kill Point* (DKP) system will usually be applied instead of rolling (Fairfield & Castronova 2006). A basic feature in most DKP systems is that each guild member is awarded points every time they attend a guild raid. The current amount of DKP of each member represents his or her priority on loot. When a member gets an item, he or she loses a DKP amount that reflects the

value of that item. Over time, players who raid most frequently will accumulate most points, and will therefore be able to collect more items. The first DKP system was invented by a guild on an *EverQuest* server in 1999 where the two high-end bosses were both dragons.[76] Currently, there exists a plethora of DKP systems with imaginative names like Suicide Kings and Coocoobree. They are all systems for loot distribution that seek to reduce the randomness with regard to loot distribution inherent in the game mechanics. I find this phenomenon an interesting example of a social convention invented by the player community and not by the game designers. DKP is simply a socially instigated system attempting to amend unwanted randomness in the game design. This can be interpreted in at least two ways. It might be regarded as an effect of collective ethics that state that playing should be as fair as possible and that loot distribution should reflect the effort made in retrieving the items. Also more practical considerations might be a leading motivation, as loot distribution through DKP will give a more stable loot distribution in a shorter time frame. Regardless of the loot method applied, over a longer period of time extreme distribution patterns due to 'luck' or 'unluck' will be evened out. The DKP system just ensures that this happens more quickly.

Raiding, as a gaming convention that originated in the game community and were not designed by developers, is an example of how players, collectively, influence the evolution and content of the game genre. In *World of Warcraft*, raiding has been given much space and is an integral part of the game. The mechanisms for loot distribution, despite being an important part of raiding, are not equally refined. Raiding and DKP can therefore, in terms of design, be regarded as two aspects of the same game convention that have fallen each side of a watershed. Raiding is fully integrated into the game system, thoroughly designed, and embodied in a massive amount of game content. In contrast, the mechanics pertaining to loot distribution are, at least from the player's point of view, only handled by the game mechanics in the crudest manner. This has spawned different types of DKP systems that are developed and maintained by the player community. Future updates of *World of Warcraft*, or future games titles in this genre, might tell us if this macro-level game convention has also made enough of an impact to be integrated into design.

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[76] http://www.wowwiki.com/Dragon_Kill_Points. Lat accessed June 27, 2008.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented other examples of how the developers, game mechanics and the players interrelate. Special parts of the game mechanics are designed for social means, furnishing this meso level of gaming organisation. In *World of Warcraft* this includes both the raiding encounters and the guild feature. In a social perspective, the instability and tension we find within many raiding guilds can be interpreted as a result of a basic conflict between individual and collective needs. The individual is depending on a guild to be able to access both the epic gear as well as specific parts of the game content. The guild on the other hand is dependant on a fairly stable group of members. All guilds will have free riders and individuals that will try to calculate a contribution that is just sufficient to be still accepted as a member. Raiding guilds are therefore formulating rules concerning raid attendance and loot distribution that seek to counter uneven contribution from the members. In contrast to team sports, the notion of fairness with regard to rewards can seem obsessive, but is partly an effect of having both the game arena and the rewards from it within the same value system.

Raiding, as the citizen feature described in last chapter, illustrates how different levels of the game might co-function. On the micro level we find individual players divided into avatar classes, with their different functions and abilities. Game mechanics ensure that specific set-ups of avatars can contribute in fulfilling tasks that individual avatars, or other assemblies of avatars, would not be able to solve. For the raiding activity and eventually the loot distribution to happen, organisation has to take place on a higher level of the system. The guild, an entity that exists on a meso level of the system, plays an important role in organising raiding. Each guild formulates rules and organises the daily raiding schedule necessary to reach their long-term ambitions. This is also the case with loot distribution. DKP, like raiding, is another emergent phenomenon and a game convention that encompasses guilds, servers, and even games. DKP also illustrates how the different levels of the system are connected. It concerns individual players on the micro level; it is handled by the guilds on a meso level, but is a convention that exists and evolves on a macro level of the game. The mechanics and conventions pertaining to loot distribution is a good example of an activity that is not fully integrated into game design, but where developers and players each provide part of the solution.

In the next chapter I will keep the focus on the meso level of the game system by describing player-initiated activities in *Discworld*. The purpose of this analysis, however, is to take a closer look at the micro component of this system – the player – to assess what kind of complexity and variety the players might bring to the table.

6

Player motivations and scientific classification

I have so far described how aspects of the game mechanics and social dynamics influence each other, instigating new forms of game play. In chapter three we saw how different researchers explained the basis of emergence with reference to rules and game mechanics. In terms of systems theory, most of the rules of a multiplayer game are manifested in the game mechanics, the number of which can seem overwhelmingly large. In the group play described in the last chapter, the individual *player* can also be regarded as a basic component of the game system, as building blocks that make social dynamics and specific types of team play possible. Individuals are necessary components for the emergence of new gaming conventions to evolve. From a sociological perspective, the individual is a natural analytical entity as it forms the basic component of a society. In this chapter I will take a closer look at the individual player. The question is what kind of motivation or what aspects of the personalities come into play when the players enter the game and get immersed in the game culture.

Within game studies, the player is often described in passing, as an entity whose motivations for playing fit into a relatively small number of categories. I wish to expand the notion of the player by describing activities that involve a larger range of motivation factors. I will further compare my finding with one of the most referenced source about player categorisation in this field, Bartle's taxonomy over player motivations. The empirical basis for this discussion will be two types of group-oriented activities, represented by a player-organised travelling service and research done by collectives of players. *Discworld* is the main case in this chapter.

Player-run clubs

In *Discworld* the players have the opportunity to create clubs resembling the guild feature in *World of Warcraft*. This is a tool for social organisation with a longer time frame than the shorter *group* command that allow players to share experience points while killing in groups. The administration does not observe or does not normally meddle in issues that take place within the confines of the clubs. The *club* command gives the players the opportunity to create clubs that yield the members a chat channel and a description of its purpose available to be read by other players with the *finger* command. During my research, I read the descriptions of many clubs on the MUD. Some are secretive and have descriptions available only for members, while others advertise their objectives with elaborate descriptions or illustrations. For instance, inquiring about the club *Singapore Sling*, which is created for people living in Singapore, the following information will appear:

Figure 6.1: In game information about the club *Singapore sling*

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     \ ........ /
       \           /
        \  /  /
         \ o  /         ||_____|   ||_____|
          \ /           ||      _  | ||  |G|
           ||           ||_____|_|  ||___|T||
           ||           ||_____|    ||_____|
           ||
          _||_
```
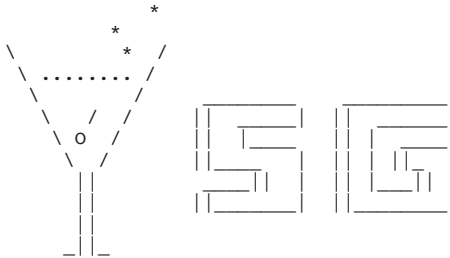
```
'The Singapore Sling is a cocktail invented by a Mr. Ngiam Tong Boon
for the Raffles Hotel in Singapore sometime between 1910 and 1915. At
one point, the recipe fell into disuse and was forgotten by the bar
staff.  The  recipe  currently  used  by  the  hotel  was  the  result  of
recreating  the  original  recipe  based  on  the  memories  of  former
bartenders and some written notes that they were able to discover.'
(Wikipedia)

It is also one of the two things that non-Singaporeans often bring up
whenever you mention Singapore, the other being the ban on chewing-
gum.

So if you live on that small red dot near the equator and wish to meet
your fellow countrymen and women on the Disc, we invite you to join
this club!
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There are two different sorts of clubs on *Discworld*, personal clubs and elected clubs. Personal clubs are controlled by one single person that has the power to change any element of the club. An elected club is run by an elected group of players. To change anything in these kinds of clubs requires voting. There are currently 179 different

clubs on *Discworld*.[77] The largest one, the *Tshop spotters,* has 814 members and has as its sole purpose to alert other players to where the travelling shop is currently located. The travelling shop is constantly changing location on the MUD, and is the only way to get from one continent to another. In the following section I will have a closer look at how the players take advantage of the club function and what social ramifications this can have. But first, I will provide a short description of Richard Bartle's player taxonomy to discuss what might motivate *individual* players to enter a game area like this.

Player taxonomy

Bartle's seminal article *Hearts, clubs, diamonds, spades: Players who suit MUDs* is one of the earliest efforts to give a more systematic overview of different player types. Bartle's taxonomy differs from other play and game taxonomies, like those of Huizinga and Caillois, as the focus lies on the player's motivation more than on the rules or materiality of the game (Huizinga 1950, Caillois 1961). In his taxonomy Bartle distinguishes between four different types of players that he labels *achievers*, *explorers*, *socializers* and *killers* (Bartle 1996). He further sorts these types according to two axes, where achievers and explorers have interest in acting on the virtual world and socializers and killers are interested in acting on other players. The basis for his model is an argument that each category is *mutually exclusive*. For instance, players that fall into the category of socializers will have this as their main playing style and will not normally indulge in other play styles. As Bartle explains, the players: 'will only switch to other styles as a (deliberate or subconscious) means to advance their main interest' (Bartle 1996).

There have been some criticisms of Bartle's taxonomy, for instance I have described how players often engage in several aspects of play at the same time, occupying several of Bartle's categories (Karlsen 2004). T. L. Taylor has described how, while the categories achievers and socializers, are opposites in his model, they are often intimately related in actual play (Taylor 2003). For instance, being part of a raiding guild in *World of Warcraft* is arguably both a social- and achievement-oriented

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[77] Count made at May 14, 2008.

enterprise. More importantly, Bartle's notion of players having one main motivation for playing, which is in opposition to other types of motivations, lacks a thorough empirical basis. His model is developed after observation of a discussion among players of one single MUD, and no other methods have been applied to confirm or invalidate this model.

Bartle's model is based on a concept of the users as different factions that influence each other. For instance, killers prey mainly upon socializers and hence, more killers mean fewer socializers. In turn, fewer socializers means that there is less prey for the killers, who, as a result, will start leaving the game. This once more gives room for more socializers, and after a while the game will reach some sort of equilibrium, where the distribution of the different player groups stops fluctuating (Bartle 2003: 133). It is interesting to note that Bartle describes the game in systemic terms, where players constitute parts of different functions that influence each other. My main criticism of Bartle's model is that his view of the player is too simplistic, an argument I will elaborate later. As a preliminary remark, I will point to the fact that this game model is more static than real multiplayer online games. Most MUDs and MMORPG change over time, as new game content is added and game mechanics are altered. Players might orient themselves towards the game in new and unexpected ways, simply because new features are introduced. The player community also has a constant turnover, because segments of the player community leave while others start to play. Over time, a game might attract quite different player groups, for instance by being introduced to other segments of the population, or to new parts of the world. His model does not address how, for instance, the introduction of younger or older players to a game can create new dynamics, both socially and game-wise. In *Discworld*, players who had been around for quite a while often commented that the new players were constantly getting younger. One of the developers I interviewed explained that the younger players were different from, and had interests other than the older players, which again resulted in a more fragmented community:

> In my opinion I think that probably the average age of the players is possibly getting younger. Which adds to that effect that there isn't any sort of cohesion sort of thing. So I think that probably at the start the players were older, 'cos that was the sort of people that had access to the internet then. As the general

Internet demographics gets younger, then the age of the disc is probably getting younger. (M, 29)

It might take years for alterations in the player demographics to be noticeable, but in *Discworld*, such alteration is a well-known aspect of the evolvement of the MUD.

Bartle has since expanded his original taxonomy in several ways (Bartle 2003). First, he has sub-divided his four categories into eight. The killer category is divided into *Politicians* and *Griefers*. Politicians are 'players who act in an open fashion on other players' and griefers are describes as 'bullies prepared to use force or other unpleasantness to get their way or be noticed'. (Ibid: 167) Socializers are divided into *Friends* and *Networkers*. Friends are: 'Players who interact primarily with people they have known a long time and with whom they have deep bonds' and networkers: 'Players who interact openly with other players – even complete strangers – on any and all subjects' (Ibid). This sub-division, however, does not alter the original design and restriction of his model. Bartle has introduced a temporal aspect into his model as a reflection of the fact that players might change orientation towards the game over time. In what he called the *main sequence*,

> [p]layers typically start off testing the immediate bounds on their behaviour (killer) then begin to acquire knowledge of their environment (explorer); following this, they apply their knowledge (achiever), in the course of which they forge bonds with other players; final, they retire and spend their time chatting with their friends (socializer). (Bartle 2003: 165)

The main sequence is what Bartle regards as the most common development trajectory for players. This introduces more flexibility to his original model but its basic constitution remains, as he still conceives of players as restricted to one motivation type at the time. Also, this supplement of the model lacks a thorough empirical grounding. The game researcher Nick Yee has constructed an alternative model, where he distinguishes between 5 different stages: *Entry, Practice, Mastery, Burnout and Recovery*. (Yee 2007) Yee's categories are more open than Bartle' and do not discriminate between different orientations towards the game. For instance, the entry phase includes all types of engagement with the game, like social life, game mechanics and exploration. As we saw in chapter four, the reason many players initially entered *Discworld* was interest in the book series. It is difficult to evaluate

exactly how this influences their play style but it is reasonable to think that many players are most interested in exploring the game universe when they start playing.

Enterprises

In most multiplayer online games, money is a central feature, as this gives the players the opportunity to buy items or services that enhance their avatar. This is also the case in *Discworld*, where trade goods such as potions, weapon and clothing can be bought. Very wealthy players have the opportunity to rent houses that can be furnished after their own standards or taste. This feature was introduced to the game in 2002, and allegedly because the creators needed to get some balance in the MUD's economy, as some of the players had gathered incredible amounts of money. The possibility of owning 'private property' is easily one of the most sought after features of this game, and less wealthy players are working hard to be able to afford this.

Discworld gives the players a wide range of opportunities for organising different enterprises. First, the players have the opportunity to go into business with the aid of specially programmed player-run shops. These shops are usually organised as some kind of cooperative where the work is divided between several players. Some players act as shopkeepers, while others *farm* the game for consumable items, for instance items used as spell components. This is different from the types of enterprises documented by Edward Castronova (2001) and Julian Dibbell (2003, 2006), since, in this case, the earnings stay within the boundaries of the game.[78] In contrast to object-oriented MUDs (MOOs), where it is possible for ordinary players to create game content, in *Discworld* it is only possible to create generic items. The player-run shops have a special position in the MUD by being *hard coded* or programmed especially for this functionality. There are other shops where players can offer goods like healing tea to other players, but in these cases the logistics and selling are taken care of by NPCs.

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[78] The economist Castronova conducted one of the earliest studies where the economy of the MMORPG EverQuest and its impact on the ordinary marked was analysed. The journalist Dibbell had a more direct approach and tried to live off the money he earned in Ultima Online for almost a year.

Another enterprise with some distinction concerns travelling. In most MMORPGs, some of the classes have means of travelling that others lack. As described by T.L. Taylor, some of the players on *EverQuest* made a living by providing other players with teleportation to different locations. She writes: 'What was always striking was the way this service emerged from the player community and how it regulated prices associated with it' (Taylor 2006b: 60) In contrast to the player-run shops in *Discworld*, this travelling service was an emergent phenomenon with no features programmed especially for it. The combination of three different aspects was the basis for this business: 1) Different abilities among the classes with regard to travelling. 2) A demand among the players for fast travel. 3) Public channels where the offers could be advertised. This business did not, however, last. The designers made two important design changes that made faster travelling accessible for other classes as well. The first one was the introduction of special NPCs that facilitated travelling. Later on, special portal pillars distributed throughout the game, were introduced. Taylor writes that,

> [a]lmost overnight the economy around porting crashed. Players who had formerly made a decent living as a kind of in-game taxi service found themselves practically out of work (Ibid: 61)

This change had severe social ramifications as the places where people used to meet for buying transportation, in effect, died. A similar emergent phenomenon associated with travelling exists on *Discworld*. On *Discworld* there are two guilds that, by magical or spiritual means, can transport themselves and other players over great distances. Wizards use portals that open up a temporary door to another place on the MUD. To perform this spell the wizards must have been at the location to which he or she wishes to travel on an earlier occasion, and *imbued* the surroundings into an item by *blorping* it with a spell. Priests travel by spiritual means. They can also bring passengers, but guild points spent on transportation increase with each passenger and this therefore limits the number of people they can transport simultaneously.

On this basis, priests and wizards offer travel services to other players. Some of the priests and wizards have organised a service called *Taxi*, which functions much the same way as a real life taxi service does. In this case the player has to ask a taxi

member to take him or her to some specific destination. Taxi is organised in a club with 125 members[79] and they advertise their services in the following manner:

Figure 6.2: In game information about the club *Taxi*

TAXI -- The Original Portal Club

Taxi is the *Discworld*'s primary arcane transportation business. We offer travel to most Disc locations for the small fee of $5.

Newbies: Free under two hours old, $2 for 2-5 hours. Does not apply for transport on the Courageous Courier quest.

To hire a taxi simply type who taxi and then send a tell to a member, stating your location and your destination.

If the member cannot personally serve you, your request will be forwarded to the other online members via our club channel.

Please do not send multi-tells or ask several members in rapid succession. We can all see the channel, your request has been heard.[80]

This travelling service is different from the one we find in *EverQuest* by being organised collectively. This gives the players more easily available services, compared to what they would have got, if they had had to inquire for services individually. The lower population on *Discworld*, compared to *EverQuest*, makes it less of an option to stay put in one place, waiting for requests for fares. The taxi club organisation gives the taxi 'drivers' the possibility of carrying out activities in other locations and travelling to a customer if the occasion should arise. Both the service providers and the customers benefit from this club arrangement.

Despite the small population of this MUD, *Discworld* actually also has another player-run travelling service. For players with a taste for luxury, or who want to go to less accessible places, the service *Limo* is an alternative. This service is also organised as a club, but with only 14 members. They describe their 'services' on their club site info as follows:

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[79] Count of members were done July 28, 2004.
[80] Last accessed June 27, 2008.

Figure 6.3: In game information about the club *Limo*

> = LIMO = - For those who don't mind paying. -
>
> We're not taxis. We're not $5 a pop newbies. We're bitter disgruntled players who are willing to transport you only at exorbitant prices to wherever you want to go (being old enough to be disgruntled means we've accumulated quite a collection of Blorps.)
>
> Don't ask if you're not willing to pay (the idea being most of you won't ask). But if you're really desperate and have the cash to back it up, or you want to go somewhere unusual, or you need something special... dig into that bank account and hail a limo. We're not cheap, we're not even that polite, but we are stylish.
>
> Standard prices: Whatever you're asked to pay. Recommended fare is $50, not to exceed 1 royal except in extenuating circumstances (as defined by the limo member).
>
> So go ahead and call for a limo. Or don't. We don't really mind either way.[81]

As stated quite bluntly, these players are not dependant on the income from their Limo service, but have created a way to earn money for the occasional player who is willing to pay for their fares. The exclusivity of both the price and the small number of members, of course, has other social functions. They obviously wish to indicate to their surroundings that they are old, experienced and well-travelled. Players that need transportation will often check what priests or wizards are logged on, and ask for free transportation. The implicit message of the Limo members is that they don't want to be bothered with these kinds of requests.

The possibility of establishing this kind of service depends on a combination of several game mechanical features that individually are not designed to facilitate this kind of enterprise. In this case it involves the club feature, different communication solutions and the possibility of storing and retrieving information about the services. The *club* function is the tool that gives the players the opportunity to create clubs, much as in *World of Warcraft*. Secondly, the communication tools and especially the general chat, make it possible to advertise their services. The *finger* and *who*

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[81] Last accessed July 28, 2004. Club later disbanded.

command give all players access to a description of the service, as well as an overview over all taxi members that are currently online and available for requests.[82]

These two competing services could be interpreted in economic terms as an effect of differentiation in the market. I find this phenomenon more interesting as an illustration of the different social strata of the game, where some of the *oldbies* use it as a way to demonstrate their superiority over newer players. This is also an activity that spans several of Bartle's motivation categories. The foundation for this enterprise is that the players are well travelled and *exploring* is therefore a pre-requisite. They must also like to interact with players they don't know especially well. This aspect, as well as the way the service is organised, makes them fall into the category *networkers*. Finally, as this is a way to earn money, some of them will fit into the *achievers* category.

It is also interesting to note that the club feature on *Discworld* gives the players more flexibility than the guild feature on *World of Warcraft*, since the players can be members of several clubs at the same time. This might account for some of the diversity we find in the club ecology in *Discworld*. There are clubs for specific nationalities, sexual orientation, and clubs dedicated to most aspects of playing, from game mechanics to role-playing. *World of Warcraft* also has guilds created around real life interests, for instance nationalities. On the Bronzebeard server, I observed guilds dedicated to players from many different European countries, for instance the *Italian Knights* guild. Even the leading raiding guild after *The Burning Crusade* expansion was a guild consisting exclusively of players from Poland. The important difference between *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft* is, however, that players in the latter can only be member of one guild, and often have to choose whether, for instance, nationality, friendship or play interest is the most important reason to join a guild. In *Discworld*, the non-exclusive nature of club membership has spawned a much more differentiated club ecology, even with only a fraction of the player population of *World of Warcraft*.

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[82] The *finger* command yields the description of the whole club, including all of its members, while the *who* command only shows which members are currently online.

Exploring or doing research?

My other example of socially based activity on *Discworld* concerns research on the game conducted by players. As mentioned earlier, the players can print their own books on *Discworld*. The few titles that exist largely consist of guides for other players. One of the authors was the player Griffin, who produced several works on subjects concerning wizardry. In one of his books, *Guide to Magicke Paraphernalia*, he examined different magical artefacts that wizards were able to use. Below is a copy of one of the pages of the book. As we see it was designed with ASCII-art to give the reader the illusion of browsing an old and battered book of magic.

Figure 6.4: Illustration from the book *Guide to Magicke Paraphernalia*

```
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///                                                                   \/
|||                                                                    |
|||   ____                                                             |
|||  (-/   ` harred Wand.                                              |
|||    \__,                                                            |
|||                                                                    |
|||  Wand of Infestation Removal.                                      =
|||                                                                    =
|||  Description: `This is ae thinnish piece of wood, about two feet,  =
|||    which has been charred at various points along its length. It   =
|||    still seems quite sturdy though.'                               |
|||                                                                    |
|||  This wand rids you of fleas. It must have been handy in thee days |
|||  of thee big flea epidemics. These days, ae bath and several      |
|||  thorough scrubbings seem more practical and certainly a lot      |
|||  cheaper. Thee only advantage compared to ae bath, is that thee   |
|||  wand will not wash off anything that you did not want removed,    =
|||  such as your favourite labels.                                    =
|||                                                                    =
|||  Level: 40.                                                        =
|||  Weight: less than ae pound.                                       |
|||  Price: between A$12 and A$40 at Hobliet's, depending on thee      |
|||    number of charges.                                             |
|||                                                                    |
|||  Maximum recorded charges: 15 (Recommended: 8)                     |
|||  Overcharge damage indication: 600-1090 (9 measurments)           |
|||  Pinches per charge: about 2                                       =
|||                                                                    =
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|||                 Fig.2: Thee Common Flea after having been          =
|||                   zapped by Alwin thee Hopeless, student           =
|||                    of Unseen Universitie, Ankh-Morpork,            |
|||                     on ae rainy afternoon, waiting for             |
|||                       dinner. (Picture drawn by jgs.)              |
|||                                                                    |
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Most of the information on this 'page' is collected from the game, but the player also adds information based on experiments concerning how much damage the wand can inflict on the player if it is *overcharged*. Every page in this book was illustrated, and as we see in this case another player provided the artful illustration of a flea.

Another book written by this author was *Griffin's Guide to Magicke*. Here the nature of every spell available to wizards was explained in detail. He eventually stopped updating the book, and the information mostly became obsolete, but when its last edition was printed around 2000, it was still being used by a large number of wizards. The basis for the book was a thorough study performed by the author, with help from some of his fellow players. To new and struggling wizards, the book was an invaluable help in several respects: it explained about the dangers of using spells, where spell components could be found, and how difficult a spell was to master. Some of this was just a systematised collection of information already available within the game, but some parts were the result of extensive research on how spells work under different conditions. This effort makes Griffin, in Bartle's taxonomy, a typical *explorer*.[83] The effort this player shows, not only to experiment, but also to share this painstakingly gathered information to the greater player community, makes him a contributor to the game experience for a large number of players and hence a *socially* oriented player. Finally, since the book was also sold for a substantial amount of money, this makes him an economic *entrepreneur*, besides being an *author*. To make the picture even more complex, it should be added that the player Griffin also was an avid *role-player*, as his pseudo old-English writing style reveals. Since Bartle regards role-playing as a form of socializing, Griffin indulges in two aspects of the game that Bartle regards as conflicting: exploring and socializing. In short, Griffin displays usages of the game that covers several of Bartle's categories and it would be hard to pick one of these as the 'main motivation' category, since several of them rely on each other.

Griffin's research was later replaced largely by information on the web provided by other players. For some years, the web site of a younger wizard was one of the more

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[83] In the updated version of his taxonomy Bartle has included *scientists* as a sub-category. Scientists, are according to Bartle: 'Explorers who experiment in a thorough, methodical fashion.' (Bartle 2003: 169)

prominent among them, but this player also didn't have the means or the time to update the information during the ever-evolving changes of the MUD. On his web site under the link *research*, he shows a fascinating example of the tedious work that is being conducted within the game. As the player himself explains:

> As part of the Experimentation Team, from time to time I conduct research at the instigation of the Dean of Experimentation, Bremen. As well as giving my results to bremen to be collated, I'm now going to report my results on this page, and more importantly, my conclusions and theories based on the research. However, my reports are based only on one set of data, performed with my skills, so once completed, you should read the full report written by bremen Bremen to look for any inaccuracies that may occur in mine.[84]

We are obviously talking about a somewhat coordinated research project here. The effort this player makes to explain methodological issues and the shortcomings of his study will be recognised and appreciated by most people who have undertaken empirical research. His reference to other studies is also exemplary in this respect. The point is simply that the concept explorer or scientist cannot fully explain this group's achievement in the game. They are collaborating on conducting empirical studies, using experiment as a method coupled with statistical analysis. They establish facts about a virtual universe that, in many respects, the creators of the universe themselves don't even know about. They are, by this, enhancing other parts of their playing activities. By publishing the result of their research, they are also, like Griffin, educating the player community, influencing how other wizards play and conceive of the game.

The findings from my two examples are clearly in conflict with Bartle's taxonomy, as it is hard to see how these players could be constrained to any one category. My data indicate flaws in Bartle's model, but do not in themselves offer an alternative. The ethnographic method might not be the best tool for these kinds of generalisations and I will underline that establishing such a model has not been my concern. My goal has been rather the opposite: to demonstrate how several motivation factors might be involved in one single activity. Secondly, my aim has been to show that open-ended solutions in the game mechanics, such as the club function, give the players the opportunity to invent a wide range of activities; activities that are not necessarily a

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[84] http://www.geocities.com/sekiri98/ last accessed June 27, 2008.

direct result of the individual player's isolated palette of motivation factors, but might be brought into existence through interaction and contact with other players. The motivation behind some of the social activities, like the taxi service, would be impossible to trace back to singular factors: in the individual players, in the game mechanics or on a social level. A complex weave of factors constitutes this activity, whatever angle it is analysed from.

My theoretical aim has been to illustrate that it might be analytically impoverishing to employ simple models for the increasingly complex material. I will, however, hold on to the modelling enterprise for a while longer, by introducing an alternative player motivation model.

A scientific player categorisation

Nick Yee has conducted several large quantitative surveys of MMORPG players. I will briefly explain the procedure of one of these: a survey exploring the topic *player motivation*, covering 3200 players from different MMORPGs. Yee based this survey on a list of 39 possible motivation factors for playing MMORPGs, generated from existing literature and open-ended responses from earlier surveys. These motivation categories were given a survey setup, with 5 answer options.[85] On the basis of the accumulated data, he conducted a factor analysis with the aim of clustering types of motivations that were related. This procedure ensured that 'components of each motivation are indeed related' as he states (Yee 2005). Yee ended up with ten factors then factored further into three overarching factors: Achievement, Social and Immersion. The other motivational factors were grouped under these three major categories in the following manner.

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[85] These options were ranging from for instance from 'Not important at all' to 'Tremendously important'.

Table 6.1: Yee's factorised model of player motivation		
Achievement	**Social**	**Immersion**
Advancement Progress, Power, Accumulation, Status	**Socializing** Casual Chat, Helping Others, Making Friends	**Discovery** Exploration, Lore, Finding Hidden Things
Mechanics Numbers, Optimization, Templating, Analysis	**Relationship** Personal, Self-Disclosure, Find and Give Support	**Role-Playing** Story Line, Character History, Roles, Fantasy
Competition Challenging Others, Provocation, Domination	**Teamwork** Collaboration, Groups, Group Achievements	**Customization** Appearances, Accessories, Style, Color Schemes
		Escapism Relax, Escape from RL, Avoid RL Problems

This model includes some of the same categories as Bartle's taxonomy but activities that Bartle described as being in opposition are here related. For instance, one of the sub-categories of the Achievement motivation was *Advancement*. Yee describes players in this category:

> Gamers who score high on this subcomponent derive satisfaction from reaching goals, leveling quickly and accumulating in-game resources such as gold. They enjoy making constant progress and gaining power in the forms offered by the game – combat prowess, social recognition, or financial/industrial superiority. Gamers who score high on this subcomponent are typically drawn to serious, hard-core guilds that can facilitate their advancement. (Yee 2005)

In Yee's model, social recognition or *status* is important for the achievers and not necessarily in opposition to it. The *achievement* component in Yee's model is not negatively correlated with the *socializing* component as Bartle's model would predict. In fact, it is mildly positively correlated. Yee explains that: 'Bartle assumed that your underlying motivations "suppressed" each other. In other words, the more of an Achiever you were, the less of a Socializer, Explorer and Killer you could be, but just because you like ice-cream doesn't mean you will hate pasta.' (Ibid) Yee further explains that bi-modal distributions seldom occur in personality, attitude or ability assessments. The reason for this is that most psychometric assessments follow the bell curve or normal distribution. Most people fall along the mean and there are few individuals who fall at the ends of the spectrum. It only makes sense to classify people

into categories when there are clear distinctions in the distribution of the population. According to Yee, this is not the case with regard to player motivations and it is here that the difference between Yee and Bartle's models becomes clear. Bartle's model is a *classification* model, where a player fits into one of the four (or eight) categories. Yee's model is an *assessment* model, where every player has a score on each of the components. A player's score in *achievement* has nothing to do with how he or she scores in, for instance, the *socializing* component; every player scores in all categories. This model will, for instance, show how the categories achievement and socializing might covariate: a player who scores high on achievement and low on socializing is most likely a solo grinder. A player who scores high on both achievement and socializing is more likely a member or an officer of a raiding guild. Seen in this perspective, it is clear that the usefulness of Bartle's model would have been considerably greater if it had been a list of *types of player activities*, rather than mutually exclusive personality traits.

Although Yee's model has a more nuanced notion of how motivation factors might be related, some of the results are puzzling. In Bartle's model, role-playing and socializing are related, but according to Yee these types of motivation are not related at all. Role-playing is actually more related to exploring, or what Yee labels *discovery*.[86] This result can be interpreted in several ways. One possibility is that role-players do not conceive of this activity as being strictly personal, since they are acting out a character different from themselves. There could also, of course, be methodological issues involved, for instance the phrasing of the questions in the survey. While Yee's assessment model, arguably, is based on a more thorough methodological approach than Bartle's, and also based on a much larger empirical data set, it still produces results that are in need of interpretation. It indicates how motivation factors might covariate, but not exactly why.

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[86] Yee describes the Discovery category in the following way: Players who score high on Discovery enjoy exploring the world and discovering locations, quests or artefacts that others may not know about. They enjoy travelling just to see different parts of the world as well as investigating physical locations (such as dungeons and caves). They enjoy collecting information, artefacts or trinkets that few others have.

If we take a step back and analyse Bartle's model from a different epistemological perspective, it is tempting to regard it as a categorisation system akin to Max Weber's notion of ideal types. An ideal type, according to Weber (1949), is a concept that lies somewhere between general abstract ideas and descriptions of particular empirically existing entities. This concept implies an interpretation of an observed phenomenon that accentuates particular features. All features of the phenomenon are not necessarily present in every sample, and neither will it represent an average of a collective of samples. The psychologists Schwartz et al. describe ideal types in the follow manner:

> The concrete features of things frequently prove to be difficult to distinguish from one another; their identities may remain fuzzy, fluid, indefinite, and vague. With ideal types, we draw precise and clear conceptual boundaries around these features of things. We conceptually set aside the real indistinctness and ambiguity, and we imagine a 'pure' case in which the relevant features are distinct and unambiguous. (Schwartz 1995: 424)

To deal with ambiguous or extremely complex empirical material, Weber advertises a creation of categories that are distinct and clearly separable. Framed thus, Bartle's typology could be regarded as having a heuristic value, by giving us useful categories against which we can measure our empirical analysis. In my view, this typology is based on a notion of the human mind that is too simple to explain the complexity of motivations factors found in individual players, not least when they are shaped in a social space. Bartle's model might be useful, for instance, for game designers that are in need of a simple concept of an 'implied player', but if we are interested in understanding how the complexity of the player is unfolding within the complexity of the game, we need to hold on to the nuances.

Folk taxonomy

From an ethnographical, social or psychological perspective, Bartle's model has limited value, but can be used to illustrate another interesting phenomenon in multiplayer games – the development of folk taxonomies. A folk taxonomy is a vernacular naming system that is contrasted to scientifically generated taxonomies by their origin in folk culture and use in everyday speech. Anthropologists have observed that different societies develop different ways to categorise or sort their surrounding

world. Emile Durkheim first articulated this observation in his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1912). Unlike scientific taxonomies that claim objectivity and universality, folk taxonomies are usually regarded as context-dependent and tied to specific social or cultural fields, despite the fact that the categories involved might be regarded as universal for those using them. The most common kind of folk taxonomies studied within anthropology seems to concern the classification of plants and animals (see for instance *Folkbiology* 1999). The anthropologist Brent Berlin has studied this phenomenon in a cross-cultural perspective where he found: 'widespread regularities concerning the categorization and nomenclature of plants and animals by peoples of traditional, nonliterate societies' (Berlin 1992: xi).

What I find interesting is how folk taxonomies function in societies, and how they relate to scientific classification. Early anthropologists, like James G. Frazer (1890), tended to amplify the difference between the mind of 'primitive' people and modern scientific thinking, describing primitive magic, religion and science as different stages that our civilisations have undergone to evolve into modern man (Evans-Pritchard 1962). Later contributions tend to describe the difference between folk and scientific classification as a matter of degree rather than nature. The economist Janet T. Landa and the biologist Michael T. Ghiselin, for instance, in a joint study state that:

> [t]he difference between folk and scientific classification *then may be considered a matter of degree: there are more categories in scientific systems, and they are more elaborate, but they are not fundamentally different in kind from folk systems*. (Ghiselin and Landa 2006: 235)

Folk taxonomies are devices that turn complex phenomena into manageable categories. When they are applied to nature, they can seem harmless, as the main function is simply to organise a large amount of information. When folk taxonomies are concerned with classification of people, for instance through the concept of race, we understand how the classification can have more dramatic consequences, not least if the classification also gains political or scientific status. Folk taxonomies in tandem with social control mechanisms can be powerful tools. [87]

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[87] The Indian caste system is an example of a folk taxonomy that, by support from religious and political institutions, has kept groups of people, the casteless, in poverty for generations.

Bartle's taxonomy meets the criteria of a folk taxonomy, as the basis for his taxonomy resulted from a discussion among players of the *MUD2* (Bartle 2003: 165). Bartle's contribution to this discussion was to systematise the arguments and sort them into categories – categories also derived from the gaming community. In this perspective, Bartle's taxonomy is a refinement of a folk taxonomy developed within this specific game community.

In my participant observation in *Discworld*, I witnessed a folk taxonomy with similarities to Bartle's, but also with some important differences. In *Discworld* the notions *number chaser* and *socializer* were characteristics often used in discussions among the players, both on the boards and in general chat. Other characteristics were also used, like *role-player* and *explorer*, but my impression was that these two had a special position within the gaming community. Number chaser as a category is what comes closest to Bartle's achiever category while socializer was used in more or less the same sense as Bartle uses it.[88] In *Discworld* the use of these categories was not neutral, as it was a clear tendency to use the term *number chaser* in a derogatory way. It had some of the same function as the concept *power gamer* described by T.L. Taylor (2003), although number chasers were normally not seen as cheaters, as some of Taylor's informants describes them as. Even though farming experience points was necessary for all player types in order to develop an avatar, number chasers were often depicted as players that were overtly achievement driven, and not interested in contributing to the larger player community. The term *socializers* had the opposite attribute, as players in this category were often described in a positive manner, as friendly and community oriented. During my research interviews, I asked the players and developers several questions concerning their playing habits and also inquired about these categorisations. Here, the function of these categories became clearer, as illustrated in the following conversation with Eskarina, who worked as a liaison:

> Researcher: You are not a big number chaser then?
> Informant: Never was. With Eskarina, before I went creator, since Eskarina is
> a pishite, I spent a lot of time resurrecting, and doing *that* kind of number

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[88] Bartle's killer category has no parallel in *Discworld*, since it is only possible for specific parts of the player community to kill or to get killed by other players, player killers being a sub-community on the MUD.

chasing, but I was never a kind of fighting number chaser. Never appealed to me. (F, 22)

The pishite priest is the only type of avatar that is able to resurrect other players and is therefore in high demand. The combination of being a pishite and a liaison involves an extensive interaction with other players. When I asked Aliss the same question, she replied:

Not really. I do every now and then group and go and have a good whack at things. Just, kill everything, but it's not my main, um, goal. I gain experience, I do. And slowly get better at things. (F, 26)

None of my informants characterised themselves as number chasers, while seven out of eleven labelled themselves as socializers. They all stressed that they had other interests as well, and that they enjoyed mudding exactly because of its diverse features and the opportunity to engage in a multitude of activities. It was, not surprisingly, difficult to get the informants to identify with only one category. However, these categories played an important role in how the players understood the player community. For instance, all of my informants had a clear notion of what a number chaser was, and how their playing style basically differed from this. The players also had a clear understanding that the development of the game could favour some player types more than others. As this player describes it:

In four years I have played, I think the role-players have been given the most, definitely. I also have a family name and have created a club, but it is so much more useful for the role-players. Many players think that it's bad with all these restaurants, bars and cafés that are coded with all these facilities, but stand empty because no one needs to eat. It is just infinite possibilities for the ones who want to role-play. Practically, it would be enough with only one shop where we could sell stuff, and another place for repairs. And then we could run around and fight the rest of the time. Now we even have tattoos and I have seen hairdressers in the new Ankh-Morpork.

This folk taxonomy works as a focal point for some of the arguments between the players as they need to distinguish between different playing styles in order to articulate their own needs. As in other subcultures, the players of multi-playing online games have developed a whole lingo connected to the game and, from this perspective, the folk taxonomy is part of a broader conceptual articulation of a

specific culture. What is special with this taxonomy is that it holds key concepts for the player's self-understanding, as players. It makes the complexity of the social game arena easier to conceptualise, as well as to help categorise the 'others'.

As a concluding remark, I will mention a point that might seem self-evident: that we as researchers have a different role from that of the players we study. With regard to conceptual models, it is crucial that we do not simply reproduce distinctions found in our material, but evaluate their function and usefulness with great care. A folk taxonomy might have an important function in the game community in which it originates, but taken at face value, and used as a scientific measure, such a model might reduce the diversity and complexity of the research object beyond recognition. As noted earlier, the main distinction between a folk taxonomy and a scientific one is that the latter is more elaborate and stringent. This is probably a strategy to which we all should pay more attention.

Summary

In this chapter, player motivation and categorisation have been the leading themes. The diversity in game mechanics in multiplayer games gives room for a wide range of player activities that might involve an equally wide range of motivation factors. I have used examples from *Discworld* to show how motivation factors get funnelled into different playing activities. I have also demonstrated how open solutions in the game mechanics, like the club function, combined with communication tools, give room for player-developed activities that, again, are a response to needs of the player community. Systemically speaking, the players represent basic components that bring a wide range of individual qualities and motivation factors to the table, which can be combined into a myriad of different types of use.

Bartle's player taxonomy represents an early effort, before computer game studies were established as a field, to try to capture the mechanisms that govern a player community. As we have seen, there are several limitations with this model. The most severe limitation is the underlying notion of individual players belonging to one of four, later eight, categories. Yee's assessment model represents a more adequate methodological approach, and is based upon a more extensive empirical base, but this

model also has weaknesses. When seeing Bartle's model in the light of the concept of folk taxonomy, its original function becomes clearer. Instead of focusing on the academic soundness of the model, it is possible to evaluate how such taxonomies function in the player community. Within the player community, simple player categorisations might make it easier for players to articulate their own agendas and needs. It is a tool for mapping the social terrain, as well as identifying the individual player's placement in the social matrix.

In the next chapter I will conduct an analysis that returns to the original focus of the thesis, the relationship between developers, game and players. However, this time the focus is not on game mechanical elements that accommodate social interaction but rather the opposite, as quests are the main object of analysis.

7

Quests in Context

I have earlier described how game mechanical features that influence the social aspects, like guilds, citizenship and clubs are important for the social organisation of the games. In this chapter I will focus on an aspect without any immediate apparent social function – the quests. The main goal is to investigate how quests relate to, and are influenced by, different contextual elements. I will, broadly speaking, discuss three contextual elements: the producers, the players and the overall game environment. The analysis seeks to uncover how these elements influence the way quests are designed, how they are used and also what meaning-production and aesthetics they might be subject to. Both games will be analysed, but the bulk of my material consists of interviews with developers and players from *Discworld*, as well as information from the official game sites of both games.[89] Quests from the games will be used as illustrations.

Earlier research on quests

Within the field of computer game studies, quests have been the object of just a handful of analyses and theoretical exercises (Tronstad 2001, 2004, 2005; Tosca 2003; Aarseth 2003, 2005a; Rettberg 2007, 2008; Howard 2008). Some of these studies have focused on the relationship between quests and narratives, like Jeff Howard's recent study *Quests: Design Theory, and History in Games and Narratives* (Howard 2008). The majority of these studies focus on quests as a structural entity intimately connected to games and, in most cases, the quest is seen as a functioning

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[89] The majority of my material concerning *Discworld* was gathered from 2002 to 2004 with some recent updates. With regard to *World of Warcraft*, my research was conducted between 2005 and 2007.

whole – as a substructure within a larger game area. However, these analyses pay little attention to elements that surround the quests and stand in relation to them, like other parts of the game mechanics. Another topic seldom analysed is the motivation of players to solve the quests, and of the producers to create them. One exception is Susana Tosca who, in the paper *The Quest Problem in Computer Games,* reminds us of the importance of separating the perspectives of the player and the producer. For the players, she writes, quests are first and foremost a semiotic challenge whereas for the producers they are structural elements that are intended to limit the users' range of choice (Tosca 2003).

In her PhD thesis *Interpretation, performance, play, & seduction* Ragnhild Tronstad offers a thorough analysis of quests from the MUD *Tubmud.* Inspired by Baudrillard's concept of seduction, she explains that the player has to be willing to be seduced by the text in order to be able to encounter the quest properly. She writes that:

> Every discourse contains something that will evade interpretation, and everything evading interpretation may function seductively: including the MUD quest, starting out as a total enigma. Everything in the description of the room may be significant – and at the same time, nothing really *is* significant. Nothing leads anywhere at this point. When a player doesn't know where to start, every insignificant word may successfully fake significance. Gradually, though, the initial stage of helplessness is *overcome*, through examination, exploration, and interpretation (Tronstad 2004: 158).

In the MUD she examines, the quests are constructed as riddles that must be solved through exploration by the player. Tronstad regards quests as sub-games and states that there are: 'rules, governing each particular sub-game where they define the procedures that lead to a situation where the player either wins or loses the game' (Ibid: 29). Hence, the MUD quest can be separated from the overall game as a functional entity of its own. What her analysis shows is that the enigmatic character of the quests is to a certain degree tied to, and dependant on, their uniqueness. Each quest, in spite of being easily recognisable as belonging to the same family of riddles, stands out from other quests by employing an idiomatic set of rules, a specific syntax or a new set of challenges. Experiences with other quests will only provide the player with basic tools for solving new quests, and the method of solving will still be

through 'examination, exploration and interpretation'. In contrast to this, we see Espen Aarseth's more general approach when he states that:

> Quests are a basic, dominant ingredient in a number of types of games in virtual environments, from the early adventure games to today's massive multiplayers, and by understanding their function and importance for game design and game aesthetics we can contribute to many of the current debates in game studies, such as the question of genres and typologies (2005a: 496)

Aarseth virtually starts at the other end of the spectrum from Tronstad. Instead of making a closer analysis of single quests, as does Tronstad, he zooms out trying to capture the most general traits of quests. Aarseth underscores his structural approach by stating that: 'it is on the grammatical level that we must look for structure and design principles' (Ibid, 497). On the basis of this approach he further offers two different definitions of quest *games,* the most elaborate of which talks of,

> *a game with a concrete and attainable goal, which supersedes performance or the accumulation of points. Such goals can be nested (hierarchic), concurrent, or serial, or a combination of the above* (Ibid).

In his search for the basic building blocks of the quest, Aarseth further distinguishes between three basic quest types: place, time and objective oriented quests. A typical place-oriented quest would imply getting to a specific location, such as finding your path through a maze in a first person shooter game. He explains that most quests consist of a combination of these categories and can, for instance, imply retrieving an item from a specific location within a limited amount of time. A weakness with Aarseth's categories is that they are indeed very general and his 'grammar' too crude. This is not least evident in his *other* definition of quest games that runs as follows: '*a game which depends on mere movement from position A to position B*.' (Ibid) Even his first definition of quest game is more or less all-embracing, as most activities in computer games could be labelled space-, time- and object-oriented. The open endedness in both definitions makes it hard to distinguish between quests as a specific sub-structure and other game elements that might be subject to goal-oriented activities. In contrast to this, the quest analyses conducted by Tronstad clearly focus on sub-structures and not on general game goals. The quests in these analyses will also be easily identified as quests by the player community as distinguished from

other types of game content. What I find most convincing in Aarseth's approach is that he might be right in assuming that there are some basic elements of quests that exist in a wide variety of computer game genres. A more systematic examination of different game genres would probably establish better data concerning this.

What Tronstad and Aarseth have in common is a focus on the structural, textual and aesthetics traits of quests – basic questions concerning what a quest *is* and how it functions. This perspective also seems to be predominant in the discourse surrounding quests in the writings of Jill Walker Rettberg. In her article *Quests in World of Warcraft: Deferral and Repetition* (2008) she examines quests as rhetorical structures and argues that 'studying the structure and dominant pattern of quests in a game gives us access to some of the basic patterns of the game itself' (Ibid: 168). Although this structural approach has its own merit, my approach is rather the opposite of Rettberg's: my aim is to highlight how contextual elements influence how quests are perceived, designed and used. Rather than trying to find the essence, the grammar, of the quest, I will highlight the plasticity of the quest feature.

Quests in multi-user games

Persistent games as MUDs and MMORPGs do not have any definite goal as part of their structure and would for that reason fall outside Aarseth's definition of a quest game. Quests are, however, a prominent feature of this genre of games. The definition of quest I will use in this analysis is one that is identifiable by the MUD and MMORPG community, and is to a lesser degree informed by an aesthetic, ontological academic discussion. A quest is, in these terms, a special mission that the players engage in, that requires a specific set of actions to be performed, that has a definite ending point with some sort of reward at the end. As such, the quest is an easily identifiable sub-structure within the larger media frame. Solving these quests by *questing* will also be recognised as a separate gaming activity that differs from mere killing and exploring. As I argued in chapter three, a quest can, structurally speaking, fulfil Jesper Juul's classic game definition (Juul 2005: 36), but is not usually regarded

as a stand-alone game by the gaming community[90]. This self-contained structure does, however, illustrate why quests often are regarded as 'mini-games', as well as highlighting an ambiguity in Juul's classic game model.

Quests in World of Warcraft

Questing is one of the core activities in *World of Warcraft*, especially when the player is levelling an avatar, as quests normally give a substantial amount of experience points. During my research I have leveled several avatars from different classes, and two of them to the maximum level of 70. Since questing, even for a researcher, is essential for fast levelling, I have probably completed hundreds, if not thousands, of quests. The most comprehensive online resource regarding quests lists a total of 6000 quests from *World of Warcraft*.[91]

In *World of Warcraft* a quest is a task, normally given by an NPC, that yields different types of rewards when completed. As long as the character has not reached the maximum level of 70, all quests give experience points when finished. In addition they can reward the avatar with a small sum of money or an item that can be consumed or used as equipment by the avatar. Item rewards are normally armour or weapon items of common quality, but recipes for professions that the avatar can learn might also be given as rewards. Some types of quests also increase the avatar's reputation with a specific faction of NPCs in the game. A higher reputation with these factions gives the avatar access to items that can be bought from representatives of that faction. In general, the quests in *World of Warcraft* are multipurpose: experience points might normally be regarded as the most important rewards, but money, items and reputation might be just as important for players at some point.

Finding quests in *World of Warcraft* is straightforward, as the NPCs that give quests, also known as quest givers, are marked by a large yellow exclamation mark over their

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[90] Juuls definition is as follows: A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable.
[91] www.wowhead.com have 6093 quests in their database, wow.allakhazam.com lists 6108. Last accessed June 27, 2008.

head. When a quest is completed, the exclamation mark will be substituted by a yellow question mark [92]. Quests are, as with most aspects of the game, level-coordinated. In this case, there are level restrictions about when a quest can be taken. This ensures that the players will not engage in a quest that may be impossible to complete, but on the other hand, it also ensures that the players will not get hold of quest rewards that are beyond their level. When a quest is finished, the NPC with the reward will also be indicated by a yellow dot on the mini map in the user interface.

Figure 7.1: Quest givers in *World of Warcraft*

The simple semiotic systems surrounding quests in World of Warcraft. From left: 1) Quest giver with a quest ready. 2) Quest giver with a reward for a finished quest. 3) Quest giver with a repeatable quest. 4) Quest giver with a reward for a not yet completed quest. 5) Quest giver with a quest too high a level for the avatar.

Quests in *World of Warcraft* are, structurally speaking quite homogenous, or as Rettberg explains: 'Quests in *World of Warcraft* have a very clear syntax. The basic parts of a quest do not vary: Quest-giver, background story, objectives, rewards.' (Rettberg 2008: 168). These quests could possibly be categorised and sorted by a 'grammar' after Aarseth's fashion, since, to a large degree, they are based on a limited set of building blocks. The information site wowwiki.com lists a total of ten different quest types in *World of Warcraft*, but even these might be considered as sub-categories of even broader types, such as killing and exploring quests. I will now briefly describe some of the quest types in *World of Warcraft*.

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[92] For some quests the NPC you must return to for a reward is not the same as the one that gave you the quest.

Most quests include either the tasks of killing a specific number of monsters or collecting one or several items, either from monsters or from some specific location. So-called delivery quests ask the player to deliver a specific item to an NPC at another location. These quests often take the character to a new zone or a new area and therefore serve as vehicles for further exploration of the game. Another quest type is the escort quest, where the player has to follow an NPC to a safe area. In this scenario, the NPC will normally move painfully slowly in order to draw attention to every available monster before the destination is reached – the object being to fight off the monsters while keeping the NPC alive. Other quests involve exploring a specific area or retrieving a specific item from some kind of container, which also serves as a way of directing the player to new or useful areas. Finally, I will mention one specific type of quest: the attunement quest. All attunement quests consist of chains of quests that need to be completed in order for an avatar to get access to the most difficult raid dungeons, called *instances*, in the game. The main objective is therefore not money, experience points or items, but simply access to game content. A typical attunement quest chain involves repeated runs to easier instances, lots of travelling and item gathering. These quests are most easily done with a cooperating group of players, and preferably within a large player guild.

Given the fact that *World of Warcraft* has many thousands of quests to offer, the range of quests can seem quite limited. They have a prefabricated flavour to them, at least compared with the quests Tronstad describes in her study. The benefit of this limitation, however, is that the quests are easily recognisable by the player, and normally quite easy to complete. The semiotic system surrounding the quest system points in the same direction; simplicity is key. This is also evident in the quest log feature, which stores a description of every quest the player has accepted, up to a maximum of 25 quests.

Figure 7.2: Quest log
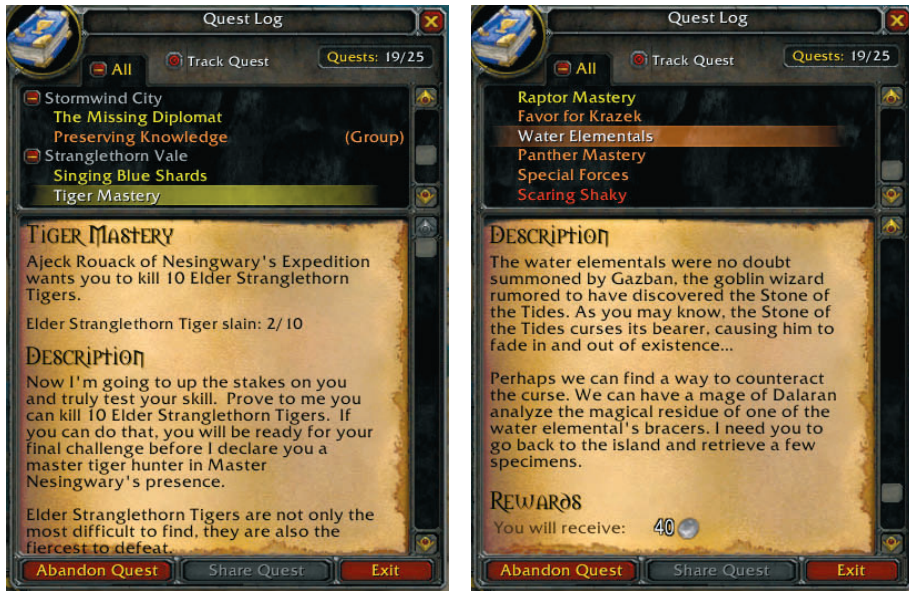
Two screenshots from a quest log. To the left we see the quest Tiger Mastery that is part of a quest chain. This is the second quest in the chain and, as we see, the description hints at least at one more quest. The quest log keeps track of the quest progression, in this case the number of tigers slain. In the other picture we see the log revealing how much money will be gained from the quest, but not how many experience points. The titles are colour-coded, indicating degree of difficulty. Grey is easiest, blood red most difficult.

Every quest is given a short description that places it in the overall fictional universe. This description serves at least two different functions. First, players that are willing to immerse themselves in the fictional universe of the game can read about what heroic deed they are about to undertake. Others, probably the majority of the players, will scan through the fiction to uncover the details necessary for completing the quest. Most quests have a summary at the end of the log, listing the objectives of the quest and as information is so easily available, there is little incentive for the player to dwell on the fiction.

The quest logs in *World of Warcraft* do not reveal *all* information necessary to complete the quest; the player for instance has to find out where the different monsters or items are located. This has opened up opportunities for information sites on the net that offer more detailed information and reveals hints about the completion of quests. Two of the most popular are thottbot.com and allakhazam.com, the latter

having also, earlier, developed a large database of information regarding *EverQuest*. The most common information sought after seems to be the exact location of things, but strategy hints about how to defeat different monsters are also common. Players can contribute hints to these databases, and there are many descriptions of how to proceed with a quest, and what fighting tactics the different classes might apply for a successful solution. There are also addons that facilitate quest solving. The addon *Quest helper,* for instance, is integrated directly into the game's map feature and displays locations and explains objectives of the different quests the avatar is currently on. It also creates a route describing in what order the player should complete the different tasks, in order to solve the quests most time efficiently.

Figure 7.3: Quest helper

In this screenshot we see the map over the zone Hellfire Peninsula. The different signs on the map indicate activities the player has to undertake. The greyed out areas are places the avatar has not yet visited. As we see, quest objectives in these areas are also indicated on the map.

The rewards from the quests in *World of Warcraft* as a whole correspond with the level of difficulty or amount of work involved. Some of the best rewards are at the end of a nested quest, or so-called quest chain. The most arduous chains can consist of as many as 30-40 quests. The reward at the end is usually an item of rare quality.

Quests that involve more than one player, the so-called group quests, are usually part of the longer quest chains and are therefore also subject to better rewards.

In general, quests in *World of Warcraft* do not require any riddle or puzzle solving, and it is much more a question of fighting tactics and time efficiency, and how to avoid dying in the process. In this respect, the quests in *World of Warcraft* differ from the puzzle quests Tronstad describes. In a passage quoted by Tosca (2003), Løvlie (2005) and Howard (2008), Tronstad states that: 'To do a quest is to search for the meaning of it. Having reached this meaning, the quest is solved' (Tronstad, 2001: 3). In contrast to this, the point of doing quests in *World of Warcraft* is to reach the reward. The quests are not so much intellectual challenges as logistical ones.

Quests in Discworld

Quests in *Discworld* are quite different from the ones we find in *World of Warcraft*. First, they differ by being hidden in the environment. There are often only vague indications that the player has stumbled upon a quest, and it can be hard, or even impossible, to know if one has started on a quest. They can include simple elements, such as uncovering items or deliver something to an NPC, which we can recognise from *World of Warcraft*. However, the quests are normally more elaborate and include activities and syntax that are unique to that particular quest. An additional issue is that very little information is revealed in *Discworld* about quests; for instance, how far a player is from completing a quest or at what stage in the quest the player is. A related issue concerns the lack of information when a quest fails or a player does something inappropriate to the quest. There are no features in *Discworld* resembling the quest log in *World of Warcraft* and the player has to store and compile information about the quest manually. The quests in *Discworld* also lack the level restriction we found in *World of Warcraft*, which makes it difficult to decide whether an avatar will be able to access those areas involved in the quest. A circumstance that emphasises these difficulties is the fact that the players are not allowed to share direct information about quests on the MUD, a point that is even mentioned in the MUD's terms of agreement as one of six major topics. Besides agreeing that profanity is not allowed on public channels, that harassment of any kind is a reason for immediate banishment, the player must also accept that:

> Giving out quest solutions, in whole or in part is not permitted either on the mud or through other media.[93]

In spite of this, new players sometimes ask in the general chat about how to find quests. These requests are often directed to the 'help quest' file that comments:

> Note that some players get a lot of satisfaction by completing the quests by themselves. If you discuss how to solve a quest on a public channel or by shouting it, you're probably ruining the experience for many others. If you're desperate you can ask another player in a 'tell' for some kind of additional hint or insight.[94]

When a player enters *Discworld* with a new avatar, he or she at first will only have access to the so-called *newbie area*. This area has several signs that explain different aspects of the game. To get out of this area, the player will have to complete a specific quest, called *Womble's Friend,* the object of which is to retrieve a brooch for this womble. This is the first lesson where the player learns that reading descriptions of rooms and items, and using the 'search' command, can reveal information about possible quests. One of the signs in this area shows the following message:

Figure 7.4: Sign from newbie area in *Discworld*

```
 _____
//                                                            \
|| This mud is based on the books written by Terry Pratchett.  While  |
|| it is not necessary to have read the Discworld books you may find  |
|| it helpful for some of the quests and in knowing more about the    |
|| characters and places in the game.                                 |
\_____/
```

Some of the quests in *Discworld* imply that specific incidents from the books have to be re-enacted within the MUD, and a player without keen knowledge of the books will occasionally find it more difficult to solve them. The large majority does not, however, rely on the book series. The quests in *World of Warcraft* are also related to their fictional universe, but the difference is that the main source of the lore concerning the *World of Warcraft* is the game itself.

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[93] Help file,"help quests" last accessed 28. August 2007. Information was later altered.
[94] Help file "help quests" last accessed June 27, 2008.

The number of quests in *Discworld* is far lower than in *World of Warcraft*. During my research I gathered information about 156 quests and completed most of them.[95] The exact number of existing quests was probably not more that 200 in total at the time of my study. In the last few years there have been several quests added, along with the addition of new game areas, but the total number of quest is still less than 220. Of the 156 quests on which I collected data, almost a third gave some type of reward, of which nine were money and the other either some kind of item or access to a specific syntax or command in the game. Most noticeable are the quests that give the player access to the emote and remote commands. These commands are crucial for role-players as they are basic tools for staging this kind of play, but they are also used by the broader player community to mimic emotions, mood and extra-linguistic information. Other quests give access to specific game commands, for instance the leatherworking feature. One specific quest gave access to an intra-MUD chat channel, i.e. a channel that is accessible for players on two other MUDs as well as *Discworld*. Only a handful of the quests gave useful rewards, like weapons; the rest were of a more humorous character and included a yo-yo, some extremely hard soap flakes, a handful of peanuts and a pogo stick.

In general, the quests in *Discworld* are not possible to categorise as easily as in *World of Warcraft*, as they often involve unique elements. I will therefore spend some time describing how a quest might be structured. The quest *Bethan's Buddy* will serve as an example, and I will illustrate this by narrating my own process of solving it. This quest is of average complexity of the quests in *Discworld*, and there are quests that both involve a more complicated syntax, more items and a larger number of sub-goals. This particular quest mainly involves acquiring items.

On entering Cohen's house on Vagabond Street in Ankh-Morpork, you will find his wife Bethan. If you stay in the room a few seconds the following chat will appear:

Figure 7.5: Bethan's Buddy, excerpt a:

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[95] New quests have been introduced since my research was completed, while others have been removed. The official web site lists a total of 214 quests at August 13, 2007.

```
> Bethan says: Can you please help me? I'll never find
everything on my own.
> Bethan asks: What am I going to do? What am I going to
do?
```

An NPC that addresses the player directly is a good indication that some sort of interaction will be possible. In this case, if you answer the NPC's request by entering the command 'say help,' the following will happen:

Figure 7.5: Bethan's Buddy, excerpt b:

```
> You say: help
> Bethan asks: You'll help me? That's wonderful! Thank
you so much. I just need you to find a few things for me.
You wouldn't mind, would you?
> You say: no
> Bethan says: Great! My problem is that my husband is
very particular about his few luxuries in life, and gets
very upset if he can't have them. I just haven't got time
to find them all, so, if it were at all possible, would
you be able to find me some soft lavatory paper and some
hot water? Oh, and also do something about his dentures
if you could - they have been hurting him like crazy, the
poor old guy.
```

In this case the magic word 'help' uncovers the objectives of the quest. Saying help in the vicinity of NPC's might, in many cases, prompt them to reveal hints about quests; in other cases, repeating words they say can have the same function. When the necessary information is obtained, the implementation of the quest can start. In this case we have to find three different things: toilet paper, a set of dentures and some hot water. The easy part is to get hold of some toilet paper, which I remember seeing in a house nearby. After some minutes backtracking my traversal, I find the paper. Locating a dentist is a bit harder, but here an inquiry in the general chat reveals that there is one located in another part of the city. Inside the building where the dentist is located there is a 'neat secretary' who prevents me from entering his office. When I try the command 'make appointment' or 'say appointment', the secretary answers: 'I'm sorry, the dentist is fully booked for the next three years. Cohen is quite a handful...' At least with the mention of Cohen's name I now know that this is the right place. After I have been getting nowhere trying to forcefully enter the dentist's room and trying different commands like 'get in queue' or 'enter office', the dentist suddenly arrives from his office. Now, the task is to get the NPC to either give me

Cohen's dentures or at least reveal how I can get hold of them. Saying words like 'Cohen' or 'dentures' does not have any effect on this NPC. Having tried many possibilities, including investigating every object in the room, I consult a quest list that reveals that the sentence: 'Cohen needs his dentures' will do the trick. The solution was most likely prompted by the mention of the words 'Cohen' and 'dentures' in the same sentence. By saying this I get the following response:

Figure 7.5: Bethan's Buddy, excerpt c:

```
> The dentist asks: Cohen? His dentures playing up again,
huh?
> The dentist says: Well, give him this voucher, then...
I owe him a favour.
The dentist gives a dentistry voucher to you.
```

The riddle first seemed to concern how to get hold of a set of dentures, and then the task seemed to be about how to make an appointment with the dentist. Eventually, it turned out to concern what syntax to use to get hold of a voucher. Now the third part of the quest can start: to get hold of some hot water. At this point I am not even trying to find the way on my own but, by consulting a quest list, it turns out that the correct place to search is far away from this city, on a table inside a gingerbread house in a place called Skund. After a relatively long journey, I get hold of the water. All items gathered, I now have to give them to Bethan, using the 'give' command, and the quest is completed.

The three different tasks in this quest turned out to involve items that were located at an increasing distance from the quest giver. The first and last task simply involved obtaining an item, but locating the last item was the problem. The second task involved interaction with different NPCs and was structured more like a riddle quest. Tronstad (2005) writes that part of the challenge presented by a riddle is to establish what rules the riddle follows. A good riddle, according to Tronstad, contains hints necessary for understanding the solution: 'One of the characteristics of a good riddle or puzzle is that after we've solved it – or even been told its solution – the solution will appear obvious to us. If the solution still appears far-fetched it is simply not a very good puzzle' (Tronstad 2005: 6). A similar point is mentioned by Nick Montfort (2003) where he describes a false riddle, the *neckriddle,* where only the riddler knows the answer. In *Discworld*, some of the quests have elements that would make them

almost qualify as neckriddles, as they involve finding objects or typing a combination of words or a syntax it is very unlikely that the player will find unguided. The second part of the Bethan's buddy quest would probably be solvable for most players as long as they try out enough combinations of words related to the quest. The last part, however, would for most players be impossible to solve, since it is highly unlikely that they would find this house in a random search for a cup of hot water. A player solving a quest like this without any guidance would need to have a very good overview of the MUD's geography and a generous amount of time on his or her hands. As such, the quest is not a self-sustained entity containing the necessary hints for a solution. It is arguably not a very good quest.

Volatile aesthetics

There are several structural issues that make it hard to complete quests in *Discworld*. These can be divided into two broad categories. First there are issues related to the development history of the MUD, and secondly, issues related to the quest ethos enforced by the developers. By ethos I mean an ethical standard governing the aesthetic approach the developers advocate as the correct way of solving quests. I will first address what I regard as the source of most of the difficulties regarding quests: design issues related to the development history of the MUD.

The *Discworld* MUD is now in its 17th year, and many changes have occurred during this time: much of the player base has been replaced several times, as have most of the developers; the programmers, just a handful at the beginning of the MUD's history, now amount to about 180; and the operating systems running the MUD have been upgraded or changed several times. Finally, there has not been any centrally coordinated coding praxis or clear guidelines of what syntax or coding to use for the MUD, particularly in the early days. The result of all this is that quests are, as much of the MUD, a patchwork of different programming practices, different semiotic systems, different gameplay traditions and different game mechanics. As an example of this, I will mention one specific quest, where the objective is simply to enter a tent in a desert to complete the quest. This quest challenges the whole concept of a quest, as no considered effort is needed to complete it. The reason why this can still be considered a quest is the fact that it gives the player both quest points and experience

points. This quest more than anything illustrates the lack of coordinated design criteria on this MUD. The differences regarding syntax and programming practice are perhaps more noticeable in quests than in other parts of the game, since commands and syntax usually work universally, whereas it is possible to write specific commands or syntax for each quest. The individual quest programmer, to a certain degree, is able to follow their own idiosyncrasies or programming style. At the receiving end, this severely limits how the experience from one quest will benefit a player trying to solve another.

A final contextual element tied to the development history of the MUD concerns the sheer size of it. *Discworld* has grown from a single street with some surrounding houses, to a large world consisting of tens of thousands of single rooms. A programmer creating a quest in the earlier phase of the MUD would have had no idea that the MUD would eventually become ten times bigger. This is especially relevant in relation to quests that involve many different items, sometimes scattered all over the MUD. Later expansions of the MUD make these kinds of quests far more complicated than initially planned just because of the exponential growth of the possible combination of items.

These are some of the historical related design issues that make quest-solving in *Discworld* difficult. These difficulties were also apparent in my interview material, as most informants described the quests as being too difficult. A female player, aged 22, who had become a play tester shortly before the interview, had difficulties completing quests. She describes her playing style as that of an explorer and helper and knew the MUD fairly well, having played about 80 days over the last two years but her explorative approach to the MUD was not always enough to handle the quests she encountered. When I asked her what she though about the quests, she responded:

> Informant: Some of them are just… are very difficult. Too difficult. I have loads of half finished quests because I can't work out what to do.
> Researcher: But you don't use quest lists, no?
> Informant: No, normally I hear rumours, like: oh, there is a quest list, lets see what we can do there. That's normally what we'll do, or someone will tell you: you have to do so and so, just hear bits about them. Mostly I just find them out for myself.

Researcher: Yeah, but if you get really stuck, do you then ask someone to help you?
Informant: Yes, a little, but people won't tell though. Nobody will actually tell. They will just: have a look at so and so and... oh yes.

This player describes how the ethics regarding quest hints are upheld by at least parts of the player population. Regardless of having lots of friends in the game, she seldom finds people who will actually tell her directly how to solve quests. The difficulty of solving quests was also mentioned by some of the developers. A female senior creator aged 26 put it like this:

Informant: Well, the quests I am familiar with I usually solve with my alts. Mostly for fun, when I run past and: aha right, here we can do this but... yes, sometimes I look for, look actively for quests, but I usually think it is quite hard actually. In spite of the fact that I have been on this MUD for six years and have written a number of quests myself, I sometimes find it tremendously hard to figure out what to do with what, because it's so... I think some creators are very anxious about giving out hints, so it ends up with no hints at all. You have this item and then: oh well (laughs) then you just stand there and see if you can do anything with it. And then you go around testing a few things and then finally you get bored with it.
Researcher: It is too time consuming?
Informant: Yes, too hard to figure out. I think quests should include hints. If you look around and read everything, you should be able to figure out what you are supposed to do. The next step.

When even the developers of the MUD conceive of the quests as being too hard, it might be pertinent to ask why they create them this way. One explanation is related to how the work on the MUD is organised. One of the administrators I interviewed mentioned that programming was hard work and that motivating the programmers could be difficult. At the time of the interview, he was involved in the development of a new continent, the Counterweight Continent, that was put into the game in 2003. He described the process of building the major city, Agathea, like this:

Building Agathea was lonely and tiresome, because was this fun like creating an NPC or a quest? Actually you had to build a hundred street rooms that looked identical around it, and *can not* be identical. And in each of those it got to be five or six or ten room chats. Five or six or ten items you can look at, each with a little description. So it can take ... to write something like short street which we all know is 25 rooms or something. That could be a fortnight's work to write that, or a week's work to write that and actually you have added

no more that the street. There is no quest, no interesting things, it is just a road. And actually it takes a long time and that's how it works. Trying to get people to build and build and build. But you have to do it and we managed.

Having produced large amounts of description of ordinary places, items and rooms, the programmers were given the opportunity to create, as he put it, a 'funky NPC or a quest' as some sort of reward. It is interesting to note that there is clear evidence of a *content hierarchy* among the developers of *Discworld*, with quests and unique NPCs ranking highly, and generic items like rooms and items having a very low rank. The quests are definitely regarded as the fine art of the game, as elements where the programmers can show their skills as programmers, game constructors and writers. While quests in *Discworld* are products of creativity, in *World of Warcraft* they are largely produced from a pre-defined set of design elements.

The uniqueness of quests in *Discworld*, as we have seen, will not be met with equal enthusiasm by all the players. One of the players who *did* enjoy quests, however, was a 26 year old male player. At the time of the interview, he had accumulated a total of 175 playing days over the last four years. For him, quests represent a break in the routine; something out of the ordinary:

> I think quests are great fun. Because it is such unique stuff. You can't do them more than once, but what is great about them is that they don't go anywhere. They don't disappear. It is never over. If you do something wrong some place, you can almost always start over and then you can solve it. But they are of a specific … it is some kind of depth to them. Because it is something different from the ordinary things you do. They are a little different. Often there is some sort of special commands and stuff happens that you don't see anywhere else. In the beginning it was mainly because you got experience points, but after a while you think that … it is fun as well. It is fun to have a high, to show that you have done a lot of quests as well.

This player obviously recognises and appreciates the unique quality of the quests. It should be mentioned that this specific player had made maps covering the entire MUD and therefore had a much more detailed knowledge of its content than most players, probably most of the developers as well. In the quote above, the player mentions that it is fun to show *others* that he has completed many quests. In the main *Discworld* city there is a specific room, the Great Hall of Heroes, where it is possible to see what quests all of the players have completed. Each player is also given a title

reflecting the number of quests he or she has completed. Players that have solved many quests receive titles like 'an adventurer who is famous' or 'an adventurer who is Disc renowned'. The really dedicated ones that have completed most of the quests can acquire the title: 'an adventurer who is so renowned that no introduction is needed.' This simple feature can be seen as mirroring the content hierarchy of the developers. Killing a hundred thousand NPCs yields a great number of experience points but little glory, while solving a mere one hundred quests will earn the player celebrity, or at least the illusion of it.

Ethos surrounding quests

So far I have described the type of quests we find in the two games, with emphasis on their difference in difficulty. In *Discworld*, quests are supposed to present the player with a real challenge. They are not meant to be easy, and the use and possible 'exploits' of quests are surrounded by both formal and informal rules. It might be difficult to understand the reason for this design agenda; an issue I will explore more thoroughly in the following. Formally, the rules concerning quests clearly state that:

> Giving out quest solutions in whole or part is cheating. Information related to quests must not be discussed over chat channels. If a player is stuck while doing a quest assisting with a hint is acceptable but giving specifics on how to solve the quest will be punished severely. For further information see 'help quests'.[96]

Compare this with the help description concerning quests in *World of Warcraft*:

> Completing quests is the easiest way to level up, get money, receive trade skill recipes/components, earn equipment, and more. It is best to spend the majority of your time focusing on quests if you want to level up and become more powerful. Be sure to grab every quest you can find, and feel free to jump on to your next quest as soon as you've finished one. You can play however you want, but remember, it's all about having fun![97]

In another section of the help site, Blizzard further state that:

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[96] Help file accesses December 14, 2003. The information was later altered.
[97] http://www.wow-europe.com/en/info/basics/questbasics.html, last accessed June 27, 2008.

> Other players can tell you which quests are good for experience or which might have a quest reward that will benefit your character. Feel free to talk to guild members, party members, or players in the general channels for advice.
>
> If you are having problems completing a quest or finding where to get a quest, ask for help in the general chat channel. You can also post about quests in the Quest Forum. Usually the best place to ask is your guild, especially if there are more experienced players who have completed the quests several times.[98]

It is quite obvious that Blizzard regards quests as a feature that should be easy for the users to accomplish. This could be interpreted as a result of the economic structure of the game. As far as possible, being a commercial company, Blizzard will avoid users that get frustrated with the game and leave because of too high a level of difficulty. In contrast, the developers of *Discworld* do not need to take any economic considerations when deciding on design strategies, as the MUD is exclusively run by volunteers. For several years, to ensure that quests were solved in 'the right spirit', the developers of *Discworld* were hunting down sites on the net that contained quest solutions and made the server providers ban those containing hints and walkthroughs. They even made quest lists themselves with false quest solutions in the hope that this would diminish the value of the correct ones. Finally, in 2002, the developers decided that quests no longer should be rewarded with experience points, as this was regarded as the only way the players would solve them without agendas other than the enjoyment of the quests themselves. When the developers' quest ethos was not agreed upon by the players, when the socially enforced rules didn't work as intended, they simply changed the game mechanics instead. Several years later, in 2006, they reversed this decision by reintroducing experience points for some quests and also by making available a database consisting of hints for quest solutions. This database is located on their web site and has the following introduction:

> Welcome to *Discworld* MUD's quest database! Here you can find information on where to find and how to solve all the quests on the MUD, choosing yourself if you want to see the whole solution or just to get hints about how to get started.
> …

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[98] http://www.wow-europe.com/en/info/basics/questmanagement.html, last accessed June 27, 2008.

Disclaimer: A lot of the fun you get out of a quest is the satisfaction of actually having figured it out. Some of that might be lost by reading the solutions found here.[99]

As we can see, the initial reasoning about the proper way of solving quests is still apparent. The ambition in the earlier phase of *Discworld* to sanction hints and walkthroughs distributed on the net can easily be regarded as a paradox, given the fact that a multi-user medium embedded in an even larger networked media society presents the users with almost unlimited access to information. From the players' position, an instrumental approach toward quests can also be highly desirable, since levelling as fast as possible gives access to more game content, represented by more powerful weapons, spells and geographical areas. The quest ethos formulated by the developers of *Discworld* is in clear conflict with the realities surrounding the medium, as well as the enhancement structure of the game. One of the creators that resented the recent changes on the MUD offered this as the reason for his resentment:

I think it devalues one of the more unique elements of DWmud and is in a way almost giving in to the unpleasant individuals who weren't prepared to sign up to the implied social contract that playing the game imposes.[100]

There is a strong moral tenor underlying this statement, but the developers believe they have reasons for trying to uphold this 'implied social contract'. One explanation offered by this developer is that the players could develop a strong avatar in just a matter of a few days by using quest lists, which has led to several incidents where players developed 'harassment characters' just to make other players' lives miserable, without running the risk of having their main character expelled from the MUD.

This reveals an important difference regarding design of the quests in *Discworld* and *World of Warcraft*. In *Discworld*, many of the quests can be completed very quickly if you know exactly where to go and what action to perform, since quests seldom involve repetitive chores. Thus, you don't need a quest list to rapidly advance a new avatar; you just need to have done the quests earlier with another avatar. In *World of Warcraft*, even if you know the exact procedure of the quest, the execution of it will take a specific amount of time as you still need to kill these 15 whelps or obtain those

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[99] http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/secure/quests.c last accessed June 27, 2008. Player account required.
[100] mail correspondence, June 8. 2007

10 pelts. The repetitive pattern of the quests in *World of Warcraft* simply reduces the benefit of cheating. In *Discworld* the difference between solving a quest unaided and with a walkthrough can be as much as a few minutes compared to many hours, sometimes even days. Instead of designing quests that required more than a few minutes to solve, they tried to force the players to spend as much time as they thought was appropriate. It is hard not to regard this as a naïve approach toward the player community.

In addition to appealing to a 'proper' way of approaching quests, the developers also discussed different design solutions. For a designer who both wants quests to be unique and to avoid the use of quest lists, the repetitive chore, like the ones we find in *World of Warcraft*, is not a good enough option. One developer wrote the post *Unlisting the listable* explaining some of the elements a quest should include to render quest lists useless. The central argument of the post was to '[i]dentify areas where there is room for randomness.' He elaborate on this:

> It's remarkably difficult to design a quest that cannot be listed. It requires an exponential amount of effort to design, and a huge amount of extra effort to develop. However, this is pretty much the only way to ensure a fairness in quest rewards – the reward must equal the expended effort.[101]

This developer describes the high level of complexity involved in designing a quest that has random elements, due to the fact that the combinatorial possibilities grow exponentially with every new element added. This brings us back to the difference between emergent and progressive game elements described in chapter three. The normal quest design in *Discworld* is linear or progressive, which is the reason it is possible to write walkthroughs in the first place. The difficulty of including randomness into the design offers another reason why the developers were trying to lean on the players morals rather than on design solutions.

We might still ask why the developers regard it as imperative for the player to approach the quest in 'the right spirit'. As we saw from the help file '[a] lot of the fun you get out of a quest is the satisfaction of actually having figured it out.' The right

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[101] http://*Discworld*.atuin.net/lpc/about/articles/unlisting_the_listable.html, last accessed June 27, 2008.

way of approaching a quest is in a lonely struggle with the few scraps of information revealed by the MUD. Tronstad's account of how the player should approach the quest, might shed some light on this issue:

> Only the player who believes that there is something 'behind' the surface, some secret to be disclosed, may enter the seductive discourse of questing. At the same time, players who are not willing to indulge in the quest as a seductive practice but who encounter the puzzles forcefully as challenges to be *overcome* – who are playing for the sole purpose of re-configuring the quest product, to obtain a final meaning – may find it difficult to enjoy questing. (Tronstad 2004: 161)

The developers of *Discworld* would probably agree with this, as it resonates with the way they conceive of, and construct, quests. The elusive nature of the quests in *Discworld* compared with the easily accessible ones in *World of Warcraft* is somewhat reminiscent of the difference between fine art and popular culture. Fine art represents an intellectual journey that is not supposed to be entirely easy or immediately accessible, and the aspect of uniqueness and originality of the quests in *Discworld* points more toward art than popular culture; while the easily recognisable genre traits of the quests in *World of Warcraft* are more akin to popular fictional genres like fantasy and crime fiction. As mentioned earlier, some of the quests in *Discworld* might be considered poorly designed rather than artful, but my intention has been to show how the developers regard their quests, and further, how this influences their view on how a player should approach them.

An analysis based on the quests alone would suggest that *Discworld* is a more sophisticated and difficult game than *World of Warcraft*. This is not necessarily the case. As described in the last chapter, in *World of Warcraft*, the most complicated enterprise of the game is to defeat the toughest monsters, the bosses, in the raiding instances. These bosses will in many ways represent the uniqueness and variety we find in the quests in *Discworld*. In *World of Warcraft*, quests represent the average, run-of-the-mill action, and a necessary recourse to advance a character. In *Discworld*, on the other hand, there is no maximum level an avatar can reach, and no high end-gaming to strive for. The quest is, in many ways, the high end of this MUD and therefore, like the raiding dungeons in *World of Warcraft*, at the top of the content hierarchy.

Summary

I will sum up by highlighting three findings from my material. First, the comparative analysis shows a wide range of quest types within the two games, and that the greatest difference is between them. The quests in *Discworld* have many design elements that make them hard to solve. They are hidden in the environment and employ syntax or action that is often unique to each quest. In *World of Warcraft*, the quests are easy to find and easy to solve. The quests in *World of Warcraft* are therefore, on the whole, possible to map structurally, as advocated by Aarseth and Rettberg. The quests in *Discworld*, on the other hand, cannot be categorised by structural features as easily, because of the variety and complexity of their design. As such, the possibility for academic categorisation and analysis mirrors the accessibility of the quests. In *World of Warcraft*, quests are clearly themed and easily solved, whereas in *Discworld* they are both harder to solve and to categorise.

Secondly, we have seen that the quests fill different roles and have different positions within the content hierarchy of the games, both with regard to difficulty level and artistic expression. In *World of Warcraft*, quests are mainly an easy, accessible and temporary occupation while advancing towards the maximum level. The raiding is the most complex and challenging game content here, both with regard to social organisation and tactics. The boss encounters represent uniqueness more akin to the quests in *Discworld*. Designing quests in *Discworld* is regarded as a sort of aesthetic or creative reward after designing generic items and rooms. Their uniqueness is matched by the difficulty the players have in solving them. While quests in *World of Warcraft* are somewhere in the middle of the content hierarchy of the game, in *Discworld* they are at the top.

Thirdly, I will bring attention to the difference of ethos in relation to quests. Many of the quests in *Discworld* are designed in such a manner that help from a walkthrough can save the player a tremendous amount of time. The arms race between the players and the developers regarding quest lists illustrates how the developer's intentions with the design were not fully embraced by the player community. The developers tried for some time to prevent players sharing information about quests by relying on social mechanisms, but ended up using game mechanics to regulate unwanted behaviour. This can serve as another illustration of the tug of war between the developers and

players where they try to define what the game arena should look like. In *World of Warcraft*, in contrast, the developers furnish an instrumental approach towards questing in several ways. Through the online forums and help pages, the developers support players that want to help each other in solving quests. Features like the quest log and addons like *Quest helper* further facilitate questing. The quest design in *World of Warcraft* is a solution where, for economical or aesthetic reasons, the player's utilitarian approach is accommodated through the developer's design. In *Discworld*, the aesthetic ambitions regarding quests is arguably loftier than in *World of Warcraft*, but the fact that the players are subverting the content by cheating is a strong indication that the aesthetic ambitions of the developers is not successfully embodied in design. A more player-oriented view of the quest feature would probably have been beneficial for their design solutions.

8

Games as dynamic systems:
Concluding remarks

In this thesis, I have conducted an analysis of two multiplayer online games and discussed general issues about how these objects should be approached methodologically and theoretically. The modus operandi of my investigation has been to let the objects of study guide my choice of approach. As my cases are complex along several axes – technologically, functionally and socially – there are many potential aspects that might be targeted for analytical purposes. In this regard, my analysis has involved a large number of choices about which aspects need the most careful attention and which can be treated in a more cursory manner, or simply left aside. The player versus player (pvp) interaction, for instance, exists in both games but is not included in this study. What has been important for me is to present and discuss a number of elements from the games that work together analytically as a whole. As stated in the introduction, the research question encompassing this thesis is:

What is the relationship between the players, the medium and the developers in the two cases Discworld and World of Warcraft?

One very general answer to this question is that changes within the games are dependent on mechanisms formed through this relationship. What these mechanisms consist of, however, is not a uniform set of elements but rather different combinations of elements that must be seen in relation to a specific context. The raiding enterprise in *World of Warcraft* described in chapter five, for instance, is dependant on several sets of game mechanical tools, means for communicating and socially instigated conventions.

Before I highlight some of my findings concerning this relationship in more detail, I would like to position my study more explicitly, and in more formal terms, in the field of game studies. Studies on MUDs have declined over the last years, to be overtaken by a large number of studies of MMORPGs. From a few budding contributions at the beginning of this decade (Yee 2001, Castronova 2001), it has grown to a vast array of articles, books and conference papers over the last few years. *World of Warcraft* alone has had an enormous gravitational pull on the research community, with literally hundreds of papers and articles written on subjects related to this game. As a reflection of the general diversity within this field, these contributions come from most walks of academic life. However, there are rather fewer of them in which the developers, the game and players are all represented. There are also, to my knowledge, few studies that are conducted over extensive periods of time, or are based on a longitudinal approach. Thirdly, there are very few studies that are comparative. My analysis can therefore be considered an original contribution to this rapidly growing field, not due to any single factor, but rather as a combination of three factors:

- *Empirically*, by focusing on the triad of developers, games and players.
- *Analytically*, by employing a comparative approach.
- *Theoretically*, by employing a systems theoretical framework where the dynamic qualities of the cases are described.

T.L. Taylor earlier argued that '[r]ather than simply identifying "emergence" as a prime property of massively multiplayer online game life, a better understanding of the complex nature of player-produced culture is needed' (Taylor 2006a: 318). I will argue that my study, besides providing an analysis of my two cases, has introduced theoretical concepts that may be valuable on a more general level, accommodating a better understanding of the mechanisms governing multiplayer online games. In addition, I will suggest that my discussion of the concept of the player provides a broader picture of how the player contributes to the diversity of playing practices and indirectly to game design, in a more general sense. In the following section I will present some central findings from this thesis and discuss some of their implications.

Micro – Meso – Macro

The triad of the developers, the game and the players marks the empirical boundaries of my thesis. During my analysis another triad has been introduced, namely the systemic distinction between the micro, meso and macro levels of the game. As argued in chapter four, the technological and social aspects can be distinguished according to levels separately, but they are also intimately related. On the micro level, we find individual avatars that are a mesh of player preferences and game mechanical restraints on that particular avatar. On the meso level we find a different set of units, consisting of another functional relationship, this time of groups of players and the technology. Finally on a macro level we find the evolvement of general gaming conventions. With *World of Warcraft*, both raiding and DKP are conventions that are slowly changing and evolving on this level.

The parts of the game mechanics that are developed particularly as social instruments have been central to my analyses. Three such elements have been analysed, namely the club and citizen functions in *Discworld* described in chapters four and six, and the guild function in *World of Warcraft* described in chapter five. Raiding in *World of Warcraft* represents another group-oriented feature, however not a tool for social organisations, but rather game content designed for group play. Through these three social tools, the developers have relinquished some of their powers. My analyses describe users that are collectively developing their own set of rules as well as different kinds of player-invented activities. Of these three game mechanical features, the club function in *Discworld* is clearly the one that accommodates most flexibility. Socially, it fulfils a large array of functions, ranging from purely social, through gaming activities to different types of enterprises. An important reason for this is the possibility for a player to be a member of several clubs simultaneously. The club ecology is therefore more diverse in *Discworld* than in *World of Warcraft*, which is quite remarkable, considering the much higher number of players in *World of Warcraft*. This illustrates how a small game mechanical difference can have extensive social ramifications.

The social aspects of the games are, in a more indirect manner, the topic of chapter seven, where quests are analysed. Here, the interdependence between the player, the medium and the developers shows itself rather clearly, but not this time through

intentional design. In contrast to the club and guild functions, this game element is not designed as a social tool but rather the opposite, as most quests are supposed to be solved in solitude. In *Discworld*, the quests are also supposed to be solved unaided, a fact that is explicitly mentioned in the game rules. As described, some of the players undermined the developer's design intent by sharing quest lists on the net. Despite the developers' intense efforts to restrain the players' use of such lists through both game mechanical means and codes of conduct, the social aspects of the game generally rendered their attempts futile. This can serve as an illustration of how the social, collective aspect of the games is visible on almost every level, permeating even the most secluded elements of the games.

Complexity and models

Complexity has been both an undercurrent and a major topic in this thesis. The two chapters that discuss complexity most explicitly, are chapters three and six where Juul's and Bartle's models are presented. My approach towards both of these models has been to confront them with empirical examples, and to describe types of use, that conflict with their inherent order and categorisation. Why has this been important? The driving force behind this investigation has been an experience of discrepancy between the complex dynamics of my cases and the static simplicity of these models. My aspiration has been to describe why these models have shortcomings.

Within different academic disciplines we find many ways of organising knowledge into more or less ordered theoretical models, but there is no unifying set of criteria for defining how models should be constructed. The reflexivity concerning the modelling enterprise also varies greatly from discipline to discipline. Within natural sciences the correspondence between the models and reality is often regarded as crucial. As the theoretical ecologist William Silvert states: 'Above all, the successful modeller must be able to recognise whether a model reflects reality, and identify and deal with divergences between theory and data.' (Silvert 2000: 1) Within the social sciences and humanities this correspondence is often regarded as not being of equal importance. Max Weber's ideal types is one example of a different use of a model, where the aim is to construct clear categories and not necessarily a model that reflects reality in the most accurate manner (Weber 1949). This type of modelling is interesting because it

theoretically refines and enhances some of the mechanisms of the phenomena being studied. These phenomena may not exist in this pure form, but the model can still be used as a starting point for theoretical explorations. Although being highly idealised, in contrast to being highly accurate, such models simplify complex phenomena into elements that are possible to handle theoretically, without losing too much of the phenomena's inherent qualities.

Despite being idealised, Weber's concept of ideal types has the important advantage of being developed in close connection with empirical studies. In my view, the greatest weakness of both Bartle's and Juul's models is their lack of empirical grounding. With regard to Bartle's model (1996, 2003), the limited data set it is built upon jeopardizes its general claims. Other weaknesses are its inadequate methodological approach and the simplified concept of the human mind that it implies. By analysing Bartle's model in light of the concept of folk taxonomy, as I did in chapter six, the reason for its simplistic design and its original function becomes clearer – the taxonomy is a reflection of distinctions found in one specific gaming community. A similar folk taxonomy exists in *Discworld*, with slightly different categories. In my material, we see glimpses of how this taxonomy provides the players with a basic outline of the social structure of the game. Although it only captures a rudimentary notion of this complex player arena, it makes it easier for the players to understand their own playing preferences and to articulate how the game should be further developed. A folk taxonomy can play an important role in a community but, as noted, it is important that we, as researchers, are reflexive about the categories we 'uncover' in our material and that we do not automatically incorporate them into our theoretical armoury.

Concerning Juul's model, the picture is somewhat more complicated. In general, Juul's approach also lacks a thorough basis in empirical data, as it is mainly based on earlier theoretical contributions. One of the goals of this model is to establish a definition of a computer game and to separate it from other phenomena, such as play, for instance (Juul 2005). This is a distinction that Caillios (1961), in particular, is fronting in his definition of games, and one of the distinctions that are still widely used and reproduced within our field. Other aspects from older game definitions are also incorporated into this model, like the definitions of rules and end goal. As I have

argued in chapter three, these characteristics of games are useful for describing structurally simple games like Chess, but less fruitful when confronted with the structural complexity of games like MUDs and MMORPGs. An end goal does not have to be a material part of the game medium, but can just as well be established by the player. Rules are subject to the same duality. They are not necessarily embedded into a game's physical or material structure and may just as well be partly constructed by the players. The complexity of the game mechanics and the enormous number of rules make them subject to interpretative, inventive manipulation by the users. This is especially significant when approaching such collective game spaces as multiplayer online games, where socially instigated rules can be just as important as game mechanics.

To what degree my critique of Juul can be directed at other representatives of ludology or game studies is a matter of consideration, but in my view there is a general need to place the focus on the dynamic relationship between the game medium and gaming phenomena. I have tried to move away from, to escape, the media-centric concepts of games found in ludology. As I have stated earlier, in an attempt to illustrate the diversity of player activities in *Discworld*, '[a]part from traditional gaming activities, the players can act as administrators, coders, law enforcers, researchers, merchants, journalists, editors, friends, spouses, teachers and artists' (Karlsen 2004: 8). The complexity of the game spaces opens up for a large variety of player approaches. In order to understand new playing conventions, it can be crucial to put aside concepts like the ideal player or simple sets of player motivations and rather embrace the complex, sometimes conflicting, motivation palette of actual players. Although I sympathise with the need to classify and structure an object of study, it is important that we develop a classification that reflects the complexity of our object.

A last critical remark concerning Juul's model is about its static concept of games. Most of my empirical findings concern the dynamic characteristics of games, and my solution has been to propose a more flexible game concept, based on a concept of flexible rules and game goals. The slowly evolving nature of these games, their dynamic structure, is intimately tied to the games' temporality. Systems theory and complexity theory seems especially suited to explore this temporality since time is

essential for change. This leads me to the last theoretical point I will describe here, namely temporality.

Temporality

The temporal dimension is especially important with regard to multiplayer online games, as they, unlike singleplayer games, change and evolve. It should be noted that one of the benefits of following *Discworld* for nearly a decade has been to witness some of the changes this game has gone through with regard to policy alterations, growth in geographical expansion and chances in game mechanics and demographics. Also the frequent updates of *World of Warcraft* bear witness to a game, and a game culture, in transit. Some of the mechanisms behind these changes can be described with reference to how feedback mechanisms in a system influence the basic building blocks and slowly change their form. In multiplayer online games, the basic building blocks can be both individual players and fundamental game mechanics. Both players and developers slowly adjust their approach to the game, partly by adapting, partly by influencing and changing the game. The temporal dimension of multiplayer online games is an aspect where they differ from most other aesthetic objects by not being constant. A traditional aesthetic object, such as a movie or novel, also has a temporal dimension, but it does not change every time someone observes or uses it. Multiplayer online games change because they are partly under the influence of social and cultural mechanisms. An academic approach towards aesthetics that studies elements of this magnitude is genre analysis, describing how genres within literature, film or art change as part of changes in taste, or through overall change in society[102]. I am referring here to a concept of genre that Carolyn Miller describes when she states that '[t]he classification I am advocating is, in effect, ethnomethodological: it seeks to explicate the knowledge that practice creates' (Miller 1984: 155). This is a genre concept that is sensitive to dynamic change in culture and not focused on creating a rigid taxonomy based on *a priori* principles. This characteristic also fits my argument concerning Juul's and Bartle's models: they are too static and closed to be able to properly incorporate change in game genres.

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[102] Beside genre studies, serialised fiction, like TV-series, share some of the same characteristics as multiplayer online games. Also here the popularity and demands from the public might change the development strategy of the producers. The biggest difference, however, is the *direct* impact the users of a multiplayer game have.

On the macro level of multiplayer online games, we are witnessing the development of player genres and player conventions, based on activities found deeper in the system. What is interesting is that this is both a planned and an emergent phenomenon. On a temporal scale, game conventions that emerged without any initial planning, like raiding, can, in later incarnations of the same game genre, become a thoroughly designed and top-down planned feature. The DKP system I describe in chapter five is another example of an emergent social phenomenon, but one that has not yet been incorporated into the design. It might very well be so, in the future, if DKP is an element that can be properly handled by game mechanical means.[103] Raiding and DKP are also game conventions that go beyond this particular game. They are related to the mechanics of this specific game, but are also cultural phenomena that are slowly evolving, encompassing many different games. It is doubtlessly on the macroscopic cultural level that these conventions are captured most comprehensively. The different gaming conventions are simply the largest evolving systems we can observe within this cultural sphere. As emergent phenomena they have no identifiable orchestrator, but are being developed through the active use of millions of players and thousands of developers spanning continents and game platforms. What is quite extraordinary, and which has been important for me to highlight, is that these general cultural mechanisms also influence the use and development of single online multiplayer games.

Further research

In this last section I will propose some suggestions for further research. In my study, elements at the meso level of the system seem to play a particularly significant role in the change and evolvement in the game. The meso level, represented by groups of players employing game mechanics more or less suited for social purposes, is the place where friction and change are most easily identified. The particular blend of technology and social formations we find on this level can be described as the

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[103] Another example of emergent phenomenon on a macro level is that of the infamous gold sellers in *World of Warcraft*, who harvest the game for gold that they sell for real life currency to other players. This is an example of another type of activity that, economically, has effects on the macro level of the game. As most users think this ruins the economical system of the game, this is a feature that, most likely, will not be introduced in future incarnations. In other types of synthetic worlds, like Second Life, earning money is a feature that is incorporated into the design and encouraged by the designers.

dynamic engine that drives the system. In a moment of theoretical euphoria, this engine might be regarded as a core of a cultural mechanism that makes certain types of game conventions evolve. However, we still know little about the variety of these mechanisms and how different contexts might influence them. My thesis provides only two empirical cases and although they stand, technologically and socially, quite far apart, there are without doubt many other games and gaming conventions that are based on different technosocial solutions. A wider empirical exploration that specifically targets the dynamic aspects of multiplayer games would broaden our understanding of the variety of the phenomena in question. An analysis that targets elements that instigate change more specifically would be able to pinpoint elements that may be important both for stability, variety and change in multiplayer games.

Theoretically, I have employed concepts like feedback mechanisms, temporality, change, levels and rules. These concepts are mainly borrowed from systems theory and complexity theory, and to a lesser degree lean on concepts from social theory, anthropology, ludology and economics. There is, however, a wide range of other disciplines and theoretical approaches that employ related concepts and analyse similar phenomena, for instance biology, chaos theory, genre studies and network theory. It has been beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate these theoretical terrains, but there are doubtlessly many other concepts and reflections that describe change and dynamic systems that can contribute to a theoretical framework and further analyses of multiplayer online games.

Lastly, multiplayer online games are dynamic systems that also stand in a functional relationship to other media like social web features. An aspect that has only been briefly described in this thesis is how communication tools and tools for distributing information influence gaming. Information is one subject over which the players and developers fight. The quest lists in *Discworld* described in chapter seven, for instance, instigated an arms race between players and developers that spanned several years. The dissemination of information was in this case mainly realised through net solutions outside of the game. Closer investigations of information and communication tools, and empirical studies that follow trails of information, may contribute with insights regarding the dynamic role information plays in the gaming culture, and also how the game is intertwined with other media.

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Tables and Figures

Appendices

Appendix I: Interview guide

Playing and alts
- Is one of your alts more "you" than the others?
- Do you use your alts differently?
- Do you try keeping them separate?
- Do you try to keep any alts secret?
- Do any of your alts have different sex then yourself?
- Do you usually have an overall goal when playing?
- If creator: Do you still play with some of your other characters?
- Has the way you play changed over time?

Communication and in game public sphere
- Do you use boards? (both read and write) Which boards?
- Are you a member of any clubs on the disc? Do you use them actively?
- Are you a member of a family?
- Do you have a citizenship anywhere?
- Do you usually participate in debates about in-game social or political issues?
- Do you read the newspapers regularly?
- Do you write in the newspapers?
- What do you think about the different happenings which are arranged on the MUD like drawing contest the ostrics etc?

Creativity and fandom
- Do you have any *Discworld* homepage?
- Do you use much time maintaining them?
- Do you use others homepages regularly?
- Is it still fun?
- Does it in some way influence your mudding experience?
- Is it pictures of you on hall of shame?

MUDs, games and fiction
- How many Pratchett books have you read?
- What is the relationship between the books and the MUD?
- What kind of fiction do you prefer? Why?
- Is there any similarity in experience from reading books and playing the MUD?
- Do you usually listen to music/radio or have the TV on when mudding?
- Do you play other online computer game? Which?
- Do you play ordinary computer games?
- What is the difference between these games and the MUD?

Socializing
- Is there any group of players/administrators you speak with more than others? People from the same country, of the same sex, guild etc.
- Do you often group with other players?
- Are people you know on this MUD any different from others?
- Have you had a crush on anyone on the Disc?
- Have you had any serious conflicts with anyone?
- What subjects do you usually talk with others about? (game mechanics, RL issues etc.)
- How many MUD meets have you attended?
- Do you talk with your "ordinary" friends about mudding?
- What do you like best about meeting your MUD friends in person?

Development and administration
- Do you think the administrators of the MUD handles the player community well?
- Where do you mainly find inspiration when developing the MUD further? Other MUDs? Other games? The books?
- Ceres has written on the boards about IC/OOC issues and that the MUD is moving in a more sophisticated direction. How will you describe the focus of the development at the present stage?
- What is the balance between individual creativity and overall design goals?
- Is it difficult to demand work from creators when they are unpaid and are using their spare time coding for the MUD?

Appendix II: Discworld survey

RL:

Name _____

Age _____

Sex _____

Occupation/study/school _____ Year of higher education ____

Name of main character (with longest online time)

_____

Number of alts _____
Approximate playing time with all your characters _____
Approximate time you first logged onto *Discworld*. _____

What was your main reason beginning playing *Discworld*?
☐ Experience with other MUDs
☐ Experience with Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* books
☐ A random hit on internet
☐ A friend told me about it
☐ Article in *Discworld* monthly
☐ Other, please explain _____

How will you characterize your main playing style?
☐ Number chasing
☐ Role playing
☐ Socializing
☐ Other, please describe: _____

Do you have a home page about the Discworld MUD?

☐ Yes
☐ No

How often do you do the following when you log on to *Discworld*:

Chat on the talker	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Talk with my friends	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Learning new guild specific things	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Solving quests	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Kill NPCs	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Role play	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Gather experience points	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Exploring new areas of the game	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Trying to figure out the game mechanics	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Read boards	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Post on the boards	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never

How often do you:

Vote in elections	On every occasion	☐ Once in a while	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Read a *Discworld* newspaper	Every issue	☐ Once in a while	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Write for the newspapers	Every issue	☐ Once in a while	☐ Seldom	☐ Never

When talking to other players, how often is the following the topic for the conversation:

Personal real life issues	Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
General real life issues	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
The *Discworld* MUD in general	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Tactical issues of playing	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Guild specific issues	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
The *Discworld* books	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Other fiction	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Other players	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Discworld politics or social issues	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never

How often do you read the following types of books:

Fantasy	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Science-fiction	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Historical novels	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Poetry	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Crime	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Other fiction	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Scientific literature	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never
Biographies	☐ Very often	☐ Often	☐ Seldom	☐ Never

Please mention three books/series you like especially much:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Appendix III: Letter to informants

Oslo, 19th January 2003

Research project on the Discworld MUD
I am working as a researcher at the Department of media and communication at the University of Oslo. Presently I am conducting a research study on online socialization. As part of this, I am interviewing players and administrators of *Discworld* about their experiences with the MUD. The result from this project will be published as a report within the end of this year. The identity of all informants that are part of this study will be kept hidden when referred to in this report.

If you have any further questions about the nature of this study please contact me on tel.: +47 22 85 04 04 or email: faltin.karlsen@media.uio.no.

Sincerely,

Faltin Karlsen
Researcher
IMK, UiO

skills crafts

```
======SKILLS======Level/Bonus============================
smithing...........  24  124 | spinning..........  11   62
| gold.............  30  140 | needlework........  14   78
| silver..........  15   84 | dyeing............  14   78
| black...........  29  137 husbandry...........   0    0
| | tools..........  21  115 | plant.............   0    0
| | weapons........  37  160 | | edible..........   0    0
| | armour.........  29  137 | | herbal..........   0    0
| gem..............  24  124 | | milling.........   0    0
| | cutting........  24  124 | | tree............   0    0
| | polishing......  24  124 | animal............   0    0
| | setting........  24  124 | | grooming........   0    0
| locks............  24  124 | | breeding........   0    0
mining.............  10   55 | | slaughtering....   0    0
| gem..............  10   55 culinary............   0    0
| ore..............  10   55 | cooking...........   0    0
| | panning........  10   55 | baking............   0    0
| mineral..........  10   55 | butchering........   0    0
hunting............  10   58 | preserving........   0    0
| tracking.........  10   58 | brewing...........   0    0
| fishing..........  10   58 | distilling........   0    0
| trapping.........  10   58 arts...............   0    0
| foraging.........  10   58 | design............   0    0
carpentry..........  20  112 | calligraphy.......   0    0
| furniture........  20  112 | drawing...........   0    0
| coopering........  20  112 | painting..........   0    0
| turning..........  23  120 | printing..........   0    0
| whittling........  20  112 | sculpture.........   0    0
pottery............  11   62 music..............   0    0
| forming..........  11   62 | instruments.......   0    0
| | throwing.......  11   62 | | percussion......   0    0
| | shaping........  11   62 | | wind............   0    0
| glazing..........  11   62 | | stringed........   0    0
| staining.........  11   62 | | keyboard........   0    0
| firing...........  11   62 | | vocal...........   0    0
materials..........  14   78 | special...........   0    0
| tanning..........  20  112 | theory............   0    0
| leatherwork......  14   78 | performance.......   0    0
| weaving..........  13   73 points.............  12   66
```

skills covert

```
======SKILLS======Level/Bonus==============================
stealth.............  10   54 | palming...........  19  102
| inside...........  10   54 | passing...........  16   86
| outside..........  10   54 | sleight-of-hand...  35  148
| underwater.......  10   54 | stealing..........  11   59
hiding.............   8   45 casing.............   8   43
| person...........   8   45 | person...........   8   43
| object...........   8   45 | place.............   8   43
lockpick...........   8   43 items..............  13   78
| doors............   8   43 | poisons...........  10   60
| safes............   8   43 | traps.............  20  121
| traps............   8   43 | weapons...........  10   60
manipulation.......  20  108 points.............  10   55
```

skills faith

```
======SKILLS======Level/Bonus==============================
rituals............   9   45 | | target.........   9   45
| offensive........   9   46 | misc.............   9   47
| | area...........   9   46 | | area...........   9   47
| | target.........   9   46 | | self...........   9   47
| defensive........   9   46 | | target.........   9   47
| | area...........   9   46 | special...........   9   45
| | self...........   9   46 items..............  34  146
| | target.........   9   46 | rod...............  55  178
| curing...........   9   45 | scroll...........  13   70
| | self...........   9   45 points.............  78  190
```

skills fighting

```
======SKILLS======Level/Bonus==============================
combat.............  48  170 | | melee..........  132  209
| melee............  97  189 | | range..........  25  113
| | sharp..........  230  263 dodging...........  22  107
| | pierce.........  91  192 | melee...........  23  109
| | blunt..........  34  138 | range...........  21  104
| | unarmed........  35  140 special...........  29  131
| range............  18   93 | weapon..........  51  187
| | thrown.........  21  106 | unarmed........  19  111
| | fired..........  15   78 | tactics........  19  106
| parry............  78  181 points.............  13   65
```

skills magic

```
======SKILLS======Level/Bonus============================
spells.............. 267 295 | | enchanting...... 237 293
| offensive......... 300 316 | | evoking......... 238 294
| defensive......... 329 326 | | healing........ 85 206
| misc.............. 230 282 | | scrying........ 65 195
| special.......... 210 258 | spiritual........ 127 214
methods............. 144 243 | | abjuring....... 170 237
| elemental........ 119 215 | | banishing...... 135 218
| | air............. 73 190 | | conjuring...... 103 201
| | earth.......... 51 174 | | divining....... 50 168
| | fire............ 302 315 | | summoning...... 180 242
| | water.......... 53 176 items............... 74 191
| mental............ 166 279 | held............. 93 201
| | animating....... 188 293 | | wand............ 115 213
| | channeling...... 245 328 | | rod............. 76 192
| | charming........ 135 259 | | staff.......... 130 221
| | convoking....... 136 260 | | broom.......... 50 173
| | cursing........ 130 256 worn.............. 50 173
| physical.......... 166 253 | amulet.......... 50 173
| | binding........ 277 315 | | ring............ 50 173
| | brewing........ 50 181 scroll............ 106 208
| | chanting....... 240 295 | talisman.......... 50 173
| | dancing........ 136 236 points.............. 250 284
```

skills other

```
======SKILLS======Level/Bonus============================
trading............. –   – | weapons.......... 25 132
| buying............ 25 132 | armour.......... 25 132
| selling........... 25 132 culture............. –   –
| valueing.......... –   – | ankh-morporkian... 0   0
| | gems............ 25 132 | djelian.......... 0   0
| | jewellery....... 25 132 | ephebian......... 0   0
| | weapons........ 25 132 | agatean.......... 0   0
| | armour......... 25 132 perception.......... 60 179
movement............ –   – direction........... 37 157
| swimming.......... 28 121 health.............. 126 199
| riding............ –   – points.............. 41 157
| | horse.......... 1   5 language............ –   –
| | camel.......... 22 106 | agatean.......... –   –
| climbing.......... –   – | | spoken.......... 38   –
| | tree........... 26 116 | | written........ 33   –
| | rock........... 25 113 | djelian.......... –   –
| | rope........... 25 113 | | spoken......... 90   –
| sailing........... 0   0 | | written........ 90   –
acrobatics.......... –   – | morporkian........ –   –
| tumbling.......... 0   0 | | spoken......... 100   –
| vaulting.......... 0   0 | | written........ 100   –
| balancing......... 0   0 | wizard_spells..... –   –
evaluating.......... –   – | | written........ 100   –
```

Appendix V: Talent tree for rogues

This specialisation is called combat swords spec, because most talent points is in the combat tree and swords is chosen as specialisation. This specialisation is common for raiding or solo play, whereas specialisation in subtlety and assassination is more commonly used for player versus player-play (pvp).

Appendix VI: Stats for night elf rogue

Lvl	Str		Agility				Stamina			Intel			Spirit			Health			Armor
34	45	—	61	78	2	138	45	—	96	27	—	34	24	—	60	794	36	1306	996
33	44	—	60	76	2	138	44	—	104	27	—	33	24	—	65	758	35	1360	964
32	43	—	52	74	2	129	43	—	101	26	—	33	23	—	71	723	34	1305	931
31	42	—	52	72	—	114	42	—	108	26	—	32	23	—	64	689	33	1351	883
30	41	—	51	71	2	106	41	—	106	26	—	32	23	—	63	656	32	1308	860
29	40	—	54	69	2	111	40	—	113	26	—	31	23	—	72	624	31	1346	980
28	40	—	50	67	2	103	40	—	106	25	—	31	23	—	56	593	30	1255	799
27	39	—	46	65	—	101	39	—	81	25	—	30	22	—	43	563	29	985	700
26	38	—	51	64	2	106	38	—	106	25	—	30	22	—	49	534	28	1216	870
25	37	—	49	62	2	93	37	—	73	24	—	30	22	—	43	506	27	868	675
24	36	—	48	60	—	91	36	—	72	24	—	29	22	—	42	481	26	841	671
23	35	—	44	59	2	87	35	—	90	24	—	29	22	—	39	455	25	995	663
22	34	—	49	57	—	85	35	—	65	24	—	28	22	—	35	430	24	730	654
21	33	—	48	56	2	80	34	—	69	23	—	28	22	—	33	406	23	756	633
20	32	—	44	54	—	67	33	—	53	23	—	27	22	—	33	383	22	583	595
19	32	—	40	53	2	65	32	—	41	23	—	27	22	—	33	361	21	451	549
18	31	—	39	51	2	63	31	—	41	22	—	26	22	—	32	340	20	321	545
17	30	—	33	49	—	58	30	—	44	22	—	26	22	—	34	320	19	450	456
16	29	—	32	48	—	59	30	—	32	22	—	25	22	—	31	301	18	450	417
15	28	—	28	47	2	55	29	—	29	22	—	25	22	—	25	283	17	283	426
14	27	—	27	45	—	47	29	—	29	22	—	25	22	—	25	266	17	266	416
13	27	—	27	44	2	47	28	—	28	22	—	25	22	—	24	249	17	249	416
12	26	—	26	42	—	45	27	—	27	22	—	24	22	—	24	232	17	232	330
11	25	—	25	41	—	42	27	—	27	22	—	24	22	—	24	215	17	215	284
10	24	—	24	40	2	40	26	—	26	22	—	23	22	—	23	198	17	198	280
9	24	—	24	38	—	38	25	—	25	21	—	23	22	—	23	181	17	181	243
8	23	—	23	37	2	37	24	—	24	21	—	22	21	—	22	164	17	164	216
7	22	—	22	36	2	36	24	—	24	21	—	22	21	—	22	147	17	147	214
6	21	—	21	34	—	34	23	—	23	21	—	22	21	—	22	130	17	130	210
5	21	—	21	33	—	33	23	—	23	21	—	22	21	—	21	113	17	113	233
4	20	—	20	32	2	32	22	—	22	21	—	22	21	—	21	96	17	96	204
3	19	—	19	30	—	30	21	—	21	21	—	21	21	—	22	79	17	79	110
2	19	—	19	29	—	29	21	—	21	20	—	21	20	—	21	62	17	62	60
1	18	—	19	28	2	28	20	—	20	20	—	20	20	—	20	45	17	45	58

35	46	I	63	80	2	142	46	—	105	27	—	34	58	—	54	831	37	1423	1011
36	48	2	58	82	2	136	47	—	112	28	—	35	55	—	55	869	38	1521	1010
37	49	—	59	83	1	150	48	—	122	28	—	36	56	—	48	908	39	1650	1029
38	50	—	67	85	2	158	49	—	124	28	—	36	52	—	56	948	40	1700	1066
39	51	—	72	87	2	165	50	—	125	32	—	32	57	—	57	989	41	1741	1112
40	52	—	70	89	2	172	51	—	123	29	—	33	55	—	55	1031	42	1753	1130
41	53	—	77	92	2	182	52	—	135	29	—	33	37	—	55	1074	43	1906	1163
42	54	—	78	94	2	200	53	—	153	29	—	33	38	—	57	1118	44	2120	1215
43	55	—	90	96	2	191	54	—	126	29	—	33	39	—	46	1163	45	1885	1228
44	56	—	91	99	3	194	55	—	139	30	—	34	39	—	58	1209	46	2051	1234
45	58	2	102	101	2	199	56	—	125	30	—	34	34	—	55	1256	47	1948	1253
46	59	—	95	103	2	225	57	—	140	30	—	34	40	—	60	1304	48	2136	1320
47	60	—	78	105	2	182	58	—	140	31	—	31	41	—	70	1353	49	2175	1275
48	61	—	113	107	2	201	59	—	153	31	—	31	42	—	59	1403	50	2345	1289
49	62	—	116	109	2	211	60	—	140	31	—	31	43	—	52	1454	51	2246	1309
50	64	2	109	112	3	214	61	—	141	32	—	32	43	—	52	1506	52	2298	1315
51	65	—	107	114	2	242	62	—	167	32	—	32	44	—	57	1559	53	2601	1424
52	66	—	124	116	2	262	63	—	162	32	—	23	44	—	68	1613	54	2595	1450
53	67	—	116	119	3	253	64	—	166	33	—	33	45	—	50	1668	55	2680	1430
54	69	2	118	121	2	280	65	—	157	33	—	33	46	—	51	1724	56	2636	1484
55	70	—	118	123	2	257	67	2	159	33	2	33	46	—	51	1781	57	2693	1438
56	71	—	107	126	3	244	68	—	172	34	—	34	47	—	64	1839	58	2871	1507
57	73	2	109	128	2	246	69	—	173	34	—	34	48	—	68	1898	59	2785	1511
58	74	—	113	130	3	266	70	—	169	34	—	34	49	—	49	1958	60	2940	1517
59	76	2	128	132	2	268	72	2	219	35	—	34	49	—	49	2019	61	3481	1571
60	77	—	121	135	3	276	73	—	188	35	—	35	50	—	50	2081	62	3223	1587
61	78	—	129	138	3	305	75	2	250	35	—	35	51	—	51	2272	191	4110	1855
62	80	2	138	142	2	328	77	2	310	36	—	36	51	—	71	2469	197	4509	2151
63	81	—	157	145	3	336	78	—	352	36	—	54	52	—	90	2677	208	5417	2664
64	83	2	137	148	3	344	79	—	379	36	—	36	53	—	53	2895	218	5895	2223
65	84	—	121	150	2	386	81	2	355	37	2	55	54	—	72	3119	224	5859	2578
66	86	2	111	154	4	407	82	—	353	37	—	61	55	—	71	3357	238	6067	2230
67	87	—	204	157	3	409	84	2	361	38	2	44	56	—	81	3601	244	6371	2252
68	89	2	134	160	3	421	85	—	384	38	—	44	56	—	82	3860	259	6490	2296
69	91	2	116	163	3	437	86	—	372	39	—	44	57	—	83	4130	270	6990	2361
70	92	—	98	166	3	423	88	2	332	40	—	45	58	—	84	4404	274	6844	2378