

Cyber Anthropology:

Behind The Avatar

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction: | 3 |
| Literature Review: | 4 |
| MMORPG 101: The Basics | 10 |
| What is an Avatar | 11 |
| Race and Class | 12 |
| The MMO's | 12 |
| Methods: | 14 |
| Participant Observation: | 14 |
| Interviews: | 16 |
| Focus Group: | 18 |
| Ethics: | 18 |
| Issues: | 19 |
| Analysis: | 21 |
| Reflections on Fieldwork: | 33 |
| Possible Avenues for Further Inquiry: | 41 |
| Bibliography | 43 |
| Appendices | 44 |
| Consent Form | 44 |
| Interview Questions/Topics | 47 |
| Focus Group Guide | 48 |
| Interviews | 50 |
| Everwyn | 50 |
| Hector | 54 |
| Jericho | 60 |
| Korin | 65 |
| Norith | 72 |
| Procter | 77 |
| Till | 82 |
| Glossary | 87 |

I found myself on a snowy planet, at night in a snow storm. I could only see a very limited distance in front of me, but I noticed enemy characters and neutral critters. I spotted a fellow guild mate running by and quickly tailed him, finding myself safely with the group. I froze when one of the members shouted out "What are you doing?!" I tensed up, worried I had broken some rule or etiquette without realizing it. Fortunately I was not the one being addressed. "What? They're passive mobs, it's ok." Tim replied. "It doesn't matter, Wendy will still get upset if she sees you killin' them." Replied the leader. "Ya, she sees it as animal cruelty whether it's RL or virtual" asserted Tom. "Fine, fine. I won't. Sorry," replied Tim.

Introduction:

Anthropologists have traditionally gone to remote places all around the globe to study cultures and share their knowledge and experiences with the world. With the birth of the Internet however, anthropologists need go no further than their desk to access millions of people and diverse communities and cultures. Digital Ethnography is a relatively new field in anthropology that pushes the boundaries of anthropology beyond the traditional and opens new avenues to explore. There are thousands thriving online communities that consist of millions of users actively participating in online activities through their computer. While this can include from social networking sites such as Facebook, posting comments on a forum such as Yahoo Questions, or even placing bids on eBay, there has been one virtual venue that has really flourished - Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG).

An MMORPG is typically a game that requires internet connection and is accessed by hundreds, thousands, or even millions of users each month. The users interact with one another in a world (often 3d) generated by the game through their computer or video game console. These worlds are often fantasy or science-fiction based, though some even attempt to mimic real life. Within these online worlds, a person is more often than not represented by an

avatar, a visual representation of him or herself, that is custom-designed by the user selecting such options as skin tone, hair, clothing, and accessories. Once a user has created their avatar, they are free to interact with the others in the world and attempt to complete quests, join guilds, explore, or sit back on their friends' virtual couch and watch a film.

The purpose of my research was to analyze how we form these avatars within these virtual worlds and what may influence our choices during the process. I was curious to see what factors influenced their creation and how the creators viewed their own avatars. I also looked into how people would interact with these avatars in these virtual spaces. By doing this, I will reveal ways in which we perceive ourselves, others, online worlds, and, more fundamentally, why. This will give us a better understanding of self-perception, and help identify the patterns that become associated with online game play in these virtual worlds.

Literature Review:

Before starting my ethnographic field work I reviewed work already done in this field by other anthropologists, specifically Bonnie A. Nardi's *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*, William Bainbridge's *The Warcraft Civilization*, and Tom Boellstorff's *Coming of Age in Second Life*. These were each done in their own respective worlds reflected in their titles. Boellstorff's book particularly is establishing links between his research and the work of anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (For which his books title is meant to reflect her work "*Coming of Age in Samoa*") (Boellstorff, pg 8) and Bronislaw Malinowski. The main idea asserted by him in his opening pages is that these online worlds are truly representative of their own online cultures, and thus must be explored in the

same way that an anthropologist would explore any other culture. All three of the authors demonstrate through their participant observation rules and regulations within these virtual worlds, as well as entire religions, class/race struggles, gender differences, economies, government, and identity. They are able to gather all of this information in context relative to the actual game world and understand it as a whole to be able to better understand the players roles and goals within these virtual worlds. It is also by exploring all of this virtual world culture that they are then able to draw comparisons between these virtual worlds and real-life which assist them in their analysis.

Starting with Nardi and Bainbridge, their work was done in the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* (WoW). Because of the magnitude of players that play, and have played, this game is a leading example for a community that has been able to generate its own culture in regard to their own customs, adapted language, and lifestyle that affects both the online and offline worlds. Because of all this, it was fertile ground for Nardi and Bainbridge to conduct research.

Nardi spent over three years doing participatory fieldwork in *World of Warcraft*. During this research, she designed multiple avatars on multiple servers and interacted largely with several player organizations (referred to as guilds). Most notably were the Scarlet Ravens and Terror Nova. Through these different guilds she was able to participate and learn the ways in which people interact with the virtual world itself and each other within the virtual world. Nardi goes on to explain how she conducted her fieldwork, and give examples of her first-hand experience through her avatar, Innikka.

"I developed a strong sensation that I had woken up inside an animated fairy tale. I was not just watching and listening though; I played a starring role" (Nardi, pg 8).

Throughout her study she relied on participant observation, interviews both virtual and in person, and observing people play the game in real life at internet cafes. She also had access to several undergraduate students to assist her in completing tasks such as interviewing, coding, and even translating. In her analysis Nardi found that the general reason people play *World of Warcraft* is due to their enjoyment derived from being consistently rewarded with more advanced levels and items as the game progresses. This was reinforced by the chance for random rewards that could occur at any time in the form of rare virtual items (Nardi, pg 39).

Nardi investigates how participants in these online worlds divide their time between the virtual world and real-life obligations, such as family and work. An interesting component she came across was how online play could often be referred to as "work" as one had to log onto the virtual world to help their guild accomplish large scale missions known as "raids". So, in a sense, they were moving from real-life work and transitioning into virtual work. However, it was still viewed as play (Nardi, pg. 101). The topic of addiction was addressed, and revealed to be a prominent theme within these online worlds. It is openly recognized (though referenced in humorous ways) and considered a real threat. Because of this, players tended to be rather accepting when people opted to quit and tackle real life by stepping away from the game (Nardi, pg. 130). Nardi also addressed the issue of gender within the *World of Warcraft*. She found the online community to be heavily dominated by men, and player's had a tendency to address female avatars as males and express surprise when it was revealed a female avatar was actually a female player (Nardi, pg 159).

Nardi's research gives us great insight as to why people play MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*, and this can largely be applied to others such as *Star Wars: The Old Republic* and

Guild Wars 2. All the activities and forms of behaviors that players featured in her study are also present in these other online worlds - largely due to the trend that players of these games at one time played *World of Warcraft*. *World of Warcraft* was a landmark MMORPG that influenced nearly every MMORPG that has come after it, and has heavily influenced gaming culture as a whole, as well as the players themselves (who bring the culture to life in each virtual world they visit).

The book *The Warcraft Civilization* by William Bainbridge is a bit different from the other two works that I read. This book is broken into chapters, each of which explores a different aspect within the game-world of *World of Warcraft*. Bainbridge does this by opening each chapter with a story that takes place from the perspective of his avatar. The story is structured around a particular aspect of the game-world, such as religion or economics, and then the story unfolds as his avatar carries out the particular duties associated with that part of the game. After the narrative in each chapter, he then breaks down what his character was actually doing, correlates how it relates to the real world, and talks of things he witnessed during his participant observation that have to do with the specific topic the chapter covers.

What this book shows us is a breakdown of the *World of Warcraft*, and how each component (religion, race, class; war, economy, etc) of the game holds a wealth of information, lore, and activities that can only be attributed to the organization of an entire civilization. This is emphasized as each of the chapters are divided and address each component individually. Everything is examined with cultural relativism, and helps provide us with a picture of not a game-world, but a manner in which to view this virtual world on its own terms as something that is present and actually exists (instead of being fantasy or fiction). Reading this book helped

enabled me to identify the specific realms that exist within the game-worlds and see that there is much more depth than might be originally thought when dealing with a mere "game". The way everything is set up is actually built to function in a manner as they do in real life, and by having the players interact within this world with these systems, they are thus brought to life and become extremely valuable for determining how humans interact with and within these virtual worlds.

Boellstorff's *Coming of Age in Second Life* represents a completely different atmosphere with the opportunities it provides its users and their overall objective. In *Second Life* (SL), it seeks to mimic many of the things we can do in real-life. Users have the ability to create homes, shops, and even theme parks as well as create anything they can think of to go inside of these places with the provided editing tools. Unlike *World of Warcraft* where your goal is to acquire the maximum level and high-quality equipment, in *Second Life* you can design your own small home or an entire shopping mall. Once you fill them with objects, you can then set items you created for sale to generate money, or use real-life money to obtain virtual currency, or exchange virtual currency for real-life money. After you've settled into the world, you can visit theme parks, shopping malls, Nightclubs, and even space stations. Or, you can put on your suit and attend your corporate business meeting being held on your company owned island. Because of its creativity and freedom, *Second Life* has seen great use and has hundreds of thousands of users that at one point stretched to several million.

The book gives deep insight into preconceived notions, theoretical practices, anthropological approaches, and a general definition of all the later plus a large amount of information on the game of *Second Life* itself. It offers a superb analysis on just what is "virtual"

within this world, and what “virtual” actually means. Boellstorff presents the perspective that the *virtual* is much less a separate space, as we commonly perceive it to be. He argues rather that the virtual is merely an alternate space, deeply grounded in our current space. A good explanation he gives is looking at just how far back virtual worlds have existed; He provides an example utilizing the telephone. The telephone is a device that allows two or more people to communicate and interact with each other at the same time, despite them being in completely different physical spaces in the world. The telephone acts as a tool that creates a virtual space for the people on the line to engage each other. The people’s participation in this virtual space is completely dependent on their actual space, and therefore they cannot be deemed separate.

Like Nardi, Boellstorff relies heavily on *participant observation* and *interviewing* to obtain his information. He also held virtual focus groups online by actually forming an in-game group (like a weekly book club meeting) and hosted it in his home (called *Ethnographia*) where their discussions would revolve around the chosen topic for the meeting. While the focus groups were much less useful in his ethnographic fieldwork in Indonesia, he found it much more manageable to organize and have participants appear in the virtual world (Boellstorff, pg 78). Boellstorffs "Methods" chapter was particularly useful, as it demonstrated the transmission of the Internet Consent form occurring from within the virtual world itself, and also revealed the concerns around potential interviewee's not being alone in the actual world when an interview could be taking place, thereby effecting what is meant to be a personal one-on-one interview. He would use screenshots and save all of his text logs so he could later refer back to them for information and quotes.

Where Nardi talks about "progression" in her book, Boellstorff turns to "place", as in *Second Life*. While you can't "level up" and explore dungeons, you can buy your own land (up to an entire island) and build whatever you see fit on your property. In one specific example, Boellstorff talks of one of his friends putting dozens of hours into developing a beautiful house on the water. Then, as one could experience in real-life, a neighbor moves in, and designs a mall on their plot of land, adding lots of neon signs to the building with an architectural design considered vulgar to the artistic residential area. The player responded by putting up giant signs in protest, asking other players not to shop at this store since it destroyed the beauty of the area (Boellstorff, pg 90). Along the same lines as occupied space, Boellstorff touches upon the notion's of "afk" (away from keyboard), a situation one could never truly run into in the real-world. AFK, refers the situation where a player is still present in the virtual world, but has left their computer, or isn't accessing the game interface at that particular moment. This results in the avatar simply standing in place with no one controlling it. The other players in the world assume the player is active because the avatar is present, but the person behind the avatar actually is not present. This causes an adjustment in perception in a virtual world: Even though someone is visually there, they could very well not be. Games have adapted over the years to help reflect this for avatars and confused players. *World of Warcraft*, for instance, will log the player out due to inactivity, or inform you the player is AFK if you send them a message. In *Second Life*, the avatar's head bows down and "away" appears over them (Boellstorff, pg 107).

MMORPG 101: The Basics

The following is a brief discussion on how virtual worlds generally work. These worlds have their own lingo and acronyms that can differ greatly from our traditional language, even though both are most certainly expressed in English. MMORPG stands for "Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game". Everything is communicated through text within the virtual worlds. There are third-party programs that many players use to communicate via voice-chat, similar to a system like Skype. They often combine using the two at once, as not everyone in the virtual world can be on the same voice-chat as they are. Everything within these worlds that are not controlled by a human being are referred to as "NPC's" which stands for "Non-Player Character". All of the beings in towns, all of the forest critters, and all of the things that can harm you or guide you through the game are NPC's. These online worlds often generate income for the company in the form of having a monthly subscription (WoW, SW: TOR) or feature selling virtual currency/items for cash (SL, GW2). Players access these virtual worlds by loading up the game program on their computer. This program is dedicated to running only the game itself, and is referred to as a "client". An "avatar" is a visual representation of a player in a virtual world. A player can only control their avatar by using the client.

What is an Avatar

A player advances through, and interacts with, these online worlds using an avatar. One's avatars are often put on a level scale starting at one, which is the weakest. They then progress towards the level cap (which varies game to game) by completing "quests" (missions/tasks assigned to the player in the virtual world), and acquiring virtual items and currency. This level progression is measured by the amount of "experience" a character has. That is, for each quest completed, enemies killed, and other tasks completed you are awarded

"experience" aka "exp". Each level requires you to reach a certain amount of *exp* before advancing to the next level. Accruing this experience allows users to equipment that not only changes the abilities of their avatars, but their appearance as well. The more experience one has within the world, the more advanced their avatar will appear. As the purpose of these online worlds is to interact with players, the players often form clubs/organizations that are referred to as "Guilds". This ensures easy communication with each other and a quick reference to see who's available to get together in the virtual world. These online worlds are "patched" (have updates applied) frequently to adjust the game, and occasionally feature "Expansion's" (which are large scale updates to the game that drastically change it, or add a lot of new content such as additional quests, storylines, character classes, and even races).

Race and Class

It is important to note that "race" and "class" do not translate to how we perceive them when referring to human culture. *Race* can actually be thought of as *species* and transcends the culturally-created definition that is often used today. *Class* does not refer to an economic standing or cultural standing, but rather a *role* one fills within the game-world. Examples of classes are *warriors*, *mages*, *priests*, and *rogues*. Normally, race and class carry no weight in these online worlds except to determine which side you align with if a world is faction-based (Faction-based is two or possibly three sides who are generally against each other; *World of Warcraft* features two factions- *The Alliance* and *The Horde*. Faction is determined by *race*, and either faction can feature any class).

The MMO's

I chose to do my research in *Star Wars: The Old Republic* not just based off of its potential popularity and anthropologically unexplored land, but also because of unique features it was bringing to the sphere of MMORPG's. It was the first game to feature 100% voice acting (that is, where most games have their dialogue in the form of text, *Star Wars* had audio where actors spoke all of the lines and one could listen instead of read- creates further immersion) from all Non-player Characters (NPC's). This feature was further emphasized by the personal stories each character was able to experience (quests and cinematics designed to portray a feeling similar to experiencing a "Star Wars" film), and within these stories players could choose preset responses to the dialogue, and see their avatar, or another avatar in the group depending on the situation, respond and directly interact with the game world. A third major feature was the choice of *Light side* versus *Dark side*, a common theme within the *Star Wars* mythos. While progressing through this world, the players were often presented with choices to make in regard to situations ranging from which people to help, how to punish someone who was breaking the law, or who dies and who lives. These choices equate to what our culture may consider *Good*, *Neutral*, or *Evil*. The more Good or Evil choices a character would select, the further they would move to the light side or the dark side. Their choices were accented within the game by featuring their avatar committing the dialogue/actions, providing a visual representation of the good or evil act, but also by shaping the appearance of the avatar. The avatar would begin to have their eyes darken, become more red, and veins appear on their face the more they "embraced" the dark side. With these features combined, I believed this would make the avatar center-stage in the game and be the best way to explore my research questions that pertained to the avatar's themselves.

Methods:

My data gathering methods included participant observation and interviews. Nardi's and Boellstorff's work demonstrate that these methods are completely applicable within online worlds and I believed I could achieve the same success and apply these methods in this other virtual world. These methods would provide me with the core of my data. After collecting this data, I combined the methods of Nardi's participant observation at an internet cafe with Boellstorff's virtual focus group and obtained supplemental data in the form of a focus group of anthropology students at SUNY Potsdam where they experienced creating an avatar, moving around in a virtual world, and filled out a questionnaire, all while in a computer lab with me. More information and jargon specific to online role playing games can be seen in the glossary included in the appendixes.

Participant Observation:

Participant observation involved participating in *Star Wars: The Old Republic* over the course of three months in the summer of 2012. Initially selecting a human Jedi as my character, I was dropped off at a Jedi temple on the planet Tython. From here, I was expected to complete quests assigned to me by NPC's to gain experience and advance in level, while also being rewarded in equipment. Completion of this introduction to the game was signified with my avatar being granted his lightsaber.

"Catra: I did it! I got my lightsaber!"

"Aura: Congrats!"

"Promethius: GJ! GL in your future travels!"

"Kris: When do I get mine?!"

-A Player completing the introduction, and player responses.

After this point, I was able to access the next planet, in which the activities culminated with me

(and for all avatars regardless of class) receiving my very own spaceship. From this point I could all access the entire universe within this game world.

Following Nardi, I decided to focus my participant observation largely around a single guild, known as *The Eternal*. This allowed me to actively participate with the online community, to play a role, to have purpose. I could now record my data and have the proper context in which to analyze it without having to theorize how design and interaction occurred. This helped me take on a role similar to a traditional anthropologist. It was through their help that I was able to more closely observe the day-to-day activities of an everyday player in this virtual world. I worked as part of this guild, completing quests with them; competing in PVP matches with them, and also completing high-level raids. Through these interactions, I was able to become a known member of the guild and was able to reach out to individuals for assistance with my research, as well as learn how the inner dynamics of a guild operate within this virtual world. This gave me insight into hierarchal ranking; distribution of virtual goods within a guild; guild priorities; and even transmission of leadership responsibilities and their effect on the guild. Perhaps most importantly, this focused participant observation taught me how players are able to outfit their avatars.

Outside of the guild, my observations were generally just what I came across while completing everyday virtual tasks in the world. This involved a few hours a day completing quests spanning multiple planets just as many of the other players in the virtual world were also doing. However, I also spent an average of 2 hours a week conducting in-depth observation on players' avatars. I would observe the different variations of avatars and the outfits they could wear, looking for either common trends or avatars with unique features that made them

stand out in the crowd. I did this by selecting the location with the highest amount of consistent traffic within the virtual world, which was known as "Carrick Station". It was a central hub for players to obtain quests, PVP match-ups, and gear. Initially I would run around and gather as many screenshots as I could of players. After amassing a few hundred, I turned to simply staking out one area on the space station and looking for avatar styles I had never seen before. This helped me identify common trends in avatar development and common trends in which players would outfit their avatars.

Interviews:

All seven of the interviews were conducted online in one of two methods: One was having the interviews done through a chat program known as *Mumble*, and the other was text-based within the game. During these interviews, I would meet with the player in the game world before starting the interview. Using *Mumble* would allow me to record the interview and transcribe it, very much like a traditional interview, or one over the phone. What became a bit atypical was actually trying to get the interviews to occur. As may occur, issues can arise in daily life, whether virtual or reality. An Anthropologist may avoid issues by visiting your home for the interview or giving you a quick phone call (the latter of which I could have tried, had I obtained any personal information). However, waiting in the virtual world I had to wait for them to actually appear before I knew if it was going to happen or not. There was no opportunity for me to go to the interviewee; I had to rely on them coming to me. As far as text-based interviews, I only did a couple of these before ruling them out as a possibility. Text-based interviews took place based on shyness, and on technical difficulties with *Mumble*. While I received great responses to the questions, these interviews took four to eight times longer than the standard

interview. Though they did have the added benefit of being transcribed already, it wasn't ideal to take one to two hours completing an interview meant to take fifteen to twenty minutes.

These interviews allowed me to focus on my research questions regarding to avatars and what we, as their creators, put into making them. I conducted seven interviews and was able to gain a better understanding than I had previously had on the way we model these visual representations that we control in these virtual worlds. I was able to ask personal questions, see what influenced people in their design, and also see how they perceived their avatars in these online worlds. Throughout these interviews I asked several questions, such as "How did you design your avatar?" Depending on the character, I would also ask more specific questions, such as "Why did you chose that hair style?" or "Why did you place that scar on your avatar's face?" or even "How did you decide on your avatar's name?" After getting a general feeling on how they physically sculpted their avatar, I moved on to how they interacted with their avatar. I would ask questions such as "Are there activities you do with your avatar that you would not do yourself?" and "How do you determine the "personality" of your avatar?" This latter question was broken down further, with questions like "Do they act like you?", "Do they act contrary to your normal behavior?", "Do you have guidelines to how your avatar behaves?", and "Why does your avatar act this way?" I would then move onto asking questions such as "Is this your only avatar in this virtual world?", "Do you have a bond with this avatar?", and "Are you ever addressed as your avatar in real life?" If they had many avatars, I would ask "Do you have a preferred Avatar? If so, why?", "Are your avatars designed the same way each time?", and "Do your avatars share the same personality?" I would also ask them if they ever refer to themselves in the real-world as their avatar, or if they ever act like their avatar. Throughout the

interview, I would also listen carefully to see how they referred to their avatar; whether they would say he, she, it, I, or me. After listening, I would directly ask the question "Do you consider yourself to be your avatar?" Through these questions, I was able to gather a lot of interesting information from my informants.

Focus Group:

I also used a small focus study group of SUNY Potsdam anthropology students for supplemental data (additional information on the structure of the group and the questions they were asked can be found in the appendix). As my core data was reflective of several casual gamers, I wanted to see what I could infer about the results by comparing it against another set of data. The group of students I used had none to moderate experience in online worlds. In this controlled instance, I had them create avatars in the *World of Warcraft*, and briefly explore it while answering a list of questions. This was done with all of us within the same computer lab on campus, and I was actively walking from computer to computer, assisting them in their endeavor and taking notes of their actions.

Ethics:

I first had to obtain permission from the IRB here at SUNY Potsdam. After a few attempts at explaining how online interactions would work, I received approval and began my participant observation. Before joining a guild, I would reply to guild invites by addressing the leader of the guild and explaining I was an anthropology student conducting a research project. After joining the guild *The Eternal*, I immediately introduced myself to the guild from within the virtual world and explained my topic. While it was impossible for me to explain who I was and

the scope of my project to everyone in the game-world, I was obligated to announce my presence to this group of players I would be focusing on more closely. Borrowing from Boellstorff's methods, I attempted to deliver my consent form for interviews via the in game mail system. Unfortunately, there was a space limit and I needed roughly four to five mail messages to transmit the whole document. I decided this was impractical and then recalled how Nardi was actively involved on her guilds forums (online message venues dedicated to discussions about and by the guild). I made a post explaining who I was and expressing my intent and the details of my research project. I also took this opportunity to ask for volunteers for my interviews. This method not only allowed me to be ethical, but allowed me to advertise myself and my project and get informants to come to me rather than chasing them down in the virtual world. People would respond with interest using private messages on the guild forums, and I would respond by showing them the consent form in its entirety and gaining their consent.

Issues:

My methods faced an unexpected issue, however. I faced a steep decline in the amount of people I was able to observe. This world of *Star Wars: The Old Republic* was launched on December 20th, 2011. It was projected to be one of the most popular MMO's launched of all time. It had very high expectations and was advertised heavily and held large scale events in the busiest cities, one being a live action Flash Mob in central square featuring actors portraying characters in the game dressed up in full authentic looking costumes (Flash Mob). While the initial surge and populations gave me confidence, it proved to be a false sense of security. The populations dropped heavily after a few months (graph). There was a slight surge at one point

with the a patch midsummer, but even that only lasted about thirty days as numbers sank to an alarming degree, forcing me to rethink my research strategy.

My participant observation however helped me identify trends and make a successful shift to accommodate this situation. At all times there is usually a consistent flow of conversations occurring within the channel know as "general". Channels are different venues of chat that one can access, as long as they are in the particular region. In this chat players often talk about a wide range of topics, including the state of the game and the existence of other MMORPGs or other gaming experiences. This served as a great resource for information on gathering a sense of players' intentions with the changes occurring in the game and the release of other big titles, and was complimented by conversations taking place on the games official forums as well as guild forums. By monitoring these I was able to determine there was a clear intent by many participants to jump from *Star Wars: The Old Republic* to *Guild Wars 2*.

Additionally, Nardi and Boellstorff also treated their virtual experiences as completely immersive ethnographic research projects, and spent most days almost entirely online. While a traditional anthropologist may face dangers such as disease, predators, or over exposure, this type of cyber anthropology has other, but potentially as dangerous, effects on the body. Your physical body isn't exposed to any extra dangers that you could face inside your home, but your body must remain seated in front of a computer to interact with these online worlds. Diet and exercise can quickly be forgotten, especially if one "goes native", and this can lead to troublesome effects on the body. Personally, I developed back pain from sitting for long durations.

As I previously mentioned, all of my interviews were conducted with members of the guild, *The Eternal*, which I was actively involved in. Not all interviews were done with focus on *Star Wars: The Old Republic* world however. The population of SWTOR declined greatly, and by observing the general chat of the players on Carrick Station, as well as the guild expressing their intentions, a large migration of players was expected to take place as another highly anticipated title was on the verge of being launched in late August. After much debate, I decided to also migrate over to the new virtual world in hopes of continuing my project and gaining more data. Between both games I was able to conduct seven interviews. Through these interviews I was able to focus on my research topic and analyze why they developed their avatars the way that they do, how they perceive their avatars in these virtual worlds, and ways in which they interact with these virtual worlds through their avatars.

Analysis:

These worlds have very detailed lore ranging from the simplest item you pick up to entire planets. The players enter these worlds, interpret the lore, and bring it to life as they act out their roles. By doing so, while also interacting with one-another, they give these worlds life, create the community, and a culture shaped by the worlds parameters and through their interactions with each other within it.

In *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, a player designed their avatar using preset options: Pre-designed faces throughout six races (each featuring both sexes), pre-designed hairstyles, three choices of body build (slim/average/fat), and their characters class. There were customization features such as adding scars or tattoo's to your character, but again these were pre-designed

to go in specific places, they could not be placed where the player desired. What was unique about the Star Wars avatars was their evolution. Each character had the ability to choose Light side or Dark side as their moral alignment. This was a highly exciting feature for the players because it allowed them the ability to mold their avatars personality, a feature that had appeared to be absent in the genre. It ended up having fewer effects on an avatar's appearance and game-play than players thought however, as reflected in my observations and interviews.

"... it seems light side or dark side choices really do not have an effect on interactions with other characters. There's, ya know the storyline might go one way or another a little bit, but ultimately everyone ends up at the same point in the end, which surprised me a little bit doing dark side choices that I got or took, and a lot of the responses from the characters, ya know the NPC's was an initial shock, but then an "oh, we understand why you did this" which was kind of disappointing. I was hoping to having negative reactions with other NPC's"
- Hector (lines 60-65).



Screenshot showing an avatar as "normal" and as moderately tainted by the Dark Side (Image by Author).

Guild Wars 2, on the other hand, offered a much more in-depth experience when creating an avatar. In the game, you had a choice of five races (each featuring both sexes). While designing the avatar, like *SWTOR* you had hair and tattoo options that were limited to preset configurations. That was the extent of their similar limitations. *GW2* utilized what is known as “sliders”. These are options that are slid on a scale to adjust the features of the avatar. You are able to adjust the details your face, eye size, proximity to one another, ear size, and nose length/height. You are even able to adjust the height of your character using the sliders. Furthermore, you can select the colors of your avatar’s clothing. You are even able to

independently color the head item, torso, legs, and boots. Each item could have three colors in it. Later in the game you can pick up dyes that are unique and rare and even further customize your character.



A screenshot of part of the avatar creation process in Guild Wars 2 (Image by author).

What is great about this is the avatar has much more initial input from the player instead of developing its appearance over time as in *Star Wars*. They have more choices, more reflections of themselves (or more differences from themselves) and more is revealed to me, and players, at first sight of their avatar instead of having to ask additional questions or wait to interview players who have reached max level. Players chose their characters back story from three options, chose which trait they favored most out of three (Dignity, Charisma, Ferocity), and even chose such things as God's or Spirits to worship from the game world myths. Another interesting feature of *Guild Wars 2* was the option to switch to a “casual” outfit,

something the players can switch to on the fly when they don't wish to be seen walking around in their battle outfits. For example, when a person's avatar wanders into town, they can switch their outfit to a "casual" outfit, which removes armor and helmets and presents the avatar in an outfit that you would expect to commonly see walking around town in an everyday situation. I was to be able to explore this system to see the extent of the available casual wear.

I conducted seven interviews that form the core of my data on the process of avatar creation. My interviews were conducted between the two games; five from *Star Wars: The Old Republic* and two from *Guild Wars 2*. It is important to note that these seven interviews only allow me to make tentative suggestions about overarching themes and ideas. All seven interviews were with members of *The Eternal* guild. I noticed several themes in these interviews. Going into them, I had expected one of three things: 1) I had expected players to develop their Avatars as a reflection of themselves and their ideals, 2) to design their avatar after what they *want* themselves to be like in real life, or 3) players who had designed their avatars to stand in stark contrast to their actual self. Looking at the interviews, there was some evidence of these themes, but it was shared by the minority of interviews, and not in the way I had envisioned it. Players had developed their avatars to follow their ideals, but only one player had designed his avatar to look like him *and* follow his ideals (and, he had created an avatar to stand in contrast to himself and his ideals to experience both worlds).

"Personally, I do model my first character (generally) after me. My personality, my gender/shape. I see my "main" as my virtual self. I like the idea of the mask matching the person."

"I generally always, in any game I play, make a hero, and a villain. I model the Hero after me. I model the villain after everything I could never be as the Hero."
- Norith (lines 97-89, 113-114).

Two other players had designed their characters to reflect their ideals, but chose to develop physical appearances that were completely different from themselves and more influenced by things they enjoyed, had pre-conceived notions they had about their class, or other selection during the creation process.

“I think a lot of our choices in making a character really come from who we are in real life.”- Procter (lines 86-87).

“cause my main character that I create is always going to be Jericho, and I would like to think that I would try and make Jericho as much as I could, personality wise, to me.”- Jericho (lines 135-136).

These three interviewees identified with their avatars and saw them as *themselves* in this world. The other interviews I conducted showed that avatars were used more as tools rather than expression. They designed their avatar to fill a role, a purpose. One common theme among a few was developing their avatar with role-play specifically in mind. One female interviewee had even referred to her avatar as a doll.

“I think they’re, for me, they’re to create something cute that I get to look at. It’s like dressing up a doll. That’s why I like getting outfits for them; to me it’s like a great big game of House.”- Korin (lines 153-155).

When looking at the question of *why* they participate in these online worlds, the overarching theme was entertainment. Looking more closely however, other themes emerged. Common among nearly all of the interviews was the notion of a social life. This consisted of both real-world friends, and virtual friends.

“Basically it becomes a social life, the guild and what not. To talk about my social life, I just moved like 3,500 miles just about a year ago. When I came back into playing MMO’s, I logged back into World of Warcraft, and eventually Star Wars, its more or less a social life, you have people in the guild to show up to at 12 o’clock at night, friends, instant friends.” - Till (lines 84-87)

"I just like playing with people it's really fun to get a group together and go play and stuff. And if you're playing with your real life friends in an mmo it's even more fun because when you get together you can talk about it and be like "remember that time blah blah blah" ya know." - Jericho (lines 21-24).

The ability to interact with their friends and to a lesser extent other people while being in their own homes was a key factor of their entertainment in these online worlds. Some had been isolated from their friends and chose to utilize online worlds to remain in contact with their friends. Some had only online friends and did not involve any with their online worlds.

"No real life friends know my characters name. I actually had 1 person at work actually ask me some questions about it because I was being weird and mentioned it. No real life friends actually know my gamer tag." - Till (lines 91-93).

Some were mixed. I was only able to interview two females, and I noticed that they both played in these online worlds with their significant other. This however is much too small a sample and I don't believe it could be its own theme given my limited sample. However, I would believe it would be worthwhile to pursue research on females who play independently and females who play with a significant other to see if there are different factors influencing the two, and to see which group is more prominent in the virtual space.

"I'll play for a few hours when he's not home by myself, but when we get a game its usually so we can play together and do something together as a couple." - Korin (lines 210-211).

"yes, he does effect (sic) it. If he didn't play I don't think I'd have much of a reason to." - Everwyn (lines 101-102).

While entertainment and social life were certainly the dominant themes, there were significant, less universal themes that were attributed to how players derived their entertainment from these virtual worlds. As previously mentioned there was role-playing, as well as interacting with a "persistent world" through exploration, and becoming involved in the

worlds story through ones avatar. Players enjoyed that their actions affected the world, and that their avatars were permanent residents ready to interact with other players at any moment.

"... but I think the number one reason is the persistent world element of the games." - Hector (lines 8-9).

"...I've loved the idea of playing a video game online in a persistent world with Thousands of other active participants." - Norith (lines 12-14).

Role-playing is something created outside of the game that players utilize with their Avatars to enhance their experience and entertainment in the virtual world. They invent personalities for their avatars and act them out within the game world. The players who did this with their avatars also were involved in doing this outside of virtual worlds and in the real-world itself.

"I LARP, I do Live Action Role Play so I'm used to acting out a character at an event." - Korin (lines 104-105)

They had both mentioned that it was however more difficult doing this in a *virtual world* as compared to acting it out themselves in the real world. This is due to the limitations which avatars represent. Even though these worlds provide visuals that are otherwise impossible to bear witness to, and places and tools so we don't have to imagine their existence, the avatar can't always do what the player, or the role intends. While there are emotes one can command their avatar to do - a wave, a bow, a scream - , they can't fully control their avatar and do other desired commands. This includes dancing a particular way, cooking at a stove, or sitting in a chair.

" Where you have this avatar where you can walk around, it can do emotes, it can wave to people, laugh, dance, but it can't do specifically the action that you want it to do, and just for the fact that it can do everything is the worst part about it, because then you can imagine stuff where you're like in a book, ok I'm playing a pen and paper dungeon and dragons, everything that is going on we're

describing verbally, and we're saying "ok, I'm gonna go up and shake your hand, and I'm looking sternly at you, or this is the perception you're getting from me. Its all very interpreted, whereas here in a virtual world, it often ends up being at a loss and you're missing things, and you try to do an emote, but someone misses it because they're reading text or doing something else. There's a lot of things going on."- Till (lines 121-128).



A few players I stumbled upon in the middle of a role-play. All in this photo are actual players (except the bear)(Image by Author).

Players have to rely on text to actually describe what their character is doing, thus role-play is conducted in text as voice alone can cause confusion, because as noted in the interviews you can't always tell by the tone of voice alone someone's intention, so it has to be written out to provide clarity.

" Like sometimes Ken will crack jokes, and mumble will quiet, and you can't tell how it was received. You don't know if they're laughing on the other end or going oh my god what the fuck did he just say?"- Korin (lines 66-68).

So, even with all of this technology, they have to fall back on their imaginations. The *virtual world* is potentially more important as a location, a means, a space, rather than the world it is representing. This would agree with Boellstorff's assessment that these virtual worlds can be identify as a place, very much so grounded in our reality, rather than a separate virtual entity.

"... the funny thing about role-playing with a group of people, is exactly that, you need a group of people... being in this guild The Eternal for a while, you get to group with people, you get to figure out people, not just their characters and what not, you get to have that social life." - Till (lines 130-131, 137-139).

Turning to the focus group I was able to identify additional trends. My focus group consisted of ten participants. Firstly, falling in line with my interviews, all participants made avatars that represented the same sex that they were in real-life. Unlike my interviewees, the focus group dominantly featured participants that had never accessed an online game-world before. These participants all referenced pop-culture such as *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings* when developing their avatars. Out of the entire group, only one participant actually selected a human, while others made note that they didn't want to create a human since they were one. They indicated, however, that they didn't want to deviate too far from being human, which led many to select elves. Unfortunately since this focus group utilized *World of Warcraft*, the avatar creation process was more limited. However, these trends help identified outside influences that help shape our avatars that more advance players may not be able to so easily identify.

Another interesting situation that arose while in the focus group was the reaction of one participant when they accidently attacked and killed a cat. She let out a

quick shriek as she covered her mouth and stared at her screen in shock. This reminded me of the event that took place that I described in the opening of this paper. The participant was saddened because she had killed a creature that not only wasn't a threat to her, but represented a pet in real life. Reading through the responses to the guided questions for the focus group, I saw additional references to such feelings towards animals in these virtual worlds.

"Killing 'bad guys' doesn't affect me in any way but 'innocent' things make me feel bad when I see them die. Like bunnies." -Focus group Participant

Between my participant observation and the focus group, I only witnessed females exhibit this particular behavior.

Perhaps the most interesting thing I came across during my participant observation, interviews, and focus group was the fact that these were virtual worlds with completely different sets of cultures and rules taking place in fictional universes, but what shaped the players and their avatars more than anything was their own culture. This really shouldn't have been much of a surprise however. I initially believed in a world where players could be anything and everything they desired, they would do exactly that. My data however pointed to the contrary, where players would more often than not go to length to constrain themselves even. We can look to Norith defining having a hero character and a villain character, or Korin's idea of dressing up a doll to see evidence of this. While we could analyze this more in-depth, we happen to have a significant part of the answer staring us right in the face. These virtual worlds, while designed to represent completely different worlds, are largely based on our own reality. The culture that exists within these worlds, the religions, the economics, the race and

class system, the "good" and the "evil"- these are all ideas derived from our own understanding of culture in the real world, and have been transplanted into these virtual worlds and given a new meaning. I put "good" and "evil" in quotations because these virtual worlds rarely define which is which, and merely represent the philosophical ideals of each side. The players, however, are quick to define which is good and which is bad, and they do this by drawing examples of the morals and ethics that they know from their own world. It is not uncommon to then see debates between both sides attempting to use real world examples to justify or explain their affiliation or the philosophy of their chosen side.

The intriguing part is, which aspect of this virtual culture do we define as the culture. Is it the stories, lore, religion, caste system, and land that the game developers and writers came up within its natural, static form? Or perhaps it can all be based off of where the creators of the world and the players of the world derive their own culture from, thus the real world and the general locale that fosters the game. Then again, does this all give evidence to players interpreting the knowledge set in these virtual worlds, combining it with their own cultures and beliefs, and interacting with thousands or even millions of other users from all across the globe to form a unique virtual culture that very much so effects both the virtual world and the real world? Perhaps suggesting that they are interwoven and neither is more nor less real than the other. From all my data presented in this project, I would tentatively suggest that these online worlds are merely a place where people interact with one another, at first heavily influenced by their own background (which heavily influences their avatar creation and the way that

they originally see these virtual worlds), but slowly changes as players assimilate to these virtual worlds. They can then actively adapt this knowledge to other virtual worlds, or even the real world itself. I believe this contributes to a "gaming culture", and is very much present regardless of the space in which it is taking place.

Reflections on Fieldwork:

The participant observation was a bit different from what I had expected. I knew I had to integrate myself into the local community and actively participate and contribute while recording all of my notes, but I didn't know *how* to do this. After creating my avatar and logging onto *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, I found myself in a world filled with thousands of people, dozens of them actively ready for me to interact with at any moment. I was literally (in the virtual sense) dropped off by a ship and left to my own devices. My first sight was of dozens of Padawans (term from Star Wars mythos, the title of a Jedi in training) scurrying all over the temple. I followed the trails of people from quest giver to quest giver on the planet of *Tython*, and eventually was declared a full fledge Jedi and sent into the galaxy to thwart evil. At this point my interactions with other's in the world were limited to simple parties (groups of players formally recognized within a group by the game) formed to complete an objective that was too difficult to complete alone, and then would disperse immediately after or when others had to leave. Circumstantial relationships in a way, no bonds or friendships formed as a result. I believe this stemmed from the general attitude that players are more focused on the progression of their character rather than forming social relationships. I didn't find this to be an issue however, as I was familiar with beginning portions of these types of worlds being more of

an introduction to the game, something people have to play and generally want to get through as quickly as possible.

Even as I made it beyond the introductory planet and the next planet beyond that, there were a couple major issues that arose. While I had access to hundreds and even thousands of participants in this community, I was relatively invisible. In this virtual world, even though I was represented by an avatar, I didn't occupy actual space within this world, as the game world is programmed to allow avatar's to pass through one another (see "Collision" in Glossary).

Because of this, it is quite easy to consider other players as not actually present. A minor issue, but accentuated by the fact that I had no way to make myself stand out. While this could be considered a great aspect for an anthropologist in real-world applications as it avoids the observed from acting in a manner specifically in response to the anthropologist, I was left with a different concern. The people I was observing were potentially disregarding my presence, and perhaps the presence of everyone else around them. Even when I would openly declare myself an anthropologist, mention my study and research in an open channel with over 100 people to bear witness, I found myself ignored and invisible. While relevant data for the behavior of users in these online worlds, it was a disappointing thought that people would participate in these online worlds just to isolate themselves.

Within this world, I observed enough of the community to find this to be a common trend. This stands in stark contrast to "traditional" anthropological field work in the real-world as we of course all occupy physical space, and it is in human nature to be aware of our surroundings. Also, when an anthropologist is screaming "Hey! Anthropologist over here! I'm looking to study you!" their voice can override others, and thus it is hard to miss or ignore

someone shouting at you as you can't carry on your own conversation until you get them to stop. In the digital world, my shouting was easily lost in lines of text from dozens of players having multiple conversations occurring all at once. Despite this, I was eventually able to work around it and pursue the knowledge I was looking for as my avatar progressed through the game.

I created a Jedi Knight that was named *Catra*. As I progressed on my own through the introductory worlds of *Tython* and *Coruscant* my Jedi became a Jedi Guardian and progressed towards the light side as I completed missions in the game world. The game started me off at level one, and I could reach a level as high as fifty. The more time I spent within this world, the more I began to realize that the isolation among dozens of people was a consistent trend. I hoped this would at least pass as I reached level 50. Many MMO's refer to something called the "end-game". It refers to the portion of the game that is dedicated to all the players that have reached the maximum level the game has to offer. Some games are said to not even begin until the "end-game" is reached; that all the content before that point is just to prepare you for the real action. With that thought in mind, I disregarded my early experiences and progressed as quickly as I could to reach the maximum level. Once obtaining the maximum level, I had to find myself a guild. Not to focus my research at this point, but because a guild is required when it comes to tackling the "end-game" content of an MMORPG. The missions and raids (operations in Star Wars) and player-versus-player competition (PVP) you are able to take part in ramps up incredibly in difficulty when you reach maximum level. Also, even though your character is maximum level and cannot progress any further, their equipment most-certainly can and that's what most players strive for. In other virtual worlds, the equipment ones avatar wore was what

distinguished them as a player. From the equipment an avatar wore, you could tell how much a player had accomplished, as well as the role their avatar was designed for (often referring to Tank, DPS, or Support). Star Wars featured Raid (Operation) and PVP equipment. By joining a guild, one could attempt to complete/compete in Raids/PVP and obtain this equipment. Joining *The Eternal* allowed me to obtain this equipment, observe how it was obtained/distributed amongst those actively involved in acquiring it, and what it represented. All of this would be used to analyze how an avatar was shaped after its initial creation.



The Guild, victorious after a battle with the final boss in an Operation (Image by Author).

It was actually quite hard to distinguish which avatars were wearing high-end raiding equipment/pvp equipment and which ones were not within Star Wars. The mid-level and high-level level 50 gear looked so similar, you had to check the player to make sure (an option lets you right click a player and view their gear in a chart). One of the reasons I believed Star Wars would be excellent for this research of avatars was because it allowed you to customize the

equipment you received; taking out enhancements from high-end equipment and placing it in lower-level equipment you might find appealing. Sadly, this was not widely-used as it was a very costly process. My notes do however refer to a character who did in fact utilize this and she appeared as a low level character due to her leather jacket, which was actually outfitted with the best modifications (stat boosting enhancements) possible. But for the most part, players simply wore their equipment as-is.

There was one bit of customization that players were able to identify as unique and cool. It was the color of one's weapon, specifically Jedi's and their light saber colors (Classes that used blaster weapons had different laser colors, but these were difficult to notice and not identifiable outside of combat). At any time a Jedi could unsheathe their weapon and have it light up. Common colors were blue, green, and red. The uncommon colors were orange and yellow. Rare crystals were magenta, aqua, and purple. There were also rare crystals that were the above listed crystals, but with a black core to them. These rare crystals were obtained through raiding, PVPing, and completing rare and difficult quests in the game world. The use and display of these crystals were more along the lines of my original preconception of displaying ones personal status inside the game as players would often ask another "Oh, where did you get that crystal?! It looks amazing!"

From my participant observation and interaction with the guild (as well as following general gaming news, a hobby as well as research of course) I learned of a general intention of players to shift away from Star Wars (and other MMORPG's) to an upcoming game called *Guild Wars 2*. The new game had been highly anticipated for years, and offered several unique things for players such as cutting-edge graphics, and being designed from the ground up for being

free-to-play for users instead of a fifteen dollars a month subscription fee that most (including Star Wars) MMO's used (referred to as the pay-to-play model). This company also had a reputation as their last MMO was free of a monthly subscription and offered high quality game play. If anyone was iffy about the transition before, it became more easily accepted after Star Wars in early August announced it would be transitioning to a free-to-play model in the fall of 2012 (This change occurred on November 15th, 2012). Many in the community lost faith in *Star Wars* ability to be a successful game at this point, and many no longer wanted to keep paying their monthly subscriptions (even though compensation was offered). I shared the sentiment of other players, and after thinking about the risk, decided to migrate too. Despite already witnessing first-hand that following the hype of a game world was not so reliable, I didn't want to risk losing the core members of the community I had come close within *The Eternal*.

Now, in *Guild Wars 2*, my time was much more limited. It was a late transition and I only had a few weeks of participant observation. I moved with several members from my *Star Wars* guild and explored as much as I could within this world. Initial customization of the avatars was much more in-depth than it had been in *Star Wars*. Once in the actual world, I was once again thrown into a personal storyline just like *Star Wars*. After a few hours of playing, I was amazed at the level of interaction between players. Everyone appeared more than happy to assist one another, players running from enemies were actively assisted by anyone that noticed them in trouble. People having difficulties completing quests only had to wait but a few moments and they'd have several players come to their aid who also needed the quest completed. Defeated players needed only wait a few moments for help to come by and a player would come to their

aid and resurrect them. This was in great contrast to what I had experienced in *Star Wars*, and in many other MMO's.

I have a theory in my analysis for this behavior, but the short version of it is that *Guild Wars 2* was designed to be this way. It has many features that go against the norm of MMO's, and creates a new standard. As I mentioned earlier, I believe the culture of the virtual worlds to be much more integrated with real-life values than one might think. Other game worlds limited players in assisting one another unless they were in a group together. Strangers could not actively help one another as creatures and quests were assigned to a character. If another player interfered, it could result in negative consequences for one or both characters (such as no rewards or experience). This created a very linear and self-focused experience. *Guild Wars 2* removed this limitation, and revealed a form of cooperation that was not even considered possible before this experience. *Guild Wars 2* reshaped the way we perceived cooperation within the game, and thus shaped its own unique culture as a result of this. I believe this was done intentionally as a fundamental change to alter and improve the way we (the players) experience these virtual worlds. I was now able to actively walk around and observe players consistently, and easily interact with them. In *Star Wars* I could walk around for hours and see players never exchange a word. Everyone was only focused on themselves, it was more efficient in that world to be self focused. In this world, it was more efficient to be involved with everyone around you. Players were actively seeking help, searching for events, and more than happy to resurrect one another. Players were often saying "thank you!" and "no problem!" to each other for the help. Players would find themselves in random large scale battles and band together. After surviving, they would discuss what they had just seen and express their

thoughts on it with one another. Normally this is only material I could observe in a guild of likeminded individuals who knew they had to support one another, but this was a world of strangers doing it thanks to the unique system *Guild Wars 2* was designed to use. I was not able to spend enough time in this world to isolate trends popular for avatars to identify oneself (like the light saber crystals in *Star Wars*) but I was able to take away info just as valuable, if not more so.

What my observations have shown me are general themes that can be applied to the creation and development/progression of an avatar. My interview process required my informants to critically evaluate their own thought processes, and by asking these questions they, as well as I, were able to reveal what it is we put into our creations. By realizing how we view our own representations within these worlds, we can begin to understand how we perceive these world's as a whole. Whether it is for exploration or experiencing a social life, these worlds are huge sources of entertainment for millions of people for dozens of different reasons. They offer forms of expression that some utilize to put themselves in other worlds, or others use these avatars to generate their very own creations that stand on their own; something that the user has created for a purpose; to fill a specific role: a selfless hero, a murderous bandit, a charismatic smuggler looking to make a profit- These are our "mask's", our "doll's", our avatars.

Matt: What do you think of the avatars you've left behind in other games?

Procter: Kinda sad actually. I grow very attached to my characters, like you know with World of Warcraft, my Warlock, it's like I'll close my eyes, and I see him, that's who I used to be, I see him, like, I do miss the characters, it's kind of, I think

it's kind of crazy to be emotionally attached to a fictional character that you create. But it's kind of like, ever read a very very good book? I mean really good, where you can't put it down. And then the book finishes, and you put it down, and you're done, that's it, no more. It's kind of the same feeling. (lines 132-138).

Possible Avenues for Further Inquiry:

Amidst my research I came across several unexpected that could be explored further on their own or investigated by broadening the scope of this project. One of them I already mentioned concerns female players being more likely to be involved in online worlds due to a significant other, rather than being involved with the world on their own. Does this affect their avatar creation or perception of the virtual world? Is it a space for socializing with others, or a realm that holds greater meaning only when accessed as a couple? This avenue of research would require a larger sample size, dominantly featuring females both single and with significant other, and perhaps also interview a few of these significant others.

Another very interesting topic came up during my interview with Hector. Hector was interview in *Star Wars: The Old Republic* and I was inquiring how many characters he had. When he responded seven, I asked why so many. In explaining his number of avatars, he said this:

"I let my son play, so he made up his own character, which actually you were talking about it earlier, he was specifically trying to design a character that looked like himself. He's almost 8, so when he plays I sit right there with him because you know some of the content or some of the open world chat can get

questionable at times so I just sit with him to watch that, and ya know he runs around and plays the game. I know for his choices he's certainly picking moral choices based on his morality and what we've taught him, the difference between right and wrong."-Hector (lines 101-106)

This alone could represent a great research project, measuring the morality of children through utilizing virtual worlds that shape and evolve depending on how you have their avatar behave within them. While I was interviewing adults and asking them why they make the choices they do with their avatars, children have much less experience in the world and I would predict, like players who had never accessed online worlds and fell back on what little knowledge they did have of fantasy and magic, would fall back on developing a character reflective of how they were taught to behave.

One final avenue I would like to propose is analyzing how the games are set up and how that affects how players interact with one another. As I mentioned during my participant observation, *Star Wars: The Old Republic* and *Guild Wars 2* had player interactions that differed greatly. SW followed the "mold" (general way of doing things for online games) while GW2 featured a system many had never encountered before, and thus resulted in drastically different player actions and attitudes. Could GW2's system alter the way humans interact in virtual worlds in such a way that more virtual worlds will adopt this system? Can it be seen as an improvement over the old system and improve the "quality of life" for players online? Hopefully, all of these research questions are currently being investigated, or soon will be.

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Appendices

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Cyber Anthropology: Behind the Avatar

You are invited to be in a research study of ***the creation process of Avatars***. You were selected as a possible participant because ***you expressed interest to participate to Phillips***. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by ***Dr. Alan Hersker, Department Chair of Anthropology and Matthew Phillips, Anthropology Major student*** of SUNY Potsdam.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is **An Avatar is a representation of a user who is utilizing a program to access a virtual world. This user interacts with this virtual world completely through his/her Avatar.**

This study is the first phase in larger project that seeks to understand the correlation between users' self-presentation in online versus offline worlds. In this phase I will first engage in participant observation to begin to understand the culture and to gain rapport with fellow users within these virtual worlds. Then I will conduct semi-structured interviews with members of these communities. I will be working with my PI to analyze these qualitative data. I believe that people intentionally create a new persona when they step out of their own physical world's culture and step into an online realm with much more freedom on how one can behave. I believe the data will reflect a much larger percentage of subjects designing their avatars in ways not accustomed to how they are actually represented in the offline world, as opposed to subjects who do design their avatars to reflect a life-like representation of themselves. If possible, I would like to address the questions as to why this is.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: ***Participate in an online interview that will take approximately 30 minutes. This interview will be recorded for analysis purposes.***

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has several risks: ***Probing for personal or sensitive information in interviews. You will be asked personal information, you may decline to answer any question you so chose.***

Emotional or Psychological risks. You may be bothered by questions asked, however this is extremely unlikely. In the case that you are troubled by the interview process, you can seek help from Mental Health America by contacting them at 1-800-273-TALK.

The benefits to participation are **Increased self awareness and the chance to share about your avatar/self. Overall, this will lead to a greater understanding of how people interact with the online world and create a greater appreciation of virtual communities.**

Compensation:

You will **Not** receive compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. **The data obtained (interview questions/video recordings) will only be utilized by the Investigators stated above, and will be deleted after the research and report are complete.**

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with SUNY Potsdam. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is/are **Dr. Alan Hersker and Matthew Phillips**. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at herskeal@potdam.edu or phillims190@potdam.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact Maureen McCarthy, Chair of the SUNY Potsdam Institutional Review Board by mail (Dunn Hall 100C, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY, 13668), telephone (315-267-2919) or email (mccartma@potdam.edu).

Approval by the Provost of SUNY Potsdam and the Institutional Review Board attests only that appropriate safeguards have been included in the research design to protect human participants. This approval does not imply that the College endorses the content of the research or the conclusions drawn from the results of the research.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Interview Questions/Topics

Kilmer Apprenticeship- Interview Questions

Cyber Anthropology: Behind the Avatar

1. Being required to create an Avatar
 - a. Was this an expected task?
 - b. Did you dive into customization, or use a default avatar to avoid?
 - c. What made you decide on the name you gave your avatar?
2. How did you design (if you did) your avatar
 - a. Did you utilize presets?
 - b. Did you customize each individual option?
 - c. Were you modeling your character after yourself?
 - d. Did you have an “ideal avatar” in mind during creation?
3. How do you interact with the world as the avatar
 - a. Do you partake in activities in game you do in real life with your avatar?
 - b. Are there activities you do with your avatar that you would not do yourself?
 - c. How do you determine the “personality” of your avatar?
 - i. Do they act like you?
 - ii. Do they act contrary to your normal behavior?
 - iii. Do you have guidelines to how your avatar behaves?
 - iv. Why do you have your avatar act this way?
4. On a Grander Scale
 - a. Is this your only avatar in this virtual world?
 - b. (if yes) Do you have a bond with this avatar?
 - i. Do you refer to your avatar as “Me” or “my character”?
 - ii. Do people address you in the virtual realm by your avatars name, or by your actual name? (I do not want your actual name.)
 - c. (if no) Do you have a preferred avatar?
 - i. What makes that avatar your preferred?
 - ii. Are your avatars designed the same way each time?
 - iii. Do your avatars have the same “personality”?
 - iv. Why do you have more than 1 avatar?
5. Actual World
 - a. Are you ever referred to in the actual world as your avatar?
 - b. Do you ever pretend to be your avatar (or another) in the actual world?

Focus Group Guide

Cyber Anthropology: Behind the Avatar

Anthropologists have traditionally gone to remote places around the globe to study unique cultures and share their knowledge with the world. With the birth of the internet however, Anthropologists need go no further than their desk to access millions of people and diverse communities and cultures. This digital ethnography is a relatively new field in anthropology that pushes the scope of anthropology beyond the traditional and opens new avenues to explore. *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft* are both online worlds that have millions of users forming communities (groups based on common interests, goals, forming friendships and ties with one another) within these realms to enhance their experience in the game world.

Within these online worlds a person is more often than not, represented by an Avatar, a visual representation of him or herself that is custom designed by the user selecting such options as skin tone, hair, clothing, and accessories. In this Lab, we will conduct ethnographic research within the online realm of *World of Warcraft* and then analyze this data to understand personal and cultural reasons that determine why people chose the avatars they do, and how we perceive the role of the “Avatar” and their interactions with these online worlds.

After you have setup up and confirmed your account, log into *World of Warcraft* on the computer using the account you just created.

Once you have logged into the game, you will be presented with selecting a game server. For the purposes of this Lab, **we will all select the same game server. Please select “Vashj”**. This step is crucial! When you first log in, it will bring you automatically to the avatar creation page. **YOU MUST** hit the “Back” button. It will bring you to a castle room like screen. In the **top right** of the screen, you will see a “**Change Realm**” button. Click it, and select the realm “**Vashj**”. After you have selected this, look to the **bottom left** of your screen, and click the Create New Character button to begin designing your avatar. You will have several options at this point ranging from Race, Class, and even faction. Design the Avatar by whatever means you deem appropriate. Do this independently without talking to classmates. You can ask for assistance from the TA’s or professor.

After you designed your avatar, BUT BEFORE ENTERING THE GAME WORLD (don’t click the “Enter World” button)

Take a good look at your avatar now. What options did you have while creating your Avatar? Why do you think you had these options? What were limitations you faced while creating your avatar? Why did you make the choices that you did (Race, Class, Sex, Appearance)? (Don’t be afraid to re-enter the create Avatar menu and recheck anything you may have missed). What does your Avatar represent?

After you have reflected at least half a page worth (single spaced) on your avatar, you are now ready. Sit tight and wait for all of your classmates to be prepared.

When, and only when, instructed by the professor, Click the “Enter World” button.

Now begins the Ethnographic Field Work, be prepared to stop regularly to take notes.

You are now inside a virtual world. You are participating in this world through your Avatar. How do you feel? What do you see? Who do you see? Where are you? What is expected of you?

After taking a few moments to address the previous questions, focus on the other Avatars around you. Many of them are likely students in the class with you right now. Some may not be.

How do the other Avatars around you look? Do they have any distinguishing features? Do you think they followed the same reasoning/process in designing their avatar that you did?

If you can, focus on your class mates Avatars at this point. You will already be divided into several different starting areas throughout the world of Azeroth, so you may not have many (or any) Classmates around you (If so, you can then attempt to figure out why this is instead of answering the following).

Does any Avatar appear to reassemble their creator? Are Males playing Males? Are Females playing Females? Do the classes they selected seem to represent their personality?

For the final part of this exercise, I want you to attempt to do the first couple of quests around you at your starter zone. Take about 15-30 minutes doing this.

Each race spawns newly created avatars in a starter zone that has NPC's around to give you quests that explain how the game works. Seek out these NPC's (Marked with a "!" on the mini-map) and set out on the quests they assign you. This can be done with or without your fellow classmates. Whichever option you chose, note WHY you chose to do it with a group or as individuals. You do have an activity to complete once you are inside the capital city of your race, so do not take too long getting there. You can see the World Map by pressing "M". The map reveals itself the more you travel, so it may not be much help if you aren't moving. Your best bet is to stick to the roads.

Throughout navigating the quests, there is a lot in the game world happening all around you, independent of your actions. You may also **see** a lot of this going on. Depending on how you are interacting with this world, you may notice nothing. Whichever occurs, NOTE IT (preferably in a safe place, yes, you can die. Definitely note that if it occurs. How you feel about it, and how this virtual world represents death).

If you happen to reach another area populated by players, take a few minutes to explore it. What do you see? Are the Avatars different? Are there more or less people in this area? What are the Avatars doing? What are the people talking about in the chat channels? How do you feel?(Don't get too bogged down on this portion, make general observations based on how they relate to your prior observations you made earlier and anything you think worthy of note). Now log out. Exit the virtual world. What does this mean to you? How do you feel? (Nothing is an ok answer, but do you think others could feel differently?)

By this point you should have at minimum a full page of notes (or more). Now for the reflection.

In your reflection make sure to tie your experience in creating the Avatar in the first portion of this lab with the second portion of interacting with this virtual world with your avatar. Do you believe that this virtual world does in fact represent its own culture? Is "Cyber Anthropology" or "Digital Ethnography" really anthropology? Can "playing a game" truly represent field work?

(The Focus Group guide was adapted from a Cultural Anthropology Lab I had created, this is the Lab here).

Interviews

Everwyn

Everwyn Interview

July 20, 2012

Text based in game

Matt: Ok have you read the internet disclaimer and consent form Eve?

Everwyn: Yes, I have

Matt: Ok my first question is just going to be a broad and basic one. Why do you play online games, specifically MMO's?

Everwyn: I suppose it is a way to experience something I can't in real life. Everyone has their outlets. This is just a way to escape reality and be someone new; someone I couldn't ever actually be.

Matt: What MMO's have you played?

Everwyn: This one (starwars: the old republic) and Everquest.

Matt: When you created Avatar's in these worlds, was your goal to create someone new?

Everwyn: For the most part. I've never made one to look like me but I keep obvious traits.

Matt: Why don't you make one to look like you? Are there other obvious traits?

Everwyn: Well the biggest reason I don't make any that look like me is because its hard to actually get one to look like you.

Matt: Do you find that to be an issue?

Everwyn: Other obvious traits that I've kept are things like height, hair color, and skin tone.

Everwyn: It's not really an issue for me because I like seeing the kind of people I can create

Matt: Why do you maintain the traits of height, hair color, and skin tone?

Everwyn: I'm not sure to be honest. Maybe it is just familiarity?

Matt: As in familiarity with yourself, or what you see in real life culture?

Everwyn: Familiarity with the people I socialize with. I'm surrounded by people with many different features but I've noticed that most of my friends are females with darker hair, etc.

Matt: In that case, what would you refer to your Avatar as?

Everwyn: I see her as her own person actually.

Matt: Tell me your thought process when you were creating her.

Everwyn: I suppose it would be a stereotypical girl thought process... "Oh this looks cute"

Matt: You chose the humanoid race that looks nearly like a human, but they have no eyes. Are no eyes and visors cute? :p

Everwyn: Hahaha. Good point. When I make a class that is built for fighting, I try to toughen up the look.

Matt: Ok, so now no eyes are tough? :p I don't mean to sound rude, just trying to understand.

Everwyn: well I don't think losing your eyes is a painless process :p It adds to my characters background story. She has had to suffer and prevail.

Matt: I don't mean to burst your bubble, but that race was born without eyes. They see through the force. That isn't important though, the important part is what you meant behind it.

Everwyn: Even so, when you see someone with no eyes...

Matt: So now they're scary? :p

Everwyn: Not scary, but intimidating.

Matt: I see. You said Eve is her own person. Describe her to me if you could.

Everwyn: Well she is a Jedi Knight. She knows how to fight BUT she uses it only for good. She only kills if she has to. So she's tough and yet gentle.

Matt: You mentioned having a back-story. Suffering and prevailing. Does she have more traits?

Everwyn: Not really. I like to think that she would be the person that might have suffered in her past but instead of taking it out on people in her future, she tries to help others to prevent them from suffering.

Matt: How would you describe your real life self in a few short sentences?

Everwyn: Hmmmmm. I like to try new things at least once and if given the chance (I know this sounds cheesy but...) I like to help people. Even if it is something small.

Matt: Why is Eve good and not evil?

Everwyn: When she is chasing down a “bad guy” in a storyline, she always picks that option to spare them giving them to the proper authorities instead of killing them. Things such as that.

Matt: But why? Why not select the evil option?

Everwyn: Just not in her nature I suppose. Asking her that question would be like asking a real life person why they don't rob a bank if they are poor... It's because we are taught that it is wrong.

Matt: Many might not give that answer. Personally I would have no problem stealing from a bank. It's getting caught that's the issue :p You mentioned this is an outlet, but you are good, and Eve is good. Can you explain to me what makes it an outlet?

Everwyn: Everyone has stress. MMO's create a new world for people. A world where those stresses don't exist.

Matt: Does being good in this world feel as rewarding as being good in the real world?

Matt: How about a better question actually, What does your avatar do that you cannot?

Everwyn: Not AS rewarding but it is nice. It's nice to know that I choose to do good even though it isn't even real.

Everwyn: Fight with a light saver... :p When I do a good deed it is something simple like, getting something off the top shelf at a grocery store for an old lady. Here, my avatar saves lives. Sometimes even entire races.

Matt: How does that make you/your avatar feel?

Everwyn: Well I'm sure my avatar feels like a badass. Me on the other hand, I do get a sense of accomplishment. The quests give me goals to complete and leveling is pretty cool too.

Matt: You've made it rather clear Eve is her own person. Do you have other Avatars?

Everwyn: Normally I create several but only to try them out. I stop playing them when I find one that I really like playing. Then I focus on that one. For this MMO I only created one other avatar. It was a smuggler.

Matt: Why did you prefer Eve?

Everwyn: My smuggler was long range. Eve gets right into the action, and she gets two light sabers which looks pretty cool.

Matt: What does that mean to you? As the Avatar obviously can't have an opinion on that :p

Everwyn: Honestly, it just makes me pay more attention :p

Matt: Does anything from this avatar, or from Everquest transfer over into the real world?

Everwyn: Hmm god question haha. Probably more so the other way around.

Matt: What do you mean?

Everwyn: Well my avatar makes decisions the way I would if I was a super cool jedi.

Matt: So she makes choices you would if you could be a jedi?

Everwyn: Basically yeah. Sometimes I pick different options just because I'm curious to see what happens in the game.

Matt: Does Eve have your personality then?

Everwyn: Sorta. She makes decisions like I would but that doesn't give her my personality.

Matt: Why not?

Everwyn: Well technically Jedi's keep emotions out of their decisions. They make decisions based on logic. A lot of NPC's that my avatar spares, are people I would probably want dead :p

Matt: You've raised a lot of points that I would like to come back and talk to you later about. Especially concepts of following expected behavior within the context of your avatar's identity and comparing it to expected behavior in real life. But I've already eaten an hour of your time. So I'll take everything you've given me so far and examine it and more than likely come back at a later time for a follow up if you are willing. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Everwyn: Ok, sounds good to me. 😊

Interview took 64 minutes. took place on my Jedi ship and was all done via in game text. The Avatar was not max level and was wearing its currently acquired gear through standard questing. Interesting that nearly no answers related to other players within the world (so why an MMO?). Perhaps a good focal point for follow-up interview.

Hector

Hector Interview

August 19th, 2012

Matt: This is Matthew Phillips and I am interviewing Hector on August 19th. Hector, have you read the internet disclaimer and the consent form and do you agree?

Hector: Yes

Matt: Alright good! My first question is going to be an easy one, why do you play MMO's?

Hector: For a number of reasons, but I think the number one reason is the persistent world element of the games.

Matt: Which games have you played?

Hector: In the past I've played Neocron, which was a cyber punk sci-fi first person shooter style MMO. World of... er, Warhammer, never played *World of Warcraft* online just Warhammer. And that's probably about it for true MMO's.

Matt: And Star Wars?

Hector: And Star Wars of course *laugh*.

Matt: You said you like the persistent world, why is that?

Hector: I guess I like the, in an MMO I guess the worlds tend to be a bit more larger, so there's more opportunity to explore. There's, I guess it doesn't feel as claustrophobic I guess as some standalone game's where the boundaries are very defined and very narrow.

Matt: When it came to designing your avatar, what was your thought process there? I forgot the name of your race... The Green people, why did you choose them? I see a scar on your face, why is that there? Things like that.

Hector: I think a lot of times I'll, ya know sometimes depending on the character, sometimes I have an idea of what the character is going to be like, sometimes I just go through and purely based on aesthetics and a look I think looks cool or if it happens to be a female character. This character, being a smuggler I tried to give him a bit more roguish look to 'em. So I figured with the scar, it gives him a little bit more character.

Matt: Define roguish look.

Hector: I guess keeping in the Star Wars sort of sense, ya know the Han Solo kinda look. The fun loving, mysterious, playful, as opposed to, say my, I have a low level trooper too, gave him the militaristic look

to him, the basic square jaw, marine style character to him. My consular Hector is one of my other primary characters. Ya know I went into Star Wars, all the other games I've always played and it's always been a very much a good guy, so for this game, I specifically made my first character someone who is not going to be a good guy.

Matt: So he's dark side?

Hector: Yes he is.

Matt: What made you want to change when it came to this game?

Hector: I played a couple of the Knights of the Old Republic games, I guess the predecessors to this one that were standalone RPG games, and in those games I ended up going light side on those characters, and ya know a lot of the other games where there's moral choices where they have to be made and they reward you with some sort of moral scale, I seem to of always gone to the good side, so on this game for my first character I specifically went out with the idea that I was gonna go with every evil answer it was possible to choose.

Matt: So when you designed Hector the consular, you had the intention of designing him as his own entity rather than after you?

Hector: Ya, all my characters, any character I've ever made, don't intentionally try to model them after myself, always try to pick something that's different, but not nothing that I ever tried make look like me.

Matt: What about personality wise when it comes to the dark side light side choices or do you just streamline it and say this character makes the light side choices and this character makes the dark side choices?

Hector: Uh no, I think in a lot of the other games I've played, morally they've probably reflected more of my own personality. This game has definitely been a step away from that where I intentionally went out to character a character that was going to choose all of the dark side choices possibly, so that was different from a lot of other characters that I've played in the past.

Matt: Why was it different when it came to Star Wars?

Hector: I think because they did make that light side dark side choice kind of key to, ya know they focused on it as one of their key points they talked about in their character development discussions that being Bioware discussing what you can do with your character.

Matt: So did that give you options or take options away?

Hector: I don't think it actually did very much of either one. In this game, it seems light side or dark side choices really do not have an effect on interactions with other characters. There's, ya know the storyline might go one way or another a little bit, but ultimately everyone ends up at the same point in the end, which surprised me a little bit doing dark side choices that I got or took, and a lot of the responses from the characters, ya know the NPC's was an initial shock, but then an "oh, we understand why you did

this” which was kind of disappointing. I was hoping to having negative reactions with other NPC’s which was lacking in this game. To draw a bit of, to give you maybe a little bit more of an idea what I mean, some of the other games I play, where if you stacked up too many evil choices or good choices there’d be NPC’s who refuse to interact with you based on the choices that you’ve made. There may be an area of the game where the area outright hostile to you, or very welcoming depending on the choices that you made earlier on in the game. Star Wars doesn’t seem to have very much of that at all as far as light side dark side choices.

Matt: Ok I’m going to ask a question where I’m nit picking at your words here, earlier you said you wanted to make a character “roguish” like, Rogue being a term usually associated with fantasy MMO’s, and then this one obviously being a smuggler, did you have inspiration besides Han Solo for the design of your character?

Hector: No, I wouldn’t even say that he was a design inspiration when I made him, but he seems to fit the design I was going for. He’s not really keeping within the Star Wars, he’s not an innocent Sky Walker type character, he’s not all for the cause Princess Leia, I figured he’s going to be out for himself a little bit more and sit more neutral. Honestly probably gave less thought to this character during creation for actually having a character, this one was probably I spent more time on an aesthetic appeal.

Matt: So more thought and concern into this character?

Hector: I wouldn’t say more thought or concern, ya know it's just in the character creation process they give you so many options for face, some of them I just plain disliked, ya know a big round pudgy face on a on this character would have looked kind of odd because I was going more for the smaller frame size of the bulky frame size, so I think this was definitely more of an aesthetic appeal than a trying to design to specific character elements that I wanted him to have.

Matt: Why the slender frame?

Hector: For this one it was actually more of a thought from a PVP stance, I picked the smallest frame size figuring I would maybe be a little less obvious on the player versus player field as opposed to the larger frame size.

Matt: Makes sense. I know I touched on the question before, but I’m going to ask one more time, what does the scar mean?

Hector: Ya know, I’m trying to remember, I don’t know if I actually intended to have the scar there or if I just didn’t notice when I was going through the facial selection, that maybe I was looking to the other side of his face when I had it mirrored through just checking what the tattoo’s looked like and the scar ended up there unintentionally, but now that it’s on there I look at it and, it doesn’t look bad.

Matt: Oh, ok. *laugh* So you’ve mentioned 3 different characters, is that all that you have?

Hector: Nope, I have two at level 50 which is currently that highest level, and I have 2 more that are sitting around level 13, and then 2 or 3 more that are below level 10, they are level 8.

Matt: Why so many?

Hector: Part of it is one, one is I let my son play, so he made up his own character, which actually you were talking about it earlier, he was specifically trying to design a character that looked like himself. He's almost 8, so when he plays I sit right there with him because you know some of the content or some of the open world chat can get questionable at times so I just sit with him to watch that, and ya know he runs around and plays the game. I know for his choices he's certainly picking moral choices based on his morality and what we've taught him, the difference between right and wrong. The other characters are just ones that I've created to just tinker around with or just play around with. Trying to think whether I'll advance one of them up to 50 or just play with what I have.

Matt: The two characters you do have at 50, what drove you to complete them to the max level?

Hector: Well usually in MMO's that I've played in the past and in Star Wars I will generally pick a healer class first to play. In other MMO's, one of the things I don't like to happen in the PVP setting is I don't like dying, so in most other MMO's the healer class is able to absorb huge amounts of damage and don't die quite as frequently necessarily. And my experience has been in the past that in other MMO's that healers aren't necessarily always a popular choice, it seems a lot of people want to play more the aggressive classes, so being a healer seems that there's never a shortage of a party or group to join because everybody is always looking for one, but there's relatively fewer to be had. So it's always given me more options to do more content just because people are always looking for a healer to round a party out.

Matt: And then what about Jon'tre?

Hector: After a while, the one thing that I do find with healing is that it is a rather intensive class to be on because you are responsible for keeping the party going. You have to watch in Star Wars for example, I mean you might be in a party between 4-8 people and you're watching an awful lot of health bars go up and down as you take damage and try to balance out your actions to keep everyone going until the missions done or the particular battle is complete. So after playing that type of character for a while, I made the switch over and do the party mechanic that is less stressful. With my smuggler here, being a DPS character, all I have to do is aim at the boss and shoot and that's all I have to worry about and maybe some area of effect that I might have to dodge or get out of the way of, but other than that it's much much simpler task.

Matt: What led you to Star Wars?

Hector: I've been out of MMO's for probably about a year or so, maybe closer to 2 years. Warhammer online was the last MMO I played, I played some MMO games in-between but Star Wars, what drew my attention to Star Wars was I liked the way that Bioware had worked within the franchise with Knights of the Old Republic, I enjoyed a lot of the other Bioware games in the past as well, their Dungeons and Dragons series game and what not, and thought they'd always done a very good job with those, so I thought, I guess there was a lot of hype about what they were doing within the game that made it sound like it was going to be a really good MMO to be in.

Matt: Why a role-play server?

Hector: That one was more of a... the guild I was in prior to AT was.. had a, the guild master of Star Wars was also the head of that guild so I knew him before joining over to AT, so I joined the guild mostly because of a couple people I knew as opposed to being a real RPer.

Matt: So did you transfer servers?

Hector: Nope, AT was already joining this server and because I knew the guild leader I joined the guild because of him.

Matt: Knew him which way?

Hector: He was, we were in another guild together so we were playing a couple other games prior to coming over to Star Wars. He had been part of AT with *World of Warcraft*, but he was also playing, he's an old, I mention Neocron as being one of the other MMO's I was in. It was a guild I had played some other games, Neocron a guild that I joined up with for some other games, and that's Comie, known as Comie in the other guild, most people know him as Dey over here.

Matt: Now when it comes to playing these online games, have you ever had any experiences where you've met with online people in the real life or have you ever gotten together with real life friends and played online, have you ever experienced anything where the worlds intermix or interact?

Hector: Nope, I don't have a lot of friends who play computer games. The ones that do tend to play other games that I haven't played. I've had friends play *World of Warcraft* which I've never gotten into so I've never played with real life friends in an MMO and from the same standpoint I've never actually met anybody that I've talked to or friends with in the game never met in real life.

Matt: When you have friends in real life playing *World of Warcraft*, why didn't you?

Hector: I don't know, it may have been at the time the computer I had may not of been good enough to run *World of Warcraft*, I played a couple of the Warcraft real time strategy games, so it may have been a mix of not being necessarily fond of the real time strategy games, but for whatever reason it never really appealed to me. And then by the time I'd gotten to where maybe I would have considered it because of people I knew in real life who were playing it had characters capped, I wasn't willing to put in the level grind just to get up to the point that they were.

Matt: Two more questions, number one, how old are you?

Hector: 39

Matt: And, I'm gonna try this again; I know I already asked, but after our talk, I wanted to ask one more time. Why do you play online games?

Hector: Like I mentioned before, I like the persistent world element, maybe beyond that why do I play games in general, online or otherwise? I've always liked computer games, it's more of a, maybe not a

hobby, but I'll spend an hour playing computer games instead of playing computer games, so this is maybe a TV replacement. In my house we don't have cable, we've got a limited amount of TV, that hasn't always been the case, I guess it's a little bit more engaging, whereas in front of a TV you're not engaged and being a couch potatoes, at least here you're engaged, there's some thought process, some social aspect to it that I enjoy.

Matt: Alright, I think that just about does it. Thank you very much for your time, I'm going to go over everything you said and review it, and if I have any more questions I'd like to do a follow-up if that's ok with you.

Hector: Absolutely.

Matt: Alright, thanks!

Jericho

Jericho Interview

9/11/2012

Matt: Jericho, have you read the internet disclaimer and consent form?

Jericho: Yes I have.

Matt: And do you consent?

Jericho: Yup, I do.

Matt: Alright my first question is going to be a rather easy one, why do you play online games?

Jericho: Why do I play online games? Well, I really enjoy playing with other people. Like... how much, how deep do I have to go into detail, because I was just about to go into a story about why I even do it at all.

Matt: That is completely fine.

Jericho: Ok, well when... my favorite part about gaming, like it doesn't matter the genre of the game or like, anything. As long as I am able to play with people, that where my enjoyment from a video game, I just love playing with people, working together, more of a co-op than against each other kind of game. More or less, I don't really do a lot of online versus gaming, I do a lot of online working together kind of gaming. So, that's why... and online it's just easier to get a group of people playing the same game rather than just walking around, well I mean I guess I could find my friends to play online and stuff, but it's just ultimately easier to play online and stuff, quick match, like get a bunch of people and play a quick match, like left for dead, get a bunch of people and play in co-op and stuff like that.

Matt: What do you like about MMO's?

Jericho: I just like, it's really you can just go back to the last answer, I just like playing with people it's really fun to get a group together and go play and stuff. And if you're playing with your real life friends in an mmo it's even more fun because when you get together you can talk about it and be like "remember that time blah blah blah" ya know.

Matt: Ok, specifically for MMO's which ones have you played?

Jericho: Oh boy... well, MMO wise I started on Everquest 1, that's 1999 I think? That's, it was made by Sony Online entertainment, it was the first MMO I ever played and, my brother introduced me to that, and when I started playing on his account, I just looked around and was like all these people are other people I'm playing with? And he was like "yup" and I was like "oh my god". And even with Everquest and all of its faults, that, just that, me being able to play with all these other people it was just like a chat room and you could chat with people, but then you could just go and do stuff with, and it was

incredible, it was \$15 a month, but when I told my brother that, he gave me a copy. That was the first time I upgraded my computer with a 3d accelerator, that's what graphics cards were called back then, before they were graphics cards, they were just *funny voice* "3d Accelerator" for your computer. So I upgraded so I could just play that, and then from there, I played another game called Grail. It was a Zelda 3 type MMO where it was using the Zelda 3 Link to the Past engine, graphics engine, and kinda played around with other people. And from there I went and did Star Wars Galaxies right when it launched, when it was Good, and that went to crap, but I stopped playing before it did, and I enjoyed that because I liked Star Wars and I enjoyed Everquest. It was made by Sony Online Entertainment as well, SOE I think. From there, that's when I stopped playing for a little bit I think. And then I started, my brother showed me this new game he had been playing called *World of Warcraft*, and I was like "ah man, *World of Warcraft*" I like *World of Warcraft* because... Hold on I jumped ahead, my brain had a fart. He showed me *World of Warcraft*, and I played a little bit of it, and I enjoyed it because it was like Everquest, but it wasn't so grindy, and by grindy I mean it wasn't just sitting in 1 spot for an entire day killing the same spawning monsters like Everquest was. The name "Everquest" didn't really fit Everquest because you never quested, ever. But... *World of Warcraft*, it was very easy to see who had a quest for you, you could go and do it, and I really enjoyed that. And really from there I got all of my real life friends into it. I had 2 free trials and I went and gave one to my friend Chad, which you probably did an interview with him, but, he uh, started playing because I gave him a free trial and I said it's kinda like the game Everquest I tried to get you to play, but I enjoyed it more. And he started playing and was like "oh my god", and he got his girlfriend to play and, but anyway, I digress. *World of Warcraft* and from *World of Warcraft* I didn't really play too many MMO's after that because a lot of them were really WoW clones where it was kinda like the same game mechanics, but looked a little prettier. I think, I really think the one after *World of Warcraft* that I tried was Aion, I think. I tried Aion, and that was... After playing *World of Warcraft* and getting away from the grind that Everquest had, going back to the grind that Aion had, it just wasn't very fun for me, even though I had friends playing it, I couldn't get into it very much. And then from Aion, I jumped to Guild Wars 1. I played that for a little bit, I used a different account because I didn't at the time, I didn't have the money to buy the game, but I played it and it was really fun. The max level was 20, whereas the other games the max level was 70, so it was very quick to get through, but it was still an MMO, kind of. And then, from Guild Wars I went to Second Life because I like to create stuff, and in Second Life you were just allowed to build whatever you want, be whatever you want, it's just whatever. Started doing that and I would consider that MMO, it's Massively Multiplayer Online, I guess it's a Massive Online Social game I suppose it would be? But I still consider it an MMO. And I still play it, I still create shit, I make money, I made something I sell stuff. And from Second Life I went tooooo, I played Guild Wars 2 I guess. That's the most current one I've been playing I guess and I've been enjoying it, there's no monthly fee, just like in second life, and neither did Guild Wars 1. But I, Oh wait, I did Star Wars! I did Star Wars: The Old Republic. That was fun, I mean it felt, it was more fun because it felt more single player, it wasn't really more fun because I was playing it with my friends. Even though I could, I just, it felt, once you hit the end you were done, and friends I was playing with fell behind, and they would complain that I wasn't helping them, and I was, I was going back and helping them as much as I could, even though they weren't logging in, or just not doing stuff, so they fell really far behind. But, I mean, Star Wars was ok, but there's your list. I mean, might be a little sloppy of a list, but it's there..

Matt: Well that works. Ok, now a task you do in each of these games is create and Avatar. At first, let's go specific and look here at Guild wars 2. I see you made a... I forgot what they're called.

Jericho: They're called Asura.

Matt: I see you made an Asura! You have the orange hair, black ears, white face, you're a hunter, you chose green for the colors for your clothes, and brown. Just go over what made you decide these choices, the green eyes, stuff like that.

Jericho: Ok well first I was making an Asura, they didn't have the colors I wanted, but I definitely wanted green eyes because I think green eyes are really pretty, and what I was going to do was I was going to have green eyes and some blue hair, because I really love blue, and green and blue kinda go together, at least in my head they go together, and I don't know sonic has green eyes and blue fur so whatever, I was kinda gonna go for a Sonic color scheme, but they didn't have blue enough hair, so I went well what other colors go with green, and I figured well allot of red heads have green eyes, so I figured I'd go with the orange hair-ish, cause they kinda complement each other because usually when you see green eyes, there's orange hair, and... that's kinda why I have the green armor, because I wanted to continue the color scheme of green and orange. And, the brown, I chose brown because brown also goes pretty well with green, and, I have, you can't really tell, but the under armor is white, kinda like, just like a white under armor for the pants and the shirt and stuff. And I chose those colors because they go pretty well together and I've played games like Legend of Zelda where the main character Link has green and he has the brown gauntlets and grown boots and he has the white under armor underneath his tunic and stuff, so I figured since I'm making green armor, I might as well do a color scheme that works with those colors and the big floppy ears, I Just like the big floppy ears because they flop around when you run and look cute, so cute! And there was allot of face choices and I liked allot, they had allot of flat faces but I didn't really like the look of that, kinda looked like aliens. I wanted to kinda have like a little snout, cause I wanted the face that stuck out a little farther, you can't really tell cause I wear the bandit mask. And I chose black and white because all the other color schemes looked really crappy, and ehhhh, I kinda look like a Dalmatian I guess, so I kinda went with the Dalmatian color scheme with the black and the white and it turned out pretty good because it goes pretty well with the other colors I think... It's all about the colors, you have to make all the colors work.

Matt: I see, what about the hunter?

Jericho: I picked hunter because I really like ranged combat, because I can be running and shooting back at things, and like melee, if melee combat with swords and stuff like that, you're right in there you're doing allot of damage, and you feel like you're doing allot of damage but you're also allot of the times the melee group is so close in, they fall, so I like being out and away and if my friends fall, the monsters tend to come get the ranged after that, so I can kind of kite them away while they kind of bring themselves back up. So it kind of gives my friends time to recuperate. And I just like shooting bows. And my secondary weapons are axes and war horns, I don't.. I use those to complement my bow, I don't really use them. I just like shooting a bow and arrow, because it's fucking awesome.

Matt: What about the name, Jericho Cage?

Jericho: Ummm, well the name Jericho is taken, but I've used Jericho since my second MMO. Once I stopped playing Everquest and went to Grail I got the name Jericho from there, because it was actually the name of a classmate that I had, and I really liked the sound of it, has the word ace in it, and I don't know, I just really like the sound of Jericho. So, I had Jericho, and I'm gonna be Jericho. So I put it in, and it's already taken, and I'm like I'm going to kill whoever took that name, I'm kidding. But because, and there's a different varieties that I could of chosen, Jericho with a y, Jericho with two C's, but then people might call me Jackie, so I just gave myself a last name cause in Guild Wars there's a nice little feature where you can have a last name because all names are shared throughout all servers, it's not server based. Every name is over the entire game, So that's why they give you the ability to have like three names in your name. So I was able, I just added Cage because, I don't know, I just like short names that's just have a punch to them. So Cage came from Mortal Kombat, Johnny Cage, and he had started with a J and kinda, I don't know, I just like Jericho Cage. Sometimes it's Jericho Jericho, but I went with Jericho Cage this time.

Matt: When we're creating our character, we can chose a personality, whether it be Charm, Dignity, or ferocity, which did you chose?

Jericho: I chose charm, cause, as much as I like to fight, I like to avoid it if IU can, because, I just, charisma man, I would think that my character would be very charming because, He's kinda small. So, he wouldn't wanna try and get in combat right away, and the personality of Asura is they think that they're better than all the other races, and I didn't like that Idea, so I figured I would try to chose everything that would totally contradict what the character race would follow, so I tried to make, I would try and be nice to everybody, I would try to give everybody a chance, I would think that everybody was equal. So I tried, and I kinda chose that. Kinda go against what the race actually stood for.

Matt: You sorta shifted there, when you started talking you said I, but then you switched to identifying your character as he and them. Does the character share your personality, or is he his own guy?

Jericho: I would like to think so, I like to think that, cause my main character that I create is always going to be Jericho, and I would like to think that I would try and make Jericho as much as I could, personality wise, to me. And, the reason I shifted it, cause when you talk you mentioned Jericho, so I tried to shift it around so you would understand that I was talking about Jericho and not myself. So that's why I kinda shifted. But that's... that's that.

Matt: Now do you ever make alts?

Jericho: I do make alts. I try not to do them till I reach the end of things in MMO, then I jump back and try something else. Because, MMO's, not so much this game, but MMO's in general there's so much you need to learn about 1 class, that it would be overwhelming to go and learn a completely different thing right away as you're just starting up the game. But its nice, like I tried a bunch at first to see which profession and class I'd wanna be, but once I found the one that I'd wanna be, felt comfortable with, I just kinda deleted all the other ones and just stuck with my ranger. So, I, I do have alts, but they're really just to hold bank stuff right now, but other than that, because like Alt's... The only reason I would have another alt I would think would be if I was playing with friends, and they were falling behind, and I didn't

want to keep going without them so I would start up another class to kinda figure it out. And another big thing about having an alt on here is that your key bindings fall all over your characters, all characters have the same key bindings and I can't have that because my attacks are different on one character from the other character so I wouldn't want them in certain spots so I would have a hard time jumping between characters with key bindings I would have with one when they're stuck on it with the other character, so I wouldn't really want to do that. Does that answer your question?

Matt: Yeah, so in short you like to stick with the main focus on the one, Jericho?

Jericho: Ya the main focus on one, and then when I'm done with that I can try out other stuff, see if I enjoy it more now that I've done it with one entire class.

Matt: One thing that I began to look at in my study is migration, as I started my study in star wars and now moved to Guild Wars, and you have quite a history of moving from game to game, why do this?

Jericho: Um, I follow my friends typically, like if they, like if I can't really play a game, it became to, I have a group of internet friends that I play all of games with and typically if people stop playing, or if I have no one to play with, I get really bored. Even though there's all these other people, and all these other, like, just TONS of people doing this stuff, I'm very, I have this fear of playing with people I don't know because I don't know what they're thinking or judging me from doing a bad job or something. I know if I'm doing a bad job, because my friends tell me if I'm doing a bad job, so then I can work on making myself better. I can't really, and a lot of the times I'm on a talking program like teamspeak or mumble or vent, where I can talk to them and good around and giggle while I'm playing the game, it's not super serious when I'm playing it, playing them. So when that group of friends gone, and it's just me playing that game by myself, well not by myself, but really, "by myself", I just, it's not fun because I can't, I'm not goofing around not having much fun, and if they're playing something else I would rather play that game that they're playing so I can enjoy it with them than play a game, and most of the have a monthly subscriptions you have to remember that. I wouldn't want to pay monthly fee if I'm playing by myself, because I wouldn't be having fun.

Matt: Alright, you've actually given me all of information because you're answers are so detailed*

Jericho: I apologize

Matt: No no that's good, I don't have to ask a lot of questions now because you're already answered them in your other answers. I think for now I'll take what I have and go over it and if I have any further questions, I'll come back to you and ask you some more questions, that sound alright?

Jericho: Sounds good to me.

Matt: Alright, thank you very much for your time.

Jericho: No problem.

Korin

Korin Interview

August 8th, 2012

Matt: Alright, this is Matthew Phillips and I'm interviewing Korin for my project. Korin, have you read the consent form and internet disclaimer?

Korin: Yes I have.

Matt: And do you consent?

Korin: I consent

Matt: Good. Ok, my first question is a nice and easy one, at least I think so. Why do you play online role playing games?

Korin: I find them entertaining, it's something cheap to do after work that keeps me entertained for hours. And I like the people I've met and get to talk to.

Matt: Do you enter the online worlds to meet people, or do you already know people going in?

Korin: A friend handed me a disc and said you MUST try this, and told me what server to get on. That's how my online gaming started. So it was with a group of people in my own town that were friends, and then I met a group of people across the country.

Matt: Was that this game or another?

Korin: Actually Star Wars galaxies.

Matt: What other games have you played?

Korin: *World of Warcraft*, Warhammer Online, Diablo, Stone Keep. Before they got me into Star Wars Galaxies, I really didn't play on the computer much. I kind of bought a computer just so my husband had something to do while I read books.

Matt: Ok. Tell me a bit about your avatar. What went into designing her, what led you to the choices that you made, like why did you chose those tattoo's, why does she have white hair?

Korin: I went with the white hair because we actually thought about these characters for role play purposes. She's had trauma in her past so her hair went white, the facial tattoo's were just something I liked, the Mirialan's looked nifty to me, so I wanted to try them. And, I just liked the hair style, it was just a little different to me.

Matt: Define Nifty.

Korin: I like things that look stylized, swirly yet feminine.

Matt: You mentioned story and role playing thought going into it, is this your main character?

Korin: Yes.

Matt: How many do you have, because I know you have a few.

Korin: I have 3 at the moment, I leveled a trooper for PVP purposes, and Keenin was leveling another character so I decided to level a smuggler which is Gigg. And it turned out I had fun with that one healing.

Matt: How did you come up with the name?

Korin: I found it in "Geery Jyrack's Book of names". I did some random rolls, and got it way back when I started playing WoW, and I just stuck with it since I don't run into anyone using it.

Matt: That is the first time I've heard that answer.

Korin: Ok *laugh*. We play a lot of tabletop games as well like Dungeon and Dragons, Shadowrun, Warhammer 40k.

Matt: *interrupt* Who's we?

Korin: Me and my husband Keenin. And, so we bought the book because we were running into issues with names, so we saw it one day and decided, why not. So when we have to get a name, we'll do a random roll for how many pages, then a random roll for the line and the word in that line. And that's how we pick new names for characters.

Matt: Oh t hats neat. When you play the tabletop games, is it just you two, or are their other people involved?

Korin: They're other folks involved, we haven't gotten into one lately, but the last one we were in was about six people.

Matt: This is a new question I'm going to try and feel free to give me a range, how old are you exactly?

Korin: I'm 34, I turn 35 in November.

Matt: Ok.

Korin: Keenin is 40, he turns 41 in October. So, we're an older couple. I guess from what you can say based on most of the people we play with, cause I know Scara's 19, Ripcurl is 24 or 22 or something like that. And I've already been referred to as a guild mom.

Matt: Well that's a compliment right?

Korin: I took it as a compliment but it was actually Zarrwixx who said it to me.

Matt: Which do you have more fun doing, the online role-playing or the tabletop games?

Korin: Tabletop.

Matt: Why is that?

Korin: Because you're actually with a group of friends, you talk, tell jokes, you've got live interaction.

Matt: Can you not tell jokes online?

Korin: You can but you can't read the other person the way you can actually seeing the person, you can't see facial expressions. Like sometimes Keenin will crack jokes, and mumble will quiet, and you can't tell how it was received. You don't know if they're laughing on the other end or going oh my god what the fuck did he just say? Oops, excuse my language.

Matt: That's fine. Is your avatar modeled after anything or just free form?

Korin: Just free form.

Matt: Is it always that way?

Korin: Usually. Sometimes I just random till I get something I like.

Matt: Is your character light side or dark side?

Korin: This character is Light side 5.

Matt: Are your other characters dark side?

Korin: Ummm, no. I'm trying with my smuggler. It's actually not easy for me to dark side so I've been keeping her neutral.

Matt: I'm sorry can you repeat that?

Korin: With my smuggler I'm actually trying to keep her neutral, so I'm trying to look for dark to keep her neutral, but it's not my normal choice.

Matt: Why are you trying to keep her neutral?

Korin: Because that's the character type to me. She occasionally will do the dark things to make a profit, but occasionally the light stuff.

Matt: Have you really only developed the 2 characters?

Korin: So far, yeah just the two. I was working on some stuff for my trooper, but haven't gotten real far with it.

Matt: So are all their decisions based on their back-story and the way that you're playing them?

Korin: Somewhat, some of them are based on decisions I would make, my personal preference.

Matt: And I assume those are light side choices?

Korin: For the most part ya, I'm a softy.

Matt: Do you intend to make a dark side character?

Korin: I'm going to make a empire character, and I'm going to make that one dark side all the way.

Matt: Why the empire character?

Korin: Because they look better going funky colors with red eyes.

Matt: *laugh* ... Sorry for the pause its just you're giving me really straight answers and I'm not used to that.

Korin: Oh I'm sorry.

Matt: Oh no no that's fine, I'm just tired and getting thrown off is all *laugh*.

Korin: I work in a government job, I'm so use to if you get asked a question about something, you answer it so...

Matt: Ya, and everything means something, and so the way you answer means something and... idk I'm rambling, its 2:30.... Here's a bit of an odd question, your game characters, do you ever refer to them in the real life, or pretend to be them, or anything like that?

Korin: See, now that gets interesting, because I LARP, I do Live Action Role Play so I'm used to acting out a character at an event. I don't really do that with my online toons so much, but when you're larping you dress up in costume and you get to pretend to be that person for a couple of hours, but I haven't done that with any of my characters in WoW.

Matt: Tell me more about Larping.

Korin: One of my girlfriends when I was 18 asked me to go to a Vampire game, and I went "Huh?" And she said please, I need someone to drive, and I said ok. I thought they were a bunch of freaks, but it turned out a bunch of those freaks were my friends. So, they got me to go, and I started getting into it because I like to sew...

Matt: As in sew costumes? Did I lose you? ...

Korin: ... Hello? Ok I've got it. I actually make a little bit of money making dresses, formal wear, corset's, I've made a mens' zuit suit.

Matt: A what?

Korin: A zuit suit. It's a long suit that comes down to the knee's with a chain, form the 40's.

Matt: I have no idea what that is.

Korin: Think of the song Zoot suit riot, have you ever heard that? By the cherry popper daddy's?

Matt: Never heard of that or them.

Korin: Um, ok. What it is is it's a Men's suit but instead of a standard length, the coat comes down to about the knee, and usually guys wore it with a chain that went to a pocket watch with the belt. It's something from the 30's and 40's era.

Matt: Ah, ok. So you went to that one event at 18 and been doing it ever since?

Korin: Kinda, I take breaks here and there, now I belong to a group called the Mind's Eye society. It's a global organization so I'll go to events in other cities. It's how I met Travis that got me into the guild.

Matt: That was actually going to be one of my next questions, have you ever interacted with people online in the real life or vice versa. How'd you meet up with him exactly?

Korin: I got asked to go to Phoenix for a feature game for a LARP event, and it was in a friend's house of his, and I met him there. We didn't actually get real close at that point, I saw him again when I went back down because I'm a club officer and he was helping the regional officer and we went down to ask questions and that's when Travis and I actually talked a little bit more, and we found out a friend of ours with diabetes had lost his foot, and we actually only met him once, but we heard some friends were going to travel down for moral support, we hope you feel better, we're thinking about you... and one of the girls lived in town really close, so we made arrangements to stay there, but the girl ended up canceling, but Keenin and I said screw it this guy needs moral support and drove down there anyway. So we drove down to Phoenix, and we knew where Travis's house was, so we went to his house to get a hold of the individual so we could meet up with him and Travis couldn't get over how unbelievably, he called it sweet, for us to up and out of the blue drive all the way down to tell someone we barely know that we hope you get better.

Matt: Well it is.

Korin: That's us, we do that thing regularly. One year we saw Travis's birthday coming up on an email list and hopped in the car and drove on down and knocked on the door because someone wouldn't answer his damn phone. We actually tried calling right before we knocked on his door and he still didn't answer.

Matt: Was it you who sent Wixx cookies?

Korin: Yeah, his dad is going through a rough spot, so we thought it'd make him feel better.

Matt: *long pause* I'm usually better at this *laugh*.

Korin: I don't know, I was just thinking I sound sappy and silly, but ok.

Matt: Ah no, that's fine. As long as you're saying words it's all good. The bad part is me having nothing to say to it... Well I need a bit more but I'm not sure what to go with. What do you think about Avatars in general? Let's just make it wide open.

Korin: Um... I think they're, for me, they're to create something cute that I get to look at. It's like dressing up a doll. That's why I like getting outfits for them, to me its like a great big game of House. At least for my characters, I don't know what other people think of their characters or what not.

Matt: Do you consider the Avatar its own entity, or is it you?

Korin: A little bit of both? I mean, the things I do with my character are me, but the Avatar is not me, I mean... It's one of those I know it's my actions controlling the toon, but I don't, I don't put myself inside the toon that way, computer games its different, it's a separation, its not like Larping where I pretend to be that character, um, I don't know, its pr4obvably why I'm having a rough time with some of the RP in WoW, because occasionally it's like what do I do next, because I'm trying to think of the story I wrote for the character and what she'd do, but I think of it kind of separate, versus... so that's a little rough for me. I don't know...

Matt: So you much prefer role play in real life?

Korin: Um... its easier, for me. Because like I said, I can see other people reactions, and visual and facial reactions are easier for me to pick up on.

Matt: Which do you enjoy more?

Korin: Right now, its about 50/50.

Matt: Why is that? What helps the online world bridge the gap?

Korin: The people I get to talk to on mumble.

Matt: So it's a social atmosphere you enjoy?

Korin: Ya, and um, the larping is only like once a month, so I see people once a month with that. With Star Wars I get home at 5 o'clock in the evening, and I'm alone till 9 o'clock at night because Keenin is at work. And sitting in a house alone is very boring very fast. So sitting on mumble gives me a social interaction that doesn't make me feel like I'm sitting in a house by myself while it's dark outside.

Matt: Makes sense. Let's go back to the outfits and playing house.

Korin: It's like when I was playing as I kid, I had a Barbie doll house and a lot of Barbie's and all the clothes and shoes, and you store all the stuff, and swap all the outfits, and did their hair and what not, and I don't know that's what Avatars remind me of.

Matt: How much time do you devote to gathering those, because depending on some of those they can be really rare.

Korin: In Star Wars, I haven't done a whole lot of devotion for it. In *World of Warcraft*, I had a full bank for 1 toon. Like a Pirate outfit, and like the Tier 1 priest gear, and the Tier 2, and things like that.

Matt: Why have you done less of it in Star Wars?

Korin: Because right now The outfit I'm wearing I like, so I'm not worried about finding something else.

Matt: Is that what you role-play in?

Korin: I was role-playing in it, but this character got made the padawon of someone else, and that person said you need to wear pants, so now I have another outfit for her to wear while I RP.

Matt: Ok, last thing I guess. Tell me about your role-playing with this character.

Korin: Well Keenin wrote up most of our history because Keenin came up with the idea that our characters are twins that were separated early, and while he went off with our smuggler father I was put up in the Jedi Temple. Timeline wise I came to what most would consider late, like 8 or 9, so she was still going through everything, talking to Marachi, one of the Jedi masters would have been killed in a story line, so we made it mine, because Jedi's are supposed to be hard to kill, so we put in the bad guy is someone who can kill Jedi's, not just regular people. So I was the one who's master died before she could become a full Jedi and I was lost in the shuffle, in just paper work, "We'll assign you a master, we'll get back to you" while I was running around the galaxy with my smuggler brother because we met back up. So, in not the last RP session, but the one before, Marachi was running a character called Jurcasta from the Jedi temple, and she's like "We need to get you a master" and tesmar'one's character was being belligerent, so she assigned me to him as a small bit of revenge for not doing what he was supposed to do.

Matt: The getting lost in the paper work kind of reminds me of the, a government job.

Korin: Ya, its easy, something gets filed away and gets put down, and if you don't call to have somebody check on it, it can be 6 months before its gotten back to. I've seen it happen on people applying for licenses and what not because they were missing something, we sent out a letter, they didn't get it or something, we put it in the drawer until someone responds back.

Matt: Ok, one last question. Do you always play with Keenin? Like when you play online games or when you do Larping, is it always with Keenin?

Korin: Well, for the most part ya. I'll play for a few hours when he's not home by myself, but when we get a game its usually so we can play together and do something together as a couple.

Matt: Ok, I think that's all I need for now. I'll have to go over it when I'm not so tired. I'll probably come up with some follow-up questions if that's alright.

Korin: Ya!

Matt: Alright, well thank you!

Norith

Norith Interview

July 18th, 2012 6:52PM

Text based interview in game

Matt: Hello and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview for my research project. I just need to confirm you have read the consent form and internet disclaimer.

Norith: Yes I have read both and I do consent.

Matt: Alright Good. I'm going to start off with a nice broad question. Why do you play MMO's?

Norith: Well the basic answer is its just for entertainment. I've always enjoyed video games and the first time I was actually introduced to an MMO was a game called Runescape. I was at the public library and some older kids were playing a game with interesting graphics and it appeared to be co-op. I Asked them what they were playing, and they showed me and explained what an MMO was. Since then I've loved the idea of playing a video game online in a persistent world with Thousands of other active participants.

Matt: Heh, my last interview sparked me to ask that question and now your answer has led me to another I think I'll include here and from now on. What MMO's have you played?

Norith: Oh... a lot. I'll try and recall them in order. First obviously was Runescape. Then there were a couple I sorta tried like... I cant even remember them now. Since I cant remember, I obviously didn't care about them so whatever. The next major one was Lineage 2. That was a game changer for sure. Lineage 2, followed by Vanguard, then *World of Warcraft*, followed by Age of Conan, Aion, DC Universe Online, Rift, Star Wars The Old Republic, Tera, and Guild Wars 2.

Matt: So many, what caused you to go from one to the next? Why was Lineage 2 a game changer?

Norith: Well that's a good question because I was gonna make a side note to everything I just listed. Lineage 2 was a game changer because of what I brought to the table, and this will answer both questions. Runescape was one of the early titles that helped online play become mainstream. It was a world, you logged on, it was a mix of 3d and 2d graphics, very basic, at the time the game looked like it could have been developed in paint. There was only humans, you got a sword, armor, did quests and combat between players was restricted to a certain zone. Just 1 place in the entire game. Lineage 2 came along in 2004, 6 months before *World of Warcraft*. It was a fully 3d world with amazing graphics at the time, and several races to choose from in a huge world. Walking across runescapes world took maybe 30-60 minutes, end to end. Lineage 2 would take you a few hours, and that's assuming you didn't run into mobs, or players, that could kill you... I'm sorry I'm getting into the fine details about it, nostalgia I guess haha.

Matt: heh, That's quite alright.

Norith: For both our sakes, I'll cut to the chase. Lineage 2 offered more. Better graphics, more to do, and player choices that affected the entire game world for all players within it. Each game that has come out since has tried to do 1 of 2 things. Copy the game previous to it, or to add something new to the mix. *World of Warcraft* made online gaming for RPG's mainstream. A lot of online games to come out after WoW were called "WoW Clones" because they simply tried to reproduce WoW. The sidenote I was going to add earlier was that while I played all of those MMO's, there was only 2 that I ever went BACK to play. Lineage 2, and *World of Warcraft*.

Matt: Why those two?

Norith: Well, Lineage 2 because it was my first love. And no game had ever come even remotely close to the excellent PvP (player versus player) system that Lineage 2 had. Also, no other game to date, except for perhaps Tera, has made it so the players could actually impact the world and alter things.

Matt: I'm actually quite familiar with Lineage 2, you mean the siege system, right?

Norith: Exactly. Players actually controlled sections of the world, and ruled them. Genius. WoW I would go back to because of friends. I had many real life friends who played, or I would have friends looking to play a game with me. WoW is by far the easiest to teach and to follow. With each new game that comes out, I generally play with friends, but I keep hoping for that next "game changer". Many have taken baby steps, but none have blown me away yet.

Matt: So, basically social interaction with real life friends, and a desire for innovation has led you from one MMO to the next?

Norith: Ya, that's how I'd put it.

Matt: Have you played these games without friends?

Norith: Yea of course. Lineage 2 I have always played by myself. I knew it before I knew real life friends who played. The others, friends often start out playing in the beginning, but become bored later on and quit. Sometimes I would keep playing, sometimes I'd quit because they quit, or sometimes I was actually bored too.

Matt: Ok, let's look at Star Wars since that's where we are now :p.

Norith: Seems logical ☺

Matt: What led you to Star Wars specifically?

Norith: Well, this game was based off of a single player game that came out many many years ago. That game was critically acclaimed as one of the best RPG's ever made, and it was done by the studio Bioware which ever since then has had and maintained a reputation for releasing outstanding RPG's. This alone had me interested, but I also had several real life friends who wanted to play.

Matt: Do they still play?

Norith: Ha, no.

Matt: Why not?

Norith: Monthly fee stopped 2 of them (they had no jobs). Because of that the third quit. The other couldn't keep up with our levels, so he quit. Because he quit, his girlfriend quit. So I was left alone.

Matt: One sec...

Norith: ok.

Matt: Sorry to ask this again, but I just wanted clarification. Why did you decide to play Star Wars?

Norith: Oh, yeah, I didn't actually really answer that. This game promised a few unique things. Light/Dark side progression, a truly story driven progression through the game, and everything was 100% dialogue driven. Oh ya, and the option of "choices" in your dialogue, with different outcomes/consequences.

Matt: So, that "innovation" you were looking for?

Norith Ha, ya exactly :p

Matt: Alright, cool. When you started up the game and had to create an Avatar. I see you have a scar on your face, and you obviously chose the human race. You're not skinny, nor overall tall. What went into designing your Avatar?

Norith: Oh where to begin... Well, I am a human. I like humans. I'm attracted to humans. I wanted to be human. And not red, blue, purple, whatever. I modeled my Avatar with his class and future light side affiliation in mind. He was to be a Jedi Guardian, upright and morally good. I gave him a scar to show he has been through battle. I believe every feature on the appearance of an avatar, if chosen by the player, gives it a story, a flavor. I chose his height and shape based on my height and shape. No, I do not have a badass scar on my face.

Matt: The way you refer to your character, "I gave him a scar", is he his own entity, or is he you as you seem to have modeled his physical form after you?

Norith: He is me... and he is not me. The easiest way around that question is to call him my main. My main character. In this world, despite what character I may be on, I am referred to as Norith. When I say "Ok I'll get on" to my fellow guild mates, it's taken as ok I'm logging on Norith. So he's both.

Matt: What's the not so easy way around that question?

Norith: Um... ok I see you want more depth on this :p

Matt: Have to at least try :p

Norith: Heh ok. Personally, I do model my first character (generally) after me. My personality, my gender/shape. I see my "main" as my virtual self. I like the idea of the mask matching the person. That being said, I never create just 1 character. I often create a second character, or a third even and act out other personalities with them.

Matt: Mask matching the person? Other personalities?

Norith: No wondering you're having trouble following me, I can't seem to follow myself. I guess examples are best. Norith is me. Good, moral human jedi aligned with the light side. That's who I am/want to be. Relina is my alt [*secondary character*]. SHE is obviously female, does not have my shape, and is aligned with the dark side. She is Dark side because the game offers me a different storyline and events reflecting that. She is female because her class is a healer. Call me a stereotype, but I like my healers as women. I put as much if not MORE thought into a female character however. I craft them to be what I would want. When I play Norith, I am Norith. When I play Relina, I'm protecting Relina. I'm watching over her. This game actually offers me a way to better express what I *feel*. In this game, we have the Legacy System. I actually assigned Relina as Norith's daughter. I am going to stop talking now and hope that offers a better understanding to my madness :p

Matt: Heh, I think I understand just fine.

Norith: Stepping away from Star Wars, I generally always, in any game I play, make a hero, and a villain. I model the Hero after me. I model the villain after everything I could never be as the Hero. Looking back to lineage, I would walk around the world and Kill players and commit crimes. On my Hero I would protect players from villains. If I had to do something bad, I would just log onto my villain. I could experience the world through 2 different personalities, and thusly could experience the world completely. Star Wars makes that statement even more true with light side/dark side. Relina killed 2 birds with 1 stone as my Third character is usually a healer class female, not my 2nd.

Matt: You said you are your hero, but the villain is "everything I could never be". Does that mean you want to be the villain?

Norith: At times, Yes. Playing a villain can be quite fun.

Matt: Does that make you part evil?

Norith: Sure, till I log on the Hero again :p Seriously though. No, I wouldn't think that makes me actually evil or reflect a dark side spot in my mind lying dormant. These online worlds give us the chance to experience places, events, people, and personalities we could never visit or be. That's what makes them so wonderful. In more simple terms, I'll fall back on saying when "Being the villain" in an MMO, I followed "rules of conduct" I would set upon myself. The main rule being never kill a player more than once if unprovoked. This of course mostly relating to lineage 2 where it was possible to kill anyone, anywhere. If I made a mistake, or felt bad for people who kept trying, I would generally "break character" and give them items or gold to offset the disruption my evil character caused to their gameplay. They had provided me fun at the cost of their own. We are all real people looking to have fun

in these online worlds. Therefore, I would give something back so we could all walk away happy. Put me in an offline world with NPC's, and I'll do the most evil things imaginable to see what happens. In both realms I can slaughter an entire village given the right circumstances. Online its fun, but I realize its costing others. Offline its fun too, but the computer isn't going to get sad about it. Comparatively, online is more fun because of the fact... there's a living person behind every avatar, and I just upset their plan. I created chaos. I affected their world, their play. Killing an avatar doesn't just result in a virtual dead body, the person, the human on the other side feels emotion. Their character died. They are angry, confused, filled with hate, scared. On the opposite side, when you're the hero, the same things can happen. You can save someone from a villain. That effects even more people. Now the villain is scared, the defended are grateful, and you can be amused by that too. I'm going to stop my psychotic rambling now.

Matt: There is so much good stuff in there I have no idea how to even touch it. I think I'll need to digest it for a bit.

Norith: Ha, I think that's best for both of us :p

Matt: Are you a Jedi in real life? Do your real life friends call you Norith?

Norith: lol! No, I am not a Jedi. I think I get what you're getting at though. My friends have called me by my gamertag before, but usually as a joke. More and more I hear people making MMO references while in real life. So many people have played WoW nowadays that's its much more accepted as a much wider range of people understand the references. Take "Epic" for example, a word used commonplace today. It originated from gaming use.

Matt: Well, You've given me a huge amount of data that I think I'll have to spend some time going over. Thank you very much for your participation and I am sure I'll be in touch with you again to possibly go over a few more things or expand on some ideas.

Norith: Alright! Ttyl!

Procter

Procter Interview

9/10/2012

Matt: This is Matthew Phillips, it is September 10th, about 8 o'clock, and I am here with Procter. Procter have you read the consent form and internet disclaimer?

Procter: Yes I have.

Matt: Alright, good. Procter here is in the Guild wars 2 game. In this world I'm going to ask you a few questions about your avatar and the thought you put in to developing it. So, let's jump right into it. With Guild Wars 2 when you start developing your character, what were your choices? Why did you decide to be the Sylvari? I see you're the necromancer class, what led you to decide that? You're hair, you're skin/leaf color? The color of the clothes you're wearing? Just talk in general about yourself here.

Procter: In past online games, they never really matched up how the class profession goes with the race, and how they look. Like I'll find really big bulky races playing rogues. I found that to be really silly. I really like the idea of necromancer and spell casting, so when I saw the Sylvari, they looked very slender, they looked mystic, so they kinda fit the part I was going for. So they were a pretty easy choice for me. With Norn or even Char, I would probably go with a different class like a Tank or more of a melee class for them. As for the hair *laugh* I guess I'm a huge fan of anime, and when I saw this hair, it just reminds me of Dragon Ball Z and I just couldn't help myself.

Matt: Now why not the human race?

Procter: Cause I'm a human in real life, who does that? *laugh* You play a game because it's a game. Humans to me seem very bland in most, but I haven't tried it yet in Guild Wars 2, so I can't really say that yet, but that's typically how it goes.

Matt: Why the Dark leaf color?

Procter: Good Question. Um, aesthetically I guess it just fits the environment of the game. When I was looking at the cinematics of the area, just the darker wood color just seemed more natural versus the brightness of the other ones. And I guess it fit the hair color choice to.

Matt: What about your clothes?

Procter: Uh, I didn't really chose these clothes. This is just what I'm wearing so far for gear wise.

Matt: The Colors though, you chose those didn't you?

Procter: Yes! I see what you're saying. I chose the green, I guess it fits the whole Sylvari background where they're born from the pale tree, so I figured I would keep following that whole green, plus green is my favorite color so it all works together.

Matt: Nice coincidence.

Procter: Shh.

Matt: When it came to designing your character, did you use presets, or did you go in and use the sliders and adjust everything to your liking?

Procter: I didn't adjust everything, but I didn't just use the presets either. Going back to the whole I feel the character should fit the class, I made my character a little bit taller than average, but not too tall. I made him a little slender, because, typically with a spell caster, you think in a role playing sense they're going to be slender, they're not going to be very physical, when it came to the eyes, I spread them out a little further to make them look a little bit more cartoony because, ya know, it's not human, so you might as well have fun with it. I sunk the nose in a little bit to fit more of a tree look, I made the jaw line back a little bit more too, to give that whole necromancer skull face thing kinda trying to go on there, as best I could anyway. So all in all, I'm trying to fit Sylvari necromancer best I could.

Matt: About how much time did you put into designing your avatar?

Procter: *Laugh* Dude it's worse than Sims. Probably a good... When I played beta probably spent a good hour going through different presets and professions. But this character wasn't too long because, like I said beta, I already had played with some of it, so didn't take me too long this time around.

Matt: What about the name?

Procter: Procter, which is my name in game, I've always had that name. It comes from my obsession with Dance Dance Revolution *laugh*. As for the last name, the last name is actually Latin for shadows. And I figured I would follow the whole role play idea of it and try to keep the last name between my characters and try to keep a quote unquote "tribe" because the Sylvari background stats since you're born of the tree, you actually don't have a last name, and that only happens during courtships or marriages in the whole Guild Wars 2 world, so I'll try and follow that I think.

Matt: Do you normally go along with the role-play scene?

Procter: Never. I've never done it until Guild Wars 2. It seems like it will fit. It seems like it's gonna play a big part in the whole world eventually, where in past games they never really cared about the player, or the character itself. It's always been about the game story and the game itself.

Matt: What other games have you played?

Procter: MMO's, the biggest one is *World of Warcraft*. I played that for About 5 years, which is a really big chunk of my MMO life. I played Aion for I think 3 weeks. I played Star Wars: The Old Republic for about maybe a month, but that was off and on, I couldn't really get into it. I've also played Age of Conan. That was actually ok, but it seemed later on in the game, it was very barren. There wasn't much to do past a certain level, and it just lost my interest completely. And that's about it I think.

Matt: Now one of the things I started to focus on in my project was the migration of players from Star Wars to Guild Wars, why did you make the jump, and are you happy with the choice?

Procter: Well I think it all stems from being that void from *World of Warcraft*, and then they just kinda started making it cookie cutter with their ideas, so I jumped to Star Wars because I wanted that sense of adventure, I wanted that fresh feel. I wasn't getting that from Star Wars, I just couldn't get into it. So with Guild Wars 2, it had that look and feel of the older *World of Warcraft* kind of had, but an amazing fresh take on the idea of MMO's, and I'm very glad I made the jump.

Matt: Now when it comes to playing the game as your avatar, we have personality choices. Charm, dignity, ferocity, which chain are you following?

Procter: Charisma!

Matt: Why is that?

Procter: Because I think allot of the times it reflects the kind of person you are. I am not insane *laugh* I use my words allot when it comes to speaking to people at my job, when it comes to relationships friendships, whatever, so I think in a role play sense, charisma plays a huge part so when you're in a situation you should be able to use your words first, and that kind of stems from the Sylvari being kind of high in wisdom, try to speak, try to come to an agreement before you stab them in the face.

Matt: So you're avatar reflects real life you?

Procter: In a way I think ya.

Matt: Would you identify yourself as your avatar? Or would you call it its own entity?

Procter: *Laugh* I think its borderline psychotic if I did, but in some sense I do. Because I think a lot of our choices in making a character really come from who we are in real life.

Matt: Alright that's good.

Procter: *rushed* Unless you're playing Mass Effect!

Matt: *laugh* Where you're trying to intentionally go for the opposite story?

Procter: Ya right? Kill everybody.

Matt: *laugh* Is this your only avatar?

Procter: Currently Yes. I did work a little bit on an alternative character, but I don't have anything solid yet.

Mat: Ok, reflecting back onto previous games, when you design your alternative characters, what's usually the reason for that?

Procter: I would say once I get to a certain point on my main character where I kind of burning out on it, doing the same exact elemental casting, it gets kind of boring, and I want to see what is offered in the game, So I'll kind of look for second class profession I'll like and go from there So usually I don't really stray too far from the idea of making a whole new character. It's the whole fit the role play part, if I make a thief, probably make it shorter, and what's funny is I usually make the thieves female.

Matt: Why is that?

Procter: It seems to me females I guess, maybe it's a graphic thing, they move as thieves would.

Matt: Like ninja's?

Procter: Ya exactly. Where usually as males and you're talking about melee classes and stuff, they don't really, they seem bulky in most games. I haven't tried it yet in this game, but this is going back for past games.

Matt: Now when you have these alternative characters, do they also reflect your choices too, like if you made a rogue, or whatever they are, a thief, would you also have them use charm?

Procter: That's a good question, I probably wouldn't. I would probably go more towards role playing more towards the role of the character instead of myself. So if it's a thief, I'd probably go towards more ferocity, or just more overall, subterfuge, that kind of stuff.

Matt: So would you consider your secondary character its own entity?

Procter: Yes.

Matt: Ok!

Procter: *laugh*

Matt: I'm supposed to be smarter than that and not ask yes or no questions.

Procter: Ah that's alright, just don't turn me into some psych ward.

Matt: *laugh* Your answers have actually been very good. I'm supposed to do 1 more path of questions, but I seem to have forgotten it at the moment, so just a second... Oh yeah, it's an easy one. Why do you play online role playing games?

Procter: Why do I play online role playing games, let's see... There's allot, allot of reasons. To me, it feels like this is always going to be there. If I really enjoy it, it's not going to go anywhere. So to me, it feels like an investment on the game. I pay 60 bucks ok, and two years down the road I'm still taking from this game and enjoying it. I Mean, in *World of Warcraft* I actually hit 300 days of time played across my account, which is insane. Who else can say that, who doesn't play games, that they spent 200 dollars a year, and got that much entertainment? That's probably the biggest reason why I play these games. Second is friends. I mean, there's 20, 30 people playing these games. I get online, I talk to them it's very social. And, there's allot of reward from that. And I actually live quite a bit away from close friends, I

mean I'm talking maybe 30, 40 miles away. So it's allot easier for me to turn on the computer and hang out with them from here.

Matt: What do you think of the avatars you've left behind in other games?

Procter: Kinda sad actually. I grow very attached to my characters, like you know with *World of Warcraft*, my Warlock, it's like I'll close my eyes, and I see him, that's who I used to be, I see him, like, I do miss the characters, it's kind of, I think it's kind of crazy to be emotionally attached to a fictional character that you create. But it's kind of like, ever read a very very good book? I mean really good, where you can't put it down. And then the book finishes, and you put it down, and you're done, that's it, no more. It's kind of the same feeling.

Matt: I liked one of the words you used there, "fictional characters". Are our characters fictional?

Procter: Yes.

Matt: You don't believe they live in these online worlds?

Procter: *laugh* Ah man, um... what the hell is that anime, where they're all online...

Matt: .hack//? (Pronounced- dot hack sign)

Procter: That's it where the guy said he felt like once he logged out of the game that the enemy was going to take over if he didn't log back in. *laugh* I don't feel that way. I don't think I've ever felt that way, because its... I guess it's in the middle.

Matt: Expand on that.

Procter: *laugh*

Matt: I'm not trying to make you sound psychotic or anything.

Procter: Ha no, these people, these characters, whatever you want to call them, they do exist. They are there. But they don't exist in a reality sense. *laugh* They're real because we play them.

Matt: Alright, so we're the engine's behind them.

Procter: Wait what?

Matt: We're the engine, ya know without us they're motionless, dead in a way.

Procter: Yes. So they're us. They exist in that way.

Matt: Ok, this was actually a really good interview and probably one of my quickest, but everything you said was really on point and made allot of sense, so for now I'm gonna end it here. Thank you very much for your time. I'll go over it and I'll probably come back to you for a follow-up.

Procter: Alright, you're welcome.

Till

Till Interview

July 6th

Matt: Till, have you read the consent form and internet disclaimer form and do you consent?

Till: I have read both forms and I do consent.

Matt: That is good. Ok, so as you know my project is about looking at our avatars and what goes into our thought process in making these characters in these online worlds and what real life influences effect the way we build these avatars and then how these game worlds effect these avatars and potentially us in real life. So my first question is going to be, when you first logged into this online world and were developing your avatar, we're given a huge variety of selection such as race, class **(1:00)**, you chose the twi'lek. They alone had 5 different colors that they could choose from, different body styles, different strips. Why did you select what you did?

Till: I guess the basic guideline was more or less I don't want to look like anyone else. Therefore, As I think you can see, I chose the biggest body form because who in a virtual world is going to be like "Oh, I'm gonna be the biggest that I can" So, a bit chubby. I wanted to be Twi'lek because it was kinda cool, kinda neat, be something different. I thought the tattoo's were just kinda cool for the tattoo's I have on my ... I can't remember what they're called **(2:00)**, I'll have to look up the word but basically more or less the tentacles. After that it wasn't too much, but just basically being different.

Matt: Why was it so important to you to be different?

Till: I don't know, you're playing a game where there's so many people playing, and if you go up and stand next to someone and look exactly like them, it's more or less boring, its like defeating the purpose of playing an MMO where you're trying to create, I mean you're role-playing, you're trying to create a player that is unique. I guess that's how I go about it or think about it.

Matt: Now let's look at your name, how did you decide that?

Till: Oh, I'm weird about names, but I think it was in the middle of trying to figure out what my characters background would to be **(3:00)**, and more or less I decided he wasn't going to be very intelligent, so his name would more or less reflect that *laugh*, which too, t-i-l-l, is pretty, I think, boring, kinda dumb, reflects a kinda unintelligent idea.

Matt: So from the very beginning you intentionally designed your character to be unique and already have his own back-story going for him, is this a normal process for you?

Till: Well the funny thing about the Star Wars game is it kind of makes it that process like once you start playing there are cinematics, your character gets choices, and you're actually developing your character from the time you get put into a story and you have to choose 1, 2 ,3-Do you want to be nice? Do you

want to be snarky? **(4:00)** Do you want to be mean? There are tons of choices other than that but It kind of forces you to develop your character more or less. So, I would say, when I'm playing a character, it's kind of how I have learned to develop a character, you're always thinking about that/ I've played other role playing games, not only just games that are like computer or what not, but it's one of those things where you just start thinking about it "oh, ok, how does this character operate?" It adds another depth to the game.

Matt: Was that something that guided you toward this game?

Till: Honestly, the people guided me towards this game. I mean, Star Wars is pretty awesome, but just the people that I play with within the guild that I'm in is more or less the reason I wanted to be playing Star Wars more than any other game like *World of Warcraft* or anything like that.

Matt: Star Wars is a game **(5:00)** where we get to select a last name and create a legacy. What went into that selection?

Till: My legacy name has almost completely nothing to do with my character. The legacy name goes across characters, so I kinda of wanted it to be a bit quarky. It uses my gamer tag which is usually "ZeQue" and its called Zanpak'quo. I think you're familiar with the Bleach reference to Zanpakto

Matt: Yup.

Till: But uh, its just an anime, cartoon **(6:00)**. Kind of completely tertiary, nothing to do with my actual character which is why I have it as a tag and not actually my last name so people can identify my characters.

Matt: So it's a part of you and you're personal interests in the real life, right?

Till: Right Right. Yes, I have to admit I watch bleach.

Matt: With Till, is he his own entity or does he carry your personality with him, or is he just doing his own thing?

Till: I think that's a good question cause, honestly, I look at any character I create and there's some bit of me, even if I don't mean to, there's some bit of me kind of instilled in them. I've tried again and again and again to create evil characters and at some point, I can't do it. And I think Till has that sort of innocence, where he's gonna**(7:00)** walk around. He's the nicest guy ever, and he's gonna be used by people and ya know, that sort of thing. He's a Jedi so he should be wise and what not, but, I mean, he's good with the force and everything like that, but sometimes gets taken advantage by the random Han Solo that comes along and talks him into something. I think it's more or less an exaggeration of myself but it touches on certain bits.

Matt: Now I know he's not your only character but would you consider him your main? Is he your favorite?

Till: He's definitely my main character. I haven't been playing this game... I've been playing this game for a couple months now and actually was starting to level a couple of other characters... as of now he's definitely my main and therefore my favorite but also because I haven't played the other characters that much.

Matt: okay now with your character, I've been participating with you guys a lot in mumble a lot and generally other people refer to you as ZQ. Was that what your avatar was referred to in *World of Warcraft*?

Till: Yup, so that was the character that people knew me as in *World of Warcraft*. Like I said I tried to do a throwback to ZQ with my legacy name, Zanpak'quo. So, it has ZQ in part of the legacy, but ya, it was a *World of Warcraft* character I had.

Matt: Let's talk about the guild. How long have you been with the guild?

Till: It's almost been a year actually, it's not too long, but if you're talking gamer time its quite a while. Just to mention, The Eternal, ~~it's very bad Latin for saying trio or three together.~~

Matt: And you said one of the main things that brought you to Star Wars was the guild

Till: Yes, yes it was.

Matt: Lost my train of thought there.... That's the problem with doing these interviews at midnight, then again that's when most people are on these games.

Till: Cause they have nothing to do. Basically it becomes a social life, the guild and what not. To talk about my social life, I just moved like 3,500 miles just about a year ago. When I came back into playing MMO's, I logged back into *World of Warcraft*, and eventually Star Wars, its more or less a social life, you have people in the guild to show up to at 12 o'clock at night, friends, instant friends.

Matt: **(12:00)** Regarding the real life, do you ever get with anybody in the virtual world in the real life, or have virtual friends address you by your actual name, or ever have your real life friends address you by your character's name?

Till: No real life friends know my characters name. I actually had 1 person at work actually ask me some questions about it because I was being weird and mentioned it. No real life friends actually know my gamer tag. As for meeting people, I have met 1 person in the guild in real life, it was Travis, or Caelis, the guild leader right now, simply because we live in the same state. Duno "Tes" lives in the same state as me. But ya, it was just kind of he was coming into town, and decided to meet up.

Matt: Now I've noticed several members call Caelis by Travis, is this because he tells people to call him Travis, or is it because met him in person and others picked up on it?

Till: Oh no, I think anyone in the guild would probably prefer to have their actual name, but its just because its easier to have their tag whether it be in whichever game, whether it be Star Wars or *World*

of *Warcraft*, it's easier to remember them by their gamer tag rather than to remember their actual name. There are other people I do this with though, it's not just Travis.

Matt: Why do you role-play?

Till: I don't know, like the thing about role-playing is its just kind of another addiction. The way I got into role-playing I guess is the easiest way to start. I worked in a restaurant in high school and college. There were a couple people that would do Dungeons and Dragons. I didn't really know what they were doing, and all the bad rumors about Dungeons and Dragons ya know, I was young. I'm like "hey you should come over for a game night we can play.." oh I don't know, some random game that I knew like monopoly or something like that. They played a couple games, these people were like 30's and I was 18, so they were well versed and well skilled in the art of creating a character and role-playing, they decided to invite me into playing dungeon and dragons with them. So, learning from them I started creating characters. The first character I created was pretty boring, didn't have much dimension to him, and then you start seeing what they create for a character, and it's just like this whole other world where you get to act, I mean its basically like acting, where you get to create a persona you get to be, it's a creative act within itself, that's one think I like to describe myself as, a creative person, I enjoy having something that is completely my own, something I can create, be whatever it needs to be, but then evolve from there, and that's really what role-playing is, creating a character to evolve with everyone in a group.

Matt: You started out role-playing with dungeons and dragons in the real life, and now you're doing it here in the virtual world in Star Wars. Do you prefer this method, having your own avatar in a virtual world as opposed to imagining one in real life?

Till: I actually don't at all. Let's think about a movie versus a book. That's kind of what I'm thinking of it as. Where you have this avatar where you can walk around, it can do emotes, it can wave to people, laugh, dance, but it cant to specifically the action that you want it to do, and just for the fact that it can do everything is the worst part about it, because then you can imagine stuff where you're like in a book, ok I'm playing a pen and paper dungeon and dragons, everything that is going on we're describing verbally, and we're saying "ok, I'm gonna go up and shake your hand, and I'm looking sternly at you, or this is the perception you're getting form me. It's all very interpreted, whereas here in a virtual world, it often ends up being at a loss and you're missing things, and you try to do an emote, but someone misses it because they're reading text or doing something else. There's a lot of things going on.

Matt: Do you still role-play in real life?

Till: Not since I moved, it's, the funny thing about role-playing with a group of people, is exactly that, you need a group of people. And, it can get more or less like any sort of team that you can think of where you don't want to just get in with a group of people because ya know it might not be fun, or they might have life problems or a vendetta's, they just don't make it enjoyable. So you need to find a group you're interested in, and the same goes to groups, they just won't throw in with anyone randomly.

Matt: So, this virtual world gives you a group of like-minded individuals that you can interact with in a way.

Till: Ya I'd say so, especially being in this guild The Eternal for a while, you get to group with people, you get to figure out people, not just their characters and what not, you get to have that social life.

Matt: Ok I have one last question. Throughout this whole interview, you were pacing back and forth, was there a reason behind that?

Till: Oh no, I mean kind of for an RP sense, I'm getting bored just standing here. It's kind of funny because I used to say you could identify a *World of Warcraft* player in any game because they would also be fidgeting and jumping around. You'd see characters in other games were the character is just standing still and you'd get antsy where as in *World of Warcraft* you're always doing something.

Matt: Alright, thank you very much for your time, and I will get back to you if I need to go over anything more.

Glossary

Collision- Collision in a virtual world dictates what objects can run into each other, and which can be passed through as if they weren't actually there. Many games today use a collision system that doesn't recognize the players as actually occupying space inside of the game world. This prevents players from intentionally blocking other players' paths.

DPS- Damage per second: The amount of damage a player can inflict on an enemy per second on average.

DPS Class or "spec" - A character's specialization that is designed to inflict as much damage as possible, formerly referred to as "Damage Dealing" class prior to damage measurement becoming standardized by measurement per second.

Tank "spec" - A character specialization designed to be able to take as much damage as possible and protect fellow party members via aggro control (ex. "taunt") and protection skills.

Flashpoint- A "dungeon" in Star Wars designed for 4 players.

Operation aka "Raid" - A larger dungeon with increased difficulty designed to for 8 or 16 players with increased rewards for participants. Players are limited to running each operation to once per week.

Mobs- Slang for NPC's (often groups, hence "mobs") that are hostile.

DOT- Damage Over Time: Dot's are a negative effect that result in the depletion of a character's health. If left untreated or through careless actions or from attack, DOT's can stack and multiply the negative effects.

Aggro- Aggression: Aggro can be seen as grabbing the mobs "attention". This happens through damaging a mob or simply crossing its path. Healers can also draw aggro as mobs notice their targets being healed, and so they turn their attention to the one that is keeping their target alive. This is what makes a tank class so important, it is their job to mitigate aggro, and make sure the enemies are focused on him and not his comrades. This is why tanks need high defense to be able to endure all the hits taken. While they can't generate a lot of damage to draw aggro, they have special abilities to generate aggro, hence "aggro control".

Burn- Focusing large bursts of damage (usually using special abilities) to destroy an enemy or large groups of weak enemies.

Kill Stealing aka KSing- The act of killing someone else's mob after they have already engaged it in combat. As the only results of this are to either ruin the XP gain of that player, or to attempt to steal the mob's treasure, this is commonly associated with griefing.

Griefing- intentionally committing acts of upset other players.

Mob ownership- A system that assigns a mobs' loot to whoever stuck it first. There are other variations of this where mob ownership is determined by whoever dealt the most damage to the mob.