



UNIVERSITY
OF SKÖVDE

“WHAT IS YOUR DPS, HERO?”

Ludonarrative dissonance and player perception of story and mechanics in MMORPGs.

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Abstract

This thesis studies the MMORPGs and the ludonarrative dissonance that exist in the complexity of their design. Given the massive multiplayer nature of these games, players of different ambitions and gameplay preference need to coexist, which is a massive challenge for both the players themselves and the designers of these worlds. The balance of these two major aspects of the game, what affects the players and this tension, is the focal point of this thesis. By conducting a survey through various MMORPG player bases, this thesis concludes that this tension is not only a balance between narrative and mechanics but of other aspect as well. These aspects, intertextuality and community, this thesis argues, are the extra aspects that are tight connected with the balancing of narrative and mechanics in a MMORPG and the creation of these complex games and world. All these aspects are affected by the design decisions and affecting of how the players perceive the game world.

Keywords: MMORPG, Narrative, Ludonarrative Dissonance, Design.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Background	3
2.1	MMORPG origin	3
2.2	MMORPG game & narrative design principles	3
2.2.1	Game design framework & game activities.....	4
2.2.2	MMORPG narrative structure & design	5
2.3	Narrative perception & ludonarrative dissonance in MMORPGs	9
3	Problem	11
3.1	Method.....	12
4	Results	14
4.1	Phase 1: Data Gathering & Survey Responses.....	14
4.2	Phase 2: Thematic analysis & quantitative measurement.	18
4.3	Phase 3: Answer patterns and player affection.	19
5	Analysis & Discussion	23
5.1	MMORPG design features that enhance storytelling.....	23
5.1.1	Voice acting, cut scenes and narrative text.	23
5.1.2	Instancing & Phasing	25
5.1.3	The curse and blessing of being the hero.	27
5.2	Massive Multiplayer Online	28
5.3	RPGs, fantasy world narrative & Intertextuality	30
6	Conclusion & Future Work	33
	References	34

1 Introduction

In recent years, the development of massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) has become a fundamental part of the global game industry. Their huge communities and fanbases are attracting the interest of researchers in many aspects of their design and player behavior. Many titles that exist on the market have online functionality or online gameplay. One of the most famous genre of MMOs, and one that this thesis will mainly be focusing on, is the Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing games genre (MMORPGs). MMORPGs provide vast virtual worlds, with unlimited enemies and adventures, that players get to inhabit and share with each other. As the 'role playing' part of the genre term indicates, taking on the role of a specific character in a larger world is a core component of MMORPGs, and players are often encouraged to approach the virtual world with a sense of personality and character and not just as a strict challenge of mastering game mechanics.

But, designing game worlds that players can inhabit on this deep level comes with certain oddities that are inherited from the core philosophy of games themselves. With all these players acting in and affecting these virtual worlds there are certain moments when certain two creative pillars of a game collide and the balance is breaks. Does the design nature of MMORPG with massive player participation and interaction help a individual connect and be immersed to the story? To understand the changes around him? Does the players as individuals have an impact in the shaping of the world that they exists in? If yes, is there any visual result? These questions bring to the surface a major problem of the MMORPG genre, the disconnection of the narrative vs the game mechanics. The predecessor genre of MMORPGs, the RPG games, do not suffer from this disconnection since the story usually evolves around one hero, the player's character, and the designers thus have more authorial control of what the player will experience and can create bespoke set-pieces to ensure that those experiences are provided. The player plays through a story with a beginning, middle and an end. But in an MMORPG the story actually never ends, the players do not feel that the story has finished and hero's journey reached to an end. On the other hand they experience a constant feeling of progress as their character grows stronger to face difficult challenges in the on-going evolving world. Of course the motivation of each player differs, according to Nick Yee (2006), "Asking MMORPG players why they play reveals a dazzling array of varied motivations." (Yee 2006). This is the most bizzare fact, that

a MMORPG virtual world has the ability to draw so many different kinds of players and motivations in the same environment.

With these challenges in mind, this thesis will study how this interplay between narrative and mechanics plays out in MMORPGs. The thesis intends to do so in two ways: first, by conducting a ‘close reading’, the designs of a few popular MMORPGs that rest on fundamentally different values and universes will be described; subsequently, players’ perceptions and experiences of inhabiting these different worlds will be examined. By doing so, the effects that different designs have on players will thus be described. While the study touches upon many different MMORPGs, two will be studied in more detail: World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) and Star Wars: The Old Republic (Bioware, 2011). These two games, while sharing the same genre label, differ in a few important ways that, this thesis argues, fundamentally affect the ways players approach the,. World of Warcraft is a game built on very little intertextual material, which afforded the game designers to build the world from scratch and according to their own gameplay goals. Star Wars, on the other hand, rests upon a very rigorous and immensely popular intertextual universe that the designers have had to account for and adapt to in their designs. By deeply examining the perception of players of these two different MMORPGs, this thesis hopes to illuminate how designers’ construction of gameplay, narrative, and intertextual connections affect player experiences in MMORPGs.

2 Background

2.1 MMORPG origin

The origin of the MMORPG genre can be traced back, as described above, to the RPG game genre. In an RPG game a player takes the mantle of a character and through action based interactions the player participates in a story telling environment. The genre includes a range of games from board game to video games. The most famous of these board RPG games is Dungeons & Dragon also known as D&D (Tactical Studies Rules 1974). As the digital age started to evolve so did RPG games. Digital RPG games utilized the computational power of the computer to automate story and rule execution focusing more on character development and in-game player/environment interaction. Comparing with the board game versions of RPG games in the digital video games, the role of the game master (GM) and his crucial role of storytelling, was considered hidden from the players. The game delivered to the player the story itself, guiding them through different quests and adventures to the end.

The term MMORPG refers to a digital RPG game enhanced with the media and social capabilities of the internet. Thousands of players are adventuring together in vast digital worlds while at the same time interacting with the world or one another. The predecessor of MMORPG design was the text-based Multi-user Dungeons (MUDs). In MUDs the world was represented by checkboard areas, with thousands of areas and text representation of items in the area. The players were represented with IDs and they had to input text commands in order to interact with the world and other players. MMORPGs are considered an evolution of MUDs. Of course as the technology progressed it allowed for introducing more features to MMORPG games for players' interaction and player communication. Early MMORPGs such as the pioneering Ultima Online (Origin Systems, 1997), followed by the EverQuest (Sony Online Entertainment, 1999), Asheron's Call (Turbine Entertainment Software, 1999) and Lineage (NCSOFT, 1998) were major examples of this evolution of the MMOs.

2.2 MMORPG game & narrative design principles

The game model of this genre is outside the usual game production and distribution model and moves closer to a software service. The early MMORPG were mostly subscription based, but in the recent years other economy models are developed such as the Free-To-Play or Buy-To-Play in which the players is not necessary to pay a

specific each month in order to play the game. The game must keep the players busy in-game with features that will prolong the players interest for the game and delivering patches that introduce new content for the players to explore, see and experience.

2.2.1 Game design framework & game activities

When a player starts to play an MMORPG the first choice he must make is to choose a server that will host the character. The common method is to choose from a list of available servers during the first encounter with the game. Although this is the most common practice, in recent years with the megaserver technology some MMORPG or MMOG in general contain one or more big interconnecting server that can host more players. These servers also describe the identity of the game play activity that evolves in them by the player. Usually each server is tagged as a player versus environment server (PvE) or as a player versus player server (PvP). These labels are describing the kind of the game activity they promote to the players.

After the server choice the player must build a character. This character will be the avatar of the player inside the virtual world. The kind of choices that are available for the character building differs from game to game and they are strictly connected with the concept of the world. For example a science fiction game does not have the same choices as a fantasy game, they share some principles and ideas but the final execution will be totally different, unless the game concept proves otherwise. After the building of the character the players is ready to set foot on the game world.

The game worlds come with a variety of activities. The majority of these activities are common for both kind of servers. The main activity framework is rooted in the predecessors of MMORPG, the RPG and MUDs, and consists of interaction with the world, the undertaking of quests and the gathering of loot that help your character progress and become stronger. The server types described above add to the general behaviour of the player activities in the game. The PvP servers allow players that belong to an enemy faction, if the game concept supports that, to battle each other in the open world while the PvE server prohibits it. Despite this prohibition PvP content is still relevant to a PvE server and players can battle with each other but only and if only both players have agreed to do it. During the years each new MMORPG has brought something new to the table about activities from procedural generated live events in the world such as the activities found in games like Guild Wars 2 (ArenaNet, 2012) and Final Fantasy 14 (Square Enix, 2010) to player housing in Everquest 2 (Sony

Online Entertainment, 2004), Star Wars The Old Republic and Wildstar (Carbine Studios, 2014) or even activities that consists of pet battle like in World of Warcraft.

These game activities are connected to another major component of the MMORPG framework, the social interaction. In an MMORPG it is possible for hundreds, thousands in mega servers, to interact and socialize in the same virtual world at the same time. In the majority of the MMORPG the hardest tasks provided to the players are group tasks. These task require a group of players in order to be completed because it is either impossible or very hard for one player to complete it. These group tasks come in many forms such as group dungeons and raids which are the direct descendants of the MUD philosophy. So in an MMORPG environment we have a direct connection of the social component with the game activities and even the mechanics, for example a boss encounter mechanics that need more than one player to tackle it or overcome it. Of course all these activities and social interaction exist in a virtual world that apart from players and game mechanics, it also contains diverse and unique narrative elements. These narrative elements are the main force behind the justification of the existence for many of the activities.

2.2.2 MMORPG narrative structure & design

The narrative structure of MMORPGs is very intriguing. The coexistence of such diverse narrative elements, such as cyber-cultural and fantasy references all in one environment, is a question that sparks research interest. Eddo Stern (2002) asks the following questions:

“What elements consist the narrative structure of such complex arenas of interaction?”

This question is still today a relevant topic. The main difference of an MMORPG from a Virtual World (VW) or another MMO game is that it provides a narrative in which the player is a key component. In the design of MMORPGs, the correlation between the storytelling and the progress of the game is crucial for the developers. The performance of storytelling in virtual worlds and environments and its relation with interactivity has created a substantial amount of research and academic work. The usage of narrative analysis and theory in computer games is not something new but usually it is focused in single player experiences (Drachen & Hitchens 2006).

Throughout the years many researchers tried to introduce a narrative structure that can really describe the diverse narrative elements that exist in an MMORPG. One of

the first approaches was from Eddo Stern (2002) in the dawn of MMORPGs. Stern (2002) introduced a taxonomy that describes the narrative elements that a player encounters in an MMORPG.

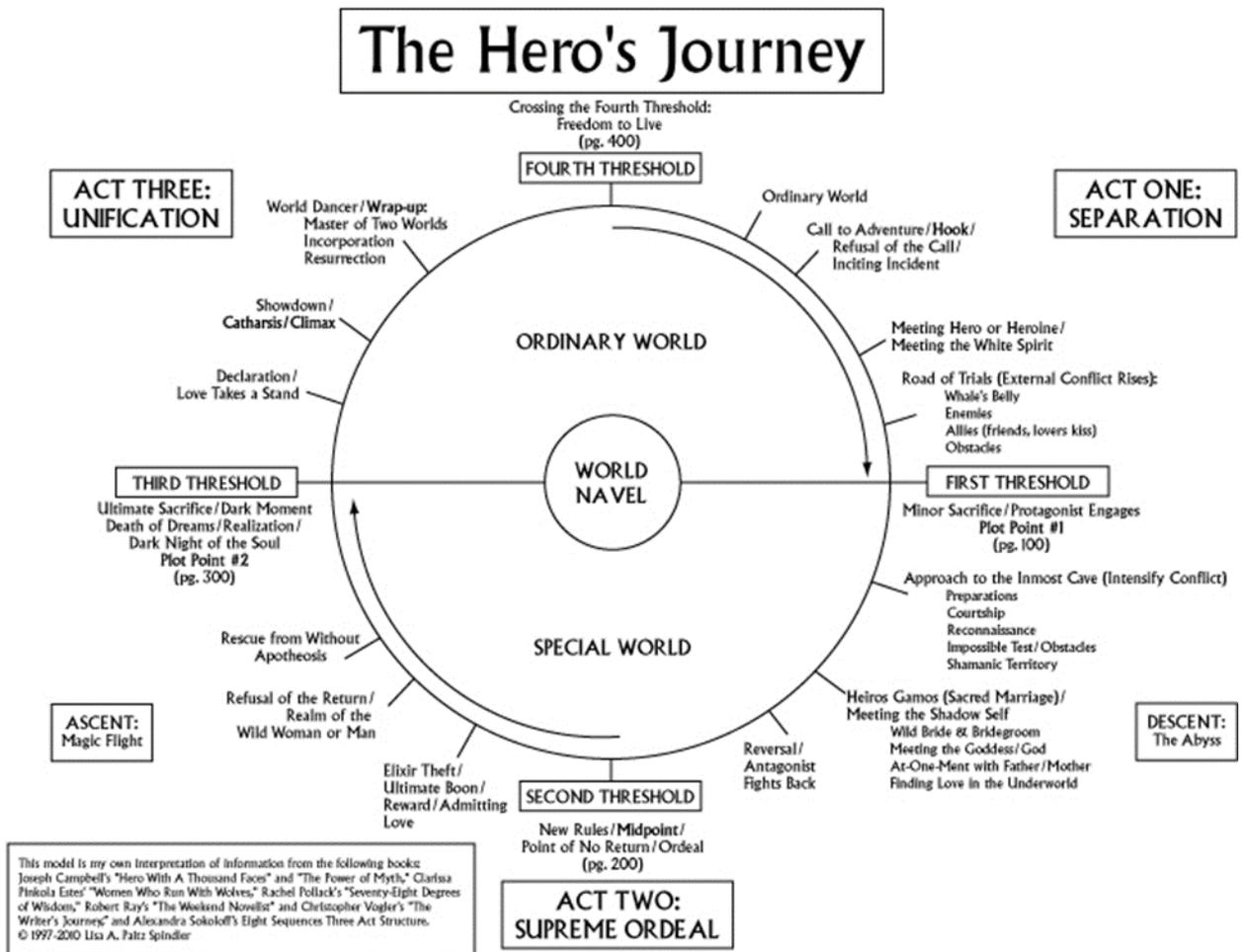
The elements that consists the Stern (2002) are the following:

- Elements of conventional narrative
 - Backstory
 - Non Player Characters
- Metaphorically patched artefacts
 - Magic Tunnels
 - Saving & Camping
 - Magic Portals
- Technological Artefacts
 - The World is Down
 - Geometry Traps & Other Bugs
- Player Artefacts
 - Language
 - Hacks & Cheats

(Stern 2002)

Despite the fact that it draws from general narrative theory Stern's taxonomy tries to structure the whole narrative, design and technology elements to a single framework.

Other approaches are trying to encapsulate only the storytelling of the genre to a single framework. Such an approach is a framework proposed by Nobaew & Ryberg (2012) that is based on three theoretical notions: The Story structure (Aristotle 1450b.), the Dramatic Structure (Freytage 1900) and the Hero's Journey (Campbell 2008). This framework utilizes story structures that are common in RPG games, especially Campbell's (2008) Hero's Journey. Nobaew & Ryberg (2012) proposed that using these three frameworks is useful for framing and analysing the story structure of an MMORPG but also analyse the connections and sub-plot structure. But all these frameworks are trying to describe a boundary for the story and narrative of MMORPGs.



1: Campbell's (2008) *The Hero's Journey Narrative Structure*.

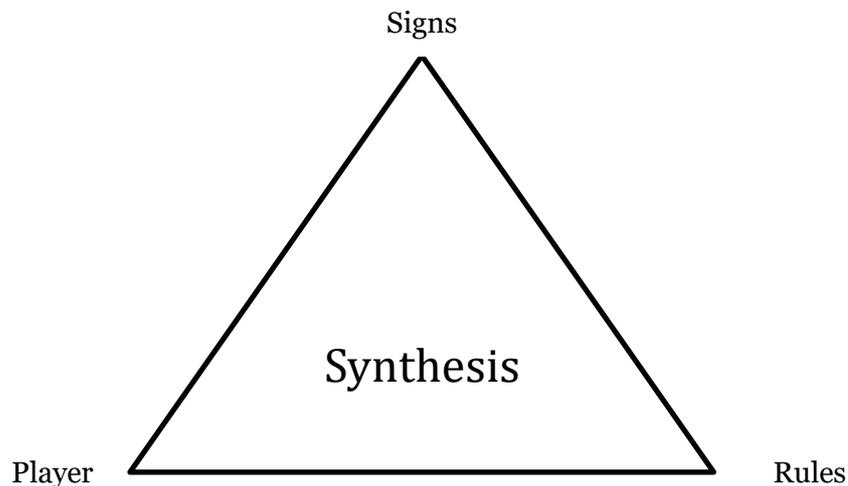
There are other approaches that try to frame the connection of the player and story in MMORPGs from the player's side. Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009) proposed the perspective of the experiential narrative and the generation of alterbiographies. The term alterbiography is defined as:

“(Alterbiography) refer to the here and now interactions with the game environment that generate story through the players interpretation of events occurring within the game environment, their interaction with the game rules, human and AI entities and objects.”

Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009)

By this definition Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009) argue that interaction creates story rather than excludes it. The process of an alterbiography generation is called Synthesis. According to Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009) the process of synthesis in a game environment is defined by three factors: player, signs and the rules and the

correlation between these factors define the power of the synthesized alterbiography. The massive scale of the world in an MMORPG with the number of players evolving in it and the interactions between the world and the players, create the perfect place for such a process to flourish.



2: Alterbiography Synthesis Process as defined by Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009)

Of course the approach of Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009) shed some light on how the players may understand the narrative that evolves in the virtual world around them. But one of the main reason that the players are interacting with the world in the first place has roots both in the game design and the narrative design of the game. The main force that prompts the player to go out there and explore these adventurous worlds are the game quests.

Landwehr et al. (2009) states that according to the literature quests for an MMORPG are:

“..windows into the game’s world and how the game’s culture and narrative are experienced by players. “

(Landwehr et al. 2009).

Quests are a part of the narrative and game culture for an MMORPG, but a small number of sub-quests may have little resonance with the players. This makes the design of the quests a vital part in the structure of the narrative and how it is presented

to the players. Despite this fact Landwehr et al. (2009) in their research found that for the game World of Warcraft the quests were left for the final stage of development, they are handled in from many writers and it is usually a small set of basic task or killing a mob of monsters.

According to Landwehr et al. (2009) the creative director of the MMORPG Stargate Worlds (FireSky), Chris Klug, confirmed that it is important to develop a storytelling that will require from the players to create multiple characters, and thus experience the story from multiple angles, in order to understand the full story of the game.

Nobaew & Ryberg (2012) applied the Hero's Journey framework described in previous section to analyse the quests in World of Warcraft. They discovered that despite the fact that the quests were urging the players to play more, the quests eventually lacked the energy to keep the players from boredom (Nobaew & Ryberg 2012). This conclusion comes in line with the conclusion from the Landwehr et al. (2009).

2.3 Narrative perception & ludonarrative dissonance in MMORPGs

The term Ludonarrative dissonance appeared from the blog of a former creative director of LucasArts (and then Bioware), Clint Hocking, back in 2007. This term describes the tension between a game's narrative and mechanics. This major conflict as described above exists in the MMORPG genre. In order to understand this conflict better we must first understand how the players perceive the narrative in an MMORPG environment.

In an MMORPG there is two kind of "players" is both the individuals and the communities that exists in the game. The social factor in the framework of operation of MMORPGs helps the creation of in-game communities. A player comes in touch with the narrative of the game both as an individual and as a part of a community, if the player choose to be a part of such a community.

The research made by MacCallum-Stewart (2009) dives into the topic of how the players understand the narrative in MMORPG from all the perspectives. MacCallum-Stewart (2009) states that the text in an MMORPG is in flux and the players tend to understand them completely different both as individuals and as communities, and reinterpreted them again according the player behaviour. According to by MacCallum-Stewart:

“Whilst player experience the same quests, conquer the same dungeons and carry out group tasks together, there is often a very little understanding of the stories behind each situation. Many players, more focused on the ludic content than its narrative, are happy to consume the text passively without really paying attention to the related narrative.”

MacCallum-Stewart (2009)

The researcher also argues that the players will implicitly drive themselves forward through stories that construct themselves while they undertake the basic action of the quests. This fact connects with the alterbiography narrative approach of Calleja & Langgaardsvej (2009). MacCallum-Stewart (2009) brings up the example of a cut scene that is watched by a group of players. It is rare from the players to point out things that are happening in the cut scene. The players are rather talking about something else game-related or just consume the scene in the same passive manner they consume the quest text. Another example is when a group is preparing to battle a boss in a dungeon or a raid and the boss intro contains a cut scene, the group will probably comment on strategies to battle the boss rather the narrative progression that is happening in front of them. Because of the time-paradox in MMORPG narrative and the lack of player intervention in the course of the narrative progression, players tend to rely in means outside the narrative text in order to fully grasp the narrative of the game. This fact shows that the players cannot perceive the full narrative of the game through the game mechanics and design and they rely to the experiential narrative synthesis process and other means. But what design features are getting in the way of this understanding from the players? Is this happening because the nature of some of the design features and thus MMORPG inherits it? Or is a mixture of different factors that make the players to overlook the narrative in the MMORPG environments? Does also this happens to all MMORPGs or just in certain like WoW? All these questions are acting as a focal point for the research of this thesis.

3 Problem

The ludonarrative dissonance can be visualized as a pendulum that the players and designers go back and forth between narrative and mechanics. The aim of this thesis is to expand the research MacCallum-Stewart (2009) of player's understanding of narrative in an MMORPG environment by finding and mapping how players move and flow in this balance and how the design choices and features affect this movement. Also one of the aims is to observe any other external factor and how it affects this balance system such as intertextual material. So the two major questions that this thesis addresses are:

RQ1: How the design features and strategies of the designers affect the tension between narrative and mechanics?

RQ2: How are the players affected by these features and external factor in their perceiving of the narrative and mechanics?

Of course throughout the years of MMORPG developing, the designers have took various approaches to tackle the problem such as phasing and instancing during story climax moments. From a player perspective the players are relying in intertextual solutions to battle the tensions. Schrader et al. (2008) a great majority of the players' utilized external tools and other means outside of the game in order to help them complete tasks in game. The usage of add-ons is a very common practice in player bases where the MMORPG does not prohibit add-ons. Even if the game does not allow add-ons during game time, numerous user created external programs or websites are created in order to help the community and other players in various ways: from character development to story arcs and lore questions. These community actions are external factors that affect the tip of the balance towards mechanics or narrative. This thesis will explore this affection, if it is profound and has a clear effect on player's judgement and choices or if it is playing a more subtle role to the tension between the narrative and mechanics. Next chapter describes how this thesis will gather the data needed to answer the above questions.

3.1 Method

In order to gather the data needed to answer the research questions we must first understand how the players understand the game and how they experience the content throughout their experience. By doing that we can pinpoint where the balance between narrative and mechanics is disturbed and how design features and external factors affect it. One of the places that are suitable for these observations are the early game experiences in which the players are getting in touch with the game and the world for the first time and this first contact can pinpoint various factors that affect the players and how they perceived the game and its world in their first time. The other places are the content in which the player participates and act. As described in previous chapter in an MMORPG the content is split to two kinds, PvE and PvP. The way that the players are doing the content and what they memorize or gain from it, can shine a light in the affections of all the factors that intertwine in an MMORPG game, from design to community guides which is the main stage that the ludonarrative dissonance is taking place.

In order to explore the above factors this study was split in 3 phases. The first of these three phases is the data gathering phase where the data for the analysis is collected. After the data analysis the second phase follow which is the research of the ludonarrative dissonance balance in the sample. The final phase is the analysis of the factors that led to the results during the second phase.

For the first phase, by using Google Forms a questionnaire has been made in order to explore the above mentioned areas and factors. The questionnaire was handed in various MMORPG communities from different games in order to gather the best variety possible and explore as many as possible design ideas and narratives styles. These communities are either the official game forums or equivalent fan communities that are active and play the game. This concludes the end of the first phase of the study.

After the data is gathered the second phase begins. In order to reach the aims of the thesis, first the condition of the ludonarrative balance in the sample must be observed and defined. To reach that goal, a thematic analysis was performed in order to label the data from the questionnaire according to the ludonarrative spectrum. The thematic analysis allows us to frame the answers text in the ludonarrative context by utilizing keywords, which refer to either the ludic or the narrative property of the game

in the given experience. These labels that are produced during the thematic analysis in phase two can be used to observe the ludonarrative balance in the sample. Then by utilizing these observations by counting the population of the labels for both the aspects of ludonarrative dissonance, and any other aspect that is visible during the analysis, the general consensus of the sample can be defined. This last step in phase two helps to perform a quantitative measurement and define the balance in the sample.

The third and last phase is to carefully inspect the data in the answer texts and then pinpoint and make the connections with the factors, and the reasons, that affected the balance during the game experience. This connections for the majority of the player base for each game can be observed through patterns found in the text answers. Then the occurrence of these patterns will be linked to design structures, features and factors that may have created them. The understanding of the design and structures for each game will come from the author's close reading of the games. The author of this study is an MMORPG player for 15 years retaining active accounts in the majority of the successful MMORPG in the market. The close reading insights can provide a better understanding in the design structures of the MMORPG games and their affection to the players during game play. The observations from phase 3 help to answer the research questions and reach the aims of this thesis study.

4 Results

4.1 Phase 1: Data Gathering & Survey Responses

The questionnaire was uploaded to big MMORPG communities as described in the previous chapter. It was active for 16 days and it has gathered 46 responses from various MMORPG players. The study was anonymous and any reference to in-game nicknames, real life names, in-game community names and any other form of personal data were removed during the analysis process. From all 46 responses 4 responses were considered bad and were not included in the analysis procedure and 42 were analysed. From these responses 19 were World of Warcraft players, 14 Star Wars The Old Republic players, 3 Guild Wars 2 players, 2 Final Fantasy XIV players and 4 declared another MMO as their favourite MMORPG. So of these MMORPGs were Star Trek Online (Cryptic Studios, 2010), Runescape (Jagex, 2001), Warhammer Online (Mythic Entertainment, 2008), and Guild Wars (ArenaNet, 2005). From all 46 responses 4 responses were considered bad and were not included in the analysis procedure and 42 were analysed. The complete survey and the questions can be found in the Appendix A.

The age demographics of the survey showed that the majority of the players that participated on the survey were between 19 and 32 but there were participants over the age of 32 with the oldest participant being 47 years old.

As described in the previous chapter the survey questions were aiming in different phases of an MMORPG experience, from early game to content consumption. For the early game experience the players were asked about the initial choices they did and the reasons they did it when they started to play the game. Also they were asked about what made them the most memorable first impression in the game. For this section the players provided numerous answers according to each game. Some examples of answers for the question “What made you pick that class and race?” as written from the participants are:

“I do like the idea of being a bounty hunter in a game. It's something I've been in similar games too. I am also fascinated by the chiss. So I had to choose them.”

“I wanted to play like Gandalf”

“Liked the Night Elf Model, Nephew was Alliance, Actually would of been mage but were not available to Night Elf at the time.”

Later in the survey the players were asked what content they prefer, Player Versus Environment (PvE), Player Versus Player (PvP), Role Playing (RP) or other. The players could choose either one, more than one or all of them as an answer. The answers were:

- 32 of the players prefer to PvE only or at least with one more type of content.
- 8 of the players prefer to PvP only or at least with one more type of content.
- 4 of the players prefer to RP only or at least with one more type of content.
- 9 of the players prefer all of the above contents.

After the above questions the players were asked what form of content in PvE, PvP and RP enjoyed more. Like the previous questions the players could choose more than one answer or all forms of content. For the PvE content, the players could choose from the following forms: Quests, Dungeons and small group content, Raids and large group content and all of them. The player preference was:

- 12 of the players enjoys at least Quests as a form of PvE content.
- 13 of the players enjoy at least Dungeons and small group content as a form of PvE content.
- 14 of the players enjoy at least Raid and large scale group content as a form of PvE content.
- 20 of the players enjoy all of the above PvE content forms.
- 3 of the players enjoy also other forms of PvE content.

The same handling of the data was done for PvP answers where the players could choose amongst Battlegrounds, Arenas, World PvP and all of them. The PvP preference was:

- 13 of the players enjoy at least Battlegrounds as a form of PvP content.
- 4 of the players enjoy at least Arena as a form of PvP content.
- 4 of the players enjoy at least World PvP as a form of PvP content.
- 4 of the players enjoy also other forms of PvP content.
- 7 of the players enjoy all the forms of PvP content.

Also the players had to answer about their most memorable experiences during the play through of the content both PvE, PvP and RP. Some questions like RP features that feel rewarding or most memorable opponent in PvE content, were targeted only specific kind of content in order to collect more specific data that corresponds to the kind of content, and not having a generic pattern of questions for all the content. Some examples of answers for the question “Describe your most memorable PvE moment.” as written by the participants are:

“Oh geez, that will be rough. Not sure if this is #1, but it popped into my head. I was playing my rogue in the wrath version of naxx, the maexxna encounter. I remember topping the meters by a huge margin one time b/c I figured out how to time my AE damage to these dozens of little spiders she would spawn. I remember raid chat being something like Something to that effect.”

“Beating HM Explosive Conflict for the first time (republic side server first on The Fatman during the 1.2 cycle) - I had been recruited to tank for a progression guild and finally downing Kephess was a distinctly rewarding experience”

And some examples of PvP content answers as written by the participants in the question “Describe your most memorable PvP moment and why.” are:

“Spell reflecting a level 80 Warlocks Chaos Bolt back as a 72 Gnome Warrior and 1 shotting him.”

“Tanking the ball-carrier in Huttball and carrying them to the goal like Samwise Gamgee carrying Frodo up Mt Doom, then doing it three more times that match.”

This will help to observe the affection from more features, which are visible only to a specific type of content, for example: raid boss mechanics, during the analysis in phase 3. The last section of the survey was about their preference as players for various MMORPG feature. The players were asked which game feature made an impact in their perception of the game. These features included voice acting, cut scenes, class lore, combat mechanics and various design choices that players meet, play and experience during an MMORPG session. The players again could choose one, more than one or all of them as an answer. The player answers were:

- 31 of the players believe that at least the cutscenes and 27 players believe that at least the class lore made an impact in their perception of the game. These answers has the majority of players.
- 25, 23 and 24 of the players believe that quests narratives, character aesthetics and PvE group content at least made an impact in their perception of the game.
- 22, 22, 22, and 17 of the players believe that class aesthetics, class mechanic, combat mechanics and combat aesthetics at least made an impact in their perception of the game.
- 22 of the players believe that voice acting at least made an impact in their perception of the game.
- 15 of the players and 16 of the players believe that Dungeons and Raid designs and aesthetics at least made an impact in their perception of the game.
- 7, 7 and 6 of the players believe that PvP content, PvP mechanics and aesthetics design made an impact at least in their perception of the game.

The players were asked also to write why they believe that these features made an impact in their perception. Some example of answers as written by the participants for the question were:

“A lot of the aesthetics make you feel more connected to not only the environment, but also your player. Raid and Dungeon mechanics require team work and communication, enhancing the social aspect of the game which I enjoy. Lore, cut scenes, dialogue and the quest fluidity also enhance the connection, as they all bring you into the world (of warcraft) and make the gameplay like a story, rather than just a game..”

“They target the social part of the game. Whenever you log off, the "world" continues to improve w/o you. Whenever you log on there's always someone there with whom you have the same goal. Work together to improve and win!”

“I could write a book probably describing all of those haha, but i'll spare you that. I think i'll focus on dungeon/raid mechanics. I recently have been playing a time locked progression server on everquest, going through all the expansions in order with other players. I was having fun, for a while. The VAST majority of early everquest raid mobs are very simple, not complicated tank and spank affairs. While numerically they can be challenging, probably more than half of the people participating in the kill could fall

asleep, with no discernable difference, except maybe it takes longer to die. Like I said, it was fun for a while, then week 13 or w/e it comes around, and i'm about to log in for my 4 hours of tank and spank numbness, and decide, you know what? I dont care about loot enough to show up to this again, i'm not really having fun anymore. I was fairly new to this group of people, and it was a massive group (about 100 people, with any 70 of them on a raid) so I had not really made any social connections yet, which could of possibly kept me there longer.”

4.2 Phase 2: Thematic analysis & quantitative measurement.

The quantitative data analysis includes the results on how the balance of narrative and mechanics exists in the players experiences per game. The players were asked to write about their most memorable moments during the phases of their game experience described in chapter 3, early game and during the doing of content of any nature. In the quantitative analysis a thematic analysis was performed in order to identify the nature of the experience from the players and which aspect were more present during that experience, narrative or ludic.

In order to identify the aspect, keywords that either attribute to a game mechanics or lore reference were searched amongst the answers. An example of such a keyword is a reference to a boss mechanic for example, ludic themed reference from a player answer. The quotes from the survey are used as written by the participants, for example:

“Tanking mount hyjal, i felt so important aoe tanking those huge waves the first times i did it.”

The keywords tanking, AoE refer to gameplay style and mechanics which is clearly a ludic dominant moment for the player. Other answers may refer to achievements and how hard they were to get or how they remember battling a specific adversary with their friends. All these experiences show a ludic dominance.

For the narrative aspect a similar analysis was performed in order to search, find and identify keywords that define narrative or lore as dominant aspect in the answer of the player. An example of such an answer as written from a player is:

“There are far too many. I love the Agent, Sith Warrior, and Sith Inquisitor's stories. Two of my top favourites would be becoming a real double agent for the SIS and becoming Darth Nox on the Dark Council.”

This answer refers to lore figure in Star Wars the Old Republic. The lore reference as one memorable experience clearly show narrative dominance in the experience.

The data labels for the quantitative analysis were: ludic, lore, community, undefined and ludic/lore. Community refers to experiences were the social aspect of the MMORPG was dominant and undefined were the answer does not contain a reference keywords to either ludic or lore aspects. Ludic/lore label refers to the answer that both ludic and the lore aspects are present in the answer.

The analysis showed that the ludic aspect was more dominant for all games and all types of content but for each game the difference between ludic and other aspects was changing. For example the World of Warcraft players were more ludic dominant, with total 134 answers that classify as ludic based answers versus 34 answers that classify as lore based. Star Wars players were more balanced with 71 answers that classify as ludic versus 66 answers that classify as lore. In terms of content, ludic was the winner here as well with the majority of the players reporting ludic based experiences in both games. In PvE content the difference was changing according to the game, World of Warcraft players were ludic than the more balanced Star Wars players. In PvP and for all games the ludic aspect was clearly dominant with huge differences from other aspects.

The results of the quantitative analysis shows that ludic and mechanics overshadow the narrative of the game, even in games that are more balanced around narrative, for the majority of the players. But despite this tip on the balance narrative is still a strong element to same game content or to some games in general for example, Star War. Of course for the quantitative analysis we draw conclusions on what factors affect the players and their perceiving of the narrative. In order to find what causes this for each game we must search more into the texts of the answers from the players.

4.3 Phase 3: Answer patterns and player affection.

The qualitative analysis focus on players' text in order to find patterns that can be identified, and try to connect these patterns and the existence of these to certain

features and factors according to the game they are present. These patterns may show connections to different game features and factors such as intertextuality that affect how the players perceive and understand the game both in the story and in the mechanics.

These patterns can be identified as game style patterns or game behavioural patterns. The search focus on how the players prefer to play the game and in what aspects of the game their memories and answer focus. An example of such a pattern is that a player has a more lore centric early game experience, while creating his character and plays the game for the first time, but has a more ludic centric early on experience with the game that enjoys the arcade nature of the contents with friends. This change of the theme of the players focus can be later be attributed to the design philosophy of the game or other factors. For example in the early experience and touch with game a players might be affected by intertextual material outside of the game that guided the players to the game in the first place. This creates a more lore centric experience in the early stages of the game but later on the design features of the game might not be helping with the deliverance of the games narrative to the players, and so the player focuses on other aspects.

The analysis showed that certain patterns can be recognised from the players' answers. These patterns are different according to the game and of course for certain games they are not represent the majority of the players. Although this fact does not mean that answers that cannot be included in a pattern does not contain qualities found in answer patterns. For example an answer pattern might be that a player starts with an interest in the story and then gradually changing to be more interested in the game. Then another player might start with the same interest at the story and continue like that through the game experience. Both players started on a common denominator, the story, so this fact can lead to assumptions about external factors that affect players in their early game experience or even before they begin the game, like intertextuality.

The thematic analysis of the patterns was focused at the early game experience of the game and at the two game content types, PvE and PvP. For the early game experience the questions that the players were asked can be found in the Appendix A. Unfortunately the samples from other MMORPG players other than World of Warcraft and Star Wars were too small in order to be able to extract patterns in a thematic

analysis so they are excluded from this procedure. For this analysis games that has over ten answers were chosen in order to have a sample that is capable to extract from it answer patterns.

For the World of Warcraft players the early game experience thematic analysis showed that a usual pattern exists in the answers of the players. The majority starts by describing their character in regards to the narrative like: a shiny knight, a nature friendly druid or a curious wizard, then they all speak about their first experience with the game mechanics and how fresh it looked or complex. Also together with this comes references to the social aspect of the game either playing with friends or joining a community. Then a game moment follows usually of ludic nature that describes either their first major mistake or their first early game achievement. So the pattern can be summarized as:

1. Character Description (lore)
2. Game Freshness/Playing with others (ludic)
3. Unique Game Moment (ludic)

As the pattern shows the World of Warcraft players are starting with a connections to the narrative and then they swift to the mechanics and the game during there early experience in the game.

For the Star Wars the Old Republic players the patterns show a slightly different affection. The pattern that we can recognise in the Star Wars players is similar with that of World of Warcraft players but in the end they express a game moment that is story connected and not a game achievement. They speak about hearing the voice of their character and the dialogs or early stories that evolve around the character. So the Star Wars players they start with a strong focus on the narrative of the game world and then they change towards a more ludic approach of the game but in the end the stay close to the game narrative.

For the content experience the analysis of World of Warcraft players showed that a specific pattern can be extract. The majority of the players' answers are focused around the following specific aspects:

1. Team based fun
2. Raid/Dungeon boss mechanics/killing

3. Raid Area experience
4. Raid Boss encounter

The players were reporting that their most memorable moments in PvE content were team based encounters in high end content. The answers were focusing mostly on the ludic part of the encounter like boss tactics, mechanics or difficulty. The occasions that the lore behind the boss or the raid in general being reported were rare. In PvP the answers were similar, heavily focused in group activities and in overpowering or overplaying an opponent or a team. For the PvP content this was expected due to the fact that during the previous analysis the PvP players and content answers were if not all, the vast majority were answers focusing on the ludic aspect of the game.

For the Star Wars players the patterns were different to those of World of Warcraft players just like the early game experience. The two main differences were that the team based fun was swapped for soloing content and the lore reports about the content were the majority. Star Wars players were keener to report that this encounter or this boss was memorable because it was the final boss of the character's story arc and the main antagonist of the player. Also the focus was swift from raid content and encounters to encounters that are part of the story arc of the character. For PvP like World of Warcraft players the patterns were almost identical in their concept and content. They focused on group activity and fun and overpowering a team or an opponent.

The summary of this analysis shows that both players of World of Warcraft and Star Wars are having similar focus during the early game experience with a minor difference. Star Wars players are focusing a bit more on the story of their character after they get familiar with the game compared to the World of Warcraft players. They later seem to focus more on the game aspect of the world and less on the story. The focus changes completely during the consumption of game content later on. World of Warcraft players continue to focus on game elements such as tactics, boss encounters and mechanics while Star Wars players are focusing on the story arc and climax of the encounter and content in general rather than the game elements.

5 Analysis & Discussion

This section will discuss about the results of the analysis and their connections with aspects of the game, such as design, as was mentioned earlier in the text. The discussion will focus around the games with the majority of the answers. These games are World of Warcraft and Star Wars the Old Republic. Of course connections with the other games that are present in the answers will be made but the main focus will be the two games mentioned earlier. The comparison between World of Warcraft and Star Wars the Old Republic is also important because these two games have a different focus in their design, with World of Warcraft having a more generic focus around the game elements while Star Wars has a deep focus in the narrative. This was visible in the player's answer as well.

The analysis showed us that the problem of ludonarrative dissonance exists even in games that they try to focus more on the narrative like Star Wars, Final Fantasy or Guild Wars 2. Although the balance in these games is better and the players seems to perceive the world narrative better, the players seem to still consume passively many aspects and parts of the game. The fact though that the players are able to understand and connect more to the game's narrative, indicates that certain design choices and features are able to keep the players interested or evolved in the story.

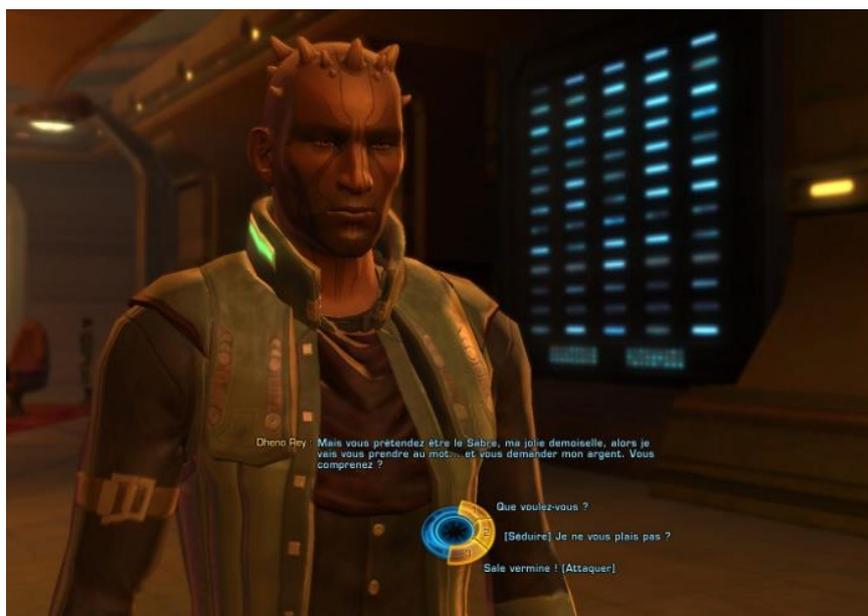
5.1 MMORPG design features that enhance storytelling.

MMORPGs utilize a broad area of game design features in order to connect the multiplayer with the single player and RPG game experience all in one product. In order to pinpoint which design features really help the storytelling aspect of the game, we need first to see what common design ideas and techniques the MMORPG games that deliver a stronger story experience have.

5.1.1 Voice acting, cut scenes and narrative text.

These two features are very famous in game design for adding to the narrative of a game. There is an undeniable impact of these two features in the presentation of a story climax to the player. Although these features are commonly used in RPGs and other games, in MMORPGs there rarely used until recently. Player's answered in the questionnaire that these two features have a big impact in the understanding of the world and its story. World of Warcraft despite the fact that it has a huge number of voice acting events there are not as many as the text base features of the game.

Recently World of Warcraft has increased both the voice acting occurrences and voice acting characters and it increased the cut scene occurrences during gameplay with the change of the area quest modelling. From the expansion Warlords of Draenor (Blizzard Entertainment, 2014) when a player finishes the main story arc for each area, then the game rewards with a cut scene that presents the story climax. But despite this increase of these features World of Warcraft miss a feature that Star Wars player reported in their answer. Star Wars has an extra voice acting that is no one where to be found in World of Warcraft, that of the main hero. Some Star Wars players reported as memorable early game experience the hearing of their characters voice. These feature allowed Star Wars to experiment even further by making a dialog system (Figure 3) that will help the voice acting of the main character to come into the spotlight. This dialog system helped to move the questing text and thus the biggest part of the narrative text of the game, outside of the passive consumption from the players. The players had to listen to the NPC and chose the correct option that will define how they will act during the quests. This dialog system accompanied by heavily used voice acting helped the players to follow more closely the story of the game during their play through. World of Warcraft until the time this thesis is written, 2016, does not have such thorough voice acting across all the game experience. Your main character is silent from the beginning till the end, saying nothing just consuming quest texts and moving through the world. This approach from Star Wars designers, which is rooted to the classic RPG game dialog systems, helped them deliver a better narrative and world experience to the players.



3: The dialog system of Star Wars the Old Republic.

Of course apart from these features and techniques which are considered classic for the game development there are other that are common in the games that the players reported a better understanding of the narrative in questionnaire. The two most common technique that Star Wars the Old Republic and the other games have are phasing and instancing.

5.1.2 Instancing & Phasing

The instancing feature also known as instance dungeon feature is when the game generate a new copy of an area for each group or player in it. This leads to the player or the group being the only player entities inside the specific area for the given moment. The instancing feature addresses several problems that occur in shared spaces in a virtual world.

Instancing is one of the oldest techniques in MMORPG in order to handle shared space but also there are other techniques that help to share space and time in a virtual world. The most common of these techniques is phasing. The idea of phasing is to have the same geographical places in a virtual world looking different for each player based on some criteria. Players in a phased area are interacting and looking at different things. The idea of phasing can help the game to present a feeling of progress since the players are seeing the world changing around them or interact with new things they weren't in the past.

In Star Wars the Old Republic we have the usage of instancing and phasing in moments when the player must play through a class story arc. Star Wars storytelling arc for each class is split in segments. Every class has a unique arc on each playable planet that the player is visiting through the game. These planets are available through progressing the game and the level of the character. So when the player is visiting the last planet available by that time, the final story arc of the class and the climax of the story is also there. In order to play through these arcs on each planet players must enter a phased area (Figure 4). This phase is private and prohibits any other player of different class or players of the same class that are not qualified to play through that arc to enter the area. Also the player experiences the visited phasing once per play through and it is not available for a latter visit unless the story dictates it. Star Wars also utilizes instancing in dungeon and group content. In these group content usually there is a storyline that the group must play through in order to reach the end of the dungeon.

The main usage of instancing in World of Warcraft was in dungeons and group content. In later years World of Warcraft started to use the instancing in order to help the player or a group of players to participate in small story instances called scenarios. These scenarios were small storytelling moments in the begging outside the main storyline arc and later on the expansions in parts of the main storyline that the players were living through as they progressed through small quest objectives. Of course World of Warcraft utilizes instancing for end game group content such as dungeons and raids. In later expansions World of Warcraft started to use phasing techniques in order to introduce progress and evolvment to the world. In certain areas the players, by completing quests and objectives, can see permanent changes happen around them. These changes are only visible to players that have met the criteria. In the end a final phase is introduced which will remain the same for the rest of playing experience for this character. Warlords of Draenor garrison feature is an example of World of Warcraft phasing.

Both games are using these techniques but with a different design philosophy. Star Wars selects a more classic RPG approach while World of Warcraft tries to retain the multiplayer and online aspect of the game more during storytelling. Of course the usage of both instancing and phasing is affecting how players are perceiving the narrative of the game.



4: Example of phasing indication for class story missions in Star Wars the Old Republic. The green colour indicates that the player is available for entering and experiencing the story part that area offer.

5.1.3 The curse and blessing of being the hero.

During the analysis the Star Wars players showed a better understanding and preference in the story that the game delivered them apart from the mechanics. World of Warcraft players from the other hand showed the exact opposite. Of course this doesn't mean that World of Warcraft does not have a narrative or a narrative strong enough to grasp better the attention of the players. Also the fact that the answers for World of Warcraft player were more skewed towards the ludic side of the experience does not mean that the players were complete unaware that a narrative exists. It means though that Star Wars had a better design philosophy overall to deliver the story arcs and the story climax to the players than World of Warcraft. In order to connect this philosophy to the aims of this thesis, one of the factors that affected the players and helped in the better storytelling was the balanced use of the instancing and phasing techniques. In Star Wars the player is visiting the story phases on each planet. Although one planet phase is visible for all players while they travel and interact, specific story bridges and climaxes are presenting only in phased areas. This transfers to the player the classic RPG hero experience, the hero is the centre of this story and everything evolves around him as an individual without ten more same heroes, living the same saga, exist nearby. This comes in comparison with a recent feature in World of Warcraft that was described earlier which is an example of bad usage of these techniques.

In recent World of Warcraft expansion Warlords of Draenor the players were considered to be commanders of an invasion force in the world of Draenor. The players were given by the game their own garrison to command. This garrison feature was not received well from the players. Despite the fact that it was used a hub for different storylines and as a starting point for the majority of them, the players were not enthusiastic neither from a ludic nor from a narrative perspective. The most common reported feedback for this feature was the heavy usage of phasing that made the players to feel like they were playing a single player game instead of an MMO. The players were phased inside their garrison and they had little to no connection with the outer world when they were there. This made communities to discuss in platforms like Reddit (2016) and forums like MMO-Champion (2015) how this feature made World of Warcraft a single player game rather than an MMORPG. This reaction from the community of World of Warcraft is showing that indeed phasing and instancing can

help deliver a story better but the heavy usage of this feature can tip the balance on the other end, thus creating an undesirable effect.

In the questionnaire players were asked if they prefer instanced or open world content. The majority of the players chose open world compared to instance. There was a variety of reason behind the players' preference in open world but the most common reasoning was that it adds to the world realism and variety. From the other hand when instanced was given as an answer usually it was because of lack of troublesome players and the fact that they can enjoy content better alone. This shows that the players are aware and they seek the existence of other players and communities in game and they just do not consume this factor passively as well, but also they are aware that this can hurt the enjoyment of specific content due to several factors like bad player behavior.

To summarize instancing and phasing is undeniable a factor that affects how the players perceive the narrative of the world. The correct usage of these techniques, like Star Wars the Old Republic, can help to balance narrative and gameplay in an MMORPG world. However, the extensive usage of these techniques might move the game far from another major component and factor, which is the multiplayer and community aspect.

5.2 Massive Multiplayer Online

As described earlier community is one of the factors that affect how players perceive the narrative. This was known from the research made by MacCallum-Stewart (2009) on how players are perceiving the narrative both as individuals and as a community, as was shown in Chapter 3. In this research the community aspect exists in many answers, across all the game phases, early game and content. A big number of players are reporting at least one memorable experience as a part of a community and not as an individual. For example boss encounters with guild communities, PvP content with friends even the picking of a class is influenced by community factors for some players. There is a good number of players that are passively consuming everything as a part of a community. Not only the narrative but gameplay as well. These players do not care which class they will play, which boss they will encounter or which world they will visit as long as they do it with friends or as a part of a community. Of course they might still know about the narrative of the world, or have a minor class preference but still if you take the community part out the equation they will probably stop play the game. This

comes in line with the community reaction described earlier. Community seems not only to affect the ludonarrative dissonance balance but the game as a whole. It seems like an extra-third component in the balance rather than just a factor. This shows the complexity that is hidden behind the design of such a complex product like an MMORPG. So someone can argue that is not only the balance of narrative and mechanics in game but also the balance of the community as well.

Communities according to MacCallum-Stewart (2009) usually influence players to consume passively the narrative of the game and focus more on the ludic components like boss tactics or class balance etc. Of course this is because the majority of the communities are focusing around these things but they are communities that focus on role playing. These communities might help players to understand better the depth of the narrative but there are the minority in every MMORPG. In the questionnaire 13 players out of the 46 said that they experienced role play or they are role play enthusiasts. According to MacCallum-Stewart (2009) the gameplay mechanics and design does not help these communities to shine and also the players showed that to the questionnaire by answering that features that reward or feel rewarding for role playing are few or do not exist. Some one can argue that role playing communities cannot be considered as a vessel to understand the narrative of the world better, because it depends on the role play theme they introduce. For example in the questionnaire there was a player out of the 13 that he was roleplaying as a potato farmer. This role play do not add something of value in the understanding of the narrative from the players but only in their personal fun factor. Also another example of this argument in the infamous Goldshire role playing incidents in World of Warcraft.

The summary of the role of the community in the ludonarrative dissonance and how it affects it, is that communities they influence the players towards the ludic side of the balance because the community theme is based there. But in more general communities are influencing the players beyond the ludonarrative spectrum and they seems as an extra component that coexists with the gameplay and narrative as dominant component of the MMORPG experience.

5.3 RPGs, fantasy world narrative & Intertextuality

Another factor that seems to be present in the answers, especially in the early game experience of the players, is intertextuality. Intertextuality is defined as the material that exist and accompanies the world narrative outside the main game. Star Wars the Old Republic for example has the entirety of the Star Wars universe as intertextual material besides the main game narrative. Star Wars the Old Republic is a perfect example of a game with rich intertextuality. World of Warcraft has also a big collections of intertextual material such as previous games, comics and animations which anyone can inspect through the games official site, worldofwarcraft.com (2016).

In the questionnaire the Star Wars players especially their choices in their early game experience are heavily influenced from the intertextual material of the Star Wars universe. Few examples of answers, as written by the participants, that justifies such an influence is:

“I am a good guy at heart combined with being an unabashed Luke Skywalker fanboy”

“Grew up with a classic tale of good vs evil called Star Wars...”

“Epitome of the Jedi Knight, and a nod to an npc named Jolee Bindo from KOTOR”

“Wanted to be a Mandalorian Bounty Hunter like Jango/Boba Fett. I prefer human races in mmorpg's.”

Of course World of Warcraft players presented some influence on the intertextual material in their choses but the examples are nowhere close to that of the Star Wars players. This intertextual influence in the starting experience of the game might affect players in their understanding of the narrative of the game. An example that can add to the argument is the example of MacCallum-Stewart (2009) that in World of Warcraft the majority of the players does not know that the two major factions, Horde & Alliance, are in a truce and not openly at war. Of course the game does not help players to understand this since it has PvP content where players of two factions are battling constantly. But adding to this is the fact that the biggest intertextual reference that the players have for Warcraft is the real time strategy games based on the same world having these two factions battling. The players feel that is natural to be at war with each other but this is far from the true in the narrative of the game. This fact

shows how intertextuality can influence the ludonarrative balance and how the players understand the story around them.

Star Wars players are more aware of the story and the background of the story around them. The Star Wars the Old Republic do not exist in the same timeline as the movies based on the Star Wars universe. But still the common references, hero archetypes and environment help the players to recognise better some narrative elements and thus increase their awareness towards the narrative. In the questionnaire the Star Wars players showed a preference towards the narrative moments of their game experience besides the early game. This fact of course is influenced by many factors as described earlier but also the fact that certain archetypes of the in game heroes exist in intertextual material outside of it, players might find it easier to connect with these characters. Intertextuality though can have a much bigger impact in the ludonarrative dissonance.

This impact can be potentially approached by using the recent buy of the Star Wars franchise from Disney (BBC, 2012). The game as mentioned is not a part of the movie timeline. Disney after the buy of the Star Wars franchise made a selection on what materials from the fan based creation and previous canon extended universe materials considers them as canon to the story of the franchise. The impact and influence of intertextuality can be summarized in the following questions: If Disney considers the game universe as non-canon, how this will influence the players towards the game narrative? This question can spark research interest. How players will react towards the game story? They will still feel connected? They will drop the game cause of this action? This question underlines the importance of intertextuality for a game that continues constantly to evolve its narrative like MMORPGs does. Proper support with intertextual material is needed in order to support the narrative of such big game. As it was described earlier the players in an MMORPG cannot experience the full story in a single play through. This means that the importance of constant refresh and update of the intertextuality is crucial for the time continuity of the narrative. A player cannot experience something in-game a story climax and one month later the company retcons the story, making this story climax obscure.

Also communities and theory crafting can be considered as an intertextual material. The fact that people reside so much on intertextual material for both the story but also

for the game as well like boss tactics and strategies, makes intertextuality a bigger component in the spectrum of MMORPGs. Intertextuality might be able elevate to the level of community for the design of an MMORPG, playing the same strong role as the story and the game itself. This strong influence is summarized in the question asked above.

6 Conclusion & Future Work

This thesis expanded the research made by MacCallum-Stewart (2009) on the ludonarrative dissonance in MMORPGs and factors that affect this tension. After the data gathering and the analysis, several factors came into surface. Some of these factors are design features and techniques, such as instancing and some others are aspects of the genre such as intertextuality and community. The conclusion is that the tension of gameplay and mechanics is not a game for two but for four including intertextuality and community. All these aspects must be balanced from the very in order to deliver a complete experience to the players both in terms of story and in terms of game play. The role of intertextuality and community aspects in the design philosophy of an MMORPG and an MMO game in general can spark research interest in the future.

A suggestion for future work is the research on a bigger sample of players across as many as MMORPG games possible in order to find which narrative elements players like and understand best and which forms of intertextuality and community behaviour affects the players the most. This research can dive even further in the complexity of an MMO game design. A decryption of the elements that make MMORPGs such a successful product with loyal fans and a unique game experiences can help to design better MMO game with other aims than pure enjoyment.

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Appendix A - Survey

Introduction

MMORPG research questionnaire

This is a questionnaire regarding a research on MMORPGs mechanics and narrative. The responses and data gathering is anonymous and it will not be used outside of the context of research. Any mentions of specific names or nicknames will be removed during the analysis process.

You can stop participating in the survey at any given moment by just closing this browser window, and none of your answers will be saved.

Contact information: ath.dev@gmail.com

Section- Player

Questions regarding you and your current MMORPG of choice.

How old are you?

Which MMO is your favourite?

Section- Class & Character (early game experience)

Questions regarding your favourite class and your in game avatar.

Which class and race did you choose when you first started the game?

What made you pick that class and race?

What class specialization did you choose? And for what role (Archetypes: Tanks, Damage and Heal).

What made you pick that role and specialization?

Which in game faction did you choose? (If factions exist in the game).

What made you choose this faction? (Answer only if you have answered the above question).

Describe your avatar.

Describe your first experience with the game.

Describe your most memorable moment from your early experience with the game.

Section- Content

Which type of content do you prefer?

Section- PVE

Which type of PvE content do you enjoy more?

Why do you prefer the specific type of PvE content?

Describe your most memorable PvE moment.

Describe your most memorable dungeon or raid and why.

Describe your most memorable opponent and why.

Do you prefer open world PvE content? Or instanced PvE content? And why.

Section- PVP

Which type of PvP content do you prefer?

Why do you prefer the specific type of PvP content?

Describe your most memorable PvP moment and why.

Describe your most memorable Battleground, Arena or WPvP moment and why.

When given multiple potential targets, do you choose your targets in PvP based on their class or appearance?

Do you think that appearance affects how you choose your target in PvP content?

Section- RP

Describe your most memorable RP moment and why.

Describe your favourite RP location in the game and why.

Describe game features that feel rewarding for RP or help the immersion during RP in the game and why.

Section- General

Describe the reason you prefer MMORPGs over other genre.

Describe your play style.

Select a feature of the game that made impact on your perception of the game and its world.

Why you believe this/these selected feature/features made that impact?