

Massively Multiplayer Online Worlds

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Session 22

Thomas Haigh

The Original MUD

- MUD stood for Multi User Dungeon
 - Set up on timesharing system at Essex University in UK in 1979
 - Like Adventure, but supports multiple simultaneous users
- Interaction between characters
 - Conversation, fights, etc.
 - Hunt for treasures to boost score
 - Leading players become "wizards", gain power over game

Later MUDS

- Many other MUDs follow
- Shift from MUD as "dungeon"
 - D comes to stand for "dimension"
 - MOO is "Multi Object Oriented" – more social
- Puzzle and treasure aspects often deemphasized
 - Some systems are more like chat rooms
- Players can code their own additions to games
 - "Bots" – automated characters
 - Build new neighborhoods in game world

Dibble Reading

- "A Rape in Cyberspace"
 - Provocative questions about virtual crime
 - "rape" takes advantage of programming glitch
 - Take over control of other characters
 - Flipside of Rheingold's idea that on-line community is real
- Concerns LambdaMOO at Xerox PARC
 - One of the leading "social" MOOs of early 1990s

Status Ambiguous

- People and stuff doesn't actually exist
 - But trauma may be real, if much smaller than from real crime
 - Can take weeks to build on-line house, etc
 - So some real work is lost
 - Is it like deleting a useful file?
 - On-line rape is "incivility" in real life
 - In virtual world, calls for death penalty

Questions about Society

- Should punishment be given in real world
 - Erasing user account of perpetrator?
- Or, if this is a real society, must punishment be given within game world?
 - Need for in-game judicial system?
 - Does a virtual world need virtual perverts?
 - Is "wizardly" elimination a virtual lynching?
- Apparent solution is on-line democracy

Turtle Reading

- Expresses some doubts about virtual community
 - More discussion of MUDs and MOOs
 - She is writing about 1995, before commercial on-line multiplayer games take off
- Finds people with dead-end real life jobs seeking success in on-line world

Commercial Online Games

- Fairly long history
 - Attempts to commercialize MUDs back in 80s
 - "Habitat" online game for Commodore 64
 - Some large-scale strategy games
 - Similar to earlier "play by mail" systems
- Fairly marginal until late 1990s
 - Most multiplayer stuff is between local computers
 - Two or more computers via serial/parallel port
 - A dozen or so via a LAN

Ultima Online

- Follows hugely successful series of single player Ultima computer roleplaying games
 - Lord of the Rings type storyline
 - Released in 1997
- Uses internet to connect players
 - Interact in huge shared world
 - Game life continues in real time even when off line
- Gathered hundreds of thousands of subscribers
 - Each with monthly fee
 - Sell a series of expansions for more money
 - Still in operation, though popularity fading

Ultima Online Screenshot



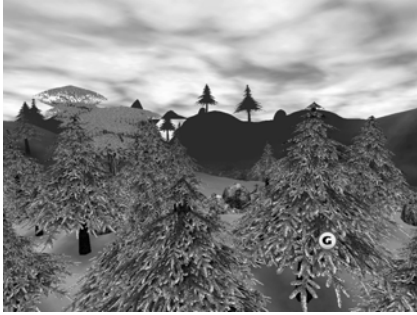
Huge Game Community Forms

- Thriving on-line economy
 - Discussed in Dibble's new article
 - Involves a lot of routine work
 - Baking bread
 - Killing rabbits to build up strength, etc.
- Various on-line groups formed
 - Guilds, groups of adventurers, etc
 - Trade, assist each other, build houses
- Programmers provide new challenges
 - Build new parts to game, storyline, etc.

Everquest

- Launched in 1999 by Sony
 - Brings pretty 3D graphics
 - Overtakes Ultima in popularity
- Notorious for repetitive actions
 - "camping at spawn points"
 - Characters develop slowly
 - Very weak to start with
 - Requires cooperation to get anything done
 - Proves very addictive

Everquest Screen



Dibble 2003 Reading

- Examines economic intersection between Ultima (a "cyberspace") and real world
 - Players on Ultima can build houses, accumulate possessions, save money
 - E-bay allows auctions of these things
 - And of on-line people!
- Some interesting consequences
 - Real economics in imaginary world
 - Possible to calculate "exchange rate"
 - Also hourly wage (\$3.42)
 - Can make a living buying and selling game items

Schiesel Reading

- Examines a different game
 - Anarchy Online, science fiction game
- One theme is contrast of real life to game
 - Real life of player: sad, isolated, no money
 - In game: respected, successful, powerful
- Another issue: game politics
 - Protest march in cyberspace
 - Real people spending hours to lobby for change in imaginary world