Writer's Statement about "The Game within the Games: The Behaviors, Language, and Virtual Norms of RuneScape"

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When given the parameter of an eight to ten page paper, it might be the general consensus to be a little worried about length—with regards to not having enough to say. When writing my ethnography I found it to be quite the opposite, although I never intended for that to happen. Regardless, the assignment ended at exactly thirty-two pages double-spaced. Needless to say, the challenges I faced were content control, being concise with my words, and finding inventive ways to communicate the most information in more subtle ways—especially with so much information to be had. Not only was I tasked with discussing the many phenomena of an online multiplayer game, but defining them to a general audience as well—information which had become so second-hand to me as a field study researcher being immersed in the environment. Now I can't say I didn't contribute to the issue: despite urges of my professor to focus in on one facet of the game at hand, which had already come to represent online gaming as a whole, I felt it was important to give my readers the real deal—the game in its entirety. After all, in my mind, I had already cut my focus much shorter than intended, narrowing it down to a single game. I guess my real point is that endnotes and footnotes became much more powerful tools over the course of this assignment.

While my audience was most assuredly my professor, I never considered that as a guiding factor. Rather, I focused on the style, tone, and voice my writing brought to the table and simply let that do the talking. After all, a formal, academically organized paper will surely do well with an English professor. My concern was always focused on "how can I make my readers see the big picture?"—to really understand how the video game worked and in turn all the possibilities—academically—it could come to embody. I felt that if readers understood how the game worked they could begin to understand how the players interacted in a virtual game with such life-like, defining principles—because the game wasn't simply a game to them. When you think of a game as simply a game, then time spent with it is simple entertainment or, to be concise, a waste of time. However, when a game captures you the way many online games do, there is utility in time spent with the game, which is the very thing that governs why so many interesting interactions take place.

I don't know if my writing outlined any sort of problem, but I do believe it outlined a topic that could be of more importance, or rather one that is already entering the peripherals of

the center of attention. If this ethnography served as an interesting and informative piece then I believe it was successful—giving people an idea of how diverse and in-depth an online game can go. As far as the more technical aspects of genre, this genre type actually guided my writing process rather than me manipulating it. Whether this was because of my inexperience with the genre or simply the way I write I am unsure. Often, I would find myself "itching" to write; each day I would use major headings like Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion, to carve out main sections of my paper, taking time to either add to them or edit previous free-writes. As my information got more substantial I began carving sections out with sub-headings to give another layer of organization. I would continually sit down with an intention to either add to my existing writing, or edit previously written material. In this way I essentially carved out the organizational structure, continuously reading for higher-order concerns and content, reworking paragraphs, and slimming down information with the use of footnotes, endnotes, and more concise summaries. Much later, during my revision process, I began to focus in on material from interviews and incorporate more convincing arguments in that way. And the result is what you have before you.

Ironically, in the end I think this piece came to represent more of an informational doorstep rather than an ethnographic study, with an added bonus of various discussion points. Writing this piece was a challenging task, forcing me to work with and synthesize more information and material than I had ever before. Fortunately for me, it all came together in the end much better than expected—often times I would find pieces of previously written excerpts and whole paragraphs I had deemed "extras" fit perfectly in sections I had later developed, almost like the pieces of a puzzle. This piece was a lot of fun to write, and even more exciting as I laughed with old friends: telling them I was writing a college-level paper about a nostalgically childhood game—RuneScape.