

I will never play World of Warcraft. Or so I have been telling myself since the game was released by Blizzard. I refused on the principle that I feel it is wrong to have to play a monthly subscription fee, and although I feel that it is still morally questionable to charge people the same monthly fee whether they play 4 hours, 4 days, or 4 weeks, I find myself no longer able to resist the call of the game simply known as WoW.

My online gaming career is rather sheltered, consisting only of several months playing Diablo II and about a year and a half playing Guild Wars on and off. If you count Warcraft III Defense of the Ancients (DotA as it is affectionately called by the community), you can add about another 3 years of online gaming in the form of hour-long custom map matches. In all of this time, and across all of these games, I have become convinced of one fact, that the typical online player is stupid, angry, or both stupid and angry and a bit of a racist. As such, I have always felt detached from the broader community that plays these games, instead making only a few “good friends” in the game (people who I could have longer discussions with, and could ask for favors from or would aid on a moment’s notice), and writing off the rest of the community as a waste of time to interact with. One of my main objectives in selecting WoW as my game for this semester is to give online gamers another chance, so to speak, in my mind. I am hoping to interact with a larger number of people and on friendlier terms than I typically do when playing online games. With over 9 million members of the WoW community (as cited by the *Boston Globe*), I would imagine that the potential for community interaction is greater than any online game currently on the market today.

I suppose the main reason that you could say I’m playing WoW is that a friend of mine adopted the game a year ago. This is the same friend that introduced me to Diablo II and DotA. We also both started playing Guild Wars at the same time. We’ve known each other since the 7th grade, and I’ve come to respect him as a gamer in addition to knowing he’s a good friend and person, etc... He is quite possibly the best gamer I know when it comes to understanding AI programmed into games. Within a very short time, he is able to develop ridiculously effective strategies for “beating the computer” so to speak. In Guild Wars, every time the game was patched and the henchman and enemy AI was changed, it would only take him a matter of days to adapt his farming strategy. His major game weakness is PvP, particularly as he doesn’t perceive any benefits from PvP. Instead he is a bit of a packrat gamer, hoarding items for his personal collection. Regardless of the details, this friend of mine recommended the game to me and offered me his second account (which he had inherited, given to a friend, and re-inherited). I agreed to play with him, on the grounds that we begin a set of characters together on a different server than he typically plays on (he has about 9000 gold on that server I believe, and a couple of level 70s with epic gear, or something equally ridiculous). So, playing WoW for this course is for me one way of interacting with an old friend of mine, with whom I haven’t had the chance to interact for a while since he abandoned DotA and Guild Wars.

This social aspect to WoW, I was surprised to find out, seems to be quite the common motivation for players to join the game. I have several friends who I know play WoW to varying degrees. When asked about the game, one of them admitted that she started because her boyfriend plays WoW. They play together on an RP server (she also has an inherited account), and she enjoys the time they spend together very much. (I doubt my girlfriend will have this same reaction, and I feel that my decision to play WoW may put our relationship in jeopardy.) This girl has been playing since July, and commented that she enjoys the plot very much, although she recommends that I don’t pick the game up during the school year as my grades may suffer. Another friend of mine, studying in the city of Zagreb in Croatia, began playing the game

because another of our mutual friends already played WoW, and they moved into adjoining apartments when headed off to college. Additionally his girlfriend also started playing WoW because he plays. Of the three friends mentioned, there is actually some tension created as the one friend's girlfriend prefers playing alliance, while his other friend prefers horde. As such, this friend has been forced to manage two characters in order to maintain his friendships and get sufficient play time in with both his girlfriend and his friend. I will be the fourth person I know, out of the five people I know who play WoW, who began the game because of a real life friendship. This is a fact I find quite fascinating, and I'm almost curious if this is a trend throughout the game itself. While taking a look into the idea that players join WoW for others, I found an interesting article in *The Onion* entitled "Baby, you mean the World of Warcraft to me". In this piece, the author declares his undying love for a girl in game terms, and pleads for the girl to join him on WoW since it is in fact cheaper than going out in the real world. I thought this was a parody of couples playing WoW together. Still, I thought it would be quite ridiculous if such a plea worked, so I tried to convince my girlfriend to play with me. She was not amused.

Given the amount of fun I'm having researching this game, I feel as though actually playing the game will be quite a blast. One concern that I have is the possibility of addiction. One girl in my dorm has apparently "lost" her boyfriend to WoW, their three year relationship placed in serious jeopardy by the game. Another girl, when told of my decision to enter the World of Warcraft for my CMS.600 game, suggested that I "might as well have chosen heroin instead of a video game." Another friend, when told how much money MMOs make every month, responded with a statement along the lines of, "If I sold drugs, do you know how much money I would make every month?" This only enticed me further to explore the game on the grounds of addiction and public reaction to the game. I'm very interested in the "people" aspect of the game, in the ways in which it helps forge and maintain real-world relationships, as well as in the ways it inhibits or destroys them.

Upon some exploration on the IGN website, as well as the WoW community website, I came to realize that the visual appeal of the game probably attracts a lot of gamers. Looking through the literature on the games, as well as reading through some of the guides at GameFaqs, I've decided to play a mage. Typically in games, especially RPGs, I'm very conservative with mana/energy/MP. I tend to be more of an "attack" player, who uses MP only to heal my characters such that I can attack more. I figured rolling a mage on WoW, would teach me to be less afraid of spending my mana, as mages rely heavily on their spells to deal damage. This would be a more minor goal of mine in playing WoW, although I think it would help broaden my experiences as a gamer. I've played through Final Fantasy VII about a dozen times, and I believe that in all that time I've used about 2 ethers total. This fear of spellcasting of mine has got to go.

Bibliography

Online Sources

<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml>

http://media.pc.ign.com/media/016/016985/imgs_1.html

<http://www.gamefaqs.com/computer/doswin/file/534914/37262>

Print Sources

<http://www.theonion.com/content/node/47492>

http://www.boston.com/ae/games/articles/2007/09/08/turbine_stakes_its_online_game_turf/

Personal Interviews

Spenser Lin

Marko Salopek

Dragan Tasic

“Fiona”

Jelena (Marko’s Girlfriend)