

STAR WARS GALAXIES: CONTROL AND
RESISTANCE IN ONLINE GAMING

BY

MIKE DENNY, B.A./B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Law

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

April 20, 2010

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-79579-8
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ISBN: 978-0-494-79579-8

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Abstract

This thesis examines policing and social surveillance in the context of *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided*, a Massive Multi-Player Online Role Playing Game. I demonstrate how Sony Online entertainment (SOE) fabricates a “hyper-panoptic” environment for the monitoring of hundreds of thousands of subscribers through both the End User License Agreement (EULA) and the computer coded architecture of the game. SOE systematically attempts to condition the subscriber base into an abiding and docile group that acts to reinforce the system. The surveillance system, of course, has its limits and subscribers eventually revolted after their stakes in conformity were swept away by wholesale, profit-driven changes to the game. By critiquing online surveillance, of “pharming,” the co-option of leading subscribers, and the effective use of online resistance, this thesis uncovers both the power relations and the practices of social control that they support.

Acknowledgements

A very special thanks to Professor George Rigakos. This project could not be completed without your incredible support. Thank you Sir for the opportunity to learn from you.

I would like to thank some very special past and present educators and members of Carleton University and the Law Department who have made an incredible difference with me: former President of Carleton University, David Atkinson, Professor Jane Dickson-Gilmore, Professor Diana Majury, Professor Neil Sargent, and Professor Peter Swan. I also must thank Barb Higgins and Andrew Squires.

I would like to thank my online friends for listening to me talk about my research with great patience for so long: BurningSpear, Kobie Pace, Cobie Pace, Ian Pace, Lexxin, ThrillKill, Fred, Mav, Mell Kerrigan, everyone in PACE and RoH. I would also like to thank Redhand, Disfigured, HillBilly, MottyBlum, z088208, Vaughngoalie, Kingredv, Sin14216, SRT, Fyrinn, BOWTIEKILLER, Wildthang22, Skullcrusher089, Augerhand, Sleazell and everyone from RLMMO.com and MMOFringe.com.

I would also like to thank my close friends Kris (a.k.a. Hippie), Brian, Ian and Peter.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents and brother for all their support. I just do not have the words.

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Introduction

EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST *STAR WARS* SAGA EVER
TOLD – YOURS

Marketing banner for *Star Wars Galaxies*

(reverse of retail box)

In the summer to early fall of 2003, I learned of an online game titled *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided*. Having been a lifelong fan of all things Star Wars, I began researching this new (to me) type of computer game. It was a Massive Multi-Player Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG; “MMO,” for short). The game required a more powerful computer than I owned at the time. Within a month or two, I had bought a new one and installed the game, clicked the I AGREE button regarding the rules and licence agreement, and begun experiencing the game as a new player in the simulated world of Tatooine in a galaxy far, far away.

As soon as I started playing *Star Wars Galaxies* (SWG), I became aware (more and more) of how the players policed themselves in a world without corporeal authority, and how some evaded the customer service representatives (CSRs; also referred to as game masters, or GMs) employed by Sony Online Entertainment (SOE). The GMs could be nowhere or everywhere, and it seemed that no one knew when they were being watched. I and many others, therefore, just went about our gaming pleasure, fascinated by SWG’s culture and by Star Wars fandom generally.

In 2006, a few weeks into a course on “Policing and Social Surveillance,” I began making historical, legal, and theoretical connections between SWG and the course

lectures. Those connections led me to wonder about SOE's surveillance abilities: the company had built and was maintaining an online environment that enabled it to police an international subscriber base that numbered, as soon as the game was launched, more than 250,000 players. Before beginning the course's major term paper, I discussed this with my professor, George Rigakos. I wanted to take the special-project option as provided for by his course outline. Specifically, I wanted to write an essay about online gaming and social surveillance.

While researching that essay, I noted the dearth of academic knowledge on this underresearched area. Clearly, this was a topic I could carry with me to grad school.

This Study in Context

Playing MMORPGs like *Star Wars Galaxies* is a popular pastime for millions of people around the world. This thesis examines historic ideas about policing and social surveillance and relates them (and the practices that have grown out of them) to SWG. The current state of the law and SWG's particular technology have combined so that subscribers play in a "hyperpanoptic" virtual world. I also examine how SOE has profited from its surveillance even while minimizing the costs of policing and monitoring the subscriber base. I also show how SOE has used computer code and law to turn panopticism into a real-world business tool for monitoring a revenue-generating subscriber base.

I ask two main questions relating to the game's hyperpanoptic design: Where is the real money? And how is making money linked to surveillance? I will be answering

these questions largely by applying a critical sensibility, with a particular focus on online power relations.

Star Wars Galaxies—its design, launch, and controversial changes—can tell us a great deal about surveillance theory and social relations and how both have impacted modern capitalism. This thesis will demonstrate that panopticism is an active component of online games—indeed, it is “designed in.” Subscribers to SOE’s products are in effect paying to be surveilled and have agreed to waive their legal rights in order to consume a product. Social hierarchy has reinforced SOE’s regulatory and monitoring activities to the point that the company has invited some subscribers to join its Warden Program in order to thwart the activities of third-party businesses. In the same surveillance context, I will also be examining the player “Senate,” which works with the developers to solve various issues within the game. And I will be questioning the role of the Influencer Program, to which are invited Web forum subscribers who are acknowledged for their positive and negative commentary on SOE. This thesis will demonstrate that many subscribers are actually helping SOE achieve its objectives instead of mounting effective resistance. The legal arrangement between SOE and the subscribers gives the latter no real standing, since only influencers, senators, and wardens can exist within the governing system, and SOE offers these people only the illusion of control or authority.¹

¹ These are not recognized as having authority by SOE’s End User License Agreement (EULA), which subscribers accept in order to play the game.

Objectives of This Study

This thesis has three main objectives. *First*, to raise awareness and analyze social surveillance in online games and its connection to corporate profits. *Second*, to demonstrate that through resistance (both inside and outside the panopticon), subscribers and third-party businesses have evolved to such a degree that SOE is now rethinking its business model with the idea of embracing “real money transfers” (RMTs). This would reduce the cost of policing the player base and also increase profits. *Third*, to encourage more academic research on online games and their communities.

This thesis will describe the social environment of SWG. It will also examine the “grinding” (gamers’ term for labour time) that goes into creating competent avatars. During these discussions, readers will come to understand why and how some subscribers break the social and contractual rules in order to gain in-game advantages.²

As a subscriber’s understanding of the SWG environment increases, his or her in-game resources grow, thus allowing participation in SWG’s player-driven economy. In my analysis of the player-driven in-game economy I provide a framework for understanding the processes of (virtual) production and value creation. This analysis will extend to the real-life (RL) corporate capital accumulation. I will discuss the convergent use or the melding of both RL and in-game economic processes when discussing the station exchange and the use of RMTs. The economic line between virtual and material exchange is markedly blurred—when we consider that the virtual recreational world of SWG is an economic engine fuelled by labour. Put another way, leisure is being translated into the compulsion to make a real-life wage. Finally, I will discuss some of

² I will discuss “why and how” some players break the rules for personal gain, but not in ways that might be detrimental to the game or to those who enjoy it.

the potentially troublesome legal challenges faced by a growing online gaming industry with regard to EULA-type agreements—challenges that may affect users in the future.

Organization

In Chapter 1 I discuss the history of Star Wars fandom, which spans multiple generations, as well as how that fandom has been capitalized on and how the world of media is changing. For example, there was a time when if you wanted simply to listen to the *Star Wars* movie, you had to purchase an LP. When VCRs became widely available as a commercial format, consumers could purchase or rent a copy of the film for home viewing. The cycle of consumption and reinvention continued from there. When *Star Wars Galaxies* was launched in 2003, the game could be purchased in a retail store. Today, SWG upgrades are available as digital downloads, and this has increased SOE's profits by eliminating a third party. Meanwhile, the merchandizing of *Star Wars* continues apace—available are action figures, lunch boxes, electric tooth brushes, and so on. I then provide insight into the gamer culture by examining SWG in the context of traditional tabletop role-playing games. This discussion will, in turn, be applied to a understanding value in both virtual and real life (RL) economics.

In Chapter 2 I take up SWG's EULA as well as SOE's surveillance capacity. I critique Foucault insofar as his theory of the panopticon relates to the organization and disciplining of the social hierarchy of SWG players, and I describe SOE's ideal "by the book" operations of that game.

In Chapter 3 my focus is on how players police themselves in a virtual world. This includes their use of in-game blacklists, message boards and screenshots, which are

circulated to shame offenders and create a sense of justice. I will also consider how, in one particular case, SOE's CSR staff revealed the identity of a thief who had stolen virtual items belonging to another player. They were able to do so by reviewing logged information files; but in doing so, they revealed the existence of the "panoptic gaze."

Chapter 4 examines players' evasion and resistance strategies as well as allegations of "developer corruption" aimed at SOE. Also discussed will be "ghosting," which is a technique for evading SOE's monitoring and potential sanctions. I also discuss the in-game changes that have transformed the original SWG, as well as the fallout this generated in the players' community, the Credit Dupe story, Combat Upgrade (CU) and the New Game Enhancements (NGE).

Chapter 5 describes how SOE co-opted the growth of independent third-party businesses that had taken root inside its games. Illicit Pharming and RMT in general are extremely controversial topics. Pharmers are individuals who earn their daily real-life (RL) wages by earning virtual money or commodities, which are then sold online for RL currencies. Online games literally have a virtual-to-real currency exchange rate. This co-option by SOE has been carried out at two levels: through traditional business practices; and by monitoring the in-game activities of Pharmers who advertise in-game for their off-site businesses. Finally I report on the apparent popularity and support that the Warden Program enjoys among players.

Finally, in Chapter 6 I address the future of democratic online gaming and the potential for a non-profit "MMORPG Aftermarket" in the form of an emulated "pre-CU" version of SWG.

Chapter 1

The In-Game Economy of SWG

The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities.

Marx, *Capital* (I:126)

In 1977 a film titled *Star Wars* caught the imagination of millions of people. They were dazzled by the film's creativity and by its revolutionary special effects. *Star Wars* combined morality with fast-paced action to draw in and maintain viewers' attention. It detailed the saga of a small group of diverse heroes: members of the Rebel Alliance, who struggled for freedom from the dominating Galactic Empire. After the commercial success of *Star Wars* on the big screen, merchandisers began selling the "experience" of the film in ways that allowed consumers to create their own adventures. I was too young to attend the first movie, but my parents made sure I had an audio recording of it on vinyl to play over and over.³

This chapter discusses the social economy of roleplaying. I hold back any deep theoretical analysis; my present goal is to acquaint the reader with the general economic context of *Star Wars Galaxies* (SWG). Throughout this book the reader will encounter a critical analysis of this in-game economy, especially as it relates to real-life (RL) labour time and notions of productivity. For now, I merely intend to show how social networking systems operate in virtual gaming, and how this relates to RL economics in general.

³ *The Story of Star Wars*, music by John Williams, narration by Roscoe Lee Browne (Toronto: 20th Century-Fox, 1977). LP.

Children who play with the popular Star Wars action figures create their own stories out of their own personal “make-believe.” Many children incorporate events, scenes, and even sounds from the Star Wars movies into their stories. In 1987, West End Games developed *The Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, a tabletop game that allowed players to create their own characters.⁴ (The now famous *Dungeons & Dragons* took a similar approach.) “Paper and pencil” games were a form of interactive entertainment. One person—the game master, or GM—would administer the story. The rest of the participants, playing the characters they had created, would complete the adventure either as commercially written by West End or as invented by the GM. This adventure could extend over many gaming sessions. A GM who wanted to provide a good adventure could easily prep for an hour for each hour of play. As an alternative, professionally written adventures could be purchased. (I recall creating multiple-act stories that served as “campaigns” for my fellow players.)

The GM would sit behind a table screen to block the players’ view. When the adventure began, the GM would begin narrating the situation the players were facing. Ideally, the GM would use highly descriptive language to help suspend disbelief and to bring the players into the adventure as active participants. An example:

The crashes and roars continue, growing closer all the time. The very ground shakes, sending ripples across the surface of the scummy swamp. A huge beast, over five meters tall, smashes a tree out of its way and lurches into the water. Its eyes glow redly as its head turns in your direction. The creature is a Rancor!⁵

⁴ Greg Costikyan, *Star Wars: The Role Playing Game* (New York: West End Games, 1987).

⁵ Jim Bambra, *Domain of Evil* (Honesdale: West End Games, 1991), 25. *Domain of Evil* is an adventure for use with *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*.

When a player or party faced a challenge, the player(s) and/or GM would roll dice to determine the outcome. Young children playing “make believe” with action figures face only the challenges they imagine for themselves. In the game situation being described here, by contrast, the players running from the Rancor faced rules that had been written to govern the simulation. When the Rancor cleared the trees, an “encounter” took place. During this encounter, each player stated his or her intention: *fight* or *flee*. Most GMs allowed a brief period of table talk to allow the players to plan. Some GMs and their players chose to inject more spontaneity into the game, typically by limiting the table talk.

In SWG, players encountering a Rancor either “follow the leader” (i.e., mimic the leader’s actions) or discuss a plan. However, typing out a plan takes time, as everything is happening in real-time. So, for efficiency, many online gamers use Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) solutions such as TeamSpeak or Ventrilo. In SWG, as in other online games, the players face computer-generated creatures that exist in a virtual world (as do the players’ avatars) and that have their own rules and physics. These rules determine what impact the actions of all players and nonplaying characters (NPCs) will have. Players in online games can still cheat, though, by resorting to hacks or exploits (“sploitiz” as gamers call them).

Star Wars (i.e., the movie) did not allow its audience to participate in the adventure they were watching. In contrast, children playing make-believe can interact with one another and with objects in their environment. Of course, children who stage a duel between their favourite lightsabre-wielding action figures can argue over “who is more powerful with the force,” or similar.

For tabletop warriors, in contrast, rules governed every aspect of their imagined selves. Players in the pencil-and-paper game began the “game round” by declaring their actions; so did the GM on the NPC’s behalf. The players and GM then rolled dice to determine a wide range of possibilities, ranging from who would avoid being hurt by the Rancor to who would succeed in wounding the beast. The players rolled their dice openly in front of one another, unlike the GM, who in most paper-and-pencil roleplaying games always sat behind a screen so that the other players couldn’t see his or her “roll totals.” The other players, then, were, to a certain extent, like prisoners in a panopticon, in that the GM (the warden) was watching them without being watched in return.

To ensure that the GM was not choosing one player to be the principal target of the Rancor, common practice was to assign each player a number. The one whose number was rolled would be the one under attack for that particular round. If complaints mounted, the GM could always lift the screen and allow the player to “gaze on” the number (in panopticon terms). The other advantage of the screen was that it helped maintain the story’s flow. For example, it would have been a letdown if the villain were caught in the first act. So if the players rolled very well or if the villain (an NPC controlled by the GM) rolled poorly, the GM could lie or “fudge” the rules without the players being aware in order to protect the spirit of the story. (When I was GM, I used to opt not to kill off a player’s character in the opening act of any adventure.)

West End Games, the publisher of *The Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, provided guidelines and suggestions relating to characters’ deaths. Basically, they said that the player characters should not be killed by the first Stormtrooper they encountered, for this would weaken the story in progress. More important, a player character who was integral

to the story could not die in the first act. If bad luck struck in terms of a dice roll and a player was killed, the GM could alter the adventure early on to protect the work that had gone into preparing the story—by stating, for example:

From your vantage point at the rear of the parties' column you see your friends ready their weapons as the Rancor clears the trees. Daylen, the Jedi accompanying your group on this mission, draws and activates his lightsaber with an audible "snap-hiss." The distinctive sound and blue glow of the Jedi weapon appears to have caught the attention of the Rancor. Kobie Pace, mission leader, only a few metres forward of you, can be heard saying to Mell and BurningSpear, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

From the dialogue, the group would thus understand that the Rancor was going to attack Daylen. The GM could now employ alternative measures to protect the character's life.⁶ If the Jedi Daylen were knocked out too early, before a "dramatic moment" in the story, this could easily leave the rest of the party short in terms of player characters and play balance. At times like this, the GM could choose to resort to creative licence—for example, by stipulating that the Jedi had suffered serious injury during the attack and would require medical attention at a hospital (to be given after the adventure). In this

⁶ Costikyan, *Star Wars*, 92.

way, the player would suffer a reduction “stat” (i.e., a reduction in attribute ability). Or, the GM could rule that the lightsaber the Jedi was wielding had been damaged and would not be able to function until repaired.⁷ Unfortunately, this could only be done between adventures. After the encounter with the Rancor, with the adventure preserved, the suspension of disbelief could continue.

The players seated around the gaming table knew that their friend’s character had just been saved by the GM, who had altered the rules in order to save the game. Indeed, the creators of the game provided for this. The players had a clear view of the score(s) of each roll made by the person playing Daylen, and usually they understood how the game worked. Also, the players were unable to monitor the rolls of the GM, who could simply roll a certain number of dice purely for the sound of the dice rolling on the table. That protected the players’ suspension of disbelief as long as they realized that the GM was protecting the story by allowing another form of penalty. When the GM rolled the dice, stating he or she was making “rolls” or “checks” against the game mechanics, the players

⁷ Ibid. When we enter a social environment—school, party, or workplace—we see people who see us. Every environment has its own social rules and values. In some situations, some people are able to bend the rules while others are not. Thus far, we have seen how a film is consumed by fans and how young children develop acceptable forms of socialization. Older children and adults are able to invest time playing a paper-and-pencil game around a table while abiding by a standard set of rules and procedures. No one would want to play in an unfair game.

When older children and adults play a table game, a social agreement exists. They can share their mutual ideas for a make-believe story, they can pool their collection of toys or game materials for a collective advantage, or they can go their separate ways and continue their stories with fewer resources.

A player who feels unhappy with a paper-and-pencil game can always pick up his or her character sheet and not recognize the GM’s decision(s), thereby dissolving any form of potential “social agreement.” A social agreement in terms of a paper-and-pencil game would be an agreement to recognize as fair the decisions made by the GM (which is important for regulating the others’ behaviour), in exchange for the equal opportunity for in-game progression. Put another way, the GM is also limited by his or her ability to take liberties because he or she must be recognized as fair by the other players.

might well realize that the GM was doing so to maintain the story. However, the extent to which the GM was changing the rules to suit the story was never revealed.

Before any gaming group could form, a few key items were needed: the rule book, paper, pencils, a place to play, and (of course) snacks. Normally, the rule book and dice were owned by the GM. Many game groups took pride in the quantity and quality of their gaming collections. However, collecting large amounts of gaming materials was often expensive, and the average enthusiast of limited means often needed a long time to make necessary purchases.

Gary Alan Fine has described how some participants in leisure activities mobilize resources.⁸ As he explains it, some leisure organizations use their resources to attract participants. When considering paper-and-pencil roleplaying games such as *The Star Wars Roleplaying Game* or *Dungeons & Dragons*, a first-time player might be discouraged by the materials costs. Before committing financial resources, that person would be wise to join an existing group to see whether he or she enjoys the game. As they bond with their group, they can then share in the costs of purchasing gaming materials. New players who wish to get more involved in the game may purchase materials individually but share them with their group.⁹

Having played *The Star Wars Roleplaying Game* and *Dungeons & Dragons* myself, I would suggest that there are several ways you can and probably should contribute to a group if you want to be thought of as a regular. One way is by taking the GM's chair for a session or two. As I have mentioned, every hour of game time requires

⁸ Gary Alan Fine, "Mobilizing Fun: Provisionary Resources in Leisure Worlds," *Sociology of Sports Journal* 6, no. 4 (1989): 319–334.

http://www.rpgstudies.net/fine/mobilizing_fun.html

⁹ Ibid.

about an hour of preparation. Remember that roleplaying games are collectivist, both in terms of the effort they take to arrange and in terms of the resources it takes to play them.

When I was young and playing *The Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, I found it refreshing to take a break from writing my own stories for my friends. Every once in a while my friends and I would contribute money and purchase, as a group, adventure and other gaming materials. Consider the reasoning behind collectively buying the earlier gaming adventure *Domain of Evil*.¹⁰ A purchased adventure is a self-contained story. After you read a book or watch an episode of your favourite television series, it will never be a new experience again. If memory serves, this adventure cost a little under \$20 in 1991. Why, then, would a group of players want to buy gaming materials that can provide a new experience only once? Playing the game together meant that after the adventure was completed, the overall value of the book for the group became secondary. It could serve, after that, as a reference aid for the person administering future games, or it could be reread years later for nostalgia's sake or perhaps even to cull academic citations. The idea of working as a collective for gaming continues today with new paper-and-pencil roleplaying games such as *Battlestar Galactica*, whose core book encourages the following prosocial behaviour: "Snacks and beverages are always welcome additions to the game. Share the load though; the host shouldn't be stuck providing for ravenous masses every session."¹¹

This same sort of economic behaviour exists in many other spheres of life. Curling clubs, football teams, bowling leagues, and even knitting groups share resources.

¹⁰ Bambra, *Domain of Evil*.

¹¹ Jamie Chambers, *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game Core Book* (Place of publication not given: Margaret Weis Productions, 2007), 9.

These activities are, of course, tertiary to capitalist exchange and are in that sense “unproductive.” That all human activity is relentlessly compelled to become “productive” is central to the narrative of capitalism—indeed, to the narrative of my analysis of SWG.¹²

Star Wars Galaxies was launched online in 2003 and is believed to have reached its peak number of subscribers (some 300,000 plus) in 2004.¹³ SWG allows subscribers to experience firsthand a galaxy far, far away through avatars they themselves create. SWG has been heavily revised twice since its launch, but it is still possible to describe its basic mechanics.

At launch, SWG was designed as a “sandbox” game. A sandbox game is open to readers and players to participate in as they wish. Once you have created an avatar—that is, a player character—and selected its gender and its Star Wars “race” (Wookiee, Rodian, Human, Mon Calamari, etc.), you load into SWG for the first time. It is then up to you to find your way in the galaxy. What will you do? Do you want to play a combat profession and join the Rebellion faction, fighting imperial tyranny and oppression? Perhaps you would rather serve as a loyal soldier of the Galactic Empire and stamp out the Rebellion. Having joined either faction, you can fight NPCs (who are controlled not

¹² George S. Rigakos, *The New Parapolice: Risk Markets and Commodified Social Control* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); idem, “Polizei Konsumieren ... Beobachtungen aus Kanada” (The commodification of policing: Field-notes from Canada), in *Kontrollierte Urbanität: Zur Neoliberalisierung städtischer Sicherheitspolitik*, edited by Volker Eick, Jens Sambale, and Eric Topfer (Bielefeld: 2007), 29–54; Steven Spitzer, “Security and Control in Capitalist Societies: The Fetishism of Security and the Secret Thereof,” in *Transcarceration: Essays in the Sociology of Social Control*, edited by John Lowman, Robert J. Menzies, and Ted S. Palys (Aldershot: Gower, 1987); Mark Neocleous, “Security, Commodity, Fetishism,” *Critique* 35, no. 3 (2007): 339–55.

¹³ Allen Varney, “Raph Koster On Fire,” *Escapistmagazine.com* (April 25, 2006), accessed on April 7, 2008.

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/print/329>

by another person but by the computer), or you can join your new friends and fight together against other RL people in “player versus player” (PVP) combat. Personally, I really enjoy PVP, as do other members of my player association or guild. I will discuss the importance of guild membership in later chapters.

If combat in any form is not to your liking, SWG still has plenty to offer. An SWG player can be an entertainer, which itself allows for specialization. Entertainers can dance, play musical instruments in bands, and alter their avatar’s “image” through “image design.” Why would anyone want to play a game that lets them just dance or play an entertainer or “play dress-up”? As I will soon discuss, entertaining is an important profession, owing to the interdependency of the professions. Perhaps neither combat nor entertaining interests you. Does SWG offer anything else? The Star Wars universe offers many alternatives besides these. The weapons, spaceships, vehicles, droids, furniture, and buildings are built by player merchants or crafters. SWG allows you to be a captain of industry. (Luke Skywalker’s family were moisture farmers who used “moisture vaporators” on Tatooine.)

SWG was launched as a sandbox game within which anyone could do anything. But no single person holding a single account can do everything. Online games typically “design in” interdependencies among avatar skill sets. At launch, for example, combat professions require entertainers to heal their mind attributes or “stats.” The entertainers are then paid from the loot gathered by combat avatars during their adventures, while the merchant or crafter avatars produce goods for both the combat avatars and entertainers to consume. It is up to the SWG consumer to decide between a fast-paced Star Wars combatant lifestyle such as Bounty Hunter, or a more slow-paced Uncle Owen-type

experience as a moisture farmer on Tatooine. By the way, in SWG economy you can change your profession whenever you wish.

Ostensibly, this economy is completely player driven. When SWG was launched, you might have thought that SWG had a hunter-gatherer economy, for almost everything that was available had to be manufactured by a player's labour time (in the very beginning, by "hand clicking" the mouse or by macro) or bought with some sort of even trade. In the Artisan profession, the starting profession that would branch out into many advanced crafting and merchant roles, you needed to acquire resources before you could begin creating the advanced equipment that has now become commonplace in SWG.

Crafters who want to create a very successful business require a "12-point crafting suit" to keep up with the competition. You will ask, "What is a 12-point crafting suit, and why is having one so important?" The answer: A 12-point suit allows a crafter to maximize the quality of his or her product. To build a 12-point suit, one must acquire "skill tapes" that grant the wearer a "12-point bonus." Skill tapes are looted from NPCs. A 12-point suit is expensive and time consuming to acquire. The difference between a full crafter with and without a "crafting suit" is highly noticeable in terms of the crafters' reputation, quality of goods, and cost of goods. Within SWG, an active full-time crafter with a 12-point suit is in all likelihood wealthy and famous.

It takes time to achieve and advance through the professions. This progress is referred to by MMO gamers as "the grind" or "grinding." When using the term correctly, a friend might ask, "Want to go PVP?" To which a person might reply, "Sorry, I really want to level up my avatar," or, as one would read in spatial chat, "sry m8, I rly want to grind up my toon." In SWG, as in other MMOs, it takes a tremendous amount of time to

acquire all the experience points necessary to obtain all the skills that someone would have as master of a profession. And even then, having all the necessary skills is not enough, for one also needs the equipment to make the items that other players will want to buy. Remember that though the rules of acquisition and exchange are set out by Sony, the SWG economy is player driven. At launch, players naturally want to buy the best available equipment and services. That said, players who have not completed “the grind” or who do not have the best equipment can still make some “credits” (money in SWG is called credits) by selling at a discount or by marketing their wares to new players who (1) could never afford high-end equipment in the first place, or (2) do not know the difference between good and bad equipment. The plus side of selling at a discount or to new players is the possibility of gaining loyal customers. An example of equipment that could be sold to new and beginning players is armour produced by an armoursmith who is grinding up his or her toon. This would also apply to a weaponsmith, or tailor, or chef, and so on. Players selling goods to new subscribers will generally sell generic goods or items in smaller quantities. A crafter with a 12-point suit will take individual custom orders and sell goods such as high-quality “food” in large quantities.

A short while after launch, player-owned mounts and vehicles were introduced to the game. Low-end vehicles are still available at little cost to new players. Low-end vehicles are used in PVP because they are viewed as disposable if they take damage. It is more expensive to repair a destroyed vehicle than to buy a new one. That said, it is considered funny—and to some degree, an accomplishment—to everyone but the owner when a player succeeds in destroying an expensive vehicle. (That is precisely why I have

cheap vehicles on all my avatars.) To this day, some five years after SWG's launch, one still finds low-end vehicles for sale and sees them in use.

A crafter requires vast resources to make a wide range of goods. The higher the quality of resources and the greater the crafter's skill, the better the item's quality. A crafter can manufacture automated "harvesters" such as "moisture vaporators" in player-owned factories. A harvester collects every sort of resource available in the game. This is akin to RL agribusiness, in that the harvester (there are various types) collects in-game resources on behalf of the player whether that player is online or not. However, player-owned harvesters cannot gain all the resources needed. Combat professions can harvest meat, hide, and bone from a range of creatures they kill. This is not graphically gory; it is just a matter of "clicks" with a mouse. A crafter who wants a specific resource can hire players to take missions from "the terminal." A mission terminal is a computer-controlled device that generates predictable missions for a small monetary reward.

At launch, a player can mix and match professions, but the skill set of the resulting avatar will never be as advanced as that of another avatar that spends all its time "grinding up" to be a full entertainer or crafter or whatever. In that sense, SWG has recreated an RL tendency toward ever-increasing job specialization under capitalist relations. The crafter will buy or barter X number of in-game credits per X number of resource units. Generally speaking, on the SWG Chilastra game server (commonly referred to as "Chilly"), resources that are not seen as good enough for making quality equipment are considered "grind quality" and typically sell for three credits per unit of resource. One often observes people talking about "selling resources for 3cpu." High-quality resources can command dramatically higher credit amounts.

After the combat profession has earned some credits from selling resources or loot items such as “skill tapes,” the player may want to purchase new equipment. It is important to purchase the best equipment you can afford. The better the equipment and weapons, the more efficient your avatar will be at gathering resources, completing missions, and racking up PVP results. A note about avatar death: in-game death means little. At launch, if you have been killed, generally your equipment has “decayed,” which means the effective life of the item has been shortened. With enough decay, an item can become unusable. It is important to insure your items against decay. The in-game credit cost of death is not very much. What is and always has been the penalty is the time delay in getting back into the fun with your friends. You may want to visit an entertainer who can give or charge a fee for a temporary attribute increase or “buff.” A buff gives your avatar an edge.

So far, we have seen a rudimentary cycle of virtual economic labour exchange. A player’s combat avatar takes a mission that offers a small sum of credits as a reward; the same avatar then sells the resources thereby gathered to a crafter. After the mission, the combat avatar renews itself and engages in a transaction with an entertainer. Before heading back out to perform more missions, the player operating the combat profession avatar may buy improved equipment. After the purchase, the player may insure these new items against decay should the avatar be killed. Buying insurance removes credits from the game’s economy.

The above description of the game has been highly simplistic (at launch, SWG was known for its complexity), but it does suggest the “rinse repeat” mission system within the game.

If you really want to invest your time efficiently, you should join a player association (PA) or guild. A guild is an assembly of like-minded individuals who offer one another social inclusion and mutual support. Generally speaking, a player who belongs to a guild helps his or her fellow guild members with in-game activities and has the right to request aid in return. One can, of course, ask any player in the game for help with a task. My experience, though, is that strangers will only help out strangers in the most basic ways. For example, new players might need a small sum of credits for traveling should they become stranded, or they may need simple advice about the game. Players who do not belong to a guild generally are not asked to help in the most complex parts of the game or when trust is needed. A guild, then, offers players a sense of security and trust and is a source of support when requested.

Membership in a guild often yields in-game discounts for player-made goods and services. For example, “buffs” from a guild member who is an entertainer are usually free. Manufactured items are often sold to fellow guild members at a discount or simply given to them. As friendships solidify, friends often place one another on their “admin” lists.¹⁴ This is a mark of significant trust and acceptance, for those who share one another’s admin lists have access to their group’s most treasured in-game items. I am fortunate to have met some great players from all over the world, and I have shared my RL contact information with them.

Note that player structures require “maintenance,” which means that credits must be paid into one’s house.¹⁵ At the time of the game’s launch—referred to as the “pre–

¹⁴ This is the author’s experience.

¹⁵ An in-game mechanic.

Combat Upgrade” or “pre-CU” period—player-owned buildings that were not “maintained” became “condemned” and were removed from play (or “poof”).

The reviews of SWG at launch were generally positive or fair.¹⁶ The game’s negatives as cited by players included these: it was riddled with bugs, customer service was poor, content was lacking, and the profession classes were out of balance.¹⁷ At launch, the galaxy far, far away was really far from complete. The game did not have vehicles, creature mounts, player cities, or even the ability to go into space. Allen Varney interviewed Raph Koster, the Creative Director of SWG, who told him:

Fundamentally, *SWG* was launched too early from a game design point of view. It may not have been a financial point of view—there’s considerations like how much had been spent, how soon it would earn back the investment, that sort of thing—but most systems in there were first-pass at best. The place where that was most obvious was in the relative lack of content at launch.¹⁸

Because of the game’s early launch, changes were soon being “patched” or “hot fixed” in an attempt to correct problems. Attempts to balance one profession against another or to correct problems at hand led players to complain that their professions were being “nerfed” or made less effective.¹⁹ When one profession was nerfed, many other professions were often irritated. So, players would migrate to other professions and

¹⁶ Allen Rausch, “Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided (PC)” (June 15, 2003). Gamespy.com. accessed on April 13, 2008. <http://pc.gamespy.com/pc/star-wars-galaxies-an-empire-divided/6008p1.html>; Varney, *Raph Koster On Fire*. The Escapist essay suggests that the opinions for SWG were “mixed or negative response.”

¹⁷ Rausch, *Star Wars Galaxies*.

¹⁸ Allen Varney, *Raph Koster On Fire*.

¹⁹ Koopa (forum name), January 3, 2003. UrbanDictionary.com, s.v. “nerf.” accessed on April 14, 2008. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nerf> *Nerf* in essence means “to make worse or weaken, usually in the context of weakening something in order to balance out a game.”

purchase corresponding equipment. This soon led to “flavour of the month” (FOTM) professions. On the subject of in-game changes Raph Koster said:

I could give you my opinions there, but there’s no point—even those changes have been changed. Many of them were essentially trying to dig out of a hole that launching prematurely had caused. I can’t really blame anyone for them, whether I agreed with the decisions or not. The whole time, the team worked their ass off and tried their best.²⁰

Clearly, SWG had been launched too early. The developers faced an uphill battle fixing the game, designing sufficient content, and attempting to balance professions (or nerf them, depending on your point of view).

The SWG community would experience two major game changes: Combat Upgrade (“Combat Downgrade,” according to many), and New Game Enhancements (NGE). Both will be discussed in later chapters. Game bugs, poor customer service, FOTM, and the controversies over the game changes altered relations between the subscribers and SOE so that they deteriorated from adversarial (with pre-CU) to downright toxic (with NGE). It does seem that in its most recent incarnation, SWG’s developers have improved the game dramatically. Too bad, then, that SWG was launched too quickly and that its early fixes were poorly thought out, for the result has been a difficult relationship between SOE and its subscribers.

To summarize this chapter: Children share their toys for mutual advantage and for fun, since sharing toys mean more toys to play “make believe” with. The main rule for children is to play nice. Those who enjoy paper-and-pencil roleplaying games accept the game mechanics and surveillance of the GM who administers the adventure. Some

²⁰ Varney, *Raph Koster On Fire*.

members of gaming groups enter into cost-sharing agreements for game supplies and snack foods. This system is an exchange-of-labour arrangement based on social and economic reciprocity. Paper-and-pencil roleplaying games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* have significantly influenced MMO game design. The shared-fantasy simulation that is SWG has its own social system, which depends on an elaborate economics of exchange that forces players to interact not only socially but commercially. Even without (yet) employing any significant theoretical tools, it should already be quite clear that relations of exchange not present in paper-and-pencil role-playing games are everywhere conditioning relations of exchange in the online world of SWG, including in-game weapons, equipment, stats, accomplishments, and so forth. Indeed, the game environment is an immense collection of (virtual) commodities, very much like the RL mode of production. Important to remember is that SWG is a system with rules, surveillance, and penalties.

Chapter 2

Policing SWG From Above

LANDO: Lord Vader, what about Leia and the Wookiee?

VADER: They must never again leave this city.

LANDO: That was never a condition of our agreement, nor was giving Han to this bounty hunter!

VADER: Perhaps you think you're being treated unfairly.

LANDO: No.

VADER: Good. It would be unfortunate if I had to leave a garrison here.

LANDO: This deal's getting worse all the time.

...

IMPERIAL OFFICER: Skywalker has just landed, my lord.

VADER: Good. See to it he finds his way here. Calrissian, take the Princess and the Wookiee to my ship.

LANDO: You said they'd be left in the city under my supervision.

VADER: I am altering the deal. Pray I don't alter it any further.

Dialogue from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

In this chapter I examine two very important factors that allow Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) to govern, regulate, and police thousands of subscribers: the End User License Agreement (EULA) and SOE surveillance. Each will be examined in the context of the game's mechanics. In the previous chapter, I referred to how in paper-and-pencil roleplaying games, players cannot monitor the game master's (GM's) dice rolls. At the same time, though, all actions taken by the players themselves are in plain view. This chapter discusses how the rules of *Star Wars Galaxies* (SWG) create stability and predictability in ways that minimize the costs of policing and that maximize the legal authority and security of SOE, in both real-life (RL) and in-game (IG) terms. So that the reader will better understand SOE's surveillance capabilities, I will offer RL examples of

corporate monitoring as conducted by a private Canadian security firm, Intelligarde. This chapter will also examine the limits of SOE's monitoring capability and show what happens when players challenge or resist SOE.

The rules governing the SWG player's relationship with SOE are explained in the EULA,²¹ which is the primary agreement between the customer and SOE. The EULA is the legal framework (or superstructure) that makes SWG a panoptic environment. In practical terms, it brings into play a computer-coded surveillance system that makes oversight possible within SWG. Each time you log in to SWG and click I AGREE, you are consenting to be under SOE's gaze. As noted earlier, SOE is the equivalent of the GM in paper-and-pencil games. But now look at what Article 3 of the EULA states:

We may amend this Agreement at any time in our sole discretion. Amendments shall be communicated to you at the time you log into your account. Such amendments shall be effective whenever we make the notification available for your review.²²

In a paper-and-pencil game, the GM rolls the dice behind a physical screen that blocks the players' view. In SWG, the players are similarly unable to see behind SOE's electronic screen. But SWG goes further than this: the players on log-in agree "not to decrypt or modify any data transmitted between the client and the server."²³ By not allowing the players to decrypt or search the data files they have purchased, SOE is insulating itself from any possible questioning of its authority. In the same way, the GM's

²¹ Other published rule lists are available on the SOE website, as well as at the end of this chapter.

²² Sony Online Entertainment, "Star Wars Galaxies End User License Agreement," revised August 21, 2006, accessed on April 14, 2008. [hereafter EULA], Article 3. http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faaid=15629

²³ Ibid., Article 7.

authority is accepted by the players in a paper-and-pencil game. The players around the table can debate the game's rules and so on, but the bottom line is that a player who does not like the story being told or how the game is being controlled has to wait until a new group is formed or be patient until a new adventure takes place. In contrast, SWG's EULA does not allow for negotiation. The choices are two: click I AGREE, or click DECLINE.

In fairness to SOE, whether one agrees with the EULA or not, it has enabled the company to monitor 300,000-plus subscribers in every corner of the world. SOE, in essence, is policing and regulating a fairly large city. While this chapter is about governance, authority, and civil maintenance, we also need to consider the relative youth of this industry and capitalists' need to grow it further. SOE's business is selling games that create and foster virtual communities. These communities do not have RL police and courts to mediate disputes. So, under the rules that players accept when they purchase the game, SOE monitors and co-opts the player base in order to provide stability. This chapter will show how SOE has "married" the law to computer code to create a hyperpanoptic surveillance system. Welcome to the machine.

The EULA is a contractual arrangement between SOE and the adult consumer, though at the adult's discretion,

you may permit one child to use the Account instead of you (in which case you may not use that Account). You are liable for all activities conducted through the Account, and parents or guardians are liable for the activities for their child.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., Article 1.

The EULA also states how the relationship between SOE and the consumer will be conducted and which party is responsible for each item in the agreement.

Besides paying an average monthly fee of US\$15 to access the game's virtual worlds, the player must purchase the "core game." At launch, I purchased the game for C\$59.99 (the price sticker is still on the box). The monthly access fee varies with the time package you purchase. For example, access to the game is cheaper if you are billed annually instead of monthly. The monthly fee of \$15 is an average and seems to be the standard fee throughout the industry.

Sony's EULA also says that the agreement is governed in all respects by the laws of the State of California.²⁵ SOE can resort to California law because the servers that subscribers connect to are located there—thus, California is the place of business. Agreeing with the EULA that California is the place of business allows SOE to legally disclaim the UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods.²⁶

There are two clear reasons for SOE to use the State of California's legal system. First and most obviously, California is a leading developer of global technology, and many high-tech firms are based there. Second, it helps SOE avoid litigation in parts of the world where the laws may not favour multinationals. SOE, by disclaiming the UN Convention on Contracts for International Sale of Goods, may be doing so out of a rational fear of nuisance lawsuits. The effect has been, however, to insulate the company from all but the wealthiest of plaintiffs. The costs of litigation and travel make any kind of legal action almost impossible for the average person. SOE must be well aware of the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 14.

²⁶ Jean-Gabriel Castel, *Introduction to Conflict of Laws*, 4th ed. (Toronto: Butterworths, 2002), 193–94.

legal advantages it enjoys by basing itself in California. To summarize, the legal agreement that EULA lays out for subscribers is to all practical purposes bulletproof.

It is noteworthy that SOE's surveillance encompasses the online game *and* online forums, where players post messages that can be viewed by nonsubscribers. However, under SOE's rules, if your message does not conform to SOE's posting regulations, it can be modified or deleted. A player can also be forbidden to post on the public message board. In extreme cases, such as making a personal threat against a player, action can be taken against your in-game on your player account and RL law enforcement could be notified.²⁷

For example, if the message board discussion is about SWG and real-money transfers (RMTs) and why SOE has not incorporated them into a few of its "live" servers, those who post messages advertising off-site sellers of virtual currency or "Pharmers" could find their posts edited by the moderator. They could also have their posting privileges suspended. This amounts to a penalty for an out-of-game infraction.²⁸ In other words, SOE is projecting its panoptic gaze outside the game into RL—specifically, onto RL message board posts. In fairness to SOE, their rules for subscribers' messaging

²⁷ Sony Online Entertainment (Star Wars Galaxies), "Policies Message Boards," accessed on March 14, 2010, http://starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com/en_US/players/content.vm?page=Policies%20Message%20Boards&resource=policies

²⁸ Sony Online Entertainment (Star Wars Galaxies), "[SWG] Community: Official Forum Rules and Policies," May 20, 2008, accessed on January 24, 2009. [hereafter SWGC] http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=19216&p_created=1211321389&p_sid=JuBoYBVj&p_accessibility=0&p_redirect=1&p_lva=16206&p_sp=cF9zcmNoPTEmcF9zb3J0X2J5PSZwX2dyaWRzb3J0PSZwX3Jvd19jbnQ9NTI2LDUyNiZwX3Byb2RzPTAmcF9jYXRzPTAmcF9wdj0mcF9jdj0mcF9zZWZyY2hfdHlwZT1hbN3ZXJzLnNIYXJjaF9ubCZwX3BhZ2U9MSZwX3NIYXJjaF90ZXh0PXJ1bGVzIGFuZCBwb2xpY2llcw**&p_li=&p_topview=1

conduct are not unreasonable and are encountered on other message boards. Posters to most boards who do not follow common courtesy in all likelihood will be “trolled,” and the original poster (OP) will be “flamed.” I have yet to receive any warning for conduct either in-game or in RL (on the message forums). That said, I have no doubt that it would be more unpleasant to be “trolled and flamed” than to be silently suspended and my post edited or removed. In any case, why create a problem when you have to “game” with the other message posters? This explains why peer pressure and clan adherence have emerged in SWG (more about this in Chapter 3).

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) proposed a Panopticon Prison Model. In such a prison, the guard would be able to observe the prison population without being seen by the prisoners. The reasoning was that prisoners would always be on good behaviour because they could never know whether they were being observed.²⁹ Agreeing to SWG’s EULA authorizes SOE’s surveillance machine to monitor you as you play in-game or talk about anything non–game-related on the SOE message forums. In essence, the subscribers have been coerced into behaving in a manner prescribed by a corporation. Bentham’s panopticon now exists in the online science fiction setting of SWG, where the consumer, by agreeing to comply with the EULA, has “no expectation of privacy in any such communication and expressly consent[s] to such monitoring of communications [they] send and receive.”³⁰ Article 9 of the EULA also states that SOE “may be forced to disclose information to the government or third parties under certain circumstances, or third parties may unlawfully intercept or access transmissions or private

²⁹ William Bogard, *The Simulation of Surveillance: Hypercontrol in Telematic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 65.

³⁰ EULA, Article 9.

communications.”³¹ Bentham had envisioned his Panopticon as a physical place built of stone, wood, and metal. His idea has morphed into a computer code designed into SWG, backed by the binding EULA agreement.

SOE has notified its subscribers that it maintains a panoptic surveillance system. In my view, that system only has power because we the subscribers allow it—that is, we have allowed SOE to place us under surveillance and to decide what form of behaviour is acceptable. This assumes, of course, that the subscribers are aware of the EULA’s articles and that they understand the subtleties and capabilities of SOE’s computer code.

SWG players network in order to maximize their enjoyment. You cannot “solo play.” So if you don’t follow the rules and regulations while being sociable and agreeable, you simply aren’t the “best” customer. My personal experience has been that antisocial players and rule breakers don’t last in SWG because they develop a poor reputation in their virtual communities (see Chapter 3). Players like that end up exiting the game—SOE bans them, or their virtual peers socially exclude them.

Long-term subscribers have come to depend on SOE continuing to deliver this game. I have spent too many hours and too many dollars to risk the loss of my account. I and other long-term account holders have become financially and socially invested enough with SWG that we will act to protect SOE, to the point of helping it preserve its

³¹ Ibid.

panoptic gaze. Compliance is the pathway of least resistance. For example, I have agreed to:³²

not organize or be a member of any player association or groups within Star Wars Galaxies that is based on or espouses any racist, sexist, anti-religious, anti-ethnic, anti-gay or hate mongering philosophy. You also may not organize or be a member of any player association which habitually violates the Star Wars Galaxies Terms of Service and/or Game/Forum rules and policies.

Organization or membership within such associations or groups participating in said actions may result in disciplinary action being taken against the account that may include official warnings, account suspensions, or account terminations depending on the severity of the incident which will be determined by a GM and a Lead GM. Multiple suspensions or account termination will result in the termination of all SOE game accounts.

Please Note: Player Association leaders condoning, participating in, or knowingly allowing such action to occur may also be held responsible for the actions of their Player Association and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the account that may include official warnings, account suspensions, or account terminations depending on the severity of the incident which will be determined by a GM and a Lead GM. Multiple suspensions or account termination will result in the termination of all SOE game accounts.

Player Associations which violate the above rules are subject to disbandment, depending on the severity of the incident which will be determined by a GM and a Lead GM.

SOE does not list age as a category of discrimination. In RL, age *is* a generally accepted factor. For safety reasons, some jobs have a minimum age requirement.

Typically, these are physically demanding government jobs: policing, firefighting, the

³² Sony Online Entertainment (Star Wars Galaxies), “[SWG] Rules and Policies: Rules of Conduct,” March 11, 2010, accessed on March 14, 2010 [hereafter SOERP] Article 8. http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=15631&p_created=1114485294&p_sid=DZwIZRWj&p_accessibility=0&p_redirect=1&p_lva=15631&p_sp=cF9zcmNoPTEmcF9zb3J0X2J5PSZwX2dyaWRzb3J0PSZwX3Jvd19jbnQ9MTY0MCwxNjQwJnBfcHJvZHM9MCZwX2NhdHM9MCZwX3B2PSZwX2N2PSZwX3NIYXJjaF90eXBIPWFuc3dlcnMuc2VhcmNoX25sJnBfcGFnZT0xJnBfc2VhcmNoX3RleHQ9U1dHIG9mZmljYWwgZm9ydW0gcGVsZXMgYW5kIHVvbnVz&p_li=&p_to_pview=1

military, and so on. Similarly, people play in sports leagues organized by skill and age group. Clearly, it would be unfair to match 10-year-olds against 17-year-olds in hockey. In this regard, online games like SWG present a rather interesting situation: they are among the few venues where people of any age can game together.

In my experience, player associations (PAs) place no age restrictions on membership. That said, my guild (i.e., the core group of people I game with) does not admit minors unless they are already well known and have demonstrated maturity, or unless the child belongs to a member's family. We will, though, sell goods or services to players with virtual money even when we know they are minors. It could be argued that our PA is practicing discrimination by turning down recruits because they are minors. However, Article 1 of the EULA states the parent or guardian must complete the registration process and accept full responsibility for the child. So you could make the counterargument that the decision to reject a recruit on the basis of age is not discrimination because the contracting party is legally an adult.

Generally speaking, online gamers do try to segregate themselves from minors. Older recruits are often viewed as more attractive because they bring RL knowledge and maturity to the game. John Smedley, SOE's president, often contributes to Stationblog.

On the subject of RL age, he has stated on that blog: “In fact, I play in a BF2 clan and we specifically ask that people under 18 not join our Teamspeak chat.”³³ In other words, age-based restrictions (age of majority) are a customary rule that SOE’s president himself upholds.³⁴

Smedley has made other interesting blog entries. In “Diary of a Hatemonger,” he responds to the criticism that SOE interfered with free speech when it banned a player. Here, Smedley maintains that SOE had no choice but to enact a ban, for the player had interrupted an in-game same-sex marriage ceremony. (This happened on the SWG Sunrunner server.)³⁵

The “Hatemonger” blog (that name is a pseudonym assigned by Smedley himself) then provides a transcript laced with disgusting homophobic, racist, and overtly politically insensitive “chatter” from the gamer who had been banned. Time markers for these comments are also provided, which date his comments back to 2004 and 2006. Apparently, this offender had been playing different avatars. Smedley supports the right to “free speech” or “freedom of expression,” as should everyone. Clearly, though, Hatemonger has crossed a line.

³³ BF2 is short for Battlefield 2; clan is another word for PA or Guild; Teamspeak (or “TS”) is a voice chat system.

³⁴ John Smedley, station blog: “I’ve gotten a lot of feedback ...,” August 25, 2006, accessed April 19, 2008. <http://stationblog.wordpress.com/2006/08/25/i%E2%80%99ve-gotten-a-lot-of-feedback%E2%80%A6/>

I recommend Smedley’s blog to anyone who wants to learn more about the MMO industry. Note: For parents or guardians considering purchasing SWG or any other MMO, I recommend that you do get involved in your child’s online gaming. Regarding guild recruitment, any potential member will generally be asked the questions listed at the end of this chapter, see “Questions and Concerns for Prospective Guild Members.”

³⁵ Smedley, Stationblog, “Diary of a Hatemonger,” August 14, 2006, accessed on April 15, 2008.

<http://stationblog.wordpress.com/2006/08/14/diary-of-a-hatemonger>

Even so, I'm curious: If SOE was able to track down a player and log his outbursts, why did the company allow him to stay in the game for so long? The two incidents took place two years apart and were typed by the same person. This indicates that SOE had the capacity to track down and cross-reference personal RL identifiers to an avatar.³⁶ If Hatemonger's first actions did not warrant a ban, was the first outburst a freebie? Was Hatemonger warned? For that matter, what does Mr. Smedley have on *me*? Can I see my account file from SOE? I have agreed to be monitored and have no expectations of privacy according to the EULA (Article 9). Even so, I wonder how much of everything is recorded and how long it is kept.

Article 9 of SWG's EULA states that SOE may have to comply with government requests for information (i.e., provide data). One wonders whether SOE would also share identifiers with other companies or other SOE MMORPGs, this would make it easier to blacklist undesirables. More to the present point—and assuming the hatemonger is a minor—SOE could send the Hatemonger transcript to federal officials in the future as part of a potential background check?

If Hatemonger can be placed under in-game surveillance this easily, it can't be the only example of RL surveillance, be it work- or play-related. So, could a firm use “stealth learning” or “immersive learning simulations” to train better security officers? Quite simply, yes. In *The New Parapolice*, George Rigakos discusses how one private security firm uses panoptics to maintain order inside its office:

One of the only places where a group of Intelligarde security officers can converse is in the briefing room just after they sign in but before the supervisor's presentation. Security officers who want

³⁶ Ibid.

to complain or commiserate must consider that their conversations can easily be heard by the QCM in the adjacent office. This is why there is often whispering in and around Intelligarde headquarters. On one occasion, as I was trying to conduct an interview, a security officer discreetly signalled that he would rather speak to me later. He gestured to the QCM's office. Another time, a training officer tried to complain to a fellow mobile security officer that he was unfairly demoted. His colleague mumbled, 'That's your business, I don't want to hear about it' but soon after murmured 'later' under his breath. The same demoted training officer indicated that he wanted to talk to me [Rigakos] in the washroom, but nonetheless *whispered* his complaints when I accompanied him there.³⁷

Like SWG, this private security firm's office is designed for monitoring its workers, just as SOE monitors its customers. Rigakos and the demoted security officer knew, as I am sure Intelligarde management did, that they could not monitor their staff inside the washroom. Here we see the manipulation of the environment to one's advantage to evade monitoring. Note that the firm is asserting control over its workers by preventing them from speaking openly. In Chapter 4, I will discuss how subscribers resist surveillance.

Intelligarde's management is also able to monitor the company parking lot.³⁸ Its rank-and-file employees, then, are always aware that management is surveilling them, indoors and out. As Rigakos explains: "This notion of 'socialization' and bonding meshes structurally with the dominion of surveillance that the Law Enforcement Company imagines—in this latter case to oversee even ... activity [in the parking lot]."³⁹

The firm's employees floated the idea of building a leisure facility in the parking lot. Intelligarde supported the idea, but stated that it would deduct membership fees from

³⁷ George Rigakos, *The New Parapolice: Risk Markets and Commodified Social Control* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 109.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

the paycheques of those who joined the club. The revenues would go toward purchasing items for facilitating the social network.⁴⁰ One Intelligarde manager explained the reasoning behind all of this:⁴¹

I'm excited by [the facility] and want to be involved with it. We want a management member on the board ... It'll be an excellent facility allowing for *structured socializing* ... this club will be a constructed way to socialize ... Sporting, for example – that develops trust among security officers ... These guys Probably don't even recognize the potential.

Consider that SOE monitors subscribers' message posts in the "general anything talk" (GAT) forums, which can have nothing whatsoever to do with SOE or SWG. In much the same way, Intelligarde's workers experience monitoring while off duty. Note well that the recreational club was planned to be in direct line of sight of the managerial offices.⁴² In a sense, Intelligarde officers and SWG subscribers have both been co-opted to conform to what has been deemed appropriate behaviour. In each case, as well, the payment of dues or subscriber fees instills a false sense of ownership. The longer you subscribe to SWG, *or*, the longer you work for Intelligarde, the bigger the stake you have in upholding the status quo the company has set. In SWG, if you violate SOE policy in the GAT forums, your account can be penalized. I would speculate that in much the same way, off-duty officers who are using the leisure facility will be penalized for transgressions (and be rewarded for acting correctly) more quickly than those who do not use the facility.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 111.

⁴¹ Ibid., 111.

⁴² Ibid., 110.

If SOE maintains observation via the EULA and Intelligarde can have a manager on the leisure facility's board, it follows that SWG's subscribers and Intelligarde's officers can both be controlled by panoptic surveillance—one physically, the other virtually.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) had this to say about “the means of correct training”:

Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy. These are humble modalities, minor procedures, as compared with majestic rituals of sovereignty or the great apparatuses of state. And it is precisely they that were gradually to invade the major forms, altering their mechanisms and imposing their procedures. The legal apparatus was not to escape this scarcely secret invasion. The success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in procedure that is specific to it, the examination.⁴³

To quote Rigakos on private security and surveillance:

The notion of hyperpanopticism, of course, is meant to transcend the physical spaces of observation as delineated by Bentham. The communications and monitoring systems of today are harbingers of a future system in which total control will be possible (Bogard 1996). These digital and virtual orderings are in their infancy at Intelligarde, but they are coming in force, and the company's disciplinary techniques reflect the assumptions that the future lies in embracing these orderings.⁴⁴

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 170.

⁴⁴ Rigakos, *The New Parapolice*, 112.

In this chapter we have seen how SOE is able to regulate its subscribers with little controversy. This harmony between SOE and gamers exists because the surveillance is conducted hyperpanoptically, with the EULA providing the authority. A final point: SOE has created a product/service that has in turn generated a want. SWG is a seductive game, and that seduction grows the longer people play. As a result, the players become co-opted into serving the system. They have a vested interest in SWG, a stake. That is why the game's rules (including its EULA) will not tolerate destabilizing influences such as unruly players. Nor for that matter will the players who behave themselves.

Which brings us to a fascinating point with which to end this chapter: the SWG's rules *can* be destabilized if those who depend on them for stability find that they no longer provide it. In the following chapters I will describe how SOE, without ever intending to, destabilized its own authority and broke its panoptic gaze over the subscriber base.

Chapter 3

Policing SWG From Below

INT. MILLENNIUM FALCON

Beeping while he works, Artoo is busy connecting some wires to Threepio, who now has one leg attached. Chewie enters through the doorway, grunting to himself.

THREEPIO: Noisy brute. Why don't we just go into light-speed?
Artoo beeps in response.

THREEPIO: We can't? How would you know the hyperdrive is deactivated?
Artoo whistles knowingly.

THREEPIO: The city's central computer told you? Artoo-Detoo, you know better than to trust a strange computer. Ouch! Pay attention to what you're doing!

Dialogue from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

This chapter discusses how players police themselves while also following the regulations crafted by Sony Online Entertainment (SOE). The system of social and community justice encountered in *Star Wars Galaxies* (SWG) is complex, reflecting the complexity of the game itself. The subscribers manipulate their virtual worlds according to the rules set by the game developers; those rules in turn are backed by the binding End User License Agreement (EULA) and other Terms of Service(s).

If SOE is an institution (like a school, or hospital), SWG can be likened to a prison, if only because the EULA you have accepted allows for no privacy and legitimizes constant monitoring. Yet at the same time, SOE's rules allowed players to develop a form of governance out of the anarchy of the "sandbox" when SWG went live in 2003.

As if to escape a Hobbesian "state of nature"—albeit a digital one—the player community has sacrificed its anarchic freedom for the security of a sovereign. The rules

and social norms for SWG do seem to stem from real-life (RL) principles of justice. But why would the players want *any* form of social regulation in a sandbox environment where any subscriber can perform a plethora of activities?

Answer 1: There *is* no “real” anarchy in SWG—there is only a power vacuum, which was filled quickly by those who earned and spent social capital. SWG community (forum members and in-game) leaders, including guild leaders and their officers, set out to create predictability and stability; this led quite rapidly to an understanding among other players that they needed to conform to the resulting game culture. Thus, a subscriber can only perform functions that are part of the rules and mechanics of the game. Other activities are considered “exploits” (or “sploitiz”) and leave their perpetrators open to disciplinary action.

Answer 2: A single subscriber (unless he or she has multiple subscription accounts) simply cannot engage in all SWG activities at the same time. In SWG, as in many online games, player interdependency has been designed in. As a result, it is in each gamer’s best interest to play collectively, so that all achieve their objectives in an efficient manner.

Answer 3: The game has been designed with a panoptic gaze built in. Players can never know when they are being watched by SOE, and this in itself is enough to dampen the anarchy and encourage passivity. All players know that engaging in deviant behaviour—as defined by SOE—can lead to banishment from the sandbox, with all the social penalties that entails.

A subscriber who dislikes the game and decides not to invest further in it will simply not renew or continue the subscription. A subscriber with an antisocial streak will

not be accepted socially in the panoptic environment, since most players gladly follow the precoded “choices” available to them in SWG. Those players, too, will drop out.

A subscriber who enjoys SWG understands soon enough the benefits of player interdependency—that virtual pursuits (such as “grinding”) are more efficient when done cooperatively. Moreover, earlier subscribers understand the benefits of recruiting new members into their guilds (i.e., player associations [PAs], or clans). New members add to their group’s skills and labour, which results in greater production and overall success in virtually any task undertaken.

Players join guilds for several reasons: commonalities in style of play; shared in-game objectives; age and/or language suitability; or simply to share in the guild’s reputation (which can include displaying the guild’s “tag” on your avatar). No matter what you want to accomplish in the game, you will always be more efficient if you join a team or guild. Note here that many guilds have their own specific social norms, which recruits must accept before they can join (see below).

As a fair assumption, if you join a guild, you must be serious about participating in and contributing to the objectives of other guild members. Once a player has joined an SWG guild, an interesting rule comes into play. Article 8 of the game’s “Rules and Policies: Rules of Conduct” (hereafter SOERP) states:

You may not organize or be a member of any player association or groups within Star Wars Galaxies that is based on or espouses any racist, sexist, anti-religious, anti-ethnic, anti-gay or hatemongering philosophy. You may also not organize or be a member of any player association which habitually violates the Star Wars Galaxies Terms of Service and/or Game/Forum rules and policies.

Organization or membership within such associations or groups participating in said actions may result in disciplinary action being

taken against the account that may include official warnings, account suspensions, or account terminations depending on the severity of the incident which will be determined by a GM and a Lead GM. Multiple suspensions or account termination will result in the termination of all SOE game accounts.

Please Note: Player Association leaders condoning, participating in, or knowingly allowing such action to occur may also be held responsible for the actions of their Player Association and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the account that may include official warnings, account suspensions, or account terminations depending on the severity of the incident which will be determined by a GM and a Lead GM. Multiple suspensions or account termination will result in the termination of all SOE game accounts.

Player Associations which violate the above rules are subject to disbandment, depending on the severity of the incident which will be determined by a GM and a Lead GM.⁴⁵

Subscribers are co-opted by SOE both during and after guild creation. To maintain order, SOE shifts its surveillance gaze from the game software to the guild leader and officers. Note here that the second-last of the above-quoted paragraphs reads “player association leaders,” not “leader.” This amounts to a re-creation, in the virtual world, of the frankpledge system of justice. In other words, your community, clan, or family (or here, guild) is held responsible for the acts of all its members. So if you harm others in SWG, your family or community will be held accountable. This also means that if the guild officers do not report improper conduct to SOE, they themselves can be held accountable. It must be said that SOE rarely wields this authority. But it must also be said that the option’s mere existence provides SOE with a lot of *theoretical* authority, which in itself encourages passivity.

⁴⁵ SOERP, Article 8.

Many guilds have been formed within SWG, each with its own unique objectives and factions (the playable factions are Imperial, Neutral/Civilian, and Rebel). Every member of a guild has an equal stake in making sure that all get a fair share of in-game opportunities. As a consequence, players watch other players and their associations for possible infractions. In this way, a customary form of social rule has developed (in synchrony with SOE's regulations) within which the PAs have established stability and predictability.

An example would be useful. Various in-game locations yield specific rewards, some of which are highly prized. These locations are, of course, very popular and busy. SOE has a rule relating to these locations:

monopolizing numerous spawn areas with the intent to exclude other players will not be permitted. If investigated and verified by a GM, monopolizing will result in the disbanding of the Player Association. As stated in Rules of Conduct section 8, Player Association leaders who condone, participate in, or knowingly allow such action may be held accountable for the actions of their members.⁴⁶

There is in all this a possible point of contention: Players who want to enjoy certain popular quests, or who want to grind rare loot rewards, will complain that others are monopolizing ("camping") locations. Anyone who has ever played an MMO will know how long it takes to earn a rare loot item. The statistical probability of actually

⁴⁶ SOERC, Article 5.

looting the rarest items required to finish one of the “collection quests” is low, to say the least.⁴⁷ It seems that this rule is on the books to maintain order *if necessary*. It is seldom if ever used. What usually happens instead is that the guild member speaks to the guild officers, who then attempt to negotiate with another guild that is grinding in that location or area.

Gary Alan Fine, in *Shared Fantasy*, discusses the social expectations placed on tabletop roleplayers:

A player may become so engrossed in the problems of his character that he forgets there are other players who want equal time to participate. Often a reminder of this basic rule of fairness and courtesy adequately controls behavior.⁴⁸

Interplayer frictions often arise from the attitude that “my time is more valuable than your time.” This happens most often when someone asks for assistance and the other player doesn’t provide it within a reasonable time. To succeed in an MMO environment, a player must behave in ways that are acceptable to other players. Edward Castronova discusses this “reputation capital”:

Since everything is not free, and since you need other people to get the things you want, you had better behave. If you don’t, none of the other users will help you get what you want. It is interesting that MMORPGs are filled with various grouping mechanisms but have no explicit justice systems or governmental structures.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Players who have or are attempting to grind out the 4/5 Sith Waist Holocron (Collection Quest) will certainly understand the frustration of grinding for lengthy periods of time at certain in-game locations. A personal note: I spent 80 million in-game credits to buy this item early on. This same item later sold for around 250 million in-game credits. Supply and demand will always factor into prices within SWG.

⁴⁸ Gary Alan Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 115.

⁴⁹ Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 116.

Castronova suggests that anarchy exists in SWG only among those players who refuse to participate in the game as SOE designed it. And SOE designed it to be largely self-policing. It is worth noting here a comment by Raph Koster, at one time SOE's Chief Creative Officer, under whose tenure SWG was created. Koster would agree with Castronova that the purpose of anarchy, as a form of virtual freedom and as a measure of equality, is "to give maximum possible scope to reputation systems and the informal norms they support."⁵⁰ Koster has written a "Declaration of the Rights Of Avatars" that directly addresses virtual gamers' rights and freedoms.⁵¹ Castronova explains that political science research validates the idea that

reputation and norms are often more powerful than law. What law there is, is in the form of customer service representatives, whose unhappy job it is to intervene in particularly bitter fights among players. Truly nasty players can be banned from the world, but this seems comparatively rare. Indeed, customer service representatives are pretty rare. Labor is expensive; most developers would prefer that the player community regulate its own conflicts.⁵²

"Getting Noticed" is the title of Chapter 6 of a study by George Rigakos titled *Nightclub: Bouncers, Risk, and the Spectacle of Consumption*. That chapter opens as follows:

Having presented our VIP passes and cleared the queue, we enter the nightclub itself: a frenzy of activities, dramas, and power plays where identities are refigured and hierarchies of social capital are violently reasserted. The point now is to see and be seen, to grease the gears of desire and the desire to be desired within the machinery of surveillance.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁵¹ Raph Koster, "Declaration of the Rights of Players," Raphkoster.com, August 27, 2000, accessed April 7, 2009. <http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/playerrights.shtml>

⁵² Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds*, 116.

⁵³ George Rigakos, *Nightclub: Bouncers, Risk, and the Spectacle of Consumption* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 186.

How do nightclubs and surveillance fit into research about MMORPGs? I believe that much of what happens inside a nightclub can also be seen in the virtual social environment that is SWG. People patronize nightclubs and virtual social spaces for any number of reasons. In both spaces, people are disciplined through constant surveillance.

Nightclubs, MMORPGs, and panoptic institutions all employ an incredible amount of non-verbal communication. Nightclubs are known for loud music that makes verbal communication difficult. MMORPGs, such as SWG, lacked Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) for a long time. For new subscribers, communication was carried out in text form only, which often made it hard to glean nonverbal communication cues. Much of the communication in a virtual world is inaccessible to new subscribers, for much happens within private guilds or group chats or over third-party VOIP programs such as Ventrilo. To chat in “voice” and in real time, you have to wait to be invited into a guild or a group or a “vent channel.” Most communications in online games are closed to those who don’t belong to a group or guild. For example, if you ran a free trial in SWG, and spent some time in the current starting area, you would see a great deal of activity, excitement, and all the sights and sounds of Star Wars without being able to overhear other players (or over read text) except for what was audible (or viewable) as general spatial chat.

You would also observe subscribers with more expensive in-game clothing, vehicles, and other items that are not available to new players. Much the same happens in

nightclubs: everyone in the building is a guest; but there is still a hierarchy, in that most of the patrons are not allowed to enter the club's VIP areas unless invited.

Social hierarchy matters only to those who acknowledge authority, wealth, skill, ego, and so on. Those who do not recognize the social mores of the in-game culture are being disrespectful of those who do. Guilds looking to recruit new players often show off impressive items and advanced skills to advertise their success as a group. Patrons of a nightclub may tell their friends they saw a celebrity there. Both the nightclub and SOE would, of course, profit from attracting more clients. The guilds themselves and their more famous or infamous members enjoy the drama, attention, and interaction that comes with encountering new and established players. To quote Rigakos:

I want here to intentionally overstate the surveillance connection between *panoptic* prison as a disciplining-punishing-factory and the nightclub as a *synoptic* disciplining-pleasuring-factory. Of course, I realize that it may be belittling to the experience of prisoners to create such analogy but I do so apologetically to make my point about power, space, "optical violence," and crisis of respect as a counterpoint to the rather celebratory and emancipatory depictions of nightclub culture and raves. I know of few other places other than prisons and nightclubs where crowding, bumping, stepping on another's shoes, and even eye contact can be interpreted as signs of disrespect legitimately creating conditions for violent confrontation within the logic of that space.⁵⁴

It is very easy to misinterpret communication in an MMO when you cannot glean body language and vocal tone. As a result, offence can easily be taken. If reputation and hierarchy are forms of social capital, then MMOs create situations in which the subscribers are hypervigilant about threats to that capital. For example, it is considered a social taboo in MMORPGs to be overly curious about someone in RL. It is acceptable to ask what time zone someone considers their prime time for gaming, but it is not proper

⁵⁴ Ibid., 187.

form to carry on with RL questions, especially if you are the new person in the guild, unless you are invited into a conversation or someone is willing to offer such information.

Entering SWG's virtual society can be likened to waiting for a bus. In RL, if you take a bus to work at a predictable time, there is a reasonable likelihood that you will stand at the bus stop with other individuals who are pursuing the same objective. Over time, you will probably engage in small talk. But because this relationship takes place a few minutes a day five or so days a week, there are social limits on what can or will be discussed. Perhaps you talk about the weather, sports, TV shows, or the quality of the bus service. The point is, you are getting to know your fellow commuters through small talk only. You can make note of their vocabulary and their clothes and perhaps guess their income level if they tell you where they work. Your fellow commuters are likely sizing you up the same way.

Gary Alan Fine discusses "escape from self" in terms of tabletop role play gamers. His analysis offers strong insight into the culture of online gaming:

As a new gamer I was struck by how little I learned about the private lives of others—even others to whom I felt close. One didn't talk about occupations, marital status, residence, or ethnic heritage. In some cases it was months before I learned a player's surname. Others confirmed this observation, and suggested that it represented a need to establish a distance from one's real self.⁵⁵

Since people are playing the game together as a hobby, the shared fantasy and objectives of the gaming session are what is important. This interest in a shared activity creates an environment of collective effort. This same dynamic can be seen when

⁵⁵ Fine, *Shared Fantasy*, 55.

resources are combined, be it in tabletop games or virtual ones. Tabletop roleplaying games and MMORPGs such as SWG can attract the same type of player. These are among the few hobbies or activities where your occupation, education, and physical ability are largely irrelevant as long as you can grasp the game and participate equally. What is most important is that you have a positive attitude. In MMOs, older players are sought after by guilds because they understand reciprocity and are better with the social graces.

In an MMO like SWG, you get to know players' core traits very well. Over time, you should be able to describe the active members of your guild using single words. You know whether they are generous by nature or always have an excuse. You know whether they contribute more than they take. You learn to judge whether prospective guild applicants want to join you because they think you can do something for them. You will learn whether someone is reliable.

For example, many guilds do not recruit people under the age of majority, because—this is a stereotype, I realize—young people are not willing to put in their time before making unreasonable demands on PAs (i.e., for time and resources). Another common peeve is that some players join a guild for the free handouts and then leave when they've got them. This sort of in-game conduct is frowned on, of course. Guilds try to recruit players with proper in-game conduct—and conversely, they watch out for those with bad reputations. I should add here that rivalries exist, arguments do happen, and

people do not always get along. Is the player's poor conduct constant or rare? Is someone willing to vouch for the new player?⁵⁶

My experience with MMOs has been that a reputation for fair dealings brings you social capital and the opportunity to spend it. Furthermore, the guild officers who handle recruitment pay close attention to how you spend your social capital. They often request references and a list of past guild memberships.

So far, I have not provided many in-game examples of how surveillance and social hierarchy in tabletop game groups and nightclubs influence space and exert a disciplinary effect. Earlier, I related Rigakos's research on nightclubs, the frenzy of activities, hierarchies of social capital, and how this is part of the spectacle of consumption. Rigakos offers a deeper explanation in his footnote to that paragraph.

It is usually at this point in the discussion that some in my audience are tempted to protest, "But I'm not there to be seen. I just want to dance ... to have a good time." My [Rigakos] response to many students who raise this protest is always: "If you just want to dance, why not stay home and turn on the stereo? Why not dance alone in the basement?"⁵⁷

If MMO players are playing a social networking game in the belief that they are not under both corporate and player surveillance, they are misinforming themselves. Consider the following examples of surveillance. SOE often offers free trials for former and potential new players. As you progress and master in-game professions, your avatar

⁵⁶ From my own experience, when a guild member vouches for new player/recruit, the social capital of the guild member is taken at face value. A recruit who has been vouched for is generally accepted more quickly than an unknown recruit. That said, many long-standing and successful guilds are highly selective in terms of whom they recruit and how long a probation will be.

⁵⁷ Rigakos, *Nightclub*, 253.

is granted “badges” stating what you have accomplished. These badges are displayed to all who check your character sheet (this is an in-game “mechanic”).

If you have played MMOs, you may have experienced in-game “begging” from players who seem to be new. The following forum post touches on this:

I mean, seriously. I’ve given away 75k+ credits [in-game money] and a bunch of old weapons to noobs [new player avatars] in the past week, and considering I’ve never had more than 800k before, I consider that generous. When I first started I was too embarrassed to even SPEAK to someone with a Master tag, much less beg them for money. Is there like a noob-introduction facility where they are all taught the art of begging? I really need to start wearing a Novice Scout tag.

Startling insight: I could just start telling people where the mission terminals are. Hmm.⁵⁸

This post is informative of SWG’s social hierarchy. Vriko, the original poster (OP), is disturbed by the conduct of new players and was too embarrassed to even speak to someone with a “Master Tag, much less beg them for money.” He then comments about wearing a lesser “Novice Scout tag.” Perhaps the OP is presuming that by displaying or wearing a lesser tag denoting achievement, he may be less likely to be asked for in-game money. Perhaps yet, he realizes that because of a sudden increase in

⁵⁸ Virko (forum name), “Chilastra—Who Taught the Noobs to Beg?” November 23, 2004, accessed on April 9, 2009.

[Http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Chilastra&message.id=338673&page=1&f](http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Chilastra&message.id=338673&page=1&f) The official message board with this message has been deleted by SOE, along with most of the old SWG message threads. Professor Peter Swan instructed me to print off as much as possible for this thesis. Note: Some links in this thesis may now be defunct but I have maintained a hardcopy log as part of my obligations regarding data retention pursuant to the guidelines of Carleton University’s Research Ethics Board and the Canadian Tri-Council on Research. All research-based queries and requests for anonymized (where appropriate) of these data may be made directly to Mike Denny by email thekidfromcleveland@hotmail.com

new players (free trial or otherwise), the established social norms are in a period flux. In the same thread, KenshiNaruto states:

I've been panhandled more in Coronet [a fictional city in SWG] than in San Francisco. I always just refer beggars to the mission terminal. They usually start to complain and won't leave me alone. I'm not very polite with them after that.

I should volunteer to help them get money on Endor or something, say I'm a Master Doctor and will give them free buffs there. Then just buy them a one way ticket, /addignore n00b, and go on with my day. I don't know if anyone is poor enough to be stuck on high level planets anymore, but it would be pretty funny."⁵⁹

The following post, made by JeffroTGIF, takes another view:

Give a man a fish he eats for a day, teach a man to fish he eats for his life. We need to stop giving away stuff and start teaching. Anything GIVEN is not appreciated. I remember having 20k and thinking I was rich cause of all the lesser plains bols i had to kill,⁶⁰ i was hungry back then and it felt good. TEACH dont GIVE. Wonder if all the beggars voted Kerry??? Just kidding, dont want to stir the pot too much."

It is cruel to strand a new player on an adventure world or high-level planet. That said, there is a clear conflict of social expectations between beginners on a free trial and veteran gamers with subscription accounts, who amount to a ruling class. In this regard, MMO players generally maintain that you are more likely to succeed in the game if you sign up for it at launch rather than later. It may be that SWG makes it harder for new players to succeed because almost all components of the in-game economy are made by other players. There is no question that the highest-quality items (weapons, armour, etc.)

⁵⁹ Virko, "Chilastra."

⁶⁰ Lesser plains bols are creatures in SWG that are often hunted as part of a mission quest that pays a small reward.

are made by a few economic elites on each server. Nor is there any question, though, that by being sociable, grinding hard, and listening to veterans, you can rise in the hierarchy (economic and otherwise).

Every game server is a community, and in that community, some members are going to be more vocal or socially active than others. In this vein, is it possible to compare SWG's elites with the VIPs in a nightclub? Every SWG server has community leaders, be they famous or infamous (and thus corresponding to VIPs), and every server has a unique atmosphere (again, like every nightclub). On some servers, gamers focus on player-versus-player combat (PVP); on other servers, not so much. Some servers are popular with role players (RPs); others, less so.

The Chilastra server (or "Chilly," as it is affectionately known) was home to an infamous scam artist tagged Anaken_Walker. It is difficult to know for certain the population numbers for each of SWG's game servers, but it is fair to assume that Chilly had several thousand players at launch. In MMOs, you have to try really hard (or perhaps not try at all) to become hated by an entire community. On January 1, 2004, Anakin_Walker posted a cross-server message on the Sunrunner forums to the effect that s/he was "rolling" (starting up) a "toon" (avatar)—in other words, creating a new beginning. The third post on the same thread stated:

FYI Anaken is a scammer from the Chilastra server. The reputation he has there, has been rightfully earned. Take care with your credits and your items.⁶¹

⁶¹ Anaken_Walker (forum name), "Sunrunner – Peace Throughout the Boards," January 1, 2004, accessed on April 9, 2009. <http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Sunrunner&message.id=64783> & See note 58 for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

If you have been irritated by another player and learn that s/he is leaving your server, you have to be very, very upset to take the time to post a warning about that player on another server's message forum. Clearly, someone on Chilly was upset enough to do just that when it came to Anakin_Walker. That warning amounted to a public shaming and, not incidentally, an expression of both community ownership and surveillance. If Anaken had really wanted to start over quietly, he or she should have deleted the username and merely re-rolled the avatar without posting an introduction.

One month after Anaken posted his Sunrunner thread, the following thread was created on Chilly:

Dspigs: To all those who know me, im in the boat as anaken is, and know his troubles. Don't go on harassing him like u do me. Cause we'll start our own guild and beat u all with sticks! Hehe, Anaken my friend, I know your troubles and I would like to send out a peace treaty to u. Good day.

Lascar4: Yes the two forces of gayness—unite into one huge gay mass of uber-gay! You can scam ppl [people] like no one has scammed before, Chilastra shall bow before you.

I can see it now... you can trade the rare mabari/RIS/ST Hyrid Armor, but oh, it won't show up in the trade window ...

The following line and “trade window” refers to a form of in-game fraud via in-game

JacenKeldroma: Too funny Lascar☺

RTL3: umm are you really with him or do you just want attention?

Dspigs: Im really with the guy

M0nkjee: A simple Delete --> Recreate --> Grind Grind Grind = Troubles and Reputation Fixed and Gone

zRyhyno: are you the one anaken married? Which ones the woman in the relationship of yours?

Alch: speaking from experience tashra? [remark directed towards m0nkjee]

M0nkjee: [quoting Alrch's post] eat a ****edit**** you fool

RTL3: if you are with him then do as he should and leave!

JRak: Anakin should go to bria [*Bria* SWG game server] they seemed to like him there from his post

C-3Poo: [quoting Dspigs wrote: Im really with the guy] Exhibit A Nugga Nugga Nooch

Lucius-X: sinking ship OCra... [apparent surname of Dspigs avatar] thats all I have to say on that

Xx_Predator_xX: [quoting Dspigs wrote: "Im really with the guy"] Nothing I could say would be funnier than this.

Bennyboy4308: What do you 2 have left on this server? Everyone knows what bastards you are, why stay here?⁶²

Noteworthy about this thread is that in SWG and in the game's forums, you can create an avatar and/or forum name that is either male or female. From the *Star Wars* movies, we know that Anaken is a male name. Thus the community's response reinforced the second poster's insulting sexualized gender remark.

Rigakos describes a fight that took place at the entrance to a nightclub. During the dispute, a woman complained that the door staff was "choking a guy." A doorman told her to shut up. The woman responded: "You've got bigger tits than me!" Then she turned

⁶² Dspigs (forum name), "Chilastra—TO ANAKEN, PLEASE READ!" January 2, 2004, accessed on April 9, 2009. The fate of this post is as per note 14. <http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Chilastra&message.id=116590> & The fate of this post is as per note 58.

to her friends: “He’s got better-looking tits than me!”⁶³ Rigakos goes on to explain “that after all of the bravado, storytelling, and even blood and violence, the woman’s most visceral verbal attack was aimed at feminizing the burly bouncer who pinned her friend to the sidewalk.”⁶⁴

Perhaps what is most striking about the preceding forum thread is that no one objects to the words chosen for the insults. Indeed, the various posters reinforce one another’s positions to create a consensus regarding Anaken’s and Dspigs’s social position and lack of acceptance. Interesting here is the remark made by RTL3: “umm are you really with him or do you just want attention?” Again, this is a putdown, for RTL3 is questioning what the OP is stating on the thread’s first post. In terms of peer pressure, Lucius-X says: “sinking ship OCra [Dspigs] ... that’s, all I have to say on that”—in other words, Anaken’s presence will be detrimental to Dspigs reputation and the OP should not associate with Anaken. Finally, regarding the extreme dislike the community has for Anaken, thread poster m0nkjee says: “A simple Delete → Recreate → Grind Grind Grind = Troubles and Reputation Fixed and Gone.”

The lesson to be learned here is that if you really want to start over, reroll your avatar (notwithstanding that grinding a new toon is a tremendous amount of work). That way, no one will know who you are, so your past reputation will not be a problem. Also, you may as well move to a new server without mentioning your previous game history. The reason is that if you decide to stay on your present server, and you do regrind everything, and it becomes known that you are playing an “alt” (a rerolled avatar), you

⁶³ Rigakos, *Nightclub*, 207.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

will be ostracized immediately. Your friends will feel used, and any guild you belong to will consider that you joined under false pretenses.

Furthermore, if you play an alt on your original server, and you are accepted under false pretenses, and you are then found out, the entire guild you have joined will lose social capital. How many guilds on that server will trust the guild you joined under false pretenses? Remember here how hypervigilant gamers can be.

I have been discussing why peer surveillance is so central to social networking within SWG. In Chapter 2 I discussed the EULA that all players must agree to and how this allows hyperpanoptic surveillance by SOE. In the next example, I describe an incident where a player's items "disappeared." At first it was assumed that a flaw in the computer code had made them vanish or that another player had stolen the items. In the event at hand, SOE's customer support rep (CSR) gazed into the system and reported back to the victim, who then revealed everything to the player community. The moral of this story will be that it is vital to remember the unsettling reality that sooner rather than later, your in-game actions will be used in judgment of your character. Put another way, SOE—just like Santa Claus—"knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake."⁶⁵

On April 22, 2005, ufo-beefcake (forum name ufo-Beefcake / in-game name: Fizzit) posted a thread titled "Hard Lesson." I will quote from it at length:

I just want to say that the purpose is to simply just raise awareness of this scam although most of you would not fall for what I did I am sure. One problem is that I trust people too much, and I usually take people at their word because it is rare in my experience in both this

⁶⁵ Credit for this sentence/idea goes to Professor George Rigakos, who discussed the role of Santa Claus, who rewards good children.

game and real life to find someone with the intent to only take advantage of you. But on with the story.

I was in my town the other day (Ragnorak Dantooine) just shopping around when I ran into someone (lebard although the name is a temp account I am positive) who chatted with me for some time about being a doctor and about making buffs, etc. She said she had heard of me and really admired the way I handle my customers, blah blah. She offered to make me some nice buff packs if I ever needed any, and that was that. Well a few hours later, I get a tell [an in-game instant message] from her and she asked if she could place a vendor in my house to sell some of her weapons and armor. I said sure. I finish the business I am working on and meet her in my house where I proceed to give her admin [Administrator access / ability to access the house controls and items]. She immediately says "AFK for 30min" [Away From Keyboard]. So I am thinking ok, that is strange. So I take her off admin and leave to go do other stuff with my alt character. 5 min later she contacts me and says, why did you take me off admin? I cannot place my vendor down. I told her I was planning on returning in 30min and that I would add her then while I was there. She said she needed to log and asked that I add her before I went to bed so she could drop the vendors in the morning. So I said I would. I am sure you all see where this is going.

So before I logged [off from SWG], I quickly did a walk-through of my shop and decided to put everything I couldn't live without on my storage vendor. There were my 2 anti-decay kits, 5 resource rewards, my 250-1150 damage LVA, a couple of 250 max damage VKs, a 590max T-21, and a bunch of crystals, pearls, tissues, etc. I figured if this person was really a scammer, I would only leave access to what I could live without and I took a chance. I added her to admin and went to bed. When I logged back in, I was sad to discover that she had not dropped her vendor at all, and about 30 items from my house had been taken. Nothing besides my mini veteran rewards is un-replaceable, but it's still annoying and sad that someone would go to the trouble she did to gain access to my house only to steal a couple million credits worth of loot kit items and veteran rewards [given to long-standing account holders who have a good record with SOE. These can be worth considerable sums]

I am not sure if the Devs [Developer / programmer of SWG] can track a person's account based on deleted character names or if they can tell which items were taken from my house or not, but I will be looking into this with the expectation that I will never see them again. In the end, I just chalk this up to a lesson learned that as much as I like to, I cannot trust everyone at their word. I am not too

disappointed about what happened because in the back of my mind, I prepared for it and always knew it was possible. Anyways, just thought I would share.⁶⁶

Later, after posting a conversation with Lebarb, ufo-beefcake told readers of the same message thread that not only *his* items were missing but those items belonging Lebarb. ufo-beefcake stated that he and Lebarb had sent in CSR tickets to SOE so that it could investigate. About two hours later, on the Chilastra trade forum, Lebarb posted two separate listings: in the first, she was selling Vks (in-game weapons); in the second, two veteran rewards—a mini–Stormtrooper and a mini C3PO (both of these are figurines).⁶⁷

On both threads, ufo-beefcake quickly responded: “OMG!! I cannot believe you are selling these!! Everyone, DO NOT BUY THESE ITEMS. Lebarb Stole them from my house!!” Beefcake provided a link to the original message board thread, thus taking the community forum post into the commercial auction forum for the server. ufo-beefcake went on to say: “Please do not bid on them as I am in the middle of getting a CSR to get them back for me.”

Soon after, in the VK trade forum thread, Lebarb (forum user name Lizz1212) stated:

What!!!!!! a friend made these for me his name is otheda so if you have a problem please take it elsewhere you can even ask him send him a tell.”

⁶⁶ ufo-beefcake (forum name), “Hard Lesson,” April 22, 2005, accessed on April 14, 2009. The fate of this post is as per note 58.

<http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/board/print?id=Chilastra&message.id=433596&>

⁶⁷ Lizz1212 (forum name), “Chilastra Galaxy Trade—222 max dmg vk’s” and “Chilastra Galaxy Trade—Mini Stormie Here!” April 22, 2005, accessed on April 14, 2009. The fate of this post is as per note 58.

http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Chilastra_trade&message.id=247

Another poster (forum name: Mcpryon) asked:

Screenshot, please.

Yet another poster (forum name Rassa) made this post:

If this is the same Lizz i know just with a different toon name s/he did the same to my guild around a year ago. stole paintings that would have went for 1-1.5 mil at the time. She was our guilds “museum curator”

Rassa followed this with yet another post:

Confirmed same Lizz that stole from ym old guild Black Star so i 100% belive beefcake.

Interestingly enough, ufo-beefcake responded as follows:

Someone tell me the best free way to post screenies, and I will post screen shots of all our conversations. I happen to have taken screenies of every exchange we had.

Forum poster Kalandra now asked:

umm don't take this the wrong way, but... why? If you believed her enough to give her admin to your house, why would you go to the trouble to taking screenshots?

ufo-beefcake responded:

Because in the back of my mind, I knew there was some chance this would happen. But like I said in my story on the Chilastra main page, my trust out-weighed my suspicion, but I took the screenies as a just in case measure.

In a forum post, ufo-beefcake, whose in-game name is Fizzit, stated:

Update to the ongoing saga. The CSRs are working the issue and contacted Lebarb. They confirmed she took the items from my house. They are giving her 2 days to give me back my items. Lebarb sent me an in game email apologizing for taking the items. I have not received anything back as of yet.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ ufo-beefcake, “Chilastra—CSRTicket confirms theft, and Lebarb apologizes,” April 23, 2005, accessed on April 15, 2009. The fate of this post is as per note 58.

All of this is an example of player self-policing. The victimized player appealed to SOE's CSRs but also to the community for support. CSR-GeorgeD, reported that he had checked the SWG logs (see Appendices A and C) and found that Lebarb "has removed items from your house." To summarize, a theft had been alleged and denied and then admitted to. In the end, the thief sent the victim an in-game e-mail apology:

hello fizzit first off i wish to appologize for taking your things i will give them all back plust reimburse you for the inconvienece. it was not my intent to take your thing was overcome with greed and i appologize.⁶⁹

All of this took place in a virtual world ruled by a EULA that requires players to acquiesce to surveillance. Here, the CSR was able to turn his panoptic gaze towards an alleged theft and confirm that it had in fact been perpetrated.

The recruitment officers for the guild I belong to, when vetting an applicant, address five basic issues (see "Questions and Concerns for Prospective Guild Members" at the end of Chapter 2). Component five relates to honesty. Lebarb's actions as just described have placed him on a social blacklist. His avatar would not be "tagged" into our guild, nor would we knowingly invite the subscriber who owned Lebarb into our guild. If we did either, we would be damaging our standing in the community. Moreover, we would be concerned about any guild that did let him join. Remember that under the

<http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Chilastra&message.id=434551> & Note that this thread contains two URLs: <http://www.imagedump.com/pics/240643.jpg> and <http://www.imagedump.com/pics/240644.jpg> The first (Appendix C-2) is the same text as in Appendix E-2. The second (Appendix D-2) is same text as in Appendix F-2. The URLs seen in the footnote of this thread match the URL index in the photocopy. The photocopies match the screenshot pics that are Appendices E-2 and F-2.

⁶⁹ Lizz1212, "Chilastra Galaxy Trade."

EULA and other regulations, if Lebarb did join us, we would be responsible (at least potentially) for her behaviour. In an extreme case, our guild could be disbanded and our leaders could face disciplinary action against their SOE accounts.⁷⁰ So we would be fools to allow players to join us whom we know (because SOE has proved it) are socially unreliable and of questionable character.

Hyperpanoptic systems are brilliant at creating environments in which those who break social norms are easily and emphatically isolated. This use of community peer pressure to socially isolate those who violate social norms is not against SOE's rules. Nowhere in any rule or publication does SOE state that the company will take action against a players' group that blacklists violators of social norms. I don't know whether Lebarb was banished from SWG; I do know that this subscriber's ability to enjoy the game has been seriously damaged, given that social interdependence has been designed into SWG. Foucault wrote extensively on prisons and discipline. In light of what I have just presented, I quote him:

Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as calculated, but permanent economy. These are humble modalities, minor procedures, as compared with the majestic rituals of sovereignty of the great apparatuses of the state. And it is precisely they that were gradually to invade the major forms, altering their mechanisms and imposing their procedures. The legal apparatus was not to escape this scarcely secret invasion. The success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination.⁷¹

⁷⁰ SOERC, Article 8.

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 170.

To review the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 in terms of Foucault's understanding of Bentham, we can say that SOE is able to invisibly monitor the actions of subscribers' avatars. On SOE's part, this is an exercise of power. A truly hyperpanoptic environment has three indispensable components. The first is legal authority, which SOE has established through its EULA. The second is the means to conduct panoptic surveillance; this has been designed into SWG's computer coded architecture, with the result that SOE can "gaze" at players whenever it chooses—for example, when it gazed at Lebarb's theft of Beefcake's property. The third and perhaps most important component is a product or service that people want badly enough to accept the relentless surveillance that comes with it. The product/service SOE is providing is SWG. Article 9 of the EULA states:

We cannot ensure that your private communications and other personally identifiable information will not be disclosed to third parties. For example, we may be forced to disclose information to the government or third parties under certain circumstances, or third parties may unlawfully intercept or access transmissions or private communications. Additionally, we can (and you authorize us to) disclose any information about you to private entities, law enforcement or other government officials as we, in our sole discretion, believe necessary or appropriate to investigate or resolve possible problems or inquiries.

A little further down, the same article states:

You have no expectation of privacy in any such communications and expressly consent to such monitoring of communications you send and receive.

Bentham designed his Panoptic prison as an environment in which the prisoners would largely regulate themselves. But he also designed it in such a way as to keep surveillance costs down: fewer watchers or wardens would mean lower operating costs. In SWG's virtual world, this notion of costs has a flipside: the notion of rewards, which

in fact have been built into the game. The longer your account remains in good standing, the greater the rewards available to you. The rewards themselves are generally regarded as items of value and contribute to your avatar's in-game wealth and social status. Remember here that Beefcake, whose virtual home had items stolen from it, stated in Lebarb's auction post that the veteran reward items—a miniature Stormtrooper and a mini-C3PO—were not his to sell.⁷²

In SWG, the veteran subscribers constitute an economic and social elite. They are the ones who manufacture goods and provide services. They also maintain the guilds and as such can be held accountable for the actions of their members as if they were kingsmen in feudal times. Furthermore, SOE maintains a player "Senate" that represents the players to the game developers. This volunteer Senate, though, has no real power to change anything: I have not found a single article in any SOE document granting this volunteer body any real authority. At best, it seems to provide elevated social status. (Though I would add that I and many others appreciate the efforts of all those who have volunteered serve the SWG community.)

SWG counts on the players themselves to foster predictability and stability.⁷³ This can only happen if the players accept SOE's (panoptic) authority. SOE encourages subscribers to do so by bestowing social capital through programs such as the SWG Senate. The senators tend to be subscribers in long and good standing to SOE products.

⁷² Lizz1212, "Chilastra Galaxy Trade."

⁷³ Sony Online Entertainment (Star Wars Galaxies), "Star Wars Galaxies End User License Agreement," revised August 21, 2006, accessed on April 16, 2009, Article 6. http://starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com/en_US/players/content.vm?page=Policies%20Eula&resource=tos

Both SOE and regular subscribers can view the Senators' forum—which is yet another venue for maintaining a hierarchy and conducting surveillance.

SOE, much like a real-life criminal justice system, has been empowered by subscribers to act as if it were a boundless, all-seeing sovereign. Having achieved control over its subscribers through the EULA, SOE can alter SWG at its whim; it also can (and does) allow subscribers to create their own virtual social justice. The subscriber has few (if any) real means of independently challenging SOE's authority, because the EULA has in effect isolated the company from such challenges. As a company, SOE is empowered to

terminate this Agreement and/or suspend your Account immediately and without notice: (i) if you violate any provision of this Agreement; (ii) if you infringe any third party intellectual property rights; (iii) if we are unable to verify or authenticate any information you provide to us; (iv) if you violate any of the player rules of conduct located at the Game Site or The Station (as defined below in Paragraph 9) rules of conduct located at <http://www.station.sony.com/en/termservice.jsp> (either of which we may amend or supplement from time to time, in our discretion), or (v) if you engage in game play, chat or any player activity whatsoever which we, in our discretion, determine is inappropriate and/or in violation of the spirit of the Game. If we terminate this Agreement or suspend your Account under these circumstances, you will lose access to your Account for the duration of the suspension and/or the balance of any prepaid period without any refund. We may also terminate this Agreement if we decide, in our sole discretion, to discontinue offering the Game, in which case we may provide you with a prorated refund of any prepaid amounts.⁷⁴

Throughout this chapter we have noted the use and role of “interest.” SOE brilliantly protects its interests by co-opting the interests of the subscribers in a number of ways: through the EULA; by designing compliance into the game; and by encouraging

⁷⁴ Ibid. Author's emphases.

player interdependence through guilds and PAs. SOE well realizes what players perhaps don't see as clearly: that only by maintaining hypervigilance—everyone watches everyone else—can the players maintain their long-term stake in the game. It is simply not in a veteran player's interest to allow other players to engage in deviant in-game behaviour. Any player who tolerated it would lose both reputation and social capital.

Yet resistance to SOE's panoptic gaze *is* possible, albeit risky. Chapter 4 discusses ways that SWG players have found to “ghost”—that is, evade SWG's gaze. For a time, the watchers became the watched.

Chapter 4

Resistance and Illicit Markets

ANAKIN: Don't lecture me, Obi-Wan. I see through the lies of the Jedi. I do not fear the dark side as you do. I have brought peace, justice, freedom, and security to my new Empire.

OBI-WAN: Your new Empire?

ANAKIN: Don't make me kill you.

OBI-WAN: Anakin, my allegiance is to the Republic ... to democracy.

ANAKIN: If you're not with me, you're my enemy.

OBI-WAN: Only a Sith Lord deals in absolutes. I will do what I must.

Dialogue from *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*

In this chapter I discuss subscriber/consumer resistance and illicit markets as these have developed within the virtual world of *Star Wars Galaxies* (SWG). I explain how and why players and Gold Pharmers (“pharmers” who work inside MMOs) sell their labour to real-life (RL) managers, who then trade these people’s virtual products for real money. These virtual-to-real transactions are known as real money transfers (RMTs). I will be describing RMTs in the context of George Rigakos’s study, *The New Parapolice*, which details how private security officers evade their management’s observation in order to divert production time away from security/surveillance toward private recreation while on the job. I will also be examining Gary Alan Fine’s analysis of tabletop player associations (PAs) and how social inclusion is used to influence gamers—and to eject from the game those who for whatever reason do not fit in. These people include Pharmers as well as unhappy subscribers whose actions may be violating SOE’s rules or who engage in activities that allow them to operate outside the panoptic gaze of SWG. It

will be shown that players' sentiments and in-game actions often mimic the RL practices of workers such as private security officers. I will also be pointing out that SWG's developers "designed in" various communication methods that may or may not be available to subscribers. At the same time, subscribers have established alternative means of communication that exist outside the panoptic gaze of SWG.

As noted in Chapter 1, Raph Koster, SWG's former Creative Director, has admitted that the game was launched too early. As the developers ("devs") made changes to the game (known at the time of launch as "Publishes" or "Patches" and currently as "Chapters"), a situation arose in which the gains a subscriber had already made under the original rules could be lost, or unfairly heightened, or even "bugged," meaning that something simply no longer worked as intended. When subscribers logged their complaints, SOE often sent back a reply that irritated many: "working as intended." A common concern among players was that too often, one profession or class was being improved, fixed, or balanced, but in ways that "nerfed" their own class or profession. In the gaming community, *nerfing* means, basically, making something less effective.⁷⁵ Nerfs were usually a consequence of SOE's efforts to balance or update the game.

At the time SWG was launched, SOE was not known to be especially communicative with its player base. Sometimes the devs would not explain or even mention in-game changes that could act as nerfs; for example, sometimes they launched "stealth nerfs" (which increased the number of professions a player had to grind in order

⁷⁵ Koopa (forum name), "Nerf," January 3, 2003, accessed on April 14, 2008. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nerf> "Nerf" in essence means "to make worse or weaken, usually in the context of weakening something in order to balance out a game. An example of the term nerf in use, from SWG's, pre-CU past: "They nerfed CM."

to unlock the FS slot) An example of nerfing: Acquiring a Jedi is a major achievement in SWG. During the pre-Combat Upgrade (pre-CU) period of SWG, subscribers could not play a Jedi profession until they had “unlocked” their avatar’s force-sensitive (FS) slot. Yet the players were never instructed how to do so. The players were also told that even if they did “unlock,” it would be very difficult to “grind up” a full-template Jedi (i.e., a fully experienced and completed one) owing to a permadeath system relating to that secretive and highly powerful alpha class. Basically, this meant that if a Jedi died more than three times, the subscriber would have to start his or her Jedi again from scratch. Later, however, the permadeath system was removed from the game.

Even several months after game launch, no Jedi had appeared. The players were given scant clues about how to “unlock” a path to acquiring Jedi status. Neither the SWG game manual nor *Prima’s Official Strategy Guide* (which retailed for C\$34.95) provided any guidance. Some subscribers speculated that the system must be broken, or perhaps it had never been completed and fully implemented. Considering that there were 300,000-plus subscribers at launch, it is hard to believe that not one player had been able to unlock quickly. Some subscribers believed that the Jedi had not been included in the game until long after launch, it was speculated by many in the community to have been bundled with some additional .tre files.⁷⁶

Instead of instructing the players about the Jedi System, the devs encouraged subscribers to travel and experience SWG’s various worlds and to engage in a multitude of virtual activities. Some players thought that owing to the complexity of the game,

⁷⁶ Admriker444 (forum name), “A Complete History of SOE’s Lies,” November 10, 2006, accessed on September 19, 2009. <http://www.rlmemo.com/viewtopic.php?t=424> Admriker444 posted a compilation list of complaints and rumours.

perhaps they needed to act a certain way; some thought that the devs were somehow going to decide which subscribers would be Jedi. One FAQ contended that a Jedi could be played by subscribers who succeeded in unlocking their FS slot and that there was no numerical limit to the number of Jedi in-game per server.⁷⁷ A month after launch, Raph Koster was interviewed by Russell Frushtick of UGO.com.⁷⁸ Koster was asked: “Is there anything that you can do to inhibit your ability to unlock a Force sensitive slot?”, Koster responded “Uh, right now, no.”

Another interesting element that was brought to light during the Frushtick interview related to the ethics of becoming a Jedi in an MMO. The interviewer asked Koster: “So if I go ahead and kill a ton of innocent Jawas, I still have a chance to unlock my Force sensitive slot?” Koster replied that this subject had been talked about at length, and, “hey, you murder innocent Ewoks, you shouldn’t become a Jedi. The problem is ... you might be playing for three years and saying ‘How come I’ve never unlocked my Jedi slot?’ and not know, ‘Well, you shouldn’t have killed those Ewoks two and a half years ago.’ So because of that, we didn’t do that.”⁷⁹

On November 7, 2003, Monika T’Sarn unlocked her FS slot.⁸⁰ In an interview, the galaxy’s first Jedi explained that in order to unlock, she had visited every place or point of interest (POI) in the SWG galaxy. Two examples of POIs in SWG are Sarlac Pit

⁷⁷ SWG Stratics, “Official Jedi FAQ” (ca. 2003), accessed on September 16, 2009. <http://swg.stratics.com/content/intro/faqs/jedifaq.php>

⁷⁸ Russell Frushtick, interview: “Raph Koster, Creative Director of Star Wars Galaxies Exclusive,” ca. Summer 2003, accessed on September 9, 2009. http://www.ugo.com/channels/games/features/starwars_galaxies/raphkoster.asp

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ JEST3R, (forum name), “Congratulations Monika T’Sarn for Unlocking the Force Sensitive Slot!” August 8, 2003, accessed on September 18, 2009. <http://swg.allakhazam.com/story.html?story=2617>

and the Escape Pod used by R2D2 and C3PO in the film *Star Wars: A New Hope*. She never married in-game, and she visited every town on every planet.⁸¹ She also listed the in-game professions she had mastered. The first few players—perhaps ten or so—to unlock their FS slots received a special congratulatory in-game e-mail from LucasArts. Remember well that these events unfolded over several years.

On the subject of Jedi exclusivity, John Smedley, President of SOE, was interviewed by ‘Edge Staff’. To quote ‘Edge Staff’:⁸²

In fact, the mechanism for which it is accomplished (which was secret for a long time) is that a character has to master five specific professions (out of more than 20), and those professions were selected for that character secretly by the game at the moment of creation. The player never knew which specific five would unlock the Jedi path. It was an incredible time sink, to say the least.

After the first Jedi became playable, the secret to unlocking became known. In the fall of 2003, to help players learn which specific professions they needed to master (“grind out”), the devs altered the Jedi Holocron loot item. All the old Holocrons that were in-game were shattered. They became shards as a result of a disturbance in the force—in other words, they were nerfed. After this nerf, the Holocrons that were looted in-game would reveal four of the five hidden professions, leaving a single profession mastery unknown. One Holocron would reveal a single profession at a time. Also, a player did not need to have a Holocron (“holo”) to unlock the FS slot: the Holocrons only gave clues to speed up the process.

⁸¹ Ibid. I heavily paraphrased and excluded much detail as the point of this source is to demonstrate the apparent complexity of unlocking a Jedi FS slot.

⁸² Edge Staff (Reporter not listed), “Star Wars Galaxies,” November 9, 2005, accessed on September 19, 2009. <http://www.next-gen.biz/features/star-wars-galaxies>

The secret was now out. Players who wanted their avatar to join the coveted Jedi class began to grind largely for that goal, forsaking other in-game activities. This period in pre-CU soon became known as the “holo-grind.” Subscribers complained that the holo-grind was harming the player-driven economy. Players would master a profession only to quit it the same day and start a new profession, hoping to unlock thereby. My own view is that the holo-grind kept the player-driven economy superheated by stabilizing the demand for goods and services. Both new and veteran subscribers could participate in the economy by selling low-end grind-quality resources, which would be consumed quickly by eager holo-grinders. I attempted to balance my own grind pursuits with earning some in-game credits (the “credit” is SWG’s unit of currency). But it became difficult to find inexpensive full-time crafters (the professions that make armour, weapons, food, vehicles, and clothes).

However one interprets these developments, the game was being skewed, and its economy was being significantly affected, by hordes of wannabe Jedi grinding their way to the top. And more change was on the way. For those who hadn’t noticed, the EULA as written had already anticipated these in-game developments:

You understand that we may update or otherwise enhance the Game and/or the Software at any time and in doing so incur no obligation to furnish such updates to you pursuant to this Agreement. You understand that online games evolve over time and, accordingly, system requirements to play the Game may change over time.⁸³

⁸³ Sony Online Entertainment [hereafter SOE], TERMS OF USE FOR STAR WARS GALAXIES™: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED™REVISED AUGUST 21, 2006, accessed on September 19, 2009 [hereafter EULA], Article 2.
http://starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com/en_US/players/content.vm?page=Policies%20Eula&resource=tos

It is worth noting that SOE had clearly marked the front of its retail game box with these words: “Game Experience May Change During Online Play.”

It should surprise no one that during the holo-grind period, Jedi began appearing in larger numbers. And as these Jedi advanced in skill and numbers, their “alpha class status” threatened to unbalance the game for those who had not yet unlocked. Simply put, in player-versus-player (PVP) combat, one or two Jedi did not really make for an unfair advantage. Five or six fully templated (i.e., fully experienced) Jedi, however, enjoyed a disproportionate advantage in PVP combat as well as in player-versus-everything (PVE), such as camping, spawn camping, and kill stealing in popular areas.⁸⁴

Significant change was coming. In October 2004, Kurt “Thunderheart” Stangl (“TH” in the official SOE forums), SWG’s Community Relations Manager, posted a thread titled “The Path of the Jedi: Reckoning of Effort.”⁸⁵ It began with a quote from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*:

You must unlearn what you have learned.

⁸⁴ KarmaGhost (forum name), “Spawn Camping,” April 27, 2004, accessed on September 19, 2009.

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=spawn%20camping> “Spawn camping” refers to remaining in one position with the intent to obtain multiple kills. Spawn points are the locations where players re-enter the game. A term related to this one is “kill stealing,” which is when an individual kills or gains looting/reward rights to a nonplaying character (NPC) or player avatar/character that another person was originally engaged in combat with. It is considered bad form to do this. When guild mates complain of kill stealing players, it is not unheard of (if that guild mate is in good standing with his or her PA) that members of his or her guild will show up and attempt to dominate the area just to aggravate the kill stealer into leaving. The logic being used is “what goes around comes around.”

⁸⁵ Thunderheart (forum name), “The Path of the Jedi: Reckoning of Effort,” August 8, 2004, accessed on September 16, 2009.

<http://swgemuserservers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

TH then announced that SOE was going to revamp the Jedi system: “The old path to Jedi was a very long and arduous journey which involved becoming a master in numerous predetermined professions that were specific to each player.” The fast-paced profession grind “was not healthy for the game,” and the rules needed to be altered:

Initially with the old system, you had to unlock 5 hidden master boxes. As the number of Jedi increased on the servers, we increased the required number of hidden boxes. As the number increased, people were completing more and more professions to hit the hidden requirements. Although we will not be giving specific credit for the total number of professions ground, we will be giving credit for how many of the required hidden master boxes you completed. There is a very strong correlation between the raw number of professions that players completed and the number of hidden master boxes people completed. In other words, for those players that acquired 32 master boxes, they by default acquired the necessary 8 master boxes that unlocked their slot. For players that finished 29 or 30 master boxes, they almost certainly acquired 7 of the necessary 8 master boxes that unlocked their slot. This was the case all the way down the scale.⁸⁶

At launch, it had taken only five randomly determined master boxes or completed professions to unlock one’s FS slot. TH now admitted that SOE had just upped the requirement from five professions to eight without notice. In other words, once the secret was out and gamers began focusing on achieving Jedi status as efficiently as possible, SOE had changed the rules. By “keeping us playing,” SOE was ensuring that we “kept on paying.” We were all paying fees to play a game in which the rules had been changed without our knowledge.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

The response to this was immediate. Following TH's original post, several players on the same thread worried out loud that SOE was planning to "gate" the new unlock system. Indeed, that is exactly what SOE did. Certain quests that needed to be unlocked became scheduled according to availability. The forums began to light up with commentary:

"so for anyone who never did the holo grind, we will have to wait to get it because of traffic. why not just keep both systems."
— CharPrime.

"Reckoning player effort has been a challenging task and here is what it boils down to: So someone who unlocked on 6 was more deserving than someone who ground out 26 ???"
—Witnezz

"I unlocked, but as a loyal customer I feel like I was completely cheated by you raising the requirements secretly. No wonder it took my friend 5 professions and me 26 to unlock, with 4 months separating us just because I guessed poorly with my 5th profession and you kept raising the requirements. Shame on you."—Ko-aIri

The negative response to SOE's unannounced changes to the rules for acquiring Jedi status prompted gamers to wonder just how ready for launch SWG had been. The community's overall perception was that SWG had been sent out unfinished. William Vitka, a reporter with CBS News, did a follow-up interview with John Smedley concerning new game enhancements (NGE) to SWG:

One e-mail in particular was a stick of dynamite. Written by an anonymous source, it claimed that Sony Online Entertainment had released unfinished software, and it went on to attack company president John Smedley for an alleged narrow focus on only one thing: exploiting the Star Wars License.

"I'm bent about that one," Smedley admitted in a phone call. "As a person, I have zero problem with criticism. I don't have any problem whatsoever with our customers complaining. I think it's perfectly legitimate, and I think it's perfectly legitimate for you guys to have a mailbag with hate mail for Star Wars Galaxies. But

of all the mail, that's the one that bothered me because it's filled with a bunch of BS."

"There has never been a release by Sony Online Entertainment that has been incomplete," Smedley said.⁸⁷

Whatever Smedley's denials, Dan Rubenfield, a former dev, chose to "set the record straight" two years later by having a "well versed and intelligent discourse" on that topic. Such public access to the backstage of game development is rare. Anyone associated with SWG seldom commented outside the company forums on matters pertaining to the game. It was also rare that the subscribers got to hear from one of the lead people behind the curtain. In his blog, Rubenfield admitted: "Hell, I implemented the original Jedi System in 2 weeks after we launched. Not because it was how we wanted it, but because we had 2 weeks to do it".⁸⁸ Subscribers were outraged.

THE CREDIT DUPE

Though most gamers realized that SOE monitored subscribers in-game, they were quite unprepared for the level of surveillance that resulted from what came to be known as the "2004 Credit Dupe." The panoptic architecture of SOE labeled innocent players as

⁸⁷ William Vitka, "In 'Galaxies' Far, Far Away ..." February 22, 2006, accessed on September 20, 2009.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/02/21/tech/gamecore/main1335511.shtml>

⁸⁸ Troneas (forum name), "OM NOM NOM" August 31, 2009, accessed on September 20, 2009.

http://mmofringe.com/index.php?option=com_joobb&view=topic&topic=565&Itemid=55

Note: This is a re-post "IN WHICH I TRY TO SPEAK HONESTLY ABOUT HISTORY" of the original version of Dan Rubenfield's blog dated June 12, 2008. The Rubenfield blog can be read here at this link.

<http://rubenfield.com/?p86>

Note: If you are interested in learning further about game design industry I would like to recommend this blog.

violators of the EULA, which led to the wrongful banning of dozens of subscribers. This demonstrated the limits of the system's capacity to police the galaxy and provide social surveillance.

On or about August 17, 2004, some 200 unscrupulous players on the Intrepid server discovered an "exploit" in the game code. An exploit is a flaw in the computer code that allows someone to do something that is otherwise not permitted. Some exploits (or sploitiz) are less serious than others. The 2004 Credit Dupe was significant in that it allowed these players to illegally create or "dupe" approximately 550 billion in-game credits. The goal of some of the dupers was to harm the player-driven economy of the server by gathering enough money to purchase goods well above the established value, thereby causing dramatic inflation in virtual prices.⁸⁹ Before SOE could seize the in-game credits, some of the dupers began buying virtual goods, paying for services, and randomly tipping or giving away the money to innocent players.

In response, SOE banned everyone who had come into contact with the duped virtual credits. SOE explained: "We have full and complete logs of every transaction."⁹⁰

When SOE banned everyone linked to these financial transactions, innocent players found their accounts blocked. The player-driven economy on the Intrepid server (and other servers) became distorted, so afraid were the players that they might receive ill-gotten credits. (To protect myself, I played on another server and stopped selling in-game resources for over a week.)

⁸⁹ Lamech, "Star Wars Galaxies: Credit Dupe details in Full," August 25, 2004, accessed on September 21, 2009. <http://swg.warcry.com/news/view/28660-Star-Wars-Galaxies-Credit-dupe-details-in-full>

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, September 21, 2009.

Meanwhile, on the Intrepid server, grievances against SOE's response mounted. Friends of the wrongfully banned began protesting in message forums. They even staged a now famous in-game protest demanding that their friends be allowed to return. Any "lag" in a virtual game causes everything within it to slow down. "Spamming" the game by sending out repeatable messages generates lag issues that may interfere with the operations of the server or prevent nonprotesting players from enjoying the game. In the case of SWG, the server as a result of this protest was having difficulty processing the information being generated by the number of players in such close proximity. And, of course, this was the intent of the protesters. The protests created a policing crisis. SOE threatened to shut down the server entirely. Over a hundred protesters from around the world could have even crashed the server due to lag and many others looked on with curiosity. Once the commercial rules governing exchange collapsed, once it became almost impossible to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate trade, SOE thrashed about in an attempt to restore order. Using powers that the RL police would surely envy, the CSR tried to quell the protest by "kicking out players from the game," teleporting or relocating protestors to areas in-game, and sending players into virtual oblivion where they "couldn't move."⁹¹

Hunt and Wickham have described how one might theorize such developments according to Foucault's (*Discipline and Punish*, 1995) notion of power and resistance as a "technical component of governance heavily involved in the fact that governance is always subject to politics". Employing Foucault's imagery of the "counter stroke", a

⁹¹ EEEmpereor (forum name / in-game private forum message), "Old Credit Dupe Protest Story," March 10, 2006, accessed on March 24, 2006. This source is from an old-forum private message in 2006. Note: Some Paraphrasing.

metaphor with powerful mechanical connotations, they argue that “power can only ever make a social machinery run imperfectly or incompletely”.⁹² Even in the Star Wars universe, this same message is conveyed by Princess Leia to Grand Moff Tarkin (*A New Hope*) when she states: “The more you tighten your grip the more star systems will slip through your fingers”.

The players succeeded in extracting the following response from SOE:

Much of the discussion on this has centered around the possibility that innocents were being banned unfairly. In a case like this, our first priority is to suspend accounts, and freeze the movement of the duped credits in order to limit damage to the game economy. There is always a chance that in doing so, players who received the credits unawares will find their accounts suspended. This is why we have an appeals process—so that each individual case can be examined by customer services after the fact.⁹³

The same post stated that 15% of the appealing accounts were deemed to have not been involved in the dupe. SOE restored each of these accounts back to active and credited each player for the playing time lost. Finally, SOE stated that each of the wrongfully banned would receive an apology.⁹⁴ This account of the 2004 Credit Dupe demonstrates that tensions were rising between SOE and subscribers, who were beginning to challenge and resist SOE by organizing both within SWG’s panopticon and outside it. A key point from this example is that though SOE would post a wealth of development information and dev chats, publish documents, and provide information for further planned SWG and other SOE expansions and products, forum members were

⁹² Hunt and Wickham, *Foucault And Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance* (London: Pluto Press, 1994). 83.

⁹³ Lamech, “Star Wars Galaxies: Credit Dupe Details in Full.”

⁹⁴ Some of the original protesting information posted online is no longer available. My original term paper has much more information regarding the protest.

reposting specific messages, copying them to blogs and third-party websites, in order to overcome the heavy moderation that occurred on official forums. Even today, message threads that are not supportive of SOE or in violation of the EULA can be locked or deleted, and the original poster can be suspended or even banned.

The 2004 Credit Dupe fiasco promoted a virtual protest that forced concessions from SOE. It also accelerated alternative or “heterodox” (*à la* Foucault) discourses outside SOE’s control.

THE WoW EFFECT

On November 23, 2004, the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* (WoW) launched. This new game had a dramatic impact on the MMORPG industry, in that it offered originality, massive virtual places, a simple design, excellent customer service (both in-game and out), and unprecedented polish (i.e., lack of bugs). Before WoW was launched, SWG had been the biggest game in town, and SWG’s in-game bugs had been accepted by gamers. This lack of polish was all that many players had ever known.

WoW set a new standard for MMO development and service. To this day, new game releases are judged against WoW, and games that do not meet its standard either lose subscribers or fail to attract them. People who have played WoW seem to have less tolerance for poor game design or customer service. After playing a game that actually works as opposed to “working as intended,” there is little incentive to pay a subscription for a faulty game. On the heels of WoW, subscribers to SWG became increasingly upset with SOE over bugs and poor communication and began leaving in large numbers to try its competitor. To some extent, this can be explained by the general tendency in the

MMO community to try out the latest, greatest thing. Indeed, entire guilds will move from game to game, because players want to be where their friends are. Many people maintain primary and secondary game accounts. (I currently have accounts with both a WoW and SWG, though I am not playing either at the moment. These games are mainly where my friends are.)

WoW, which was developed by Blizzard Entertainment, has a very different design and social ambience than SWG. In WoW, you never need to listen to entertainers in order to heal or get “buffed,” as you do in SWG. During a large PVP battle in SWG, you can find yourself in “tell hell” with someone of the other faction. “Hate tells” are part of SWG bravado. In SWG, it can be fun to try to get a rise out of someone, referred to as “smack talk.” In WoW, members of the Horde and the Alliance (WoW’s two factions) are unable to send messages back and forth, which cuts down on smack talk.

In any case, a number of frustrated subscribers permanently abandoned SWG for WoW. At its height of popularity and giving the best latitude (for the sake of argument) in account estimates, SWG may have had 450,000 subscribers, with more than a million game units sold between 2003 and September 2009. At this writing, WoW has more than *ten million* subscribers, which makes it the 600-pound gorilla among MMOs.

WoW’s success has generated an industry-wide shift known as “the WoW effect.” In essence, subscribers have come to expect a highly polished game with superior customer service for a reasonable fee. Many SWG players contend that SOE and LA have tried to reconfigure SWG as a WoW-like game, abandoning existing subscribers in order to pursue a larger client base. From that perspective, the Combat Upgrade and the

NGE have been attempts to rethink, redesign, and superimpose on an existing game a completely new gaming experience to attract new subscribers.

On April 27, 2005, the much anticipated Combat Upgrade (CU) was released. It was not well balanced in terms of game play. This led to further tweaks by the devs. Again as in pre-CU, as soon as they fixed one profession, players would move on to the next, and this continued lead to a Flavour-of-the-Month (FOTM) game culture. The devs began rushing in to fix “broken” professions, balancing the combat system by making the game more intuitive, by including countermoves, and so forth. Soon enough, divisions began to appear in the subscriber base between those who preferred the “pre-CU” SWG and those who liked the Combat Upgrade. To quote Thunderheart:

The goal of the Combat Upgrade is to make the combat game play feel more like Star Wars, play more strategically, move at a faster pace and ultimately a more fun and engaging experience for players of all levels, from the veteran player to the new player jumping in for the first time.⁹⁵

Players criticized the CU for no longer being SWG, but a new game entirely:

“Now they [SOE] promise months of testing and tuning “in live” they know it’s not ready, and they expect the customers (that remain, many of us have canceled multiple accounts, and thats just those that have *seen* it. and only a small percentage of the general playerbase goes to the test center, it’s volenter. we do that because we love the game we have.”—Loki⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Kurt Stangl, (forum name Thunderheart), “Combat Upgrade is coming to Test Center,” March 29, 2005, accessed on February 7, 2007.
http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=dev_archive&message.id=106826&format...

See note 58 (Chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

⁹⁶ Loki (forum name), “Galaxies: Your Say Part II,” April 27, 2005, accessed on September 22, 2009.
http://www.theforce.net/videogames/story/galaxies_your_say_part_ii_91674.asp

“First off, the game is NOT Star Wars, but more like a cheap *Everquest* [another MMO] rip off. Our characters are nerfed and changed dramatically. I worked my rear end off to get xp [experience points] to build my character up and it is all for naught. Many vets of the game will be gone and so will people with numerous accounts on SWG. It seems that SOE is not interested in player feedback or the opinions of its customers. Also, I think a majority of their customer base has been alienated and turned away from the game because of this bonehead CU. Another thing is: Where is LucasArts? Is SOE giving them false feedback to keep them happy? There are many people who chose to play SWG just because it is not like *Everquest* or *WOW*. Star Wars is a unique universe created by a man with a vision. If this is SOE’s interpretation of the Star Wars Universe, then they have failed Mr. Lucas.”—William R. Bennett⁹⁷

“My main point is that SOE could not possibly know what the majority want because there is no way they can gather an honest opinion from the entire player base.

People against the CU seem to think SOE can please everyone but with such a large and varied player base how can this be possible?

Personally I believe they are doing what is best for the game and they have the full support of myself and many others.”

—Rob C⁹⁸

“Several of my posts have been deleted from the SWG forums. Those of which have asked for specific details, on what is going on and why? In fact one that I posted just yesterday was deleted and it was only requesting that the SWG team look at the professions section of the forums to get more information. I thought this game was created for the community? I thought that it was created so we could live the Star Wars Fantasy? Most players liked it for what it was, and only requested that the in live version be fixed.”—K.B. Sargent⁹⁹

Sargent, then, was trying to provide feedback, only to have his posts deleted by SOE’s forum moderators (“mods”). As I have stated in past chapters, SOE has incredible control over its subscription base by virtue of the EULA, which co-opts players into

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ K.B. Sargent, “Galaxies: Your Say Part II.”

acting according to SOE's wishes. Because Sargent felt powerless to get his point across, he posted his messages beyond the reach and power of the panoptic gaze. His posts on the official boards were deleted within days, but I was still able to find them several years later because they had been posted elsewhere.

After the comment section of "Galaxies: Your Say Part II," Mark from TheForce.net states:

For those that are interested, a Galaxies petition is now online. As for this post, nearly 8,000 people have signed it so far.¹⁰⁰

Handsnake posted a message on the official SOE forums titled "Combat Upgrade—An Analysis of a Design Variance."¹⁰¹ In it he stated that he had "tested the CU since Beta and [had] been following the CU since publish 7 ... a number of unexpected problems with the implementation of the CU" that run contrary to published accounts had been made by SOE. He believed that there was "one central item" that caused problems with the CU: "Putting a 'level' system on top of a skill based system, [which was] not in the original CU documentation released on 03/31/05, and data from the public statements of sources inside the CU 'sandbox' scheme."¹⁰²

Before the CU, SWG did not have levels. Some players contend that the level system was in the old profession mastery. SWG, during the pre-CU period, was generally thought to lack content. The players found ways to amuse themselves, such as large-scale open PVP battles. Before the CU, what content there was could be enjoyed by anyone.

¹⁰⁰ Mark, "Galaxies: Your Say Part II."

¹⁰¹ Handsnake (forum name), "Combat Upgrade—An Analysis of a Design Variance," April 29, 2005, accessed on April 30, 2005.

<http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/board/print?board.id=cudiscussiontemp&message.id=2>

See note 58, (Chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

¹⁰² Ibid.

For example, on the pre-CU, SWG world of Tatooine, there was a popular POI called Fort Tusken. This fortress was and still is in the current SWG NGE system and is populated by the Sand People as seen in the Star Wars movies. During the pre-CU period, I would often grind out my in-game time there with my completed avatar, as would many others. But after the CU introduced levels to the game, you could no longer earn experience points at the fort because the Tusken Raiders and Sand People nonplaying characters (NPCs) were too low-level to award experience points. In this way, socially valuable in-game content became economically useless. Handsnake concludes by stating that the CU that went live was “a cheap easy and BAD fix that made more problems than they understood.”¹⁰³

At SOE, there was an exodus of developers and other staff who had followed a particular SWG philosophy pre-CU. In response to competition from WoW, SOE soon acquired a “successor team mentality” that encouraged the replacement devs to “put their own stamp on the operating system.”¹⁰⁴ In response to a repost of a message about the CU by SOE’s president, John Smedley, S. Hugh Campbell, a software engineer, responded by speculating that the real reason behind its introduction related to contracts between SOE and LA (LucasArts).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Handsnake, “Combat Upgrade.”

¹⁰⁴ Mahou Meido Meganecko, “And the Spin Goes On,” June 5, 2005, accessed on September 22, 2009. <http://bridgebunnies.com/?m=200505>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. On the subject of the SOE and LA partnership, much of the relationship is not well understood. For example, originally, you could pay for your SWG subscription by credit card or by prepaid 60-day game cards. Over time, though, the supply of game cards has dwindled and they are no longer available. Subscriber complaints about SOE for not offering game cards are not justified. LucasArts, not SOE, handles (or handled) game cards. Moreover, I doubt that SOE would not want prepaid game cards made available as a simple means of maintaining access to the game. Yet SOE optically suffers overwhelming blame, whereas LA’s staff tends to be rather quiet.

In response to the upheaval in the player base, Smedley (forum name “Smed”) posted on the official SWG forums his assessment of the CU. It is worth quoting at length:

We realize that the recent Combat Upgrade has caused quite a stir. Yes, we’ve seen the petition. Yes, we’re reading your emails very carefully.. In fact I’ve responded to many of you personally. From our perspective the Combat Upgrade was a crucial thing to do for the long term health of the game. In order to make the experience in SWG more diverse and to breathe new life into this game we felt it was important for us to entirely overhaul the current system and make sure that it’s balanced properly. Are we finished? Not by a longshot... by doing this what we’ve effectively done is to provide a new baseline to add a lot of new content into the game in a very short time, and to make sure that the professions really mean something in the game. We recognize there are problems that have arisen from this, and what I’d like to ask your help in doing is to target these problems so that we can knock them down very quickly. As you’ve seen in the last few days, the team is working tirelessly towards fixing any problems that have arisen.. and with your help we’re confident we can get the rest of them taken care of as well.

Please understand that we love this game too.. our goal wasn’t to upset the existing userbase.. but we do recognize that changing a game does inherently mean some people aren’t going to like that change. What we’re trying to do is to insure that we can accomplish a lot of what you’ve all been asking to do (things like Galactic Civil War) in really cool and meaningful ways.. and frankly speaking, we just couldn’t do that with the old combat system in place.

What would really help us is to give us ideas on how we can improve the new system and cool things you would like to see us do in the near term. We aren’t going back to the old system, but with your help I’m confident in a few weeks you’re going to feel this was the right call. Obviously you are our customers, and you pay the bills around here... we’re trying to make changes that are going to make your experience better in the long run. Please bear with us while we make that effort, and give us a little time to respond and address your concerns.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ John Smedley, (forum name Smed), “Combat Upgrade,” May 3, 2005, accessed on February 3, 2007.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=generalgame&message.id=85&page=1&fo>

See note 58 (chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

Smedley's post signaled a shift in strategic management. For the first time, SOE's president was communicating directly to consumers in a meaningful way, removing layers of corporate bureaucracy. By this time, subscriber dissent and resistance to SOE design changes had reached unprecedented levels. Smedley was now admitting that the CU had caused a "serious stir" in the community, and he seemed quite aware that players were communicating outside SWG's official forums. Here he was laying out his goals and vision for SWG while attempting to woo back the player base by asking for feedback. It is important here to understand that the panopticon's power lies in the rewards it is able to provide for good conduct. But this in turn relies on perpetual surveillance. When SWG's player base left the game, they left the panopticon's confines. Sanctions no longer meant anything to them because the rewards were worthless to them. Indeed, the CU had undermined years of good conduct, dutiful grinding, guild building, virtual economic gains, and social status. As a result, SOE had lost control and a revolt was in full swing because players no longer had a stake in conformity. By launching the CU and fundamentally changing the game, SOE had undermined the very panoptic construct that had granted it power. Now, to lure back subscribers, Smedley was promising that the CU design would make it simpler to develop and launch future exciting content, such as the popular idea of a galactic civil war (GCW).¹⁰⁷

A former Armoursmith Correspondent who had allegedly been dismissed because he had asked players to e-mail the devs after they refused to address the many issues regarding the CU took up Smedley on his public request for feedback, by posting a long

¹⁰⁷ I and others from in-game have been able to have e-mail exchanges with John Smedley. When he was not able to answer a question I had, he included SWG game developers in our discussion.

message on Smedley's own message thread. His reply worth reproducing at length.¹⁰⁸

SOE's president had asked for feedback and was now getting an earful:

if you guys had taken the time to listen to our feedback from the beginning, and include players in the alpha testing phase of the CU instead of letting us be alpha proof readers we would never be having this conversation, and SWG mighta been salvaged. Instead you gave us the shaft, you took over a 100 of the top community members of this game and you told them that you don't need their help, don't want it, and you know what you're doing. Then you foolheartedly plowed through us, our tons of complaints, huge amounts of outrage, and pushes this to live *EARLY!* That my friend is bad play, very very bad play, and a horrible business move. You told your customers you don't care what they want, and now you are shocked when they leave in mass droves? And it took you two weeks after the implementation to finally realize that we hate it.

Now you expect us to what? Wait another year and 9 months for another fix? A fix to your broken attempt at fixing the game that will inevitably be a failed fix. I spent 7 months trying to represent the armorsmith community to provide feedback for your company, and I was given the shaft more times than I can count, ignored more times than I wish, and felt like screaming at a brick wall when the CU was on test center and things needed to be fixed.

And btw, I'm glad I got canned trying to raise issues to my profession, you screwed us over and your pompouse developers couldn't take 30 seconds out of their busy schedules to acknowledge we were even existing. Then you go and ban me for 7 days because I couldn't keep my opinions about how bad this CU is to myself. I hope you are proud of what you have done, you have killed my beloved game and replaced it with garbage that won't last 6 months. Good game devs, good game.¹⁰⁹

The former Armoursmith Correspondent's response, however, only hints at the outrage of SWG's most passionate subscribers and volunteer correspondents. Outside the

¹⁰⁸ William Ellis, "Galaxies: Your Say," April 26, 2005, accessed on September 24, 2009. http://www.theforce.net/latestnews/story/Galaxies_Your_Say_91672.asp?format=1

¹⁰⁹ Osuss (forum name), "Combat Upgrade," May 3, 2005, accessed on February 3, 2007. <http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=generalgame&message.id=85&page=1> &fo Osuss edited his post to copy the former armorsmith correspondent's message to the first page for best coverage.

See note 58 (Chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

game's community forums, subscribers began using online retail product listings of SWG to further express their anger. One irate subscriber posted an eBay auction, selling a copy of his SWG client for one pound sterling. But in the product description he stated, using capital letters (which mean that the poster is yelling):

THIS GAME IS THE WORST THING EVER, DO NOT BUY, DO NOT EVEN CONSIDER BUYING THIS LOT TO ACTUALLY PLAY. IF YOU LIKE STARWARS LOOK FOR ANOTHER GAME.¹¹⁰

The description goes on to describe the seller's outrage. Even though the seller could easily be identified, he had no fear of reprisal because he had given up on the game—he could not be threatened with loss of privileges, since he no longer wanted them.

At the time of the CU publish, the final Star Wars movie, *Stars Wars: Revenge of the Sith* was nearing release. Arguably, this was not lost on SOE and LucasArts, who would release two expansions in 2005. The first was “Rage of the Wookiees,” which allowed players to explore the wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk. The second was “Trials of Obi-Wan,” featuring the planet of Mustafar, the volcanic world where Obi-wan fights Anakin, as seen in *Revenge of the Sith*.

“Rage of the Wookiees” and “Trials of Obi-Wan” featured a more “directed” landscape—that is, players were guided through a large amount of content. Moreover, this expansion offered players valuable loot that the crafting professions had not manufactured. Indeed, some of the rewards were of better quality than what the crafters could make. This adjustment to the game conflicted with the interests of the crafting

¹¹⁰ Mikeimitatingsteve (seller information name), “Star Wars Galaxies READ BEFORE YOU BUY,” April 30, 2005, accessed on April 30, 2005. <http://cgi.ebay.co.uk/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=8189063527> See also Appendix E.

professions—though not with those of players who were happy to avoid paying the crafters’ prices. This move by the devs was controversial with many subscribers—and still is— because it undermined the player-run economy.

Just after the Spring 2005 publish of the CU, Steve Butts of IGN Entertainment interviewed SOE and LA staff. Julio Torres represented LA; Dallas Dickinson and Debysue Wolfscale represented Sony.¹¹¹ May 5, 2005, the day of the interview, happened to be the release date of the “Rage of the Wookiees” expansion. Toward the end of the interview, the following exchange took place:

IGNPC: Maybe I’m just cynical but the suspicion seems to be that you have a big movie and an expansion coming out soon. It’s natural for people to wonder if there’s a relationship between those.

Dallas Dickinson: We know that the combat upgrade is something that is really controversial. It’s causing both the players and us a whole lot of pain right now. My response to that, from the opposite of cynical, is, “Do you think we’d be crazy enough to do something that has a potentially negative impact right in front of a huge cash cow?” We’re doing something that we think is right for the game at the right time, because this is the way forward for the game. I’d love to know how we’re trying to capitalize in a cynical way by making this change right now.¹¹²

“Trials of Obi-Wan” was released on November 1, 2005. As time went on, the CU became more stable in terms of game play and the servers appeared to recover subscribers, though not to pre-CU levels. After the announcement of “Trials” in August 2005 and nearer to its launch, more people came back to SWG to grind (i.e., prepare) for

¹¹¹ Steve Butts, “Star Wars Galaxies: Sony Online and LucasArts offer their thoughts on the recent combat upgrade,” May 5, 2005, accessed on September 22, 2009.

<http://pc.ign.com/articles/610/610552p1.html>

¹¹² Ibid.

the expansion. This was an exciting time. People had become more accustomed to the CU, and plenty of new content was on the way.

On November 2, 2005, one the day after “Trials” went on sale via digital download, Julio Torres, a LucasArts Producer, announced the New Game Enhancements (NGE) that would replace the CU. Two weeks later on November 15, the NGE was launched.

NEW GAME ENHANCEMENTS

I felt a great disturbance in the Force ... as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced. I fear something terrible has happened.

Ben Kenobi

In his letter to the community, LucasArts’s producer Julio Torres stated that the developers had been working with player feedback, focus groups, and other research and had concluded that the overall game did not “feel like a heroic Star Wars experience” because it had “a steep learning curve [and] no clearly defined path of advancement or adventure.” He continued:

Many of our fans who bought the game did not see enough *Star Wars* style early-on and ultimately left our world. It is our goal to change this and improve the experience for all players.

We are introducing a series of game enhancements to *Star Wars Galaxies* this month that include both significant enhancements to the live game as well as a completely redesigned experience for new players. The primary areas of focus include combat and profession and character development.”

In other words, the game was being changed *again*. Given that the outrage over the CU was fresh in the minds of the player base, Torres made the following the crux of his announcement:

Changing a live game is never easy. We realize that players do not like to have their experience altered. These enhancements will take some getting used to and for that reason we lined-up some incentives for the current players to enjoy as our thanks for your loyalty to our game.¹¹³

Only months earlier, in April 2005, SWG subscribers had faced their first extensive revamp of the game when the CU launched. Indeed, subscribers who had bought a digital download expansion (Article 5 of the EULA states that “all fees are prepaid and are nonrefundable”) would now learn that a new system of game mechanics would replace the CU.¹¹⁴

Kurt “Thunderheart” Stangl (“TH”) and Tiggs (forum name), SWG’s Director of Community Relations, posted and amalgamated much prerelease information into a larger and more comprehensive general FAQ regarding the NGE.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Julio Torres (forum name JulioLEC), “Letter to the Community,” November 2, 2005, accessed on September 25, 2009.

<http://swgemusers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

This is a complete capture of the original post that Torres made on the original SOE official community forums.

¹¹⁴ EULA, Article 5, accessed on September 25, 2009. The current EULA is not the version in place at the time of the NGE. However, the non refunding item in the article was in place at the time.

¹¹⁵ Kurt Stangl, (forum name Thunderheart), “*STAR WARS GALAXIES* NEW GAME ENHANCEMENTS GENERAL FAQ v1.2” November 11, 2005, accessed on March 18, 2010.

<http://www.swgemu.com/archive/scrapbookv51/data/20070205185635/index.html>

For nostalgic enjoyment of the readers, I would like to place Tiggs signature here. This always made me smile.

“~~Do not meddle in the affairs of dragons for thou art crunchy and go well with ketchup!!~~

The first glimpse that SWG gamers had of the NGEs was in a tutorial in which new players learned about the game on a space station before leaving for the game server by boarding the *Millennium Falcon*, the ship owned and piloted by Han Solo and Chewbacca.¹¹⁶ On November 4, Tiggs started a message thread asking for first impressions from those playing.¹¹⁷ Subscribers reported that the game had bugs and that players could not imagine seeing it “live”—it was not ready. Perhaps this is foreshadowing, but one poster, Slartibartfast09601, stated: “So far Han sums it up ‘This place is gonna blow!’”

The player base became increasingly enraged over what was seen as a bait-and-switch by SOE regarding “Trials of Obi-Wan.” That expansion had been billed as content for all professions. However, as more information about the NGE came out, it became clear that people who had bought the expansion and had played any of the 30 plus professions (would be down to nine “iconic” professions) would encounter difficulties. Many subscribers owned several game accounts and thus had purchased multiple copies of the expansion. On November 11, Brenlo Bixiebopper (SOE’s Director of Global Community Relations) stated that if the expansion had been purchased before November 3, SOE would offer a refund.¹¹⁸

By November 10, Tiggs was no longer employed by SOE, no reason given. It is assumed in the SWG community, however, that she was terminated after making a forum

¹¹⁶ I personally did not try the tutorial.

¹¹⁷ Tiggs (forum name), “First Impressions—For those playing only please!” November 4, 2005, accessed on September 25, 2009.

<http://swgemuserservers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

¹¹⁸ Baigs’ (forum name), “If you want a REfund for TOOW Here you go,” November 11, 2005, accessed on September 26, 2009.

<http://intrepid.galaxyforums.com/index.php?showtopic=18557> This is a reprint of SOE’s post.

post that sympathized with the players and in which she questioned SOE's implementation of the NGE. She has since made a personal blog and moved on.¹¹⁹ Her first blog post generated 546 mostly positive comments. Meanwhile, the relationship between the subscribers and SOE was becoming more and more toxic and confrontational. Tiggs, a former SOE community public relations person, can be reimagined as switching sides and coming over to the subscribers while enjoying public support. She went from being a warden in the service of the panopticon to watching "the machine."¹²⁰

In terms of tabletop role players, SOE is the dungeon master (DM) or game master (GM), and the subscribers are the players who sit around the table. Fine tells us that game referees have two tasks: to ensure that the scenario continues for the enjoyment of the players, and to control the group members.¹²¹ For an example, he describes a group that had a member who was acting immaturely and who needed to be disciplined:

"Finally Jerry says, sharply, 'You know those guys want to have some fun, too.' Berry

¹¹⁹ Tiggs (forum name), "The answer is not always what it seems," November 11, 2005, accessed on September 26, 2009.

<http://ladytiggs.livejournal.com>

¹²⁰ Ja'gg (forum name), "A movie by Ja'gg," date of film posting not given, accessed on September 26, 2009. <http://www.grapheine.com/bombaytv/playuk.php?id=199197> Additionally, we see a degree of fanfare for those former SOE employees who engage and talk to the subscribers after they leave SOE. One subscriber even made a very funny brief movie about Tiggs resisting SOE. The film demonstrates what happens when one is no longer docile from the effects of working in a panoptic environment. Moreover, as Tiggs was not employed, the fiduciary relationship between employer and employee had obviously been broken. The film depicts a heroic Tiggs disregarding her job references by literally cutting her ties to SOE while serving as a symbol of subscriber resistance.

¹²¹ Gary Alan Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 14. This is a paraphrasing of Fine's work.

continues to fool around and Jerry tells him to ‘knock it off or we won’t let you play.’ Finally Barry does quiet down.¹²²

In SWG, the players had grudgingly tolerated the Jedi stealth nerf, numerous bugs, and the general lack of communication. After the CU, however, and especially after the NGE, the subscribers would no longer “quiet down.” What was the point of being quiet? SOE’s authority and power to run the game for its subscribers was disintegrating—it was losing its control over the players. And this was happening because all of the social capital accrued through online avatar development, all the social networking based on an existing virtual economic structure, and (perhaps most decisively) all the hundreds of hours of labour time and grinding invested by subscribers, were being systematically betrayed as a result of the changes that SOE was making to the game. No longer did the players have an ideological or material stake in conformity. As a consequence, a general revolt had broken out.

When the NGE finally went live, subscribers felt keenly their impact on in some cases more than two years’ worth of game play. At that point, the player base simply melted down. Pre-NGE, Jedi grind had been a lot of work. The task of unlocking one’s FS slot had been hampered by new “gating” rules as well as by stealth nerfs that increased the number of professions one was required to grind. The new village quests further expanded this grind by increasing the number of experience points required. To unlock your FS slot in order to become a Jedi, you also had to complete six skill trees. All of this meant that the new system had rendered almost worthless the monotonous grinding that so many subscribers had already endured.

¹²² Ibid., 115.

When the NGE went live, the much coveted Jedi became playable as a starter profession. Anyone playing SWG after the NGE went live could simply select to be “respec” Jedi. Also, the post-NGE Jedi were dramatically weaker and no longer enjoyed Alpha Class standing. The subscribers who had endured an incredible grind to become a Jedi flared with resentment against the players who had decided to become Jedi simply by changing professions. As a consequence, Jedi turned against Jedi.

In the game’s earliest days, some pre-NGE Jedi accounts were selling on eBay for over a thousand dollars. In other words, in-game social status was not the only issue—the NGE had caused the monetary value of Jedi to crash. Now that grinding was no longer necessary to become one, Jedi had become the heaviest played profession, and oversupply had extinguished demand.

Recognizing that it had undermined established systems of distinction Pre-NGE Jedi could choose between two types of Elder Jedi robes and two types of special lightsaber crystal. The robes granted the Elder Jedi greater advantages in combat; the lightsaber crystals allowed higher damage bonuses in combat than any other crystal. These Elder Jedi could also adorn themselves with a special “title” stating their rank, which secured them higher status relative to the post-NGE Jedi. Opinions were deeply divided over this change.

Personally, I was somewhat annoyed by these changes. However, many of my friends had always wanted to become a Jedi, build a lightsaber, swing it around, and hear that very cool *snap-hiss* as the weapon activated. So I wasn’t overly bothered. Before the NGE, most players whose goal was to unlock the Jedi prepared well in advance by stocking up resources for constructing and maintaining their lightsabers. It really

aggravated me and other pre-NGE players to see hordes of “respec” Jedi panhandling for lightsaber-making resources in their in-game robes. (NGE Jedi, like other professions, are automatically given in-game items such as robes as they progress.) There was a lot of sentiment over this, as in “Look ... you got your free Jedi, so the least you can do is figure out how to get your own supplies!” Players who panhandle are generally detested. On the other side of the ledger, the game’s supply-and-demand economics meant that in-game lightsaber resources went up in value.

The in-game bugs and midstream rule changes, along with general and deep resentment of the NGE and the perceived bait-and-switch tactics allegedly involved in the “Trials of Obi-Wan” expansion, devastated the subscriber base. On November 17, 2005, Michael Lopez of GameSpy.com interviewed Julio Torres of LucasArts about the controversial changes to SWG:

GameSpy: What about refunds? Will any be available to players who have, say, 10 months left on a year-long subscription and no longer want to play the “new” Galaxies?

JT: No.

GameSpy: Is the possibility of establishing pre-NGE servers out of the question?

JT: Yes.¹²³

Stratics.com hosted a poll question: “Do you like the new game changes, NGE?”

The response was 87.11% no, 12.89% yes.¹²⁴ A few days earlier, in a separate message

¹²³ Michael Lopez, “Star Wars Galaxies NGE Q&A: The Readers Respond,” November 17, 2005, accessed on September 26, 2009. <http://pc.gamespy.com/pc/star-wars-galaxies-2005/667893p2.html>

thread about the same poll, IgescaStorm had stated that SOE viewed the unhappy subscribers as a “vocal minority” and that the non scientific poll had registered more than 2,000 votes for “no” against 400 for “yes.”¹²⁵ The second person to respond to the original poster (OP) was Joel “Raijinn” of SOE’s Community Relations, who stated:

Just as an FYI, that poll is not exactly accurate, you can re-vote at any time from the same IP address and you do not have to log in to vote.

The thread went back and forth from there with members debating the accuracy of voting online and how secure the results could be. In response to a poster, Raijinn stated:

Incorrect, I was re-voting quite a bit last night myself.

DrTurma:

“It is only one vote per IP, DEVS are trying to lie to us once again.”

Raijinn:

I suppose they put the IP lock on today *shrug* fact was I was able to spam votes yesterday so it’s not exactly accurate.

¹²⁴ IgescaStrom (forum name), “Stratics poll nulled,” November 21, 2005, accessed on February 3, 2007.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=swggpdiscussion%message.id=62960&page>

See note 58 (chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

¹²⁵ IgescaStrom (forum name), “The vocal minority (stratics.com poll),” November 17, 2005, accessed on February 3, 2007.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=swggpdiscussion&message.id=25107&page...>

See note 58 (chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

MillaMerani:

Hmm, so you admit you wanted to manipulate the vote?☺

Raijinn:

Even if I could spam yes I'm sure there was a handful of folks spamming no. This could have gone on for an unknown amount of time up until this point.

I have no doubt that some subscribers voted several times. The point is the players were not in any real position of power. SOE held all control over its subscribers' years of investment in the game. The real damage to SOE here was that a staff member was admitting to participation in an attempt to quell dissent.

In the first message thread on this subject, "Stratics poll nulled," IgescaStorm considered that Raijinn could not have been able to do what he had claimed. Raijinn then posted:

Your post has been locked for trolling. If you have any further questions about why your thread was locked and/or removed see [this thread](#) ['click' link] before posting again. Also read the Community Policies and SOE Community Policies located on this [Page](#). ['click' link]

Reposting your message with out rewording it to be within the guidelines above may result in administrative action against your account.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Joel (forum name Raijinn), "Stratics poll nulled," November 21, 2005, accessed on February 3, 2007.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=swggpdiscussion%0Amessage.id=62960&p ag>

See note 58 (Chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

Speaking out in official SWG forums is prohibited. SOE is entitled to take administrative action against those who do speak out. Will action be taken against my account as a result of this thesis?

The SWG community was on notice that its members were forbidden to question SOE and that there was no possibility of a subscription refund (except as it related to “Trials of Obi-Wan”). As tensions increased, many players came to believe that SOE was trying to tighten its grip on the community by suspending or banning dissenters. Many message posts were being deleted, which further aggravated those who simply wanted a constructive debate about the NGE. In essence, if you were for the NGE, you were a *fanboi* (fanboy) and if you were against the NGE, you were part of the *Vocal Minority*. This us-versus-them attitude led to a barrage of creative humour, which included several spoof films.¹²⁷

On November 21, 2005, Timothy Burke, a history professor at Swarthmore College, posted a popular blog titled “Order 66,” which read in part:

I predicted on the official SWG forum that any serious attempt to realize the ambitions of the combat revamp was going to take a major rethinking of the entire profession system and crafting along with it.

I was closer to the mark than I would have guessed: the live management team recently and with breathtaking suddenness announced and then pushed to live a massive overhaul of the entire game, the so-called “New Game Enhancement” or NGE. Unfortunately, the live management team seems to have ignored

¹²⁷ One person who made a film (or at least posted it) has “Col” as part of his or her forum name on the SOE boards. Episode 1—

<http://www.grapheine.com/bombaytv/v2/play.php?id=8314>

Episode 2— <http://www.grapheine.com/bombaytv/v2/play.php?id=8332>

Episode 3— <http://www.grapheine.com/bombaytv/v2/play.php?id=8369>

Episode 4— <http://www.grapheine.com/bombaytv/v2/play.php?id=8539>

another long-standing criticism of SWG by many observers: that their design and implementation process is a disastrous mess. Never more so than with the NGE: whatever it is conceptually, in practice, it's roughly on par with an alpha build MMOG.

Or did they ignore it? It's just possible that SWG's latest flaming car wreck resulted from *deliberately driving over a cliff*.

I'm normally deeply suspicious of conspiracy theories. In the case of SWG's NGE, though, there are really only two possibilities: that there is a deeper agenda or that the live management team is well beyond cluelessly self-destructive, out in some outer void of fecklessness.

[The players suspect] that this is not about the PC market at all, but the console market instead. Is SWG-NGE a test bed for a PS3 or even X-Box 360 implementation? That strikes me as just possible. It's about the only way this whole thing makes any sense at all, and even so, it seems to me to be further evidence of serious disarray inside SOE in the wake of Blizzard's resounding success with WoW, that they're willing to further sully their reputation among PC gamers in order to aim for a highly speculative, possibly non-existent console market for MMOGs.¹²⁸

As an afterthought, Burke speculated (as had many others) that the NGE could be a product not of SOE but of LucasArts, pointing out that the partnership between SOE and LA had always been opaque.

The SWG community's negative comments about SOE can be summarized as follows. First, if SOE (or, derogatorily, \$OE) had simply done the opposite of everything it did, SWG would be great. Second, SOE does not listen. Third, hypothetically, could you imagine what would have happened if SOE had *started* with the NGE, and *then* launched the CU, and *then* the pre-CU? My own speculation is that SOE had set out for market research purposes to learn just how relentlessly it could strong-arm its customer

¹²⁸ Timothy Burke, "Order 66," November 22, 2005, accessed on September 26, 2009. http://terranova.blogs.com/terra_nova/2005/11/order_66.html View Burke's outstanding blog entry for further enjoyment.

base, it would have done precisely what it did with the CU and the NGE. On the message boards, some players have asked variations on this question: “If this game was not Star Wars, would you still be here?” The overwhelming response has been “no.”

On November 25, 2005, John Smedley posted “An Open Letter to the SWG Community” in which he explained why the NGE had been necessary. This post was rather similar to his Combat Upgrade letter. He began by recognizing that the NGE had stirred up the community and upset some of the players.¹²⁹ Incredibly, he then stated: “We’re not sitting in our offices thinking of ways to upset our paying customers..” I will be discussing that quote because it acknowledges what I view as the toxic relationship between SOE and its subscribers.

Smedley went on to state that the NGE was necessary to increase the player base and that the CU *had* in fact increased subscriptions. He contended that balancing 34 playable professions was difficult—a point I concede. But then he continued:

I hope you understand that we absolutely value each and every player. You pay the bills around here, and that’s not something we are forgetting. None of us like seeing people cancel.. If you think this change is about “acceptable losses for a bigger goal”, that’s simply not the case.. nor is it how we view things.

He concluded his letter by declaring that the new changes had *not* been for the purpose of establishing SWG as a console game, and that it would not be viable to set up pre-NGE or pre-CU servers, for this would require two support teams.

¹²⁹ John Smedley, (forum name Smed), “An Open Letter to the SWG Community,” November 25, 2005, accessed on September 27, 2009.
<http://swgemuserservers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

Though his letter about the NGE offered more detailed explanations than the Combat Upgrade letter, the response from the SWG community was largely negative.

Following are some of the replies he received on his message thread:

“your still not getting my 2 accounts back”—undersold (forum name)

“Imao, [in my arrogant opinion] just more bull **edit** lies and made up things why they changed the game. As if anyone would still believe him.”—Ekymer (forum name):

“Smed, I think you owe your existing players a couple of months of FREE play. That is, take off that subscription fee for awhile, until you make this game what you want it to be. Players shouldn’t have to pay you to beta test a project. Maybe people would be more willing to stick around and see what vision you have for this game.”

“Your post has been locked for speaking your mind. If you have any questions about why your post was locked and/or removed, just remember that we own these forums and only allow pseudo-positive and monetary contributions to our cause.—Regards,—Big Brother”
—RT60 (forum name):

One last example is from Virrago Community Relations, SWG Community Team, which posted a thread titled “Board my ship?” that read in part:

I’m trying out the Pirates game today, in about an hour from now. There’s a free demo if you want to hop in and play with me:
<http://piratesonline.station.sony.com/> I’m a newb [new player] so if you want to sink my ships look for me.¹³⁰

Ikict:

No offense, but please stop advertising this. The announcement was enough, the ingame message was too far and now this is just ridiculous.

¹³⁰ Virrago (forum name), “Board my ship,” December 19, 2006, accessed on December 19, 2006.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=swggpdiscussion&message.id=1305818>
This thread was deleted from the official boards, but not before I printed it off. This thread is available to anyone who wants it.

Kehtal:

I just have to do this ... But ... What exactly does this have to do with SWG gameplay discussion?

KalvarisCzerka:

Lock this as it has nothing to do with gameplay discussion. Even Pre-CU talk atleast has something to do with SWG, this does not. Requesting /lock.

Post after post after post is openly defiant of Virrago. Keep in mind that SOE, especially during this time, would not have thought twice about suspending or banning anyone posting anything that conflicted with SOE forum policy—a policy that Virrago itself was apparently breaking. SWGMordrind (forum name) now posts:

The hypocrisy has gotten really blatant lately. If it's something they don't like it's "off-topic" or "not gameplay related." Yet, they then turn around and post something like this that is really blatantly off-topic. The crack at SOE must be some REALLY good stuff...

With the above thread 'Locked', Virrago has a three-part exchange with two other posters in a new thread. This one is from sickboy_ukuk:

I'm not trying to get at you V [Virrago] but you can't have 2 sets of rules for general posters and mods. It just wont work.¹³¹

Virrago:

that is correct... Mods and general posters have the same rules. Forum Admin and Developers do not.

Everitt_Cage (responding to Virrago):

¹³¹ Sickboy_ukuk (forum name), "Forum search function," December 19, 2006, assessed on December 19, 2006.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=swggpdiscussion&message.id=1306237>

...

This thread was deleted from the official boards, but I printed it off. This thread is available to anyone who wants it.

The admins and devs should lead by example, not “do as I say, not as I do”. Its hypocritical.

Virrago:

Just telling you how it is... You don't have to like it.

On December 10, 2005, the subscriber base meltdown garnered almost unprecedented coverage in the mainstream media when *The New York Times* ran a story titled “For Online Star Wars Game, It’s Revenge of the Fans.” SOE, the company that watched so many, now found itself being watched by America’s paper of record. Gaming media also carried the SWG story. In the *Times* piece, reporter Seth Schiesel quoted Nancy MacIntyre, the game’s senior director at Lucasarts, as dropping this bombshell:

We really just needed to make the game a lot more accessible to a much broader player base. There was lots of reading, much too much, in the game. There was a lot of wandering around learning about different abilities. We really needed to give people the experience of being Han Solo or Luke Skywalker rather than being Uncle Owen, the moisture farmer. We wanted more instant gratification: kill, get treasure, repeat. We needed to give people more of an opportunity to be a part of what they have seen in the movies rather than something they had created themselves.¹³²

I struggle to understand her statement. In the introduction to this thesis, I quoted the back of the game box, which on the day I bought it declared in a screaming typeface: “EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST *STAR WARS* SAGA EVER TOLD—YOURS.”

¹³² Seth Schiesel, “For Online Star Wars Game, It’s Revenge of the Fans,” December 10, 2005, accessed on March 9, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/10/arts/10star.html>

Incredibly, SOE's withering condescension toward the player base did not end there. In a *Washington Post* story titled "Sadness in 'Star Wars' World," reporter Mike Musgrove quoted John Blakely, SOE's VP-Development, as he contradicted a statement by Smedley:

It was a tough decision we had to make, we knew we were going to sacrifice some players... [but] as a 'Star Wars' license, we should do a lot better than we have been doing."¹³³

Yet only two-and-a-half months earlier, in an open letter, Smedley himself, President of SOE, had told the SWG player base:

None of us like seeing people cancel..If you think this change is about "acceptable losses for a bigger goal", that's simply not the case.. nor is it how we view things.¹³⁴

Blakely and Smedley were blatantly contradicting each other. Another example: on March 24, 2006, Smedley had stated:

The SWG community has been voting with it's feet since the NGE came about ... At the end of the day there are a lot of people in this community that wonder why we did this [NGE]? Why did we "deliberately" try and piss people off. Obviously that wasn't our intent. This is a business and we needed to improve the results of the business.¹³⁵

¹³³ Mike Musgrove, "Sadness in 'Star Wars' World," February 2, 2006, accessed on September 26, 2009.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/01/AR2006020102341.html>

¹³⁴ John Smedley (forum name Smed), "An Open Letter to the SWG community." November 25, 2005, accessed on September 27, 2009.

<http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=swggpdiscussion&message.id=442698&pa...>

See note 58 (Chapter 3) for the fate of this post, which was exactly the same.

Note: This same post that I printed out can also be found in the Pre-CU Scrapbook at the following URL.

<http://swgemuserservers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

Smedley also offers his player base some soothing remarks:

When you have an opinion about the way the game should be (as we ALL do) it's logical to try and support that position. I believe you have steadily seen a change of tone from us from "everything is fine" to "we're working on the problems."¹³⁶

Smedley also laid to rest the rumour that LucasArts had forced the NGEs on the player base:

It might be better for SOE as a company to sit back and let you all think that LucasArts forced this stuff on us. Guess what, they didn't. We all sat around a table and read the same data.¹³⁷

On March 25, 2005, HamBone- (forum name) thanked Smedley for trying to communicate with players:

/cheer... You really need to do this more often! People are hungry for this kind of interaction, it humanizes you and goes a long way to helping us stick by you and your team. Thank you for this and don't be a stranger here /applaud dev team.¹³⁸

The importance of this post is that the game as first launched demanded that the players comply with its regulations (as stated in the EULA) even while restricting access to SOE's developers and other authorities. The CU and especially the NGE dramatically improved players' access to the developers and even to John Smedley himself. This is to

¹³⁵ Smed, "Re: A bit of news around the SOE rumors and SWG," March 24, 2006, accessed on September 25, 2009.

<http://swgemuserservers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ HamBone- (forum name), "Re: A bit of news around the SOE rumors and SWG," March 24, 2006, accessed on September 25, 2009.

<http://swgemuserservers.com/precuscrapbookv5/tree/frame.html>

be applauded—it makes huge sense in nearly every way. I would make two points, though: more open communication undermined SOE’s authority; and it should have started at the time of SWG’s launch, not after two major overhauls. This tells us that players, by expressing themselves beyond the panoptic gaze of SOE, can affect the decision making process of the authority.

Originally, the complaint was that communication with SOE in relation to SWG was terrible. Players could really only access SOE effectively through the CSRs or perhaps the player Senate. When Hambone- remarked that Smedley’s actions had “humanize[d]” him to the community, the power imbalance or fiduciary relationship changed. Moreover, if the game is changed again, the outrage will be that much greater now that people like HamBone- see themselves as potential friends or partners of SOE, not clients.

GREEDO: Going somewhere, Solo?

HAN: Yes, Greedo. As a matter of fact, I was just going to see your boss. Tell Jabba that I've got his money.

Gold Pharmers have no choice but to operate outside SOE’s surveillance. In *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Greedo seeks out Han Solo and they talk about the debt the smuggler owes to Jabba the Hutt. Subscribers who need money or who want their avatars leveled up or grinded go to Pharmers, who for a fee will do the work for them or provide virtual money for RL cash.

In the preceding account of SWG’s history, we saw that SOE stealth-increased the grind (labour time) that players required to earn a Jedi. We also saw how SOE twice gave the game’s rules a fundamental overhaul. Between the changes wrought to the player-driven economy by the CU and the NGE, and the impact of virtual inflation, why

would you spend hours on hours on years grinding away when you could buy a preleveled avatar online for several hundred dollars, or hire someone to grind your existing avatar for you? And if you need credits quickly, bid at that cool in-game auction, where you can pay RL money for in-game credits.

There are some important things you should know before you consider doing any of the above. To begin with, SOE forbids such transactions in SWG. You could face an account ban or suspension. And if you do try it, don't tell your in-game friends, for three reasons: (1) they will probably resent you for cheating and call you an eBay Jedi (or whatever profession you've bought); (2) you have broken the EULA, which means that in theory (though it's unlikely) you could be banished or penalized; and (3) if your guild leaders or in-game friends endorsed or encouraged or even know about your actions and did not report you, their accounts could be penalized by SOE. To all of that, I would add that (4) if you are ripped off by a Pharmer, you'll have no one to complain to? You cannot report the fraud to SOE because you violated the EULA first, by approaching the Pharmer.

People who play MMOs likely will generally have encountered an in-game Pharmer spamming or "repeatedly" advertising power-leveiling services or cheap in-game virtual money. It is aggravating to watch Pharmers spamming their websites. It's even more annoying to watch them use your player-designed city as a grinding location. The typical spammer Pharmer is a low-level macro'ed avatar. In other words, the Pharmer is using an avatar that has been programmed (macro'ed) to execute a message explaining its services and announcing its Web address. Sometimes they also announce the "credit"-to-USD exchange rate. Another way you know that in-game Pharmers are

nearby is when you see a group of avatars jammed together. When subscribers are actually having fun, they tend to not want to be so close to others that their avatars become obscured by other avatars. You want to see your avatar, especially in combat.

Pharmers in SWG tend to avoid other players and to lack the optimum gear for the area they have entered. For example, the more advanced adventure worlds in SWG require you to have the appropriate equipment, buffs, and weapons with which to explore or grind; Pharmers usually don't. Moreover, player characters tend to show off the cool vehicles they have acquired. Generally speaking, if you have a fun new vehicle that is faster than less costly modes of transportation, you will want to use it. Pharmers, in contrast, tend use only what is necessary to their tasks at hand. A Pharmer does not yearn for a Jet Pack or a Barc Speeder, for example.

In essence, a Pharmer is an avatar that grinds for you. If you need "credits" (i.e., in-game money) but don't want to grind for them, a Gold Pharmer will grind *for* you virtual cash. Also, virtual money can be found for sale on retail websites. eBay used to host these sales but got out of the business. A Pharmer hosts a website that offers credits for sale; a buyer then may use PayPal or a credit card to make an RL payment for the credits, providing in-game details as a the subscribers avatar name for the in-game money.

SOE forbids you to buy in-game money from third parties with RL currency. Instead, subscriber labour is bartered for the labour of others. For example, I might grind out resources that can be used to manufacture armour that I want. Since I am not a crafter, I would then sell my resources to another player in exchange for in-game credits, *or* I would barter my grinded products to a crafter, receiving the armour in exchange.

Usually, to complete the grind work, the Pharmer will use various cheats that defy the game's rules. I have watched Pharmers running faster than other players can *drive* in even the fastest vehicles. This dramatically increases a Pharmer's ability to engage in combat. And when they do fight, Pharmers' actions seem incredibly precise and coordinated. They are also eerily silent, whereas player subscribers tend to spread out and talk. The popular film *The Matrix* is a good example of what I am explaining. If you were running at your highest speed and then saw someone—or better yet, a group of people—moving in a coordinated fashion four times more quickly than you, you would conclude that something was going on. In *The Matrix*, it is explained that the system has rules and that some rules can be bent while others can be broken. These sorts of actions are referred to in-game as hacks, or exploits (“sploitiz”). These can be applied to one's own system, to one's client's system, or to the game as a whole. Whichever the case, they are all violations of the EULA.

Generally, Pharmers are viewed with disdain by the SWG community. Most subscribers report Pharmers when they encounter them. Pharmers in that way get banned, but they see this as the cost of doing business. However much other players detest Pharmers, they continue to proliferate in the game, as evidenced by their voluminous spam. So one has to ask: If Pharming is so looked down upon, and if no one would violate the rules to get ahead, then why is Pharming so prevalent in the game?

To arrange power-levelling services, you provide a Pharmer with your username and account password. Then, for a fee, the Pharmer levels up your avatar(s), working twenty-four hours a day. Pharmers are expert at leveling accounts—they have to be, because they so often need to advance new avatars themselves as they get banned.

Fully leveled accounts can fetch hundreds (in the past Jedi accounts could go for over a thousand dollars) of RL dollars, depending on several variables, such as the number of leveled avatars in the account, the account's in-game wealth, and the type of profession being leveled. Buying an account does not necessarily mean that the account's avatars are in good standing with SOE (the account may have a history of administrative action) or in good standing in the community. (In my view, the latter is more important.) People sell their accounts and start again for various reasons, the two common ones being that they have shot their reputation with an earlier one, or they are trying to write a new legend of themselves.

Sometimes a player messages up an in-game friend gets back who responds to the effect of, "Do I know you?" Or the reply is in another language. This signals that the account you have messaged has been hacked, stolen, or eBayed (which is a verb in SWG).

I repeat: Pharming is a violation of the EULA. Let's say you want a Pharmer to grind up one avatar for you. The fee will be a small amount of RL money, but your overall account is worth more because of everything else it contains: grinded toons, equipment, in-game money, and so on. You are running the risk that the Pharmer will change your password and username, steal your account from you, and sell it. Again, what are you going to do? Report to SOE that you gave your account information to a Pharmer who then stole your account? That would be admitting to SOE that you yourself violated the EULA.

Pharming makes the most economic sense in developing countries, where the cost of labour is dramatically lower than in the developed world, where labour laws tend

to be weak, and where unemployment is high. Pharm owners must be mindful of their labour and production costs and also consider the exchange rate between in-game credits and the local currency. On this topic, James Lee wrote an interesting article, which I quote from:

Finally, I get into contact with a man in his 30's who goes by the name Smooth Criminal. He's a partner in one of the largest sellers of MMORPG Gold, and he isn't apologetic. His rap sheet: banned from Ultima Online, Asheron's Call Shadowbane, Star Wars Galaxies, and Ultima Online again. He says once someone even traded him a wedding ring worth \$2,000 for WOW gold.

Smooth Criminal's game cartel made \$1.5 million from Star Wars Galaxies alone last year, and individually, he's made as much as \$700,000 in a single year. "[SWG] built my new house, which I paid for in cash," he says. "So when you ring my doorbell, it plays the Star Wars music."¹³⁹

The article states this particular Pharm paid a wage of around 56 cents per hour.

According to the same article, Smooth Criminal uses various methods to circumvent the surveillance of SOE (and other firms). These methods use game accounts, IP addresses, credit cards, and computers to prevent game developers from tracing money, be it RL currency or in-game credits.¹⁴⁰

Which leads to this next observation: both Gold Pharmers and subscribers attempt to resist control by devising ways to bypass SOE's surveillance. In *The New Parapolice*, George Rigakos discusses the panoptic surveillance carried out inside the

¹³⁹ James Lee, "From sweatshops to stateside corporations, some people are profiting off of MMO gold," July 5, 2005, accessed on October, 2, 2009.

<http://www.1up.com/do/feature?cId=3141815>

¹⁴⁰ Note: I use the James Lee article because of its place in the growth of the RMT industry and because it mentions SWG. Also I choose to use this and other older sources when I need to discuss in any detail how this system works. I hope that because this information is dated, ways to counter this sort of practice will be achieved (or at the minimum, SOE will have time to react internally).

offices of a private security firm and how employees have learned to evade it. A demoted officer with the Intelligarde firm “indicated that he wanted to talk to me [Rigakos] in the washroom,” in order to protect their communication from the company’s managers.¹⁴¹

SWG subscribers have learned to migrate to Web discussion forums where SOE cannot censor their communications. Two noteworthy forums for this are RLMMO.com and MMOFringe.com, but there are many others. Some are named after their original SOE game server—for example, Intrepid.galaxyforums.com. On these forums, subscribers can share information outside the SOE’s pantoptic gaze. This is similar to Rigakos’s example noted above. Also, Rigakos often could only conduct an interview if he promised not to use the interviewee’s name.

To evade the pantopticon, SWG subscribers also e-mail journalists like William Vitka (formerly of CBS News). As a general rule of thumb, journalists do not reveal their sources. In this way, outraged subscribers can express themselves without fear of reprisal.

I offer one more example of subscriber vigilance as it relates to third-party websites. Earlier, I quoted comments by Nancy McIntyre that were not well received by former SWG subscribers. In a thread on MMORPG.com, those ex-subscribers reported that she had taken a job with Leapfrog.¹⁴² This indicates what happens when a company is perceived as having mistreated tens of thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) of Web-savvy people. SOE can still watch subscribers, but at least now the players have

¹⁴¹ George Rigakos, *The New Parapolice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 109.

¹⁴² Pjay2k (forum name), “Nancy McIntyre moved to Leapfrog ouch,” April 12, 2007, accessed on April 13, 2007.

<http://www.mmorpg.com/discussion2.cfm?thread=125095&bhcp=1>

found ways to watch SOE and LucasArts right back, especially after they leave the panopticon for other virtual climes.

Several themes have emerged in this chapter. As tensions mounted because of the Jedi stealth nerf, the Combat Upgrade, and finally the NGE, subscribers who were banned or suspended took to third-party websites such as Stratics.com and MMORPG.com to share their outrage over the changes to their game. As the CU and NGE went live, subscribers whose accounts were in good standing with SOE lost their game through no fault of their own. They responded by migrating over to these forums; they also abandoned SWG for other games—indeed, sometimes entire guilds migrated en masse. Subscribers who felt that they were being over moderated by third-party websites then created their own community forums, such as RLMMO.com and MMOFringe.com. These websites became crucibles of resistance and challenge—places where former and current subscribers could keep in touch with one another and lobby other media for attention. These same websites eventually began hosting official boards and even some developers and SOE staff such as Tiggs, Jeff Freeman, and Raph Koster even signed up and posted with the communities.

The resistance to SOE that arose in SWG happened because the developers fundamentally altered the virtual world the players knew. In doing so, SOE disenfranchised its subscribers and thereby undermined its own authority over them. No longer did the players benefit from being docile—they had lost the game they loved and had nothing to gain from “good behaviour.” The resentment this generated took the form of evading the EULA, often through third-party message boards. It also took the form of humour, as with the films posted online that expressed player outrage.

On the theme of evasion, some tactics were more purposeful than others. An example of the former were VOIPs like TeamSpeak and Ventrilo. In-game VOIP was not available in SWG at the time the NGEs were launched. Players who used VOIP enjoyed many advantages in game play, for it meant they could communicate more quickly than by typing. These programs were a huge convenience and helped fuel the rebellion.

Another form of evasion was ghosting. Rigakos notes in *The New Parapolice* that some respondents would speak to him only provided that their names would not be used and only if the conversation took pace outside Intelligarde's panoptic gaze. Similarly, we have seen how SWG subscribers succeeded in getting their complaints aired in traditional media outlets as diverse as CBS News, the BBC, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. Frustrated members of the SWG subculture had found ways to lobby the mainstream media. It helped their cause that mainstream journalists were well used to protecting their sources. All of this placed SOE under intense scrutiny. As a result of this grassroots activism, subscribers were able to get refunds for the "Trials of Obi-Wan" expansion.

Finally, we see a fundamental lack of control on the part of SOE. Gary Alan Fine notes that immature and/or unruly players "quiet down" when the game they are enjoying is threatened. Immature players learn that it is in their interest to "tone themselves down" if they want to stay in the game. It doesn't mean those players *stay* immature. The Jedi stealth nerf had been deeply unpopular, and players did complain. But that was in the game's early days, and by the time the Combat Upgrade and the NGE were launched, players were more willing to express their discontent. At that point, SOE found that it had less authority than before to police the SWG community. The players had paid for the

original product and wanted to keep consuming it, and SOE, having taken that original game away, found that it could no longer appeal to their best interests. Players had nothing to gain from continuing to adhere to SOE's authority. In the end, it was largely SOE's refusal to grant refunds that fuelled subscriber outrage and led to the protests on third-party websites. Populations, and even virtual populations, can be controlled (a) if they are under surveillance and (b) if it is in their best interest to remain docile. SOE's and perhaps LucasArts direction of fundamentally changing SWG undermined the panoptic powers of the wardens resulted in the subscribers' virtual world—its norms, its rules, its social contract—and the community answered by revolting.

Chapter 5

The Empire Strikes Back

VADER: You are beaten. It is useless to resist. Don't let yourself be destroyed as Obi-Wan did ...

VADER: There is no escape. Don't make me destroy you. You do not yet realize your importance. You have only begun to discover your power. Join me and I will complete your training. With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy.

Dialogue from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

This chapter discusses four subjects: SWG's illicit markets; how SOE has taken over real money transfers (RMTs) from the Pharmers and legitimized them; how SOE has co-opted Web forum members in order to strike back against negative opinion; and how SOE has begun to use the Warden Program to crack down on Pharmers who spam in-game messages. In simple terms, subscribers are volunteering to help a for-profit company police its own product.

Illicit Markets

GREEDO: Going somewhere, Solo?

HAN: Yes, Greedo. As a matter of fact, I was just going to see your boss. Tell Jabba that I've got his money.

Dialogue from *Star Wars: A New Hope*

“Pharming” (in some contexts, Gold Farming) is SWG players’ term for performing repetitive tasks that yield stable and predictable rewards. Players grind in a certain location, or fight or hunt a certain nonplayer character (NPC), in order to obtain reward loot. For example, the Canyon Corsair POI on the SWG world of Lok is a great place to Pharm for the crystals you need when building a lightsabre.

For some players, performing repetitive tasks became tedious. Back in the pre-CU days, while grinding at Fort Tusken, on Tatooine, I spoke to another player who told me he had bought 5,000,000 in-game credits with RL money. I felt jealous: this person had about the same skill level as me, yet he had enough in-game money to eliminate the need for drudgery. Moreover, he didn’t have to search for the best prices from in-game crafters—he could just pay what he needed and get back into the fun parts of SWG. He did, though, risk penalties or even banishment if SOE caught him buying credits with RL money.

On January 20, 2006, on his stationblog, John Smedley congratulated *PC Gamer* magazine for taking a stand and refusing advertising from IGE and other auction sites:

So what PC Gamer did took a lot of guts... and I applaud them for it. Turning away money is never an easy thing to do.. but I for one will be glad not to see an IGE ad on the back cover of PC Gamer. It just never felt right.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ John Smedley, (forum name Smed), “Props out to PC Gamer Crew,” January 20, 2006, accessed on June 10, 2009. <http://stationblog.wordpress.com/2006/01/20/props-out-to-pc-gamer> A printed copy of Smedley’s full blog post is included in the Appendix F.

In the April 2006 issue of *PC Gamer*, SOE placed a full-page ad congratulating that magazine again.¹⁴⁴

To summarize the general sentiments on this subject:

- Some in the community argue: “SWG is just a game, so why should anyone care if some players buy credits from a Pharmmer? If their account gets banned as a result, it’s their fault.”
- Others argue: “I don’t have the time that hard-core gamers have to *über*-grind everything. If I want to hang out with my friends who do have time, I need to use Pharmers. My time is too valuable to spend it all on grinding—I just want to have fun.”
- Still others argue: “SOE has made grinding so time consuming that buying from Pharmers is the only way to make progress. Why pay SOE for the time it takes to grind when you can buy credits online in RL currency? Better yet, why not just buy a completed avatar?”
- Finally, some argue: “Players who buy from Pharmers have no right to be considered serious players. Besides which, players who cheat or take short cuts are likely to be unreliable when the game doesn’t go their way. They’re too likely to bail out if they can’t buy their way out.”

¹⁴⁴ Sony Online Entertainment [SOE], “Greg and the PC Gamer crew,” April 2006, accessed on November 16, 2009.

http://www.blogcdn.com/www.joystiq.com/media/2006/04/soe_note_on_rmt_big.jpg

A reproduction of the ad has been posted at the above URL. A copy printed off from the same URL is available in the Appendix G.

Pharmers and Pharming

A subscriber who wants an avatar leveled up or grinded can hire a Pharmer to do it, paying in RL cash. As noted in Chapter 4, Gold Pharmers have no choice but to operate outside SOE's surveillance.

Over time, SOE has increased the grind time of players wishing to earn a Jedi. They have also fundamentally altered the game twice since launching it, with the Combat Upgrade and then the NGE. Those two changes generated inflation in the game's internal economy, so that it started to make sense to simply buy a preleveled avatar for several hundred dollars, or have one made, instead of investing hours of tedious work. And if you needed credits quickly, you could buy them at an online auction instead of earning them within the game. People who play MMOs such as SWG and WoW have almost certainly encountered Pharmers repeatedly advertising ("spamming") cheap in-game virtual money and power leveling services.

It is important to remember that SOE's EULA forbids the transactions just described. Any of them could have you banished or suspended from the game. So if you do go that route, don't tell your in-game friends, for two reasons: (1) they will probably resent you for cheating and brand you an "eBay Jedi" (or whichever profession you bought into); and (2) even though it is you who has broken the EULA, your guild leaders or friends may be punished (in theory) if they know you had done so and have not reported you. A final point: if a Pharmer defrauds you, there is no one you can complain to, since you yourself violated the EULA by hiring the Pharmer.

In 2005, John Smedley posted a momentous blog in which he told readers that SOE would soon be offering a new service that would provide a safe environment for players to sell and buy in-game items.¹⁴⁵ “We are NOT,” he added, “in the business of selling virtual goods ourselves.”¹⁴⁶

The service, available on *EverQuest II*, would be called Station Exchange (SE), and he explained why SOE was about to launch it. *First*, a large number of subscribers were engaging in out-of-game trading despite the risk, and many other players did not seem to mind that they were. (As an aside, many of my own gaming friends don’t have a problem with this kind of system, since it dramatically reduces the grind and allows you to spend more time actually playing the game.) He noted that by his staff’s own estimates, Pharming and the sale of virtual goods constituted a “\$200 million dollar market worldwide.”¹⁴⁷ He reassured his subscribers that SE would operate on “clean” servers to ensure that participation would be solely for those who wanted it. Furthermore, SOE would be offering a free avatar server transfer to an SE-enabled server. However, once there you would not be allowed to transfer out. This would provide security for non-SE enabled servers against economic inflation.

Second, SOE’s customer service reps (CSRs) were spending 40% of their time dealing with fraudulent transactions. Smedley suggested that many subscribers who were victims of fraud were not being up front with his staff. This lack of honesty was diverting

¹⁴⁵ Smedley, “John Smedley Discusses Station Exchange,” April 2005?, accessed on October 6, 2009.

http://eq2players.station.sony.com/news_archive_content.vm?month=042005&id=457

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. I am heavily paraphrasing Smedley’s blog; credit for this source should go to him, not me.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

time and energy away from serving subscribers' legitimate customer service requests.

Finally, he offered a *third* reason:

We see this as a potentially interesting model for future games. If we came up with a game specifically designed around these sorts of transactions, it might be pretty cool. Online gaming is always evolving, and we're going to see how a sanctioned exchange service shakes out ... From our perspective, it's always wise to keep pushing the envelope.¹⁴⁸

I will be relying here mainly on Smedley's figures and statements. Considering that \$200 million was being generated worldwide under SOE's corporate nose, it was to be expected that SOE would try to tap that lucrative part of the MMORPG business.

His statements were telling us that, in effect, SOE's CSRs were spending 40% of their time trying to stop a business that his subscribers clearly wanted. It would have been counterproductive to eliminate both the Pharms and those paying subscribers who resorted to them notwithstanding the EULA. It is worth asking: "How much grind was designed into the game simply to keep players racking up hours?" Was SOE keeping us paying by keeping us playing? Note also that if SE succeeded, Smedley would be able to improve customer service even while potentially reducing his staff, and thereby increase profits.

In 2006 the popular magazine *PG Gamer* decided that it would no longer sell ads for "grey market" game accounts and virtual currency or for services such as power leveling. In April of the same year, SOE placed a full-page colour advertisement in the same magazine commending it for its position. The ad stated that Pharming had seriously

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

affected both SOE and the industry as a whole. Moreover, for every action that SOE, other game developers, and their staff took, the Pharmsers looked for ways to counter it—for example, by running “bots” (avatars set up to work automatically, with little human control).¹⁴⁹

To give the reader an idea of how serious a problem virtual crime had become, BBC News reported in 2007 that “A Dutch teenager has been arrested for allegedly stealing virtual furniture from “rooms” in Habbo Hotel, a 3D social networking website.”¹⁵⁰ The accused allegedly stole 4,000 euros worth of virtual furniture that had been paid for with RL money:

A spokesman for Sulake, the company that operates Habbo Hotel, said: “The accused lured victims into handing over their Habbo passwords by creating fake Habbo websites.

“It is a theft because the furniture is paid for with real money. But the only way to be a thief in Habbo is to get people’s usernames and passwords and then log in and take the furniture.”¹⁵¹

In an interview with *BusinessWeek* in November 2005, Smedley discussed business models. He explained that subscription fees were only one possible method of operation. While such fees were the largest revenue generators, “upsell models [i.e., buying items, character appearance and upgrades] begin to grow in a big way.” Furthermore: “Imagine being able to have a completely non-subscription based MMO

¹⁴⁹ SOE, “Greg and the PC Gamer Crew.” See also Appendix G. I have heavily paraphrased from this source.

¹⁵⁰ “‘Virtual theft’ leads to arrest,” November 14, 2007, accessed on November 15, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7094764.stm>

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

that makes its money only from these upsells. We're already working on a game with that model that's going to release next year."¹⁵²

The Normalization and Legitimization of Pharming

VADER: What is thy bidding, my master?
EMPEROR: There is a great disturbance in the Force.
VADER: I have felt it.
EMPEROR: We have a new enemy—Luke Skywalker.
EMPEROR: He could destroy us
VADER: If he could be turned, he would become a powerful ally.
EMPEROR: Yes. Yes. He would be a great asset. Can it be done?

Select dialogue from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

On April 11, 2007, SOE sent out a Press release: "SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT NAMES DAVID D CHRISTENSEN VICE PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS."¹⁵³ It went on to say that Christensen was a veteran of the gaming industry and that he had previously been Vice President of Business Development for Internet Gaming Entertainment (IGE)—one of the largest Gold Pharming companies.

The reaction to this news from forum posters was rather telling. Some samples: "Moving from virtual gold sales to SOE. Interesting." "Interesting ... Can we crucify

¹⁵² Interviewer's name not posted. "Sony Online Discusses the MMO Market," November 9, 2005, accessed on November 14, 2009. http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/nov2005/id20051109_602467.htm

¹⁵³ SOE, Press release: "SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT NAMES DAVID D CHRISTENSEN VICE PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS." April 11, 2007, accessed on November 14, 2009. <http://www.soepress.com/release.asp?i=100> See also Appendix H.

SOE now?” “Thats messed up.” “Further insurance that Sony will never see another nickel of mine again.” “they hired the former Vice President of Business Development for IGE? ROFLMAO!!!! [Role On Floor Laughing My Ass Off] Good job Sony, way to improve your image with your customers” and “Did they make this big announcement just to piss people off?”¹⁵⁴

On August 26, 2008, Valara (forum name) posted a message titled “Star Wars Galaxies Trading Card Game: Champions of the Force.”¹⁵⁵ This virtual card game is free to play for former or current players with a valid SWG game account in good standing. In addition, several packs of virtual cards are given free of charge to each account per month. The post states that players can obtain more than 20 “loot” cards that can be used inside SWG. Players wanting additional card packs can buy them with RL money.

More important, though, is a subsequent post by Valara, “Trading Card Game Trades on the SWG Forums.” To quote from it:

Players are welcome to use the galaxy trade forums to advertise the buying and selling of loot cards in exchange for in-game items. Please use the official Trading Card Game Marketplace forum for other trades. Thank you!¹⁵⁶

For the sake of argument, suppose that I do not have a lot of time to grind out in-game money, but I don’t want to violate the EULA and buy virtual money from a Pharmer. What can I do to keep up with or pass wealthier players without breaking the

¹⁵⁴ MMORPG.com, accessed on April 19, 2009.

<http://www.mmorpg.com/discussion2.cfm?post=1332932#1332932>

¹⁵⁵ August 26, 2008, accessed on November 16, 2009.

http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?topic_id=733713

¹⁵⁶ September 5, 2009, accessed on November 16, 2009.

http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?topic_id=740823

rules? One legal method—albeit inefficient and expensive—would be to spend lots of RL money buying extra packs of virtual cards in the hope of obtaining rare loot cards, which I could then sell for in-game virtual money.

To my knowledge, “loot” items (from the card game) are not available in-game through regular grinding. A Sith Speeder is only obtainable through the card game. As far as I know, the statistical odds are not available on the “drop rate” of rare cards.¹⁵⁷ Also, the prices of additional card packs or “booster packs” vary. A Champions of the Force Digital Booster Pack is US\$2.99. Starter decks appear to sell for \$9.99, or you can purchase the “Champions of the Force Digital Booster Box for \$99.99.” These products are available after you log in to Station.com.

In SWG, as in other MMOs, people like to be seen, and owning the rarest and most in-demand items ensures that. So it troubles me when items grant an advantage that cannot be balanced or overcome through non-card loot. In other words, if I can purchase a card that grants me an advantage, how much fun can it be for those who can’t afford to spend as much RL money as me and, because of the in-game mechanics, can’t achieve parity with me? I contend that this hurts the game overall, because someone on a game server will *always* have more disposable RL money than someone else. In this way, the relative “theoretical equality” that an MMO grants by virtue of everyone being on the same server with the same choices is thwarted by the influence of RL money. In my view, this program should be available on a designated game server where those who want to compete with others who have varying amounts of disposable RL money can do

¹⁵⁷ It would be fascinating to create a project where the odds could be calculated on the “drop rate” and correlate the resulting data with the RL cost of buying additional card packs.

so. SWG's subscription fee is only \$15 US a month per account. Those who can spend \$99 to buy a "booster box" will undoubtedly be able to outbid everyone else for regular in-game items because they can inject their accounts with virtual currency from RL-sanctioned purchases.

SOE's Customer Relations

In January 2007, Kurt "Thunderheart" Stangl, SWG's Community Relations Manager, posted "New Forums Coming Soon!" on the official forums.¹⁵⁸ These new forums would enable SOE to offer new features. On the same post, Thunderheart explained what would and would not be migrated to the new forums. In essence, SOE would be scaling back its database by moving over selected forums such as "Development Discussion," "Developer's Digest," "Development Discussion Archive," "Community News," "Game Guides / Hints / Tips," and "Role Playing."

But individual server posts would *not* be saved, and the social history of each server would *not* be moved. Each individual player's forum post count (the number of posts viewable to others) would remain, but earlier individual contributions to the community would be lost. The consequence of all this was, that on the heels of the controversies surrounding the CU and the NGE, as people voted with their feet to cancel, new players would not be exposed to the old forum posts. SOE would benefit from this

¹⁵⁸ January 25, 2007, accessed on February, 5, 2007. <http://soe.lithium.com/swg/board/print?board.id=Announcements&message.id=3261&for> m Owing to the forum changes ("forum purge"), I was advised to print off the threads for my thesis at that time. I spent close to two weeks printing off several feet of message threads on a variety of subjects before even having a completed and agreed on thesis proposal. I intend to place online my message threads for anyone to access for at least a year.

by eliminating unpopular opinion. This partly explains why I and many others began saving, printing off, documenting, and migrating as many of our old posts as we could. This also explains why it has been so difficult to research SOE: you have to know where to look for the information that is out there, which is now rather scattered. One poster named Hauken from the RLMMO.com forums stated comically: “The last remnant of the republic is swept away....” a reference to Grand Moff Tarkin’s speech on the Death Star in *Star Wars: A New Hope*.¹⁵⁹

The Influencer Summit was among the more brilliant approaches that SOE took to change public opinion. Earlier chapters discussed the toxic and adversarial relationship between SOE and its subscribers. For various reasons, the customer base had been abandoning SOE’s forums for online venues where they were free to discuss SOE’s business practices without fear of its panoptic gaze. Many former SWG players had moved to other community websites such as RLMMO.com and MMOFringe.com. Where SOE has no power, it must somehow *create* that power. It must somehow generate *positive opinion*. One of its strategies was to convene the Influencer Summit.

SOE contacted influential members (potentially former customers) of the gaming community and invited them to attend meet-and-greets with SOE staff, including John Smedley. One such summit was convened in Las Vegas. The invitees included both supporters and critics of SOE’s practices.

Fishermagi, a regular poster on RLMMO.com and other forums, was among those invited to the Las Vegas summit. “Fish” (for short) had long been writing posts that were

¹⁵⁹ Hauken (forum name), “New SOe Forums Coming...,” January 25, 2007, accessed on May 7, 2009.
<http://www.rlmmo.com/viewtopic.php?p=28609&sid=11d30a9531245a3083e8b1f60be2a6d0>

critical of SOE's handling of SWG. After the Las Vegas summit, he posted on the official SWG forums a rather positive view of SOE. This post made it clear that he was impressed with the level of interaction with SOE staff that the summit had provided. Fish did not meet Smedley. However, toward the end of this post, he directed the following comments to SOE's president:

YOU want to get the players we lost back. Making the game better, having this new team bring things back from the past in new ways that are more manageable are all GREAT things, and you WILL get some positive word-of-mouth going and it has been and will have effects. All this is good, but for many, it will not be enough.

What happened here was an emotional thing. People had virtual property destroyed, virtual lives wrecked, and they view YOU as the NEXUS of the storm. After all, you da boss, man. Apologize. Show them that you care, that you feel bad, and that you want them back. You have no idea how much good it'll do.

Here, I'll start. Mr Smedley, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for every mean thing I ever said about you and your staff, everything I did and said I could have and should have done and said in a nicer way, with more recognition of you all AS PEOPLE. For that I am sorry. Deeply sorry. Now it's your turn, John."¹⁶⁰

Reactions to Fish's post on the official SWG forums were generally courteous.

Others, though, did take issue. To quote GloriousBritannia:

Hehehe, This is absolutely priceless. One time we had a really angry client and we paid for a junket for him and his wife to go somewhere with us, be a part of things, and the next thing you know, he is our best friend. The problems that he complained about still exist, but he seems to look at the bright side of things now. THIS is by far one of the most effective means to deal with voices of dissent from a business point of view. They had nothing to gain by

¹⁶⁰ Fishermagi (forum name), "The Emperor is not as forgiving as I am....," August 6, 2007, accessed on April 19, 2009.
http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?topic_id=436303

their treatment of you unless they figured you were having a negative impact.

On a brighter note, I do agree that the game is going in a good direction. I just think that sometimes the members of the community need to keep things in perspective at times.¹⁶¹

In his original post on this thread, Fish had stated: “Now, much of what went on at the Summit was under NDA [Non Discloser Agreement], and as we all know, that means in that sense, what happened in Vegas stays in Vegas.” As GloriousBritannia was pointing out, this was a brilliant way for SOE to handle dissent. Fish, who is known on various forums for his outspokenness, had changed his position, thus placing himself in the thick of an “us versus them” argument. More to the point, even if he had wanted to express something more than a general opinion of the summit, the NDA prevented him from doing so. I am sure that Fish had experienced a convincing presentation in Las Vegas, but the fact that it was convened under an NDA meant that he was unable to share the specifics of what he had learned. This had the effect of shifting attention from the customers and SOE to various groups of customers debating each other only. Besides that, wherever Fish posts, even if it is beyond SOE’s panoptic gaze, the NDA will still project its authority over him. With all of this in mind, let us sample some reactions to Fish’s post on RLMMO.com:

“Wow... I don’t know what to think of this...”—MX13

“I didn’t read it, as it was boring, but it sounded like another SWG customers gushing about how the game’s improving.”—Bissrok

¹⁶¹ GloriousBritannia (forum name), “The Emperor is not as forgiving as I am....”, August 7, 2007, accessed on April 19, 2009.
http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?topis_id=436303

“aye, it’s amazing how much an all expenses paid trip to vegas can change your perspective [e-mote smiley face]”—Efefia

“Along with an extra helping of smoke being blown up one’s ass.”—Obee

“I’m not that surprised; it’s not unusual for someone whose slung mud at another to have a change of heart once they’ve met in person. My company does that all time with particularly hot clients. Once the shelter of anonymity is broken, people tend to be far more civil towards one another.”—Ico¹⁶²

On the RLMMO.com thread, Fish posts continue to generate debate. I myself have posted on that thread, using my online name Daylen, to opine about the NDA’s impact. Most impressive to me has been SOE’s ability to generate debate among current and former subscribers on often-adversarial (toward SOE) third-party forums. The debate on those forums is not about SOE per se, so much as about who is saying what about SOE. Like the EULA, the NDA has established an advantage for SOE. The advantage being that the summit and NDA could be used to fracture a once unified opinion held by a group of forum posters. Fish being under the NDA is not able to fully debate the merits of the summit thereby having one hand tied behind his back. If the developer wants to hear fair opinion, critical or not, then it should not resort to an NDA.

Correspondent/Senate Reform

At one time SWG had player correspondents—volunteers who represented their favourite profession or activity. These correspondents were experts who conveyed information between the developers and the subscribers. They had access to private

¹⁶² MX13 (forum name), “Well, this was unexpected ...,” August 6, 2007, accessed on April 19, 2009.
<http://www.rlmmo.com/viewtopic.php?t=3952&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0&sid=77fada3f5a03c674243d4f59085bed50>

forums not viewable by other players, and they had some minor power to moderate particular forums on the official SWG website (e.g., a correspondent could “sticky” a forum). During and after their terms of service, correspondents received special forum titles such as “blue glowie” (the use of status or social capital).

In 2007, as part of efforts to improve its image, SOE announced that it would be overhauling the correspondent system by turning it into a Galactic Senate. In GreyPawn’s announcement thread, a poster named damicatz stated:

I don’t like the idea of having a bunch of people representing the community behind their backs in some private, off-limits forum. Either open up the senate forum or get rid of the senator program period.

GreyPawn’s response:

Neither do I. And you’ve made an excellent point here. The Senate forums will be opened shortly for read-only access. Full transparency in representation is an integral part of the establishment of power by proxy.¹⁶³

You can view the senate forum if you can log into the forums. You must have an active account.

On October 9, 2007, Valara posted “Stopping Bill Creation” in which he stated in part:

Thank you all again for the wealth of suggestions and feedback presented as bills to the SWG team. As for today, new bills will no longer be accepted. All of the bills currently in this forum have been passed along to the development team for consideration. No new

¹⁶³ GreyPawn (forum name), Star Wars Galaxies Community Manager, “The Galactic Senate,” July 10, 2007, accessed on November 15, 2009. http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?start=30&topic_id=402576

topics can be created in this forum, but you can still reply to discussions about existing bills.¹⁶⁴

The problem I have with words like “Senator” and “Senate” is that they suggest a capacity to change the game that does not actually exist. The Senate *has* no such power. The EULA does not grant it any, nor does any SOE policy document I have read. SOE should have stayed with the term “correspondent,” because that is what these people are.

The Co-opting of Players to Police SWG

When you log into the virtual world of Tatoonine and walk the streets of Mos Eisley, you cannot help but admire the look of the city. The emersion is amazing. But breaking that emersion and irritating players are Pharmers spamming in-game messages about their websites, which sell virtual money, power-leveling services, and off-the-shelf avatars. On the subject of RMTs in SOE’s *EverQuest* SE program, which was active between 2005 and 2006, I quote Smedley:

We took a different approach to this. We decided that in EQ II we were going to open Station Exchange servers and allow this activity specifically on those servers. Since that time, we have seen a tangible reduction of RMT on our other servers and specifically we’ve seen it go from roughly 40% of our CS [Customer Support] ticket volume to roughly 10%. Now I am NOT saying it doesn’t happen on other servers (even though the companies that do this encourage people to break our EULA). It happens and it’s common.

¹⁶⁴ Valara, “Stopping Bill Creation,” October 9, 2007, accessed on November 16, 2009. http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?start=0&topic_id=499170� Note that Senators can still post “requests,” “issues,” “proposals,” and so on. See Appendix I.

However the really serious problem cases are down by a significant amount because there is now a legitimate place to engage in this kind of practice.¹⁶⁵

In EQII, the option of buying virtual money has been incorporated into a sanctioned system. That being so, one would expect spamming to be reduced as well. Unfortunately, SE is not available in SWG. To counter spamming by Pharmers in SWG, SOE instead founded the Warden Program.

SWG developer DeadMeat introduced subscribers to this program in his forum post “The Star Wars Galaxies Warden Program.”¹⁶⁶ In it he humorously described how the development team would “flag” spamming avatars—that is, turn them into PVP-attackable targets for players to take out their aggression on. The results of this ploy were not lost on the developers. “We saw how much you enjoyed this,” DeadMeat noted. (Unfortunately, I personally never got a chance to take out a Pharmer. I would have done it, and then taken a screen shot of the event for this dissertation.) The developers understood that a potential solution could be arrived at by working together. To quote Deadmeat:

The Warden Program allows Galaxies players to apply to be voluntary in-game Wardens who have the ability to thwart the efforts of credit spammers and power levelers who are trying to sell their services. With the use of a simple command, a player in the program can target a spammer offering credits or power leveling services and squelch their ability to speak through all chat channels, spatial emotes, spatial chat bubbles and in-game mail for a period of

¹⁶⁵ Smedley, “RMT—What it is now, and what it can become!” February 7, 2007, accessed on November 15, 2009.

<http://stationblog.wordpress.com/2007/02/07/rmt-%E2%80%93-what-it-is-now-and-what-it-can-become>

¹⁶⁶ DeadMeat (forum name), “The Star Wars Galaxies Warden Program,” August 31, 2007, accessed on November 15, 2009.

http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?start=0&topic_id=464696�

6 hours. Meanwhile, an automatic email will be sent to our Customer Support Team, who will follow up on each incident and take further action against the account of the spammer.¹⁶⁷

The Warden Program has given SOE more virtual “boots on the ground,” thereby freeing its CSRs for administrative work. It seems that the simplest way for SOE to limit credit spamming has been by creating a sense of partnership with its subscribers by allowing them to take part in the thwarting of credit spammers. In effect, the players are paying a subscription fee to do volunteer work for a for-profit company, thereby enabling SOE to reduce its overhead. In this regard, SOE selects wardens based on players’

Prior vigilance against credit spammers in the form of reports filed was indeed a factor in selecting Wardens. So if you’ve reported spammers before the Warden program announcement, you’ll have a better chance of receiving an invite.¹⁶⁸

SOE, then, takes a favourable view of subscribers with a history of virtual public or community service specifically in this area. How effective has this selection process been? In a thread titled “Warden Presence needed ASAP” a poster named Iriquois states:

In Easley, Contact Gray- or Iriquois’ IG for their names.

Danask responds:

I just got one when I logged in, in a meeting soon so I will check back when I am done.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ GreyPawn, “Warden Selection Question & Concern,” September 6, 2007, accessed on November 15, 2009.

http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?start=15&topic_id=470697

¹⁶⁹ Iriquois (forum name), “Warden Presence needed ASAP,” January 5, 2008, accessed on November 15, 2009.

http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?topic_id=571123

Danask's message reveals a desire to help the community. It is not clear whether Iriquois reported the spammer to SOE. What is more important in terms of the Warden Program is that players are using out-of-game official forums to ask wardens for help. It may well be that SOE was not involved in the original complaint about the spammer, but acted only during the administrative process of the squelching by the warden known as Danask.

In RL we have seen an evolution of the policing role. In Ottawa, for example, instead of constables (who are paid more), we have bylaw officers who conduct policing yet who do not have the full legal powers of regular city constables. SOE's CSRs have all the policing authority as reflected in the EULA and the computer-coded architecture. Player wardens have been drawn into the role of CSRs but, like bylaw officers, have been granted less authority. A warden can only silence a Pharmer; in the spamming process, an automated message is sent to SOE's CSRs regarding the action.

On September 18, 2008, Valara, who is SOE's Community Manager, posted "Happy Anniversary, Wardens!" In that message it was revealed just how effective the volunteer program had been in its first year:

It's been one year since wardens started patrolling the galaxy for spamming evildoers, and we wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you to all wardens past and present for your efforts. Since the warden program started in September 2007, over 10,000 spammers have been silenced by wardens across the galaxies. Way to swing those spammer hammers!

The Entire *Star Wars* Galaxies team thanks all of our player volunteers for their contributions to the game community.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ September 18, 2009, accessed on October 9, 2008.
http://forums.station.sony.com/swg/posts/list.m?topic_id=749339

The themes of this chapter have been authority, control, and co-option. SOE has attempted to eliminate Pharming and to regulate and monetize its games. It has conducted public relations in an attempt to control opinion. It has held conventions (like the one in Las Vegas), founded a player Senate, and run ads in *PC Gamer* in an effort to manage the in-game community. But at the same time, it has made little or no effort to democratize the game. In my view, they are missing an opportunity. We also see SOE co-opting players who attend conventions by enforcing an NDA—another lost opportunity to truly influence the player community. Finally, we see the brilliant use of the Warden Program to further the aims of a for-profit company.

Chapter 6

A NEW HOPE

OFFICER: We've analyzed their attack, sir, and there is a danger.

Should I have your ship standing by?

TARKIN: Evacuate? In our moment of triumph? I think you overestimate their chances!

Dialogue from *Star Wars: A New Hope*

In this thesis, I have argued that while Star Wars Galaxies started as a sand-box MMORPG, the capitalist compulsion to innovate, to add to, to augment product codes, to commodify, and to expand the subscriber base or market share resulted in slap-dash modifications, the alienation of existing users and perhaps for the first time in recorded online history, a virtual subscriber rebellion against upgrades and enhancements. The politics of these developments have been covered in some detail in this thesis, and I have argued that they are eminently predictable under capitalist relations. They span SOE attempts to alternately ignore, then coerce, and then co-opt the energies of the active players. Even as SOE fervently opposed the extra-commercial exchanges by Pharms because this undermined the labour-based virtual "grind" of online play, they secretly made plans to co-opt such commercial exchanges through a regulated online exchange. These schemes reveal that the underlying compulsion that governed the online universe of Star Wars Galaxies, its social control, inclusion and exclusion and all the distinctions and hierarchies that made up this virtual world, were, at the bottom, for sale.

These developments smack of conspiratorial intrigue, managerial bumbling and may even border on duplicity, but the larger, more powerful current must not be ignored.

Star Wars Galaxies, as a game commodity, mimicked and even grotesquely exaggerated a culture of greed and exploitation that continues to permeate RL capitalism. Leisure time, the grind, rare or “benefit granting” wardrobes, gadgets of all types, need not be earned. There are always short-cuts. The powers that were responsible for regulating virtual commerce as in RL commerce did not bother regulating per se, they simply set about legalizing and re-branding what was already illicit and then taxing it by creating a safe medium of exchange. By doing so, almost overnight SOE’s Station Exchange sanctioned subscriber based RMT that both offered a guaranteed method of exchange but also greater control over the players who could afford to take short cuts and those looking to make a few dollars. SOE turned online socializing into a drive-by or log-in hustle “want to buy armour, weapons or in-game currency? We can deliver safely and securely to your account!”.

SOE merely did what it was compelled to do. It found a way to make more money, sell more product, (such as the Star Wars trading card game) and at least *attempt* to find more subscribers. In the process, however, it undermined what SWG was supposed to stand for. It was not only complicit, but an active participant in killing the Force. In capitalist parlance, it had to innovate, sell, expand. Its every failure was a success. Incomplete or “buggy” programming simply meant the opportunity to sell game patches or game chapters and for both SOE and the subscriber, time is money. When these were fixed, SOE could sell “new and improved” or “enhanced” products such as the “Star Wars Galaxies Trading Card Game” card booster packs. It could always rely on the fact that thousands of people wanted to participate in the Star Wars world created by

George Lucas. Like Wall Street traders, SOE did not need to be creative or productive to make a buck, it just needed to be clever because everybody already wanted in.

So, the problem of SWG was merely that SOE did what it was supposed to do because it is a for-profit corporation. By definition, therefore, it sought to exploit the public good will around the Star Wars idea. By exploit, I mean profit. To profit is a good under capitalism, but profit demands exploitation. If everyone was paid their worth, (as each worker's part in the value of a final product), capitalism would crumble. In addition, as SOE sought further revenue generation, the company failed to understand how capitalism would impact on the in-game 'exchange' economy which, in turn, was detrimental to the in-game social order that was given structure by the EULA.

But what if George Lucas's world - a world that has reportedly made him worth over three billion dollars - was conceived not as an opportunity for commercial exploitation but rather, as Star Wars itself is premised, a world where galactic democracy triumphs over tyranny? Star Wars has produced so much positive energy. It has fostered tremendous charitable work. It has brought together thousands of fans from all over the world, playing, socializing, fantasizing and dreaming of a world where right and democracy and galactic good will one day triumph over tyranny and exploitation. In short, what if we start thinking of the RL governance of Star Wars Galaxies not as a virtual world of petty hustles, conspiracies and fast bucks, but rather as a public good? A world Lucas may have conceived but that we all own and participate in? How would such a conception change how a Star Wars MMORPG operates?

The Star Wars Galaxies Emulation Effort

In a dark room, far far away, a modest beta server whirs in an air conditioned building. Internal circuits are processing the inputs of hundreds of Star Wars online players as they chat, form guilds, take on missions, resist, dominate, fight and make alliances. The server is not owned by SOE. No one is making a profit. The server is perhaps the first-ever stand-alone MMORPG emulator based on SWG. It is pre-CU. It is sand-box. Most importantly, it is non-profit.

There are several emulation efforts underway and www.SWGEmu.com is at the forefront. The Emulator staff is a dedicated group of Star Wars Galaxies fans who only want to enjoy what was taken from them: the Pre-CU version of the game. They are designing and maintaining the game but perhaps most importantly, protecting and cultivating a large Star Wars community base. Currently, over one hundred thousand members are signed up at their website. This virtual and collectivist community strives to protect the integrity of the Star Wars world while allowing players to immerse themselves in the Star Wars experience, at no cost and for no profit. Donations are welcome, of course, but the bills that keep the server running continue to pile up.

Despite all this fan-based good will, the emulator's life may be short. It seems that SOE and /or LucasArts –this is unclear-, have concern over any potential “monetization” of the emulator. The emulator staff is therefore unable to charge memberships in order to hire or pay developers, or internet and customer service personnel. SOE and /or LucasArts have thus placed the non-profit volunteer idea in a constant state of impoverishment. Star Wars fans are forbidden from nourishing their own online playpen specifically because it is not-for-profit. But what if LucasArts recognized or even allowed

it? What if players were permitted to play according to their own, democratically produced rules? What if, in RL governance, the Star Wars world was a democratic, empowering, and self-sufficient universe benefiting the public good? What would this look like?

I have been playing SWG since the fall of 2003 and I have maintained a paid subscription since. I have been a Star Wars fan from as early as I can remember. Most importantly, I have been researching the mechanics and politics of online gaming for this thesis for over four years. Here is my suggestion for actualizing the Star Wars idea for the public good.

I think a non profit, charitable, self-financed, membership-based, semi-independent SWG emulator under another name, open to old and new subscribers, needs to be permanently put in place. This line of thinking needs to be explored for the yet unreleased BioWare MMORPG, Star Wars: The Old Republic. Eventually, the unreleased Star Wars: The Old Republic will see an end to its 'main stream' life cycle. However, as a niche it will still be in demand regardless of any new Star Wars incarnation that will surely follow. The rules, governance, and organization of the emulator management group should be determined democratically. While the organization would collect membership dues like any other charitable organization, it would similarly have the ability to hire permanent staff under salary, to provide member, technical, and online support as well as software development. The staff would be answerable to an elected board. Proceeds from membership dues would go to paying salaries, organizational growth i.e. membership drives (advertising) and all additional funds would be sent to charity. For example, it would make sense to adopt as a core

recipient charity, George Lucas's own "Edutopia: The George Lucas Educational Foundation". In fact, George Lucas could sanction or recognize future emulation efforts such as Star Wars: The Old Republic MMORPG when that unreleased game eventually concludes its mainstream life cycle and membership monies could assist additional charities.

There are already examples of similar organizations. The 501st Legion (Vader's Fist) is a fan based club whose members adorn themselves in costumes from the Star Wars universe. This organization has chapters (or Garrisons, Squads, Outposts and detachments) worldwide. Often members of the 501st will perform at charity functions or appear at hospitals for children.

The 501st goes to great lengths not to infringe or cause any harm to the Star Wars brand. As an organization, the 501st holds elections, maintains member conduct regulations and interestingly, strictly regulates internal merchandising and promotional standards. To quote at length, Article VIII, Section A of the 501st Charter:

It is recognized that any organization requires promotion on some level to help it grow. It is also recognized that the 501st Legion is a club based on a copyrighted property and has no legal rights to profit from the sales of merchandise bearing images or ideas from the *Star Wars* property. Consequently, it is agreed that whatever merchandise or promotional materials are created to advertise the 501st Legion will be sold only to members within the Legion and at cost. 501st merchandise or promotional materials are not to be sold to the general public. All promotional materials will meet the following guidelines before being approved by the club. All materials not abiding by these guidelines will be considered unauthorized and forbidden to all members of the 501st Legion. Any member producing and/or distributing unauthorized Legion material will be eligible for disciplinary action by the Legion CO and/or XO and could face expulsion as decided by the Legion Council. Members wearing unauthorized Legion materials at official events shall be directed to remove these items, and if members fail to comply, said members will be eligible for disciplinary action by the Legion CO and/or XO and could face expulsion.

It is also stated that the Legion does not endorse the creation of props, costumes, or materials for sale to others. Any items created are for the express use of the creator. No provisions are made for the creation, sales, purchase, trades, or exchanges of any kind of costumes, props, or materials. Legion rules do not extend to any disputes related to these matters.¹⁷¹

Additionally Article IV – “Offices” of the 501st Charter Section G states:

The Merchandising and Branding Officer (MBO) monitors all merchandising within the Legion in regards to Garrison and Legion branded merchandise. All merchandising projects at both the Garrison and Legion level must first be approved by the MBO. The MBO makes sure that copyrights are not flagrantly violated, and that pricing follows the Legion’s non-profit philosophy. The MBO also monitors the charity fundraising activities of the Legion. Annual Garrison charity fundraising summaries should be forwarded to the MBO for statistical purposes and to have them available for public review. The MBO also responds to infringements of the Legion’s names and logos, as well as violations of the “for sale to members only” policy.¹⁷²

The club known as the 501st Legion was founded in 1997 by Albion Johnson and Tom Crews. Johnson is quoted to have said “I wanted something that would give the average fans a collective identity at the conventions – a family of their own, [with] tours of duty”.¹⁷³ To quote Steve Sansweet, head of fan relations for Lucasfilm Ltd. “We consider the members of the 501st part of the extended Lucasfilm family” and to quote Sansweet once more “They have fun and share a sense of community, while at the same

¹⁷¹ 501st Legion (Vader’s Fist). “Charter,” Date of post not given, accessed on February 3, 2010.

Article VIII Section A.
<http://501st.com/charter.php>

¹⁷² Ibid. Article IV - Offices Section G

¹⁷³ StarWars.com, Johnson, Albion, “501st Legion,” Date of quote not given, accessed on February 3, 2009.

<http://www.starwars.com/databank/organization/five01st/index.html>

time bringing joy to a lot of people through their work with kids, raising money for charities, or just posing for photos with surprised but delighted ‘civilians’”.¹⁷⁴

In 2004, in recognition of the fandom, the 501st was worked into the official background as Darth Vader’s personal legion known as “Vader’s Fist”.¹⁷⁵ According to the same LucasArts source, the company featured the 501st with a complete storyline in the Star Wars Battlefront II video game. The 501st has also been featured in two Star Wars books.

Lucasfilm has recognized the 501st Legion as its preferred Imperial costuming group.¹⁷⁶ It is also worthy to note that many of the actors from the Star Wars films and some current and former employees of George Lucas are honorary members. George Lucas himself is a honorary member of this fan organization.

What does this all mean in terms of the emulation effort? The lessons that can be drawn from examining the 501st’s most responsible care and handling of the very valuable Star Wars Intellectual Property (IP) is one that I believe could be used by the emulation effort. The 501st has demonstrated that its members can enjoy their Star Wars fantasy by forming a well governed social group that gives to charities, all the while celebrating the very best of Star Wars in the best possible light.

George Lucas and his companies appear to have not caused difficulties for the 501st. In fact the opposite is true. They have recognized and endorsed, this non profit charity club. Even more importantly, Lucas has allowed the members of the 501st to

¹⁷⁴ StarWars.com, Sansweet, Steve, Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Note: I heavily paraphrased this citation

¹⁷⁶ 501st Legion (Vader’s Fist) “Frequently Asked Question,” Date of post not given, accessed on February 3, 2010. Note: This citation is for the fine print at the bottom of the FAQ page.

<http://www.501st.com/faqs/php>

internally sell, at cost, merchandise that non-members are prohibited from purchasing. Consequently, Lucas can gain further positive attention and publicity, all the while knowing that his intellectual property is well cared for. This in turn creates greater fan appreciation while giving the community a sense of ownership.

Hypothetically, if the emulation project(s), for example SWGEmu.com, were to incorporate as a non-profit charity this would ensure that charitable endeavors would see a stable and predictable flow of donations. Lucas would also be assured that his IP is respected. A potential emulator service provider could model its organization based on the already recognized 501st Legion. By doing so, Lucas would also have a framework to handle what is now known and emerging as “MMORPG After Market”. Therefore, after the capitalist needs of recovering development costs surrounding SWG and profits are made, turning over SWG, a product that is seen from a capitalist standpoint, as obsolete, into a charity vehicle that fills a niche makes sense.

What makes this idea unique is that those who want to play the emulator right now will have access to a stable and predictable virtual community and game. The developers and other staff can be paid salaries and work full time at market rates. All surplus monies are then donated to charity. Like the 501st Legion, its members would be able to purchase, at cost, merchandise as to grow the community. The Emulation service providers would also have a source of money to improve and perhaps expand a truly unique game. There are, of course, many unknowns in this scheme. How will the emulator be democratically run? How transparent will surveillance and control over members be? How will the demand for new ‘clients’ (software disks for members) be

handled? Should any new positions, like an Ombudsperson, be created to handle liaison with the Executive and player complaints?

Concluding Remarks

SWG was launched too early; Raph Koster, the game's former Creative Director, has stated as much. SOE's overhauls of the game were largely a response to that original problem. The constant balancing and rebalancing of the game resulted in a toxic relationship between the subscribers and SOE staff.

I hope I have shown how a committed and computer – savvy customer base was able to challenge SOE's actions – that resistance is not futile, even in a hyper-panoptic, virtual space. During the implementation of the CU and the NGE, subscribers sought out virtual spaces beyond the panoptic gaze in order to offer scathing accounts of their treatment of SOE's, effectively warning off potential subscribers. The lesson that SOE should have learned is that for a leisure environment to function, the system must never be changed so radically that it is no longer in the best interests of the subscribing community continue to stay. When the game was first launched, SOE had been able to control hundreds of thousands of subscribers; by the time the game had been overhauled twice, the subscribers saw no point in remaining docile and rule abiding – they had lost their stakes in conformity.

SOE made several attempts to improve its customer relations by hosting influencer summits, road tours, and block parties (“meet-and-greets”). Again, this was an attempt to stabilize an environment of revolt that could easily have been avoided. To give SOE credit, communication between the company and its subscribers has dramatically

improved, as has the level of polish now found in the NGE. John Smedley has long been known to respond to personal e-mails, including my own. Clearly, he and his staff have revamped their customer relations on the heels of the CU and NGE fiascos.

Twice – once with the CU, and again with the NGE – the managers at SOE, and possibly at LucasArts, failed to appreciate how the games overhauls were undermining their capacity to maintain control and virtual civil order. After those overhauls were made, it did not matter whether you were banned or well behaved – your game and your money had been taken from you no matter what you did. Put simply, SOE had lost all the authority it had once enjoyed over its subscribers.

This thesis asked two basic questions relating to the game's hyper-panoptic design: (1) Where is the real money? (2) How is making money connected with surveillance? In answering these questions related to surveillance, I broke down a framework into six chapters that explained the role of power and authority in policing and co-opting SWG subscribers. SOE's failure to provide a stable game, and perhaps LucasArt's handling of SWG, drove the game's subscribers to revolt (which demonstrated, by the way, that they were more adaptable than SOE). SOE's short-sighted approach to managing its subscriber base demonstrated that poor information and planning can cost a company profits and reputation. Finally, this thesis offered a historical account of the SWG subscribers' revolt and suggests what lessons the rebels have drawn – and perhaps SOE and LA as well. Since the turmoil caused especially by the NGE, SOE has made positive and well-received changes and improvements to SWG.

For a long time SOE's EULA, combined with the computer-coded virtual architecture, allowed the company to implement a hyper-panoptic environment that

generated profit. On a deeper level, the game's internal mechanics – in particular, the designed-in need for players to gain acceptance by the player community – meant that subscribers had to join a guild to enjoy the game's full benefits. In this way, the players were co-opted into policing one another's actions. It also meant that players who broke the EULA could get their friends in trouble with SOE. Thus, the medium as SOE developed it became an intense social venue in which the players learned to protect the system with a high degree of vigilance. Later, to reduce its security and policing costs, SOE co-opted the players to volunteer their time to combat Pharmers' spam, which was advertising third party websites that were "illegally" selling virtual currency and power-leveling services. Yet at the same time, the company was selling virtual card-game packs, which offered loot that could be sold for large sums of in-game money. In other words, SOE was using the players to combat Pharming activities while selling its own sanctioned "work-arounds".

I have demonstrated two circular themes. The first theme is the legal and historic: old policing theories and practices have been adapted to the new technology and injected into a virtual environment with the goal of regulating online gamers. The second theme concerns SOE's business model. SOE has also demonstrated a capacity to quickly redirect its business model to embrace the financially lucrative market for in-game goods and virtual currency.

The gaming industry – including, of course, SOE – seems to have taken notice of two things: first, that online gaming has become a mainstream form of entertainment; and second that the mainstream media, including CBS News and the BBC, are beginning to

report on the ethics on online game companies. The player base now realizes that by resisting within and outside the panoptic environment, it can force effective change.

What remains to be seen, however, is whether the premise of the world of Star Wars the triumph of galactic good over tyranny can be actualized in RL structures like a non-profit, charitable emulator. A development that, in my opinion, holds new hope for not only disaffected SWG gamers but could be a seed that revamps online gaming as a whole. That future is already here, it will either be a legal, positive, prosocial world of game play that supports RL charitable endeavors or a subterranean, impoverished virtual world ducking and evading the lurking menace of corporal profiteers armed with legal desist orders.

SpooF Dialogue

(based on *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*)

PLAYER BASE: You're going down a path I can't follow!
SWG: Because of the Vets?
PLAYER BASE: Because of what you've patched! What you plan to patch! Stop!
Stop all this before it's too late! I love you!
SWG sees a cl 90 jedi emerge from the Player Base's ship.
SWG: You LIAR!
PLAYER BASE: No!
SWG: You're with him! You sent him here to crash me!
SWG force lags the Player Base.
VETERAN: Let them go SWG!
Continues to force lag.
VETERAN: Let, them, go!
SWG releases force lag as the Player Base collapses.
SWG: You turned them against me!
VETERAN: You have done that yourself!
SWG angerly paces.
SWG: You will not take my customers from me!
VETERAN: Your greed and lust for money have already done that. You have allowed this, SOE to twist your mind until now, until now you've become the very thing you swore to destroy.
SWG: Don't lecture me Vet. I have seen through the lies of the Veteran Community. I do not fear the NGE as you do. I have brought content, exciting new camera angle, less professions, and starwarsyness to my new game!
VETERAN: Your new game?
SWG: Don't make me perma-ban you ... !
VETERAN: SWG, my allegiance is to pre-NGE; to good gaming!
SWG: If you're not with me, then you're my enemy!
VETERAN: Only an SOE dev patches without thinking. I will do what I must.
SWG: ... You will try ...
They fight.
VETERAN: ...I have failed you SWG, I have failed you ...
SWG: I should've known the Veterans were plotting to take over!
VETERAN: SWG, Chancellor SOE is evil!
SWG: From my point of view the Veterans are evil!
VETERAN: Well then you are lost!
...
SWG: ...This is the end for you my loyal subscriber ...
They fight some more and the Vet dismembers SWG.
VETERAN: You were the Chosen One! It was said that you would be a good game

not a bad one! Bring happiness to the players, not leave them in darkness!
SWG: ...I HATE YOU!!!...
VETERAN: You were my favorite game SWG ... I loved you ...
SWG burns.
Vet logs off.

Gom_Kuub, "SWG, You're Breaking My Heart!"¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Sandi (forum name), "SWG, You're Breaking My Heart!" by Gom_Kuub, December 15, 2005, accessed on May 20, 2009.
<http://intrepid.galaxyforums.com/index.php?showtopic=19287&s=3cea7e211408aea80b69f330def077b2>

Note: Thanks to Baphometslayer (forum name) at RLMMO.com for helping me find this old reposted message.

List of Appendices

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Appendix A.

Published SWG Rule Lists

Published SWG Rule Lists

“Star Wars Galaxies End User License Agreement” (Revised August 21, 2006).
Accessed on April 14, 2008.

http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg.php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faaid=15629

SWG, “Customer Service: Rules and polices (Rules of Conduct).” Date of publication not given. Accessed on April 14, 2008.

http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faaid=15631

GEN, “Customer Service: Rules and Polices (SOE Terms of Service-station.com). Date of publication not given. Accessed on April 14, 2008.

http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faaid=15630

SWG, “Customer Service: Rules and Polices (Reimbursement Policy).” Date of publication not given. Accessed on April 14, 2008.

http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faaid=15633

GEN, “Customer Service: Rules and Polices (SOE Privacy Policy).” Date of publication not given. Accessed on April 14, 2008.

http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp?_faaid=15634

SWG, “Customer Service: Rules and Policies (Naming Policy).” Date of publication not given. Accessed on April 14, 2008.

http://help.station.sony.com/cgi-bin/soe.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?_faaid=15632

SWG, “Policies Message Boards.” Date of publication not given. Accessed on March 14, 2010.

http://starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com/en_US/players/content.vm?page=Policies%20Message%20Boards&resource=policies

Appendix B.

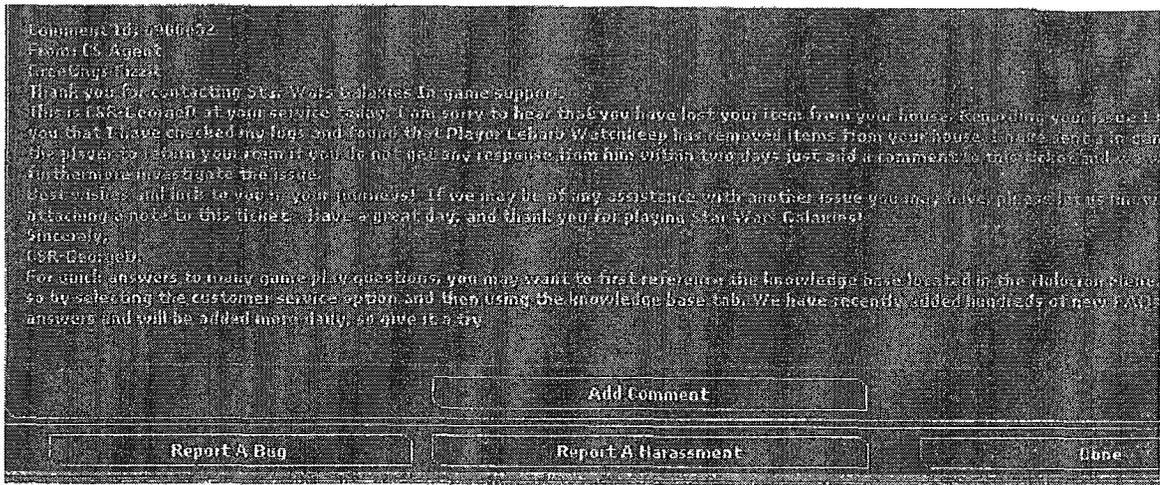
Questions and Concerns for Prospective Guild Members

Questions and Concerns for Prospective Guild Members

1. Where are you in RL? This is not meant to elicit your address. Really, the question is getting at what you consider your prime time for logging in. People want members to join their PA who will be online at the same time. For example, if you are located in North America, you would be better off not playing SWG on a European server. Different time zones are a real concern for the MMO player (leaving aside language issues).
2. What is your language proficiency? Select a game server and membership in a PA that takes advantage of your language skills. Do not expect other players to be language instructors.
3. How old are you. Over or under 18?
4. As friendships form in-game, it is not unheard of for players to meet up in RL or exchange contact information. On a personal note, some of my friends got together in Las Vegas for a meet and greet. You may also be asked to sign up on a guild website that is not connected with SOE. This is fairly common in MMO games, but some may find this uncomfortable. It is also common for PAs to use Teamspeak or Ventrillo voice software. This may actually be a guild requirement.
5. Be honest when applying to a guild. Do *not* expect a guild to change its ways for you. I would not hesitate to guild kick a new player for lying or misrepresenting him/herself. This sort of action gets very old very quickly. You will end up with a damaged reputation when others ask about your character. (More on this subject in Chapter 3.)

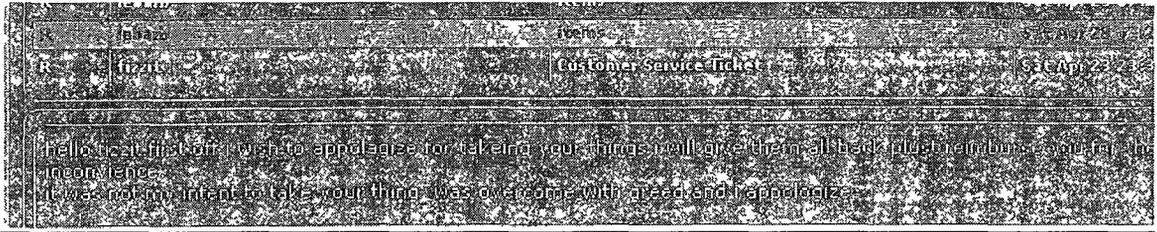
Appendix C.

CS Agent URL



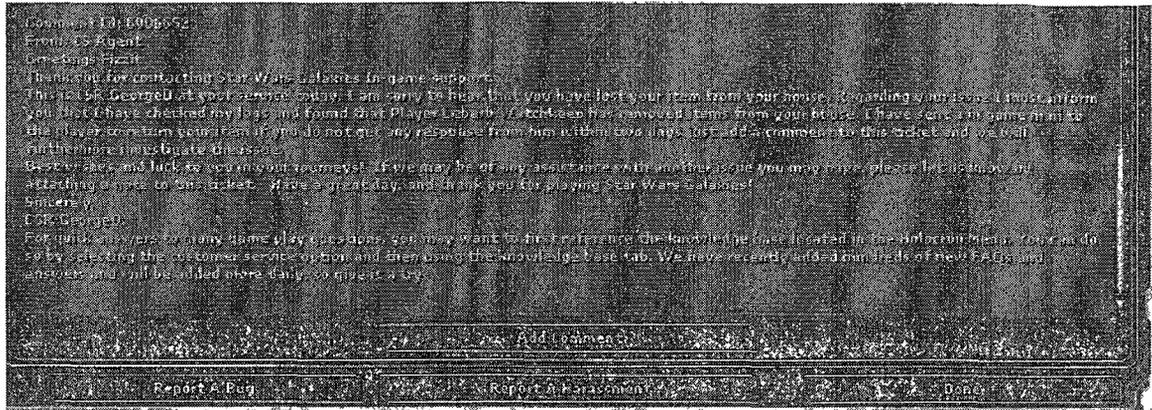
Appendix D.

Lebarb email URL



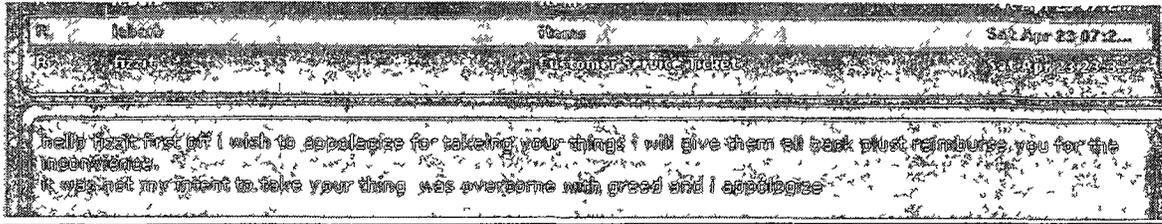
Appendix E.

CS Agent Screenshot



Appendix F.

Lebarb_email Screenshot



Appendix G.

Star Wars Galaxies READ BEFORE YOU BUY



home | eBay | register | sign in | Services | site map
[Buy](#) | [Sell](#) | [My eBay](#) | [Community](#) | [Help](#)

Start new search
 Advanced Search
 Powered By

[Back to homepage](#)

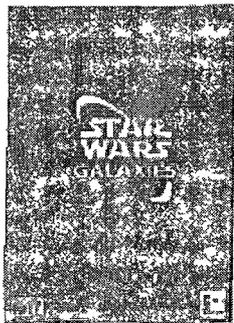
listing all ebay
 PC & Video Games > PC Game > Action/Adventure
 Toys, Books, Music & Art > Games & Accessories > Star Wars > Star Wars
 Galaxies > READ BEFORE YOU BUY

Star Wars Galaxies READ BEFORE YOU BUY
 Selling game and Expansion

Item number: 8189063527

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Starting bid **£1.00**

Time left **9 days 23 hours**
 10-day listing Ends
 10-May 05 15:28 GBST

Start time 30-Apr 05 15:28 GBST

History 1 bids

Item location Swinburn
 United Kingdom

Post to United Kingdom

Postage costs Check item description and payment instructions or contact seller for details

[Postage, payment details and return policy](#)

Seller information

mkoimitingsteve (4)
 Feedback Score 4
Positive Feedback 100%
 Member since 18 May 02 in United Kingdom
[Read feedback comments](#)
[Add to Favourite Sellers](#)
[Ask seller a question](#)
[View seller's other items](#)

Standard Purchase Protection Offered
 Feedback

Description

Platform PC
 Genre Action, Adventure

Seller assumes all responsibility for listing this item

Condition Used
 Format PAL (UK Standard)

Auction item description
 Condition Used

**'THIS GAME IS THE WORST THING EVER,
 DO NOT BUY, DO NOT EVEN CONSIDER**

**BUYING THIS LOT TO ACTUALLY PLAY.
IF YOU LIKE STARWARS LOOK FOR
ANOTHER GAME.**

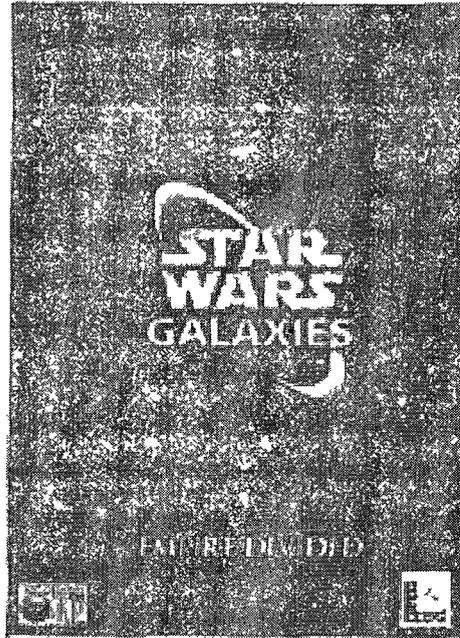
**THE DEVELOPERS OF THIS GAME HAVE
WELL AND TRUELY RUINED IT, IT IS
NOT WORTH YOUR TIME, EFFORT OR
MONEY TO BUY. IF YOU DO BUY IT FOR
A GAME YOU WILL BE VERY
DISAPOINTED, THAT IS WHY THIS
AUCTION IS SPECIAL;**

IXSWG GAME BOXED, USED CONDITION

IXJUMP TO LIGHTSPEED EXPANSION

**IXINSTRUCTIONS WHICH DO NOT EVEN MAKE SENSE
AS THE GAME IS NOW DIFFERENT. THESE COULD
NOW PERHAPS BE USED AS A COLORFUL TOILET
PAPER? IF YOU WRINKLE IT UP I FOUND IT WORKS,
SO X2 PAGES ARE MISSING ALREADY, BUT THEY
WERE REMOVED PRIOR TO THE DEED BEING DONE
SO THE REST IS CLEAN.**

THE AUCTION FOR THE TWO BOXES AND GAMES ARE



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Payment methods accepted



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10 bids (10 bids) (10 bids)

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[eBay at a glance](#)

Appendix H.

Props out to PC Gamer

Props out to PC Gamer

Home » Props out to PC Gamer

10:21 AM

It'd like to offer a huge congratulations to PC Gamer for taking a stand and... the right thing to do and to take a lot of guts. It's saying "not all games are the same" and it's doing it right. I think we're beginning to see the impact that the kind of unconditional support we've given to game developers in...

We caught a bit of flack when we launched Station Exchange, but that quickly dissipated and I think I'm now convinced that this is exactly what some portion of the people that play these games want to do. And we're doing it right with that, as long as it doesn't detract from other people's enjoyment of the game. By focusing on defining what we're doing for EQ II, we missed a lot of that activity to the Exchange servers (the number still happens on the other servers, but the level of activity has been significantly reduced). It's also nice to see to note that we've had some big differences in player activity on the Exchange servers.

The difference is that on the Exchange servers, we're not on a level playing field because the kind of activity is both allowed and regulated. On the other hand, on the other servers, there are people that do break the rules and engage in this... and we're not really doing as much to help solve problems and to provide a better experience for our players.

Let's face it, things don't happen. But we do get cheated. I'm not going to suggest that EQ is any of these companies cheat people because I don't believe that what they are doing however is wrong. It's ok to break the rules, as well as the PHAs, who I think is just doing wrong. It's like being a fence for stolen merchandise.

We who PC Gamer did look a lot of guts, and I applaud them for it. Turning away from the... in other things to do, but the one will be glad not to see in EQ II and in the Exchange of PC Gamer. It just never felt right.

David

Posted by David

Labels: EQ II, Exchange, PC Gamer, Props out to PC Gamer

Categories

EQ II, Exchange, PC Gamer, Props out to PC Gamer

Recent Comments

Gamez



1:56 PM

- Exchange the...
- EQ II

1:56 PM

- EQ II
- EQ II

Appendix I.

Greg and the PC Gamer crew.

oe_note_01_rmt_big.jpg (JPEG image, 1028x1340 pixels) - Scaled (59%) http://www.blogcdn.com/www.jcystiq.com/media/2006/04/oe_note_...



Greg and the PC Gamer crew,

It was with great interest that everyone here at Sony Online Entertainment read about your recent decision to no longer accept advertising from companies who traffic in grey market transactions in online games. These companies, and the "farmers" that usually accompany their services, have been as much of an issue for our company as they are to your readers, the people who play online games.

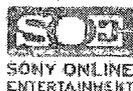
Over the last few years, the problems associated with the secondary market have impacted Sony Online Entertainment greatly. A surprising amount of the calls received by our customer service group are related to problems that arise from the unsanctioned secondary market, usually fraud related. Our developers and customer service staff spend a good deal of time working to eliminate the problems that come from farmers dominating areas of our games.

In the last few years, online game developers throughout the industry have begun thinking about these issues a great deal. Since EverQuest launched in 1999, we've seen the secondary market grow from a few players selling items or characters on eBay for EQ and Ultima Online to organized mobs of farmers and (even worse) bots engaged in ruthless harvesting and camping, spoiling the gameplay experience for hundreds of actual players.

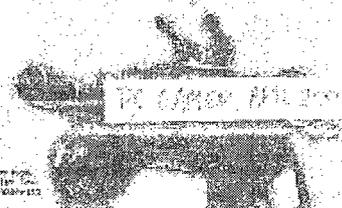
For every fix we make in our games, for every new tool we develop for our customer service teams, there are literally thousands of unscrupulous people around the globe looking for ways to poke holes in our games and find exploits in our worlds. We have taken substantial steps toward solving these and other problems, as well as balancing the desires of those who wish to engage in legitimate "real money" transactions, by launching Station Exchange™ in EverQuest® II; we will continue to develop innovative solutions in the future.

Sony Online Entertainment as a company would like to salute PC Gamer for taking a firm stance against supporting the unsanctioned grey market that has grown up around online games. It's always a bold move when a publisher turns down advertising revenue and we respect you for sticking to your guns. We're looking forward to reading farmer-free issues of PC Gamer in the future.

Best Regards,
Sony Online Entertainment



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Appendix J.

SOE, Press release

Press release

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT NAMES DAVID D CHRISTENSEN VICE PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

SOE Taps Industry Veteran to Further Strengthen San Diego Company's International Presence in Online Gaming

San Diego, Calif. - April 11, 2009 - Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) a global leader in the online gaming industry, today announces the appointment of David D. Christensen to Vice President of Business Development & International Operations. In this newly created position, Christensen will be responsible for executing SOE's global growth opportunities and managing key business relations in the U.S. and Europe on the business and legal side. In addition to his business development responsibilities, Christensen will be responsible for managing SOE's international compliance group. Christensen will be based in SOE's new Los Angeles office and will report to Vice President Greg Wheeler, Chief Executive Officer and former Vice President for Sony Online Entertainment.

Christensen is a veteran of the entertainment industry with a "wide range of business" experience, including development, distribution, a publisher, licensing and publishing. He is the former Vice President of Business Development for EA GAMES, where he drove the company's relationships with the business / multiplatform publishing community. He is also a former co-founder and CEO of Business Development for EA GAMES, where he was instrumental in leading negotiations on licensing and development deals for EA GAMES. He is also a former Vice President of Business Development for EA GAMES, where he was instrumental in leading negotiations on licensing and development deals for EA GAMES.

Christensen's wealth of experience in the industry with SOE and EA GAMES, and his extensive knowledge of the online gaming market will be an integral part of SOE's expansion strategy. Christensen joined SOE in 2007 and has been instrumental in driving the growth of SOE's international presence.

About Sony Online Entertainment
Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) is a leading provider of online entertainment experiences. SOE's portfolio of titles includes EverQuest, EverQuest II, EverQuest III, EverQuest Online Adventures, EverQuest Online Planes of Power, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 2, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 3, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 4, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 5, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 6, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 7, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 8, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 9, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 10, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 11, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 12, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 13, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 14, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 15, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 16, EverQuest Online Planes of Power: The Prophecy 17, 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Appendix K.

Stopping Bill Creation

Stopping Bill Creation

Help - Site Information - Home - My Account - My Profile - My Settings - My Alerts - My Subscriptions - My Billing - My Support - My Feedback

Stopping Bill Creation

Message

To: [Name] <[Email]>

From: [Name] <[Email]>

Subject: Stopping Bill Creation

Dear [Name],

We are pleased to see that your suggestions are being considered. In the future, we will be able to track the progress of your suggestions and provide you with updates on their status. We will also be able to provide you with more information on how to get involved in the process.

Thank you for your input.

[Signature]

© 2010 [Company Name]. All rights reserved.

Privacy Policy | Terms of Service | Site Map | Contact Us

10/10/2010 11:38 AM

Glossary

afk away from keyboard. Lets others know you will not be participating for a brief time.

afk kill A much celebrated form of PVP kill. If you are afk or perhaps reading in-game e-mail while declared ready for PVP combat, and if you have not taken measures to have your friends stand guard, then you are an afk PVPer and you will be attacked if found. If you are a prominent gamer (perhaps known for your PVP prowess) a celebrity screenshot may be taken of your demise for posting on a Web forum.

aggro Aggressive. If you venture too close to a nonplayer character, (NPC) you may be attacked without initiating combat. Tactically, a group of players may have one of their members “pull aggro” to lure a NPC away from a certain desirable location. Just to be cruel, some players “pull aggro” on purpose and lead a powerful NPC into an area with weak or low-level players. This is a form of *griefing* others and could be considered a violation of the rules.

AI Artificial Intelligence

Alpha Class (or **Alpha**) A term to describe Jedi status and power in relation to non-Jedi. Under the current NGE system, all classes are meant to be equal in power though they differ in capabilities.

alt An alternative or additional avatar that a subscriber can use. In MMOs one often hears, for example, “I’m playing my alt now not my main avatar.” See *main avatar*

avatar death Generally, nothing to worry about in SWG. When you are killed, you simply respawn in a Clone Center.

base busting (or **basetaking**) Attacking and destroying a player-owned faction base.

basetaker A player who has designed his avatar to have all the skills required to destroy a player-owned base. Having acquired these skills, a basetaker is actually quite weak and requires the protection of fellow guild members to get inside the base.

BH Bounty Hunter

buff A temporary increase in one’s abilities and/or attributes. The effectiveness of a buff varies, as does the method by which a player acquires it. In-game food increases one’s abilities; so does a doctor’s or entertainer’s buff. Buffs can also be used in noncombat situations. For example, a crafter can get a crafting buff that may allow him or her to create a better item. If a new player can afford to be buffed, that player’s grind time will be dramatically reduced.

camping Stay in one location for in-game gain. People “camp” locations for various reasons, but mainly for rewards such as in-game money (credits), or “loot items” such as power crystals for building a lightsaber.

carebear (1) A player who complains about the game mechanics and succeeds in having the rules changed to favour his or her style of play. (2) A derogatory term for a player with the Imperial or Rebel Alliance faction who flaunts a high rank to everyone in sight but does not actually participate in PVP combat. (3) A player who through ignorance or incompetence gets more experienced PVP players killed.

Chilastra (or **Chilly**) An SWG game server, affectionately known as “Chilly.” The Chilastra and Bria game servers have had a historic light hearted feud manifesting in various “forum wars” by which both server communities would post messages on the other’s server message boards much to the disapproval of SOE. For the record Chilastra does in fact own Bria.

Clone Center Where you reappear after you have been killed in-game.

Combat Upgrade (CU) The CU claimed to be major revamping of the pre-CU rules. The developers hoped it would fix many of the flaws (bugs) in the game’s computer code. The CU was also intended to balance all of the professions, thus ending the flavour-of-the-month (FOTM) approach to playing SWG. The CU was controversial: some subscribers liked it, but most did not and felt that SOE should have listened to the players more closely before trying to fix the problems with the pre-CU game.

content An in-game or message board activity that has a beginning, a climax, and a denouement that generally offers some reward.

correspondent Subscribers who volunteer and are selected to aid the SOE game developers (devs) in collecting and providing analysis in their respected fields. For example, a Jedi Senator acts as a medium between the devs and the subscribers. Originally, SWG had correspondents. As the game changed, the correspondent system became the Senate. Senators now act as the medium between the devs and the subscribers.

crafting suit An expensive collection of modded clothing that grants the crafter a tremendous advantage in manufacturing the very best items. A new player who aspires to be known server-wide for his or her goods must acquire this suit. High-level crafters are generally very wealthy.

credit The in-game currency of *Star Wars Galaxies*.

CSR Customer Service Representative. More recently known as game masters (GMs). SOE makes available both in-game and real-life (RL) customer support.

cya “C You Around.” In other words, “good-bye.”

DoT Damage over time. A form of damage that when inflicted causes steady harm. In SWG, players are able to apply various DoTs on other players (fire, poison, disease, etc.).

DPS damage per second

drop Anything looted from the corpse of a mob. Typically, friends will share news of a newly acquired and highly sought after item. *See* mob

eBay As a verb, the act of purchasing or selling virtual currency, game accounts, and power-leveling services. eBaying is generally looked down upon, besides violating SWG's EULA.

EULA *See* End User License Agreement

End User License Agreement (EULA) A binding agreement that governs and directs the relationship between SOE and its subscribers. By agreeing to the EULA, you give up all expectations of privacy. While logged into SWG, you are under the panoptic gaze of SOE and potentially, government and law enforcement.

experience points/XP Points earned by doing reward-worthy actions. The more XPs earned, the more quickly one advances to the next level or skill. Thus, if you play a combat profession and your avatar kills a creature, you earn experience points.

exploits The use of flaws in the game code for personal advantage. Often referred to as "sploitiz." If you are caught using a sploit, SOE could take action against your account. Guild leaders who encourage or condone sploitiz can be penalized as well. A player (or a guild) can loose social capital by acquiring a reputation for sploiting.

faction base (or **player base**) A bunker complex, simple or elaborate, that members of the Rebel Alliance or Galactic Empire can acquire from NPC faction recruiters by exchanging faction points. These points are earned as rewards by engaging in faction activities and PVP combat. Owners of faction bases can place a variety of turrets and minefields to protect them.

force-sensitive slot (or **FS slot**) When SWG launched, this was something you had to unlock to become a Jedi, but subscribers weren't told how they could do it. It was eventually revealed that a player needed to master five random professions in order to unlock. Later, in an example of stealth nerfing, the number was secretly raised to eight.

FOTM *See* flavour of the month

game master *See* CSR

GCW Galactic Civil War

gank To kill an opponent who is at a great disadvantage. Similarly, a “gank kill” is when a group of players kill an opponent, as in “Let’s go n00b ganking.”

grinding The lengthy process by which players advance their avatar’s in-game experience level. A new player (a “newb”) who reads the SWG game manual, listens to others, and researches strategies can dramatically reduce grind time. During the game’s CU and pre-CU periods, the grind often led to adversarial relations between subscribers and developers. The most successful players grinded “flavour of the month” (FOTM) avatars; the developers responded by nerfing the professions they had grinded. *See* nerfing

gtg good to go

guild An association of players. Guilds are central to the SWG players’ social experience. Most guilds have a leader, officers (who handle various tasks such as recruitment), members, and probationary members. The game is designed so that to reap the game’s full benefits, you almost have to join a guild. When you do, your avatar is entitled to display a “tag” with the guild’s acronym. The leaders and officers are required by the EULA and other SOE policies to report the fellow guild members who break the game’s rules.

Holocron (or ***Holo***) In Star Wars lore, an ancient holographic interactive teaching tool for Jedi. In SWG, Holocrons reveal some of the professions a player must learn in order to unlock the FS slot. Later, a Holocron could replenish the force ability of a Jedi. During the NGE period of the game Holocron quests could yield reward items and abilities to a Jedi.

holo-grinding The process of grinding out profession after profession until the prescribed number of masteries needed to unlock the FS slot is reached.

jk just kidding

k okay

kill stealing (KS) Killing a creature that is already fighting with another player. Generally seen as a form of harassment. An honourable guild will not tolerate this open disrespect of another honourable guild, regardless of player faction.

kiting A tactic commonly used in PVP and PVE to keep a player or nonplaying character (NPC) out of melee range.

latency (or ***lag***) A slow-down in the system—commonly, if one’s Internet service provider is slow.

leet speak/1337 “Elite speak,” used by gamers, mainly for amusement. 1337 is the use of numbers and or symbols to spell words in English or any other language. There are various dialects of elite speak. It is not considered proper to communicate entirely in 1337. While engaging in PVP for example one might say: “lol@u suXz0r” means “laugh out loud at you sucker.”

lfg looking for group

lol laugh out loud

macro A process by which a series of commands can be set up to be executed by a single keystroke. Often used to play the game while afk, to avoid the grind.

main avatar A subscriber’s most used avatar. Many players have multiple avatars, several for grinding and a “main” to actually play.

mission terminal A place where a new player can go to earn his or her first credits.

mt Mis/tell. A tell sent in error to the wrong person.

MMO See MMORPG

MMORPG (or MMO) Massive or Massively Multi-Player Online Role Playing Game. *Star Wars Galaxies* is an MMORPG.

mob Mobile. A nonplayer character or creature (NPC) controlled by computer.

modification (or mod) Something done to some component of the game to grant an advantage. Almost anything can be modified. High-value mods can be worth a substantial amount in SWG’s in-game economy.

multifaction guild A player association that openly welcomes all professions and all factions. Generally, the acceptance standard is lower and the turnover rates are higher. As a person leaves, a fresh face joins. Generally, though, the guild has a small core of long-term members.

nerfing Making something worse, weakening it. SOE has been known to nerf SWG in order to balance it out. Nerfing can be intentional or unintentional. When SOE doesn’t tell subscribers about a nerf, it is a “stealth nerf.”

new game enhancements (NGE) The second dramatic redesign of SWG, in 2005. (The first was Combat Upgrade.) The NGE caused tremendous outrage, which was reported by the mainstream media.

noob (or newb) A new player who has not yet integrated into virtual society. A noob who is respectful of those around him, who listens to advice, and who has read the game manual will be accepted quickly.

n00b A derogatory term for a noob who does not seem willing to adapt to the in-game society.

ninja looting The looting of rewards ahead of the other players one is grouped with before combat is over. Considered a detestable act. If you want to join a guild, don't engage in this.

np Never mind

NPC nonplaying character. *See* mob

onscreen waypoint monitor An optional albeit indispensable aid that acts as a rangefinder on one's user interface.

PA *See* player association

People Against a Communist Empire (or PACE Federation or PACE) A Rebel Alliance Faction guild that plays on the Chilastra server. PACE is a PVP guild and is a "basetaker capable." Its leader is Kobie PACE; its slogan is "That's how we roll!" It is headquartered in Trinsic on the virtual world on Lok.

Pharmer A person who earns RL money by selling virtual money or power-leveling services. Players who do not wish to grind can pay a Pharmer in RL currency to grind for them. Pharmers are generally viewed with disdain, as are those who use their services. A Pharmer who sells virtual Gold currencies is sometimes called a Gold Pharmer. *NOTE:* Pharmers in real life (RL) tend to be workers in the developing world who earn (in some cases) less than a dollar an hour.

player base *See* faction base

player Senate *See* correspondent

place of interest (or point of interest or POI) An location within the game considered remarkable. Examples: the Escape Pod used by R2D2 and C3P0 in *Star Wars: New Hope*; and Fort Tusken, which contains many NPC Sand People or Tusken Raiders.

Player Association (PA) *See* guild

player character (PC) Such characters are operated by a person controlling his or her avatar or toon. *See also* NPC

player city (or **player-owned city**) SWG allows players who have the resources to establish their own player cities. These can have various civic infrastructures such as parks and street lights. Elected mayors can appoint others to the City Militia. Unruly players can be “city banned” and thus unable to access civic resources and infrastructure (though they can still enter city limits).

player correspondent See correspondent

player killer (PK) An older term for “gank.” That is, someone who takes pleasure in killing other player avatars. PVP guild members are by nature PKs. PVP players tend to enjoy competition and to view non-PVP players of the same player faction as less relevant (derogatorily, as “carebears”).

power levelling The process by which subscribers buff their avatars. They do so as often as possible, using the very best in-game equipment to gain maximum advantage when grinding. For example, they will research the best areas in-game in order to take advantage of spawn times.

player versus environment (or player versus everything)(PVE) Combat or interaction with any computer-controlled mob.

pre-Combat Upgrade (pre-CU) SWG as it was originally launched. Many people fell in love with the original game; others complained that it was too difficult for new players to learn. Also, pre-CU had some astonishing bugs, besides lacking ground and space vehicles. Those who played pre-CU often wax nostalgic about it. Efforts are underway by former players to re-create a pre-CU game server.

pre-CU ScrapBook A definitive collection of message posts and threads that were collected and saved before SOE purged its official message forums. This thesis would not have been possible without the ScrapBook, which contains important historical posts and threads from John Smedley, SOE developers, and subscribers.

PVP See player versus player

radar Gives the player information about the surrounding area. Also reveals the player’s coordinates.

real life (RL) In-game, a group of people could be in the City of Mos Eisley; in RL, they could be located all over the real world.

real money transfer (RMT) The SOE-controlled sale of virtual currency and goods between players for RL money. SOE facilitates the process via its Station Exchange, which creates a safe intermediary; it also generates a small commission from every transaction. RMT is highly controversial as it is basically replacing Pharming.

resources In-game materials that can be mined, harvested, collected, and so on. Their quality varies dramatically. Generally, grind-quality (i.e., poor quality or substandard) materials sell for a few credits per unit. Resources of high or super-high quality are so rare that the seller can set the price.

RL See real life

role playing The act of “getting into character.” If your avatar is a Jedi, you will attempt to verbally and physically act like a Jedi.

role-playing guilds Guilds that take members who agree to role play and be in character every moment they are logged into the game.

RPG Role-playing game. Traditionally, RPG players take on a character’s role and try to achieve an objective. The game’s rules and mechanics must be understood by the participants and by the person who is facilitating the story. Role-playing games include *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Star Wars: The Role Playing Game*, and *Battlestar Galactica*.

rubberbanding An annoyance caused by high latency (see Latency). When your avatar is rubberbanded, you will see it, for example, walking 15 feet in one direction and then being snapped back to its starting position, again and again.

screenshot (or **screenie**) A picture of what is on one’s monitor while logged into SWG.

Senator See correspondent

spam unwanted, excessive, and unnecessary communications

spawning When an avatar is killed, it respawns in a Clone Center after a few seconds.

splnitz See exploits

stealth nerf See nerf

tanking A tactic that involves a suited profession confronting a mob and taking the brunt of the damage. Some of the party then heal the tank while the rest attack with ranged weapons. A Jedi is often used both *as* a tank and *for* tanking.

tell An instant private communication with another person. The command is `/tell [player’s name]` followed by whatever message you want to send.

toon avatar

twinking Providing large amounts of aid to a new player. For example, if you are a longtime subscriber and persuade a your friend to try the game, and lavish money, equipment, and other resources on him or her, you have just twinked that person. It is also common to twink your own alt.

veteran rewards High-value items granted to subscribers whose accounts are in good standing with SOE. The longer a subscriber has behaved “properly,” the greater the reward. These rewards can be traded in the in-game economy.

vibro knuckler (VK) An in-game melee weapon with a bladed edge.

Voice Over Internet Protocol/VOIP A software program that allows SWG players to use their voice in the game instead of typing out communications. At launch, SWG did not have VOIP capability; thus, some players used TeamSpeak (TS) or Ventrilo (Vent) instead. VOIP is downloadable for free, though a server must be rented. VOIPs are one way that players can circumvent (“ghost”) the hyperpanoptic gaze of SWG.

waypoint (WP) A set of in-game coordinates used for navigation and to mark locations such as shops, player cities, and so on.

XP See experience points

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