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BY NICHOLAS YEE

[\(\[HTTP://WWW.NICKYEE.COM/DAEDALUS\]\(http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus\)\)](http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus)

The Prince and The Pauper: The Transaction of Virtual Capital for Real-Life Currency

Very interesting arguments arose from player responses as to their views on the sale and purchase of virtual items, currency and accounts for RL currency. One common argument for the acceptability of these transactions rests on the inherent nature of capitalism. More importantly, some argue that the real underlying transaction is a transaction of time rather than a transaction of virtual items.

I have had friends purchase items from EBay and they have been very happy with the result. I have never been involved myself. I find it much more fun to earn the item rather than purchase it. Though, I do think the idea of making a business by selling virtual goods is intriguing and should not be the 'big deal' many game companies have made of it. These goods have value to many and many simply don't have the time to invest to get the items they want. Just like in life, if you have money, why shouldn't you be able to buy it? [CoH, F, 44]

There are some people that are vehemently against the sale of virtual goods for real life money. However, these 'virtual goods' are things that you could get in any case. Merely paying real life money for them indicates to you that your relaxing time after work is worth real life money to you. I have a friend who makes \$50,000 annually. He often buys virtual goods because his time off work is just as valuable as his time at work. Rather than camp a rare drop for 12 hours, he could be working 12 hours and use the money earned to buy the item he needs. It's all about how much you value your time. I have never sold anything, because I never have anything valuable enough to sell. I but I confess that I have bought virtual money for real money before. And I don't regret it. [EQ, M, 22]

I have purchased characters/accounts via 'playerauctions.' My reasons were simple.. I wanted a high level character of a different class and my playtime had been severely cut. I didn't feel like putting then endless hours into the needed leveling and weighed out the value of my time verses the cost of just buying an already made character. At the time I made 18/hr. So, I considered -- could I get a character to 60 in 10 hours of my time? Of course not. I don't regret the choice, I have since purchased several accounts. I have sold things in the past to liquidate from a game I was quitting (Ultima Online) and generally have had positive experiences. [EQ, F, 28]

The dominant argument against these transactions focuses on the inherent purpose of games and their separation from reality. These players argue that violating that separation threatens the essence of these environments, and is plain cheating.

I feel REALLY strongly about this, as it suddenly becomes a mockery of the game when some 30-something rich playboy lawyer, can be the biggest badass on the game, because he went on e-bay & bought some veteran's account. He didn't have to EARN what he got, while the rest of us work hard & toil for things. It's not a matter of it not being 'fair' life isn't fair, I know that but it's a matter of responsibility & respect. When I see a guy slay a huge beast & get rewarded for it, I respect him, cause he worked for that reward, he deserves it, but when you just buy it, it sort of takes away from the point of the game. [RO, M, 25]

However, I would like to absolutely stress my opinions on the topic. MMORPGs are places where people come together and be who they want to be. To stress, MMORPGs are places where people come together and be who they want to be. Perhaps being overly dramatic to drive home the point: the fat can be skinny, the ugly can be pretty, the shy can be outspoken, the handicapped can be whole, and the poor can be rich. The playing field is leveled. Act, speak...BE who you want to be. Operating outside of the in-world context erodes, and in some cases destroys, this fundamental approach. [SWG, M, 29]

Using real-world money to buy and sell in-game items is cheating, just like combat macroing is cheating, The only legitimate and fair path to success in an MMORPG is for the player to play the game -- time at the keyboard. Shortcutting that by using a macro or by buying a pre-made character or high-level item is ultimately unfair to other players who wish to advance in a legitimate manner. [AC1, M, 36]

But players who support these transactions point out that the goal of games is to have fun, and that the separation of fantasy from reality should take second seat to this essence of games - that they should be fun.

I have made it a habit of buying game-currency for real money, either from EBay or from www.ige.com (IGE). The reason for this is that making money in the game is a very slow and tedious process, and in DAoC requires you to level up a crafter for the sole purpose of turning unusable loot into raw material, and then into trinkets that can be sold. I think the best part of the game (DAoC) is Realm vs. Realm, and I don't like to spend more time in PvE than I have to. I don't like farming much, and even though I leveled up a crafter to be my trinketer, I spend \$25 at IGE and can go back to enjoying the game (RvR, looking for the perfect item to buy, play with armor dyes etc) rather than spend countless hours 'working' (i.e. farming)... [DAOC, M, 29]

I can see where buying virtual items outside of game can be a problem to a game's economy, but I can also see where (especially if the economy is already screwed beyond what the publisher/developers can ever fix) buying virtual game goods is a blessing to some gamers. Like for me. EverQuest requires far too much time in order to progress in game (items/levels). I simply do not have that time. I play 15 hours max a week right now, and that is not enough to ever get me out of middle game to end game without wearing newbie quest gear still! For \$15 bucks I can buy enough platinum that I've decent mid-level items that will help my char progress. \$30 bucks and I've what I need to do great damage and really start moving ahead faster for my limited time. [EQ, F, 35]

I've bought 120kpp in EverQuest. It definitely enhanced the gameplay. Instead of having to go farm all that plat (which would have taken a long time since I wasn't SolRo flagged or anything), I could go have fun. [DAOC, F, 17]

Of course, players who are against these transactions point out that this method of having fun is at the expense of other players who worked hard in the game to attain those achievements. It's not about buying fun as much as it is about destroying other players' sense of achievement in the game and rendering their effort meaningless.

I have neither bought or sold, but as someone who plays a lot of games and takes their time leveling, it does cheapen the 'value' and 'accomplishment' of reaching say level 50 when you are grouped with another level 50 who just 'bought' the character. I guess it's a way of life in today's MMORPGs, I would prefer it were not so. [CoH, M, 44]

If your goal in playing the game is to amass a fortune (a goal which, by the way, is fully supported by the game itself) and you do so by playing fairly (working hard, no cheats, no out of game transactions) and playing hard, how do you reconcile that in your mind? You are who you want to be, and someone, simply because they have more expendable real-world money, takes that away and the staff does nothing about it (this is acceptance, by the way...passive acceptance) how do you feel? /em steps off soapbox. Sorry about that. [SWG, M, 29]

Personally, the fact people will pay RL money in order to buy say, a gun in Star Wars Galaxies, is the mark of ignorance and laziness. Any item can be had with enough effort in the game, so why does someone take a shortcut like this in order to not have to play the game.... Isn't that the point? To play the game? [SWG, M, 28]

But players who support these transactions would argue that players who purchase in-game capital are indeed working as well. After all, RL currency doesn't appear effortlessly either. They would point out that the effort was comparable but merely took place in a different location in a different mode.

I don't see anything wrong with buying or selling items -- if a person works and has extra disposable income, it is a nice way to 'make up' some play time that they lost by working. [CoH, M, 31]

Another common argument against these transactions rests on the game developer's stance as stated in the EULA. Many players feel that it is inappropriate because of copyright or intellectual property issues.

I strongly oppose the buying and selling of game data because it is a violation of the game designer's copyright. Reasons such as 'I'm not selling data I'm selling time' should be allowed as evidence. A knowledgeable legal team needs to find ways to enforce this basic intellectual property right. [Lineage2, M, 43]

I have never been involved in this kind of thing, nor do I judge those who take part in it. It is for the games developers and producers to decide the in game legality of such acts. Some players

see it as unevening the playing field, some see it as fair exchange for the hours it takes to acquire these objects. Both arguments have good and sound logical reasoning behind them. [SWG, M, 29]

But skeptics might argue that game developers ban it only because they haven't figured out a way to capitalize on it yet.

I've bought plat for cash in EQ. If I recall, it was 50k plat. As a player who mainly solo'd or grouped in small groups, this allowed me to upgrade my weapons/armor and such to a significant extent. When you have a 40th level character with 20th level equipment, you spend a lot of time dying, and at times it is hard to find groups if you are under-equipped. As for being against EULA, my biggest theory is that the majority of the game publishers who crack down on this are upset because someone else is making money off of them, instead of them. [anon]

Elves, Ogres, and Drama Queens: Stories of Digital Intrigue and Drama

Soap operas on TV are an ironic form of entertainment - an escape from the real world into a fantasy that is stricken with constant strife, tension and drama. MMOs in a way extend that irony. Players are both audience and actors in a world that encourages strangers to interact in stressful or sustained interactions. Tension and drama caused by differing personalities and interpersonal conflicts are perhaps most unavoidable in sustained social networks such as guilds where these issues have time to fester before erupting.

Most MMOs play it safe - greatly restricting the likelihood and ability for players to harm each other in the game. The following story revolves around a well-executed murder that was the result of a failed guild alliance in EverQuest - a game in which murder typically doesn't happen outside of PvP servers.

Death by Drowning

Well, this drama was not only within my old guild, but also involved a guild we had been allied with at one time. Actually there were no problems in the alliance between the members, but the leadership of both guilds definitely collided on many different occasions. These were always petty arguments over trade skill items, and other trivial things such as that, brought up by our allied guild's leader.

Eventually the allied guild's leader broke off the alliance pretending it was because we could not see eye to eye on many issues. Really the reason, or what we were almost 99% sure was true, was that once we broke into a certain point in the game through flags and keys and such the allied guild's leadership saw no reason to raid with us anymore, and caused conflicts to hide the truth. Our guild was smaller than theirs, much of the time making up only a third of the raid force, which sometimes exceeded 80 people.

What we lacked in numbers we made up for in skill and talent. Our guild was much more experienced, had better equipment, and all around had better players. We had knowledge of all the raids we were doing, but the other guild had the numbers, so it was a symbiotic relationship, they needed us, we needed them. Apparently they felt they no longer needed us and ended up dropping us like a bad habit, and not

surprisingly recruiting some of our members, which is funny now as that guild has for the most part stagnated at the point where they left us.

Now, a lot of the people from our guild were, needless to say, angry at this turn of events. I myself had a strong disliking for the other guild's leader to begin with and this just fueled my dislike even more. So, eventually a little while after our alliance was dissolved I took it upon myself, although others did join in, to exact my revenge upon said guild leader. This guild leader tended to AFK for long periods of time close to water, and in EverQuest you can 'push' characters that are levitating over water, and when the levitation wears off they drown.

So, one night I decided to take some time, about 2 hours, and push his character over the water and drown him. A few people did help me, and I got screen shots of the events as they unfolded. Well, I wasn't satisfied with just that, I felt the need to display this and make it known why it was done. So, I got the pictures hosted and posted them over many guild boards on my server with a nasty little message about the guild leader and in turn causing some massive drama between guilds. Now, this was coupled with tension already between the guilds because our new alliance clashed with their guild many times when we headed for the same target. In fact in a few instances they did steal our targets, but we never resorted to their level stealing their targets.

So, the whole server found out what happened, or at least anybody within the higher level raiding guilds, and on the guild's website there was a huge argument with me about what I had done. Basically everybody from the guild attacked me for attacking their guild leader, which obviously would happen because guilds tend to be fiercely loyal. Well, so as to save face my guild issued a warning to me and I was put on probation for what I had done, but that was just on the surface, behind that mask most everyone congratulated me and the other members involved for doing this. [EQ, M, 19]

The most common cause of tension in guilds arises from conflicts between casual and serious players. The following story illustrates the second most common tension - how to divvy up loot when it drops and how the process can tear a guild apart.

Loot

My RL boyfriend and I were founding members of a guild that we belonged to for about a year and a half. The guild largely consisted of people that were in a former guild together and broke off from it to start our own guild. We were all online 'friends' and in the beginning things went very well. Over time, however, there began to be conflicts over the rules of the guild, especially regarding recruitment. I felt (as well as a few of the other founders) that the recruitment rules were too lax, and the guild was letting in anybody as long as they met the minimum level requirements, even if they were not good players, were using us to gain equipment, etc.

Over time the more senior guild members and skilled players seemed to slowly begin leaving for one reason or another and the newer members kind of 'took over'. Our dissatisfaction began to slowly grow, yet we still had a few good friends in the guild and we still wanted to stand behind the Guild Leader, whom we also considered a good friend. Eventually it all came to a head on one raid however, when a

good friend of ours (also a senior member/officer) was put in a position of having to random roll on a piece of loot against a much newer member.

It ended up in a large debate, with people taking sides.... one side believing that no one deserved loot more than anyone else irregardless of time put into the guild, status, seniority, etc and the other side angry that after all we had put into the guild we were being called 'loot whores' for feeling that we deserved more than having to /random against some new member. The girl involved, her boyfriend (also a very good friend), myself, and my boyfriend left over this incident. I was very upset by the way the entire thing was blown out of proportion in the end and the fact that people I considered 'friends' later stabbed me in the back with their accusations.

We were all players that rarely asked for anything, yet the one time one of us did it ended up in world war 3. At any rate, more people left shortly afterwards. It was an indirect fallout, caused by the lack of high level skilled players in the guild that could get things done. The guild is still hanging on but seems more and more people leave now every day and it's only a matter of time before they dissolve. A shame really, the guild started out with some very talented players and could have made it's mark in my opinion. [EQ, F, 40]

While many dramas occur and are fully contained in the virtual world, there are interesting cases where the drama spills into real life. In the following narrative, a player describes how the drama spilled into real life before spilling back into the virtual world.

Dangerous Liaisons: An Accusation That Crosses into Real Life

Well, here's a story of guild drama that spilled over into real life. For a while, there was a person in the guild that went by the name of Vixxy. She (and yes, it's a female playing a female, as I have met her in real life) was incredibly flirtatious on-line, even going so far as to apparently engage in cyber sex with some of the other guys in the guild (from what was relayed unto me).

Now, she was apparently paying extra attention to one fellow in the guild by the name of Cardan (or Karden, don't remember exact spelling). They sort of became an on-line item in a way. The real life component enters with the fact that the guild leader and his wife (this being the guild I was leader of for a good bit, but had since turned it over to a close real life friend when I got tired of dealing with all of the whining) regularly threw real life get-togethers for the guild at their house. Usually about once every six months, usually centering around the Super Bowl or 4th of July.

So, at their last party, thrown at this past Super Bowl (2004), Vixxy and Cardan met in person. According to the scuttlebutt, they had agreed to maybe 'hook up' if they hit it off upon meeting 'for real.' It should be noted that she was supposed to have engaged in 'cyber' with him in the game prior to this, as well as having phone sex with him. Now, these parties generally run all weekend, with some people sleeping at the host's house, some at hotels, some at homes of others of us that live in town, etc.

Vixxy was staying at a local hotel. The first night of the party, a Friday, Cardan was supposed to drive Vixxy to the hotel at the end of the evening, because she planned on getting quite drunk. I and another guild member arrived around 10 o'clock, and there was a mass guys huddled in the foyer of the house.

Apparently, Vixxy was quite drunk, and was going around hugging and kissing every guy that crossed her path. Most of the guys were trying to avoid her, because they got tired of her being over affectionate with everyone. Some of them even resorted to fleeing upstairs when she got too close to the foyer. I myself managed to avoid her for most of the evening, but she finally sort of snuck up behind me and grabbed me. She asked who I was, I introduced myself, she replied she knew my character, and then she proceeded to grab me and kiss/bite me on the neck while squeezing the crap out of me. Then we talked for a few minutes before she wandered off to harass someone else.

Now, I could tell she was definitely drunk, but not falling down drunk, so to speak. Her words weren't slurred, she didn't have any problem standing or walking, and she could carry on a conversation without any trouble. Well, about 10 minutes after she accosted me, she and Cardan decided to leave, so he drove her to her hotel. They both came back (he was staying at another hotel) Saturday and Sunday and both left town Monday.

Well, the drama part flared up a few months later when Vixxy posted on the server message board in a thread about sex that she had been raped at a RL EQ party she had attended. She went on to say that a person she met at the party had taken her back to her hotel room and had sex with her, even though she was too drunk to consent. That after she had returned home, she had had to get a prescription for the 'morning after' pill, and had had medical problems as a result thereof. She also took shots at the party's hosts by saying that they turned their back on her.

She claimed this because she said she called them after returning home the day after the party to tell them she had been raped by someone in the guild, and as guild leader(s) what did they intend to do about it. They of course told her it wasn't a matter for 'the guild' and that if she was really raped, she should call the police if she wanted to press charges. They did express sympathy, but they told her they only had her word and that they didn't really see what they could do. I know them in real life (and have known them for, oh, about 15 years now, and I don't see them as being as harsh with her as she claimed).

So, to her, they turned their backs on her. Now, in her post on the server message board, she didn't mention any names, but for anyone that had been at the party, or knew of it through the game, it was pretty obvious who she was talking about, going by what she said and the descriptions she used.

The drama flared up because another close friend of the guild leaders that lives here in town saw the post, and then basically went off on Vixxy in /tells in the game, accusing her of lying and making the whole thing up for attention. No one other than Vixxy, the guild leaders, Cardan, and one or two of her friends knew about it before that. This person, who goes by Taimar, didn't believe Vixxy's story at all, and to be honest, neither did I or most of the others I discussed it with. Taimar was most upset because what Vixxy said in her post made the guild leaders look uncompassionate and downright mean (once again, not by name, but it wasn't hard to figure out). So, when Vixxy and Taimar got into it in /tells, Vixxy of course, being a consummate drama queen (sorry if I didn't mention that before, but she was always a drama queen in guild chat, even before this incident) took it out into guild chat, which caused a flare up of people for and against her. This led to fights on the guild message boards, and Vixxy calling for Taimar to be booted from the guild. When she wasn't immediately (though she was chastised and told to leave Vixxy alone), Vixxy took it upon herself to quit the guild and accuse the guild leaders and other officers

of all sorts of things on the way out the door (which seems to be a common theme for a lot of people quitting guilds in the game, take pot shots on the way out the door).

Now, the reasons we don't believe her are quite numerous. For one thing, Vixxy claimed she was so drunk she passed out in the car on the ride to the hotel and doesn't even remember getting into the room. Well, Vixxy is a big lady, weighing in at a good 250 or so easy I would think. Cardan isn't a big fellow, I'd guess he weighs maybe 140-160 or so, and not much of it is muscle. There's simply no way he could have gotten her out of the car and up into her room without her being awake to walk.

Another thing is, when she left the party, sure, she was drunk, but not nearly enough to immediately pass out in the car (at least not considering all of the energy she displayed running around trying to kiss guys goodbye), and the hotel she was staying at was only about 10 minutes away. Having experienced drunkenness myself, and seen it in others quite often, I don't think she would've come down that hard and that fast. I met Cardan myself at the party, and he didn't seem like the sort to do it. I know, kind of cursory overview into his personality, but he just didn't give off that creepy sort of vibe. Add to that the fact that Vixxy herself claimed that 'he probably didn't realize what he was doing was rape' and that he 'didn't have much experience with women' (those both said by her in her post about it on the server boards) leads myself (and the others in the guild that didn't believe her) to think he wouldn't have 'taken advantage' of her without her at least encouraging him in some way.

There's also the fact that she came back to the party the following two days and hung out around him. Granted, I've read about rape victims doing some strange things while being in shock, but going back to a place she didn't have to, and hanging around her attacker? Not once, but twice? That just doesn't sound like the behavior of a rape victim. Add to that the fact that she didn't call the police, or tell anyone in her real life family.

She did call Cardan, and with a friend of hers in the guild listening in, she accused him over the phone, and the two of them more or less badgered him into admitting that 'maybe she hadn't said yes.' Then, she told him that if he quit the guild and the game, she wouldn't press charges. He did quit (not that anyone knew why other than the few in the know at the time).

When she posted about the rape and folks that knew him figured it out, there were more than a few that knew him quite well and didn't believe that he did it. Most of us don't really see him as quitting like that as a admission of guilt. To be honest, I think most guys might opt that way if they got to avoid being accused of rape and having the cops pay them a visit. Basically, to a good many of us, it seemed like you could call it bad judgment on both their parts, and then she was hit with 'buyer's remorse' and didn't want him around after that (especially given that she claimed to like playing the field in guild chat more than once, and Cardan, according to others at the party, seemed like he wanted to hover around her at the party).

Sounds a bit callous I know, but if you'd interacted with her as much as I have, you'd understand what I mean by that. So, anyway, when she quit, a couple others went with her, saying that they didn't like the fact that Taimar could 'attack' her and not get booted from the guild. There was the usual whining and moaning on the boards for a few days, Vixxy tried to act like the guild leaders/officers had screwed her over by saying some nasty things on the server boards, but it eventually died down. [CoH, M, 32]

Guilds are perhaps only as strong as their leaders are. In the following story, a newly elected guild leader faces challenges from an old guild leader who has returned unexpectedly.

Return of The King: A Story of Leadership Change

Our guild has been around for approximately 11 months. Around 4 months ago our leader (one of the guild founders) had to quit the game due to RL issues. This left us in the position of choosing a new leader for the guild. Due to game mechanics it took 2 months to finally get a new leader voted on and in place. During that time another guild founder returned to the game after being away for 6 months. This returned founder would have been the natural choice to have as leader but both himself and the guild knew that he had been away for too long to take the role of leader.

I was officially the new leader of the guild with all the headaches that come from trying to lead an 80+ person guild with 40+ active members. The guild wasn't in bad shape but it had lost some of its cohesion during the period between leaders. Under consultation of some of the more active members I set about to correct the known problems with the guild. That is when the returned founder became an issue. He had helped create the guild with a set of ideals in mind. The changes I was busy trying to get pushed through did not conform to the original ideals of the guild. The returned founder did not hesitate to let his dissatisfaction be known to myself or the rest of the guild.

On multiple occasions I spoke with him in private concerning his issues with the direction I was taking the guild. The biggest complaint, it seemed to me, was that the guild was not the same as he had left it 6 months previously. We still held the same ideals but could no longer implement them as we had originally. I think he understood that but just couldn't accept it. What made it worse for him was that the guild sided with me on most matters that he took issue with. I continued to hear his complaints and address them. If it was a reasonable complaint I would do something about it. If it were simply a nostalgic complaint I would tell him it was and not address it further.

He began to find problems with guild members and citizens of the town in which we are based. Most of these problems were the result of sale prices on vendors. It was his belief that guild members should get stuff either free or for a greatly reduced price. We all share that opinion but leave it up to the individual to decide what they want to do concerning sales to guild members. The returned founder did not understand that vendor prices were for the public and that if you spoke to them, guild members would provide a discount and reimburse a portion of your money or give it to you for free and reimburse all of your money. Even after this was explained to him and he was reimbursed his money by at least one of the 'offenders' he continued to 'bad-mouth' the individuals. The drama in the guild had started.

While this was going on we were also getting a council put together to provide guidelines and policies for the guild. Now instead of just me, he had 5 new people to complain to and about. I had been trying to handle his complaints in a private setting as to not worry the guild with the drama and as diplomatically as possible to avoid it getting any worse. Like myself, all of the council knew him fairly well from the days prior to his departure from the game. They didn't all try to handle him as diplomatically as I tried. The guild started to become flooded by guild mail between the returned founder and those that had a problem with him.

Knowing that nothing good would come of it I continued to try to keep myself from sending out guild mails concerning the returned founder. This went on for a week or two. None of us were having any fun and both the council and myself were having serious problems having to deal with such drama during what was supposed to be our 'free time' to game and have fun. We were now losing up to 4 members a week over the situation. I decided that it was in the best interest of the guild to have him removed. I would not ask the council about it since I was going to do it whether they agreed or not. I also did not want the new council to have a black mark on their record for kicking a member that was opposed to their decisions.

That's when I lucked out. I escaped a black mark on my record as well. The day I logged on to remove him from the guild, I was greeted with an email that stated that the returned founder was recruiting for a new guild. I did not care if he wanted to start a new guild and recruit any of our members that might wish to follow him. I did care that he was doing it in secrecy. My line of thinking is that he was committing treason against the guild. Not only because he was recruiting but he was bad-mouthing the guild and causing internal strife in order to recruit and gather members so that he could make a stand and leave with some followers. That would have brought a nice dramatic end to his drama but luckily our members are loyal and made sure that we knew before he got very far.

He was not online when I removed him so I didn't get to hear his side of the story. I mailed him to explain his removal and to let him know that if he could prove his innocence he might be allowed to return. The reply I received inferred his guilt without blatantly accepting responsibility. After two days the guild was back to normal having fun and enjoying each other. We still have work to do but it is much easier without a 'drama-king' holding us all back. That's my story of how drama turned a guild-founder into an kicked-member within a month or so. [SWG, M, 27]

To take a break from long narratives, here are two gems that capture some of the wonderful surprises in store for us in virtual worlds.

The Mediator

Oh yes, i have been in a few guild-dramas ... like when a friendly clan declares war on you because of a misunderstanding. this resulted in a 5 hour long discussion between the two opposing clan-leaders, their subordinates (each had one) and me ... because the subordinate of the opposing clan was only able to talk English and all the others involved were native German talkers so the discussion was held in German ... and i translated for him on a word for word basis ... for 5 hours ... wow :) That's one memorable moment for me ... [Neocron, M, 26]

Puppet Master

One very strange one was a small guild I was once in that had only 9 people in. There was the Guild Leader, his online wife, and 6 others of varying age and sex besides myself. The guild was a living soap opera of colorful characters constantly in shifting internal alliances with romantic affairs, strong interpersonal conflicts. It was all very intense and wonderful. The guild constantly out raided guilds twice its size. After 5 months I accidentally discovered that the guild was actually me and one person (unknown sex) who was actually 8-boxing (using 8 accounts on eight different computers) all the other members of the guild! At the time it was a shattering experience to me as I had formed deep relationships with several

of the 'guildies'. Often I had gone through exhausting emotional effort negotiating peace between two or more feuding members and all that time I as being HAD!!! It had quite an impact on me and I have never looked at a guildie the same since. [EQ, M, 58]

And finally, we'll end on a story involving betrayals, bounties and two guild hall heists.

The Heist

Me and a couple of friends put together a guild. After a while we got a couple people to join us. We had trouble with two people in our guild who said they were brothers. They donated a weapon to the guild. We kicked them out for their behavior and such, and they wanted their weapon back. We told them 'No, its the guilds. You donated it to the guild. Sorry' Him and his brother made a bog deal about it, and we put a bounty on them both. Secretly of course.

About the next day after we kicked them out of the guild, we decided we wanted to decorate the guild to show off our 'Donated weapon.' So we hired someone who decorates houses for other people. Well, we gave her admin, and the next time I logged in I guess she gave some people admin to the guild hall and banned everyone from it. Well I called my friend who was the leader of the guild, he hoped on and gave us admin back. We took a look inside, and everything was gone . But a backpack in the middle of the hall had a little message . 'Thanks for the Weapon back' We then realized it was the two brothers who wanted our weapon back.

Well we got pissed. I know a lot of people in the game, so I was able to find some people who knew them, I told them my story and they showed sympathy. So with some money out of my own pocket book (In Game Money) I was able to locate what they did with the weapon and all the contents of the guild hall . I then gave them a list of what we were missing and some credits 'half now and half later' sort of deal .

About a week and a half later I get word from the person I hired to get the stuff back for us. She said she had everything at such and such location, and she wanted me to deposit the rest of the money to her by via bank (In Game Money). I did so and we got everything and a little more, witch I was surprised.

The next day I get word from one of the brothers to meet him in the cantina (Bar) in game. So I head over there and he told me that everything in his house was gone, and he blamed our guild for it. I simply told him we only got the weapon back, and the rest was just payment for the person we hired. I refused to give him a name. It turns out he had many people on his admin list to his house, so he couldn't pinpoint anyone who would have done it. I then told him I had a little info about him and his brother that they should know. he tiped me 1 mill (In game money) for the info. I told him Our guild has a bounty placed on you and your brother. Even SOE took our side after the two brothers reported us. Vengeance was ours and no one was able to do a thing about it. [SWG, M 18]

Dragon Slaying 101: Understanding the Complexity of Raids

The complexity and intensity of social interaction and collaboration in MMOs is perhaps best illustrated by raids - an activity involving 10-200 players organized to achieve a common goal over a period of typically around 3-6 continuous hours. Oftentimes, raids involve slaying a high-level monster (such as a dragon),

conquering a heavily-guarded enemy lair (such as a dungeon), or coordinating an attack against a large group of other human players (such as laying siege to a fortress). Drawing from player narratives, the following article describes how successful raids are the culmination of incredible leadership, management, teamwork and expertise that easily overshadow the complexity and intensity of most of our day-time jobs.

Mobilization

As many players note, getting a raid started is hard in and of itself. Several related problems are intertwined - coordinating schedules, publicizing the event, making sure enough people show up to perform the raid, and dealing with impatience as the group waits for people who are late.

Getting everyone where they need to be, at the right time, is quite possibly the hardest part of a large scale raid. There will always be late comers, and not many on time. Making judgment calls - even when people are saying that they are incoming - on when to leave can be tricky. Leaving too soon will leave some people behind - and not likely give them a good impression of your raids (meaning they'll not likely go on another one of yours, and possibly speak out against raids you do). However, leaving too late will cause frustration to those that were actually on time, and want to get the event going. Most inexperienced raids have a few issues. If the leader isn't well known - a good turnout can be hard to come by, weakening the group even more. Inexperienced raids will often attempt to do things they aren't capable of doing, or go about doing them wrong - leading to their demise. An unsuccessful raid for a relatively unknown leader doesn't do much to help his or her 'status' as a leader. [UO, M, 18]

The main problem with raids is that they never start on time. Would love to attend one that started around when it should instead of an hour later. [EQ, F, 42]

In the mud I played, I was a member of the strongest guild (we were commonly accused of cheating, but we were all very honest). When we did equipment runs through high level areas, the hardest part was arranging a time when everyone could be there and had time devoted to the run. Sometimes there were miscellaneous things that needed to be done beforehand that one or two players could accomplish (retrieving wands of shadow form from another high level zone, for example), but the biggest thing was getting everyone on at the same time. [M, 25]

As late-comers trickle in, the waiting game easily becomes a slippery-slope as one player illustrates:

Hardest part is having everyone there on time, buffed, ammoed up, pets ready etc. Even if you set a meet time 1/2 hour before the raid/battle, people still trickle in, 'Bob is still logging in, let's wait 2 mins for him...ack Bob isn't buffed, lets wait 5 mins for him to get buffed, oh wait now Fred is logging in let's wait for him...' If people know the meet time is 1/2 hour before the event, they see the 1/2 hour as a buffer, able to be ignored, based on the 'real' start time. People will always want to wait for someone late, after all it isn't much fun getting left behind, and we don't want to leave our friends... [SWG, M, 33]

What becomes clear is that efficient mobilization is key to a successful raid:

Set-up and mobilization issues are raid killers. If a raid can be quickly massed, buffed and moved to the target it is usually successful. Raids where it takes hours to set-up are often failures, even against trivial targets as people quickly begin to lose focus when they are just sitting around waiting to start. [EQ, M, 30]

The most successful large raids tend to consist of experienced raiders who are completely focused on the task at hand, know exactly where to find the key information, and follow instructions without question during the active raid times. When I first started leading raids, the hardest things to accomplish were to help new raiders understand the importance of focus. A lot of problems are caused by new raiders that struggle with the quick 'get down to business NOW' that happens when the raid activity starts. [EQ, F, 40]

Management Overhead

But attendance pushes against the opposite problem - the management overhead that increases exponentially with every additional group member.

While player attendance sums to the total number of players, logistics is an exponential curve. Getting people to the meeting point, buffed, grouped properly (every group with a heavy healer, proper damage curve, proper tanking ability for each group), and moving to the action itself becomes harder and harder with each additional person...unless, of course this additional person has the veteran experience, the patience, and the maturity to overcome the additional logistics load. [EQ, M, 29]

We learned very quickly that it was detrimental to take more than 7 groups, and that 6 was optimal, due to lag issues and just for the ability to manage people. Once the groups were formed, the rules of the raid were laid out, the main tanks were announced, the chat lines were sorted out. [EQ, F, 30]

Designating and Balancing Groups

Because most games restrict the size of groups to around 8 players, the raiding party that has gathered must be split up into smaller, self-contained groups that are well-balanced in capabilities. Alternatively, specialized groups are formed to perform specific tasks during the raid. This is another reason why attendance is crucial - because necessary roles need to be filled.

The Guild I was in was at War with someone new everyday, it never mattered who, it just mattered that we were enjoying a good fight. Team 3 was my squad.. 8 mages , 1 scout and myself, the Barbarian. Our objective was simple, Support support support. Follow team 1 and 2 and make sure no one made it near them. We travelled in box formation with myself in the center so that my run and damage modifiers would affect all my men/women. As we approached our destination I dispatched the scout to get me a head count and check their organization. Stealthers can cause a nice bit of chaos. Our summoners from team 4 were doing their job swiftly by calling out names in order of the people who are to be summoned to war, their secondary job was to

summon the dead back to the fight, so they had their hands full and were not to be asked any favors at this time. [SB, M, 26]

Chain of Command and Communication

Due to the constrained channel of typed chat, and more importantly the limited amount of screen space devoted to the chat panel, communication has to be highly coordinated. Typically, this is resolved by instituting a strict chain of command that uses restricted chat channels to relay orders from the top.

In DAoC i led a few relic raid - the hardest part was to get everyone to do their part. We solved that by making a leader in each group, 8 commanders had a officer. I then made a chat group with the officers, who made separate chat groups with group leaders, who was in the group chat with their individual group. positive: important msg's didn't get lost in spam, so everyone knew what to do Negative: i had 3 officers - they had to relay commands to 8 group leaders each, and the group leaders should then tell their group what to do - a LONG chain of command that could slow down time from giving an order until it was carried out. the first raid i was leader of was a big disappointment since i tried to tell everyone what to do. and everyone was yelling their ideas of how it should be done. so my commands was lost in spam which got us all killed (stopper groups weren't in place when we started the assault) [Lineage2, M, 29]

The problem with a complex raid is always the same.. Communication. That is the one key factor in an effective. Not only the ability to communicate with others but having others listen to and understand what they are supposed to do. The most important lesson I have learned in running large scale raids is to get other player to be quiet and follow orders. Once this is established then the raid goes smoothly. I was able to stop the raid at any point and get players to listen to specific instruction before continuing. One raid in particular was well orchestrated using a Comamnd Chat which had only the group leaders participating. They then relayed the information to their respective groups and followed orders. Anyone who went rogue on the raid was immediately removed from the command chat and left to die. It was a harsh punishment but only rarely happened more than once. [M, 30]

More resourceful players use third-party tools to facilitate communication, but even in those situations, the communication channels must be highly stratified to avoid flooding a channel, and oftentimes, those third-party tools are difficult to set up.

One difficult attribute of a guild raid is communication, especially in games that limit the number of players in a group or team. My friends and i have been able to bridge that a couple different ways. The first is having 3 or 4 of us in the same room (LAN party!) and using each of is separate groups typing the concerns of the other groups to stay communicating (very tiresome). The other way is to use a third party program like (TeamSpeak) that allows people to talk to each other via microphones, handy but setting up and getting everyone involved in that it's tedious (some people don't want to, don't have the gear, ect) [Eve Online, M, 24]

Laying out Ground Rules

Once the raiding party has been set up appropriately, the raid leader discusses ground rules for the raid - a variety of overall strategies, contingency plans, and rules that all team members should obey. For example, most raids have key goals that are tricky or hidden dangers that can be easily avoided, but these can only be learned from experience. Of course, this all hinges on whether the raid members can remember these instructions and follow them in the panic of the moment.

The hardest part is definitely to get people to listen to instructions from the raid leader. I'll take the most recent dragon raid I was at as an example. While running there after assembling the needed amount of players, the raid leader explained the rules of engagement on the way. And other participants commented on in other channels that he knew what he was talking about. One of the rules was to stay very very close to the dragon, as it would otherwise be able to 'single you out' if you ran a certain distance away from it, and would breathe fire on you, killing you and the people within a small radius of you. We get to the dragon and people seemed to forget quickly about that rule, especially 'support classes' who apparently preferred to heal from a distance, thus getting killed first. [DAOC, M, 31]

Sometimes people just get too caught up in the fight to remember specific timing or a specific plan, after more experience people are able to strategize better because the novelty will have worn off. A perfect example of both these cases is one particular raid in EverQuest: Online Adventures my guild teamed up with another guild to take down one of the dragons. Pre-raid instructions were given on the strategy we'd use and tells to look for to avoid AOE's and other attacks. We had about 40 people show up to take down a relatively easy high end mob but because of people not listening and dieing our healers would need to waste mana and time healing/raising these people who didn't listen. After several tries we finally took him down and even with the problems it was still a blast. [EQOA, M, 22]

The hardest part of a raid is getting everyone to cooperate and work together, especially if it isn't a guild raid. One raid that I remember is a raid of The Deep in EverQuest. We had come to this invisible bridge, with a fake visible one next to it. A few people ran ahead and just ran across the fake bridge and fell off before the raid leader explained what we needed to do. After everyone started following the beast lord pets across the invisible bridge people did not follow correctly and fell off. It is mistakes like this that slow down the raid and make it less fun for all the people doing this correctly. [EQ, M, 16]

The Game Plan

After the basic goals and dangers of the raid have been laid out, the raid leader usually goes over the overall or specific strategy that will be used at different points during the raid. Again, this is because there is no time to communicate instructions during the crisis itself. The strategy typically changes according to the composition of the raid members, and must also take into account the expertise of key members.

I was the GM in a large guild in the realm of Midgard, Midgard have the smallest population on the server Excalibur and we have to plan our raids and relic Raids very good. And we have good experienced players that are natural leaders we assign different GM's and officers from various guilds on specific posts. We plan and scout the enemy realms alot to find weaknesses in there

defenses. We use all the stealth capable races to scout and get info. We divide our force to certain tasks and assign them to attack specific targets. And we place stealthed players on the roads to intercept the forces from the enemy realms. To weaken the strength of the defenders. And we have assigned players that are masters on the usage of siege equipment. And assigned players to carry the siege machines to the places where we need them. Logistics are a large issue, and to synchronize 180-230 players in an attack is the hardest thing. [DAoC, M, 33]

We were attempting to get a relic back from the Mids (this is in DAoC) and the raid was going to be very, very complex. There were about 100 people involved. The mechanics of DAoC are such that if you take down smaller keeps, it reduces the power of the main keep you are assaulting. However, if you take down the smaller keeps slowly, the other side will have more time to get wind of something being amiss and mount a defense. So, the plan was for about 30 people to branch out to 3 different keeps and take them down in a matter of minutes. Then make sail for the main keep before the baddies could get there. [DAoC, M, 27]

Also important, but oftentimes left unplanned are contingency actions. The following player articulates many of the potential crises that a raid leader often has to deal with.

Then there are the contingency plans: what happens when things go south? Who is expendable (I played a wizard...trust me, it's wizards first [burn all you can before you go down to try to save the raid])? What happens when the primary tank goes linkdead? When do you suspend the raid and when do you charge on? And you have to deal with rewards: who gets the loot and why? What if half your damage dealers will 'brb...dinner' and, 20 minutes later, is still not back? ... [EQ, M, 29]

People Don't Listen

The problem of course is that for a variety of reasons, people do not do what they are told to do. Typically, the wrong actions by one individual can set back the entire raid. As the following narratives illustrate, there are many reasons why this occurs. This is why it is particularly important that ground rules are laid out as clearly as possible.

A common reason for raids to have trouble is players not listening. When you get to a raid, sit down and shut up for a while. Listen to the raid leader. If your running around in circles, or killing the near by mobs or in general doing things that cause spam in other players channels/windows then your not going to get all the info you need to do your job in the raid. Its always the same, when I do a raid of 30+ people, 5-10 of them chat with each other, duel each other, and 5 minutes into the raid ask how we are going to handle something I just covered 5 minutes before the raid began. If you think you run raids better, or know more about the game then the Raid leader does, Disband and run your own raid another time. DO NOT tell the Raid Leader how he/she should run their raid. When a Raid Leader says do this or don't do that, then do as he/she says, there is a reason even if you can not think of one. [SWG, M, 30]

I have led many raids myself. What makes the raid difficult is people who don't listen to the raid leader. It's important to listen to directions. The raid leader (if they are a good one) has done

research on the zone and knows the in's and out's of it. Also it's important for every one to know their job during a raid. One person doing the wrong thing can cause the whole raid to wipe out. Also, it's very annoying for people to show up late for a raid and expect the whole party to wait for them. The best raid I ever went on was one that I was not leading. [EQ, F, 49]

The hardest part of organizing a strong raid is getting everyone on the same page.. Getting everyone to follow the orders of the raid leader and not to chatter in team speak about other things. Sometimes players wander off by themselves and then that makes the group more vulnerable. Sometimes people don't pay attention and go to the wrong city and that makes the group more vulnerable. I remember one time this guy on teamspeak wasn't paying attention to the raid leader and he kept wandering off... dueling people and going to the wrong cities.. We ended up kicking him from the guild because he wasn't a team player. It kind of sucks but the guild I'm in is a player versus player oriented guild.. It wasn't anything personal. It is just hard to get everyone to cooperate with the raid leader (especially if I am leading the raid - I am a girl and I notice that people don't pay attention or follow my orders as much as other raid leaders). [SWG, F, 21]

Players Have Personalities

Working together in stressful situations with a large group of people tends to draw out personality differences and different work styles. Oftentimes, the tensions resulting from personality conflicts have large consequences for the raid.

In EQ, major raids are usually controlled by a monk; The monk specifically leads the pull team, and the raid itself follows his/her lead in general. The single largest obstacle in a large raid is, in my experience, the same as in a small group: People who would rather burn themselves alive than take orders. An attitude I've frequently encountered is 'How DARE he tell me what to do!?! He's not my boss! I'll do the opposite to prove it!' That attitude is very common (in my experience, about 80% of the people who I've encountered with that attitude were apparently female) and one person with that attitude can get 40 characters killed almost effortlessly. When I'm leading a group or raid, I have a tendency to be a bit terse; As things go wrong, I get more and more terse, which makes the conflict with the rabid individualists worse. Some people will do absolutely anything to 'punish' me for giving them orders; If it means their death and the deaths of all their friends, so be it. The most extreme example of this attitude even went so far as to blame ME for the wipeout...after all, if I hadn't given her an order (in my capacity as raid leader) she wouldn't have been compelled to disobey it and cause a total wipeout. Managing a raid is much like managing a group, except you're managing up to nine of them at once; You have to make sure each group is properly balanced, and that each group member knows their role both within the group and in the overall raid force. Experienced raiders don't have to have these roles explained, you just tell them the name of the role (puller, main assist, second assist, main tank, cleric mommy, main healer, etc) and they simply do it. [EQ, M, 29]

Raids can be entertaining whether you succeed or fail, but if you spend more time waiting to go it soon mars the experience. You have so many random factors to deal with, and the larger the raid of course the worse it gets, the random factors are of course the other players... Unpredictable,

impatient, chaotic, abusive, disruptive. These are traits exhibited by the worse players in such situations, and characteristics we are all capable of lowering ourselves to if suitably bored... [SWG, M, 29]

Patience

The coordination required in a raid oftentimes becomes the most time-consuming thing. The problem is that as the raid leader is busy hashing out strategies with the group leaders, the rest of the raid is left in inaction. As raids progress, they typically become a great test of patience.

The hardest part of a large raid is the patience factor. A large raid will require a lot of waiting. The actual traveling and fighting are very short compared to how long you may need to wait during certain steps. The initial step of gathering all the groups together for the raid takes the longest. The sorting of loot afterwards takes just as long- these are the two parts that require the most patience, and the parts where there will be the most complaining. Another part of a raid that can be difficult is communicating the leader's directions to the entire raid. There can be a tendency to 'horse around' in the chat group while the leader is really trying to communicate important directions to everyone. Again, this is the patience factor, as people will relieve the stress of having to wait by joking or making snide comments. Unfortunately, as each person does this they only compound the problem. People on raids should realize that what may seem very funny and clever to one person at the spur of the moment may not go over as well to an audience of sixty or seventy other players that are patiently waiting quietly for further instructions. [DAOC, M, 34]

Sometimes the hardest parts of pulling off a raid is getting the more impatient players to hold back prior to the actual invasion, so that the enemy does not gain knowledge of the attack and prepare defenses, and then controlling the players amassed so that the invasion does not falter, due to the forces spreading too far apart, or not being able to react quickly enough to new threats. One memorable raid that failed for the exact reasons I mentioned happened a few months ago between the Terran Republic and the Vanu Sovereignty over the continent of Oshur, a very small desert landmass. The Terran commanders were very interested in pulling this raid off smoothly and quickly, to give the Vanu forces as little time as possible to prepare and counterattack before a 'beachhead' could be secured. A very, very large force of about 100 players was rallying in the Terran Sanctuary, but were told to hold until the order was given. Unfortunately, some 10-20 players would not listen to the commanders and headed into the warpgate leading to the continent. By the time the raid was ready and arrived at the first base, Dahaka, a valuable Technology Plant that would give the Terran forces access to tanks, a large force of Vanu defenders had already entrenched themselves and were attacking the players who had attacked before the order was given. While the Terrans were able to capture Dahaka, the Vanu were able to stall the Terran offensive long enough to call in reinforcements. The reinforcements were able to keep the Terran troops confined in Dahaka and, after assembling a large amount of tanks, finally pushed them out of the continent. [M, 22]

Loot Rules

Typically, high level enemies will drop very valuable items. The division of those items is usually settled on at the beginning of the raid. This is because of the inherent tension in divvying up a small number of very valuable items among a large group of people. This is complicated by arguments of whether loyalty or merit should be rewarded more, and made even more difficult when members of different guilds raid together.

The second hardest part is dealing with the loot distribution. I've been to very few raids, even guild raids, where there were no disputes over loot. Some people want a point system, some prefer randomness, while others seem to feel cheated if anyone else gets anything. There are always disputes about whether it is legal to bid for an item for an alt, whether higher level players get first pick, etc. Even when the rules are explained in advance or are guild policy, some people will argue about it. [AO, M, 29]

Distribution of loot is another big point. EQ is a very loot-centric game, so it was quite important for us to hand out goods fairly and without bias. The way we handled it was pretty simple. The same few people (myself included) attended most raids and knew what items were given out to what people, as well as the level of attendance guildmates had. So if a nice item dropped, it would go to the person with the best attendance who hadn't received anything lately. When they have the best attendance, we knew it would benefit the guild because the item would be used more often in subsequent raids. [EQ, M, 22]

In addition, loot is always an issue. If it's not a guild raid, loot arrangements must be clearly stated and agreed to in advance. So many players argue that 'it shouldn't be about loot', but they tend to overlook one very important point: Loot is not just for the player in question. As a healer, my mana pool does not impact me personally to anywhere near the extent that it does the guild's raids. Therefore, any 'loot' I earn that increases my mana pool (or various other attributes) is really contributing more towards the guild's efforts than to my personal ability. [EQ, F, 40]

Leadership

Of course, what becomes clear is that raid leaders are given a monumental task of coordinating the actions of a large number of people in performing an intricate, stressful and well-coordinated task over a period of several hours. Also clear is that expertise and experience in leading raids becomes highly valued by the community because it is so hard to be successful in raids.

I've been on some medium raids. Never as leader. I'm most impressed with the organizational skills of the raid leaders. They form balanced sub-groups and assign primary and secondary tasks to groups. They also give structure to what the objectives are for the raids. When they occasionally have to ask for sacrifices from the raid members it is done by volunteer (and I'm proud to say I'm frequently the sacrificial lamb to make sure the raid is successful). [EQ, M, 35]

The most difficult part of a large raid, in my opinion, is the ability of a raid leader to exercise patience. Good raid leaders are a rare thing these days. However, a good leader will exhibit positive traits such as reporting often to the raid of his intentions, waiting for those that have gone linkdead, listening to suggestions from others, treating the players in the raid with respect and not

losing his/her temper, etc. The person leading the raid must understand that the other players participating in his raid are there for their own enjoyment and it is his/her responsibility to accentuate the experience as much as possible and still accomplish the objective. I have been on many large scale raids have failed and/or players leaving with a disgruntled feeling about the way it was run simply because the raid leader was either rude, dishonest or acted in some other unsavory manor toward his/her raid companions. [DAOC, M, 47]

The most successful raids that I have been on (in DAoC) have been led by well known and knowledgeable people. People who had built up a reputation on the server. This one particular person was very strong minded and commanded respect. It was easy to follow him since he had 'paid his dues' and was always certain of what he was doing and what he needed everyone else to do. The worst raids I have been on , have been led by people who technically knew what they were doing but lacked the charisma to lead a large number of people. You always know when it's going to turn out bad when people start questioning the raid leaders judgment and he starts defending himself/herself. IMO, it is always better on a big raid to show them how to disband if they create too much discord. Seasoned raid leaders know this and practice it. New raid leaders don't....usually. [DAOC, F, 32]

Successful raids are the culmination of many different skills: leadership, team management, logistical management, crisis management, conflict resolution, strategy planning, delegation, and good communication. Moreover, the problems that often arise during raids are not trivial problems with simple solutions. Factor in random problems like lag, disconnections and power outages and these raids begin to appear to be impossible to accomplish. And yet, every day, these large raids occur in every MMO.

Many provocative questions come to mind. Have our virtual jobs become more complex and intense than our everyday jobs? If so, are they still games? Do leadership and management skills from MMOs transfer to the real world? How close are we to a time when leading an MMO raid is something you can put on the resume for a management job? Could we imagine a time when businesses screen MMO players for management or leadership talent for recruitment?

For in-depth stories about raids in a variety of current MMOs, refer to the companion article: Dragon Slaying 102: Unsung Heroes.

Dragon Slaying 102: Unsung Heroes

Players contributed narratives on raids from a broad range of current MMOs. Several players submitted well-written stories about specific raid experiences that truly illustrate the complexity of what goes on during a raid and all the decisions that must be made. These stories show the variety of current raid designs across different MMOs as well as the intensity of these experiences. For an introduction to the complexity of raids, read the companion article - Dragon Slaying 101: Understanding the Complexity of Raids.

We begin with a story from an EverQuest player who routinely leads raids on the Plane of Hate. Her experience and skill as a raid leader shine through in her narrative.

EverQuest: Plane of Hate

When I played EQ (which I did for over 5 years - I have only recently left), my husband and I often led raids to the old Plane of Hate. Before raid groups were introduced into EQ and Hate was revamped to its present state, organizing a raid to Hate was no simple task. The zone itself was a challenge. Raids that contained people that did not follow instructions often spelled disaster in the form of many hours of frustrating character corpse retrieval.

After observing how other leaders went about running raids, I learned a good deal about what worked and what did not. First thing I learned was that it was a nearly impossible task to run alone. Between my husband or my best friend, both of whom played with me, I almost always had someone who was able to help me. As we began running the raids we quickly fell into a pattern. I would announce the raids on the boards, and lay out the rules that always stipulated that while we liked to have fun, we wouldn't put up with any crap. We made groups beforehand, as best we could, from people who had signed up for the raid. It gave us a framework to work with.

We demanded that people arrive early so that we could port into Hate on time. (Timing was an important factor. If you ported up far later than the posted time, you could screw up later raids. The static mobs would spawn roughly every 8 hours, so there were often raids scheduled about 10 hours apart. While some raid leaders didn't care, we did.) I was generally the more vocal one, always in view.

I was the organizer, and sometimes the enforcer. I would announce the preliminary groups, and appoint a leader for each group - often someone who was taken aside and chosen before the groups were formed. We picked people who we knew, who were trustworthy and who could command some amount of respect if things were to go badly. We took folks who didn't get as many opportunities to raid, or who were passed over for being lower level. We took folks who wanted to go but whose guilds often were far beyond the level of the older Plains and were into other things.

Once those groups were formed, we filled in the remaining spots with people who showed up on the fly, starting with guild mates, friends and alliance members. If there were still open spots, we would fill in with other interested people and necessary classes. We learned very quickly that it was detrimental to take more than 7 groups, and that 6 was optimal, due to lag issues and just for the ability to manage people. Once the groups were formed, the rules of the raid were laid out, the main tanks were announced, the chat lines were sorted out.

Once any questions and last minute problems were dealt with, we had the groups buff up, drop a person so that the wizard porting could get them up to the zone and took up two to three groups at a time - depending on how many teleporters were available to us. My husband always went up with the first wave of people, so that he could control what was going on. The first few minutes were crucial because roaming monster aggro could destroy a raid before it began. Once in place, we would continue bringing the rest of the groups up, and I was always in the last group, making sure everyone who was supposed to go had ported up safely.

Groups then reassembled and if the wizards were not staying to play, they left the zone. When all the groups were in place the fun began. The tactical side of the raid became my husband's domain. He would

scout, or send folks to scout, figure out the targets and determine what we were doing in what order. He kept track of what loot dropped and who it was distributed to as the raid progressed. I dealt with questions, announcements, problems and the overall order of things. We were among the few raid leaders who would venture to the second floor of Hate, or otherwise leave the port in room, and our raids were almost always a lot of fun.

We never put up with any crap from people. There was at least two occasions where someone in the raid caused excessive problems and we removed them from the raid, with little hesitation. We always made sure that we kept the people who raided with us as safe as we could within our abilities. We gained a reputation for that, and people respected it. Some signs that we were successful raid leaders: People wanted to raid with us just to raid with -us-. These were people that had nothing to gain from the encounters. People who had long finished with the Plane and any possible items from it came back to help us with pullers, porters, resservers, tanks. They came with us because the raids were often filled with laughter and fun. They weren't always productive - sometimes we had been 'sniped' (another group/raid goes up before a scheduled raid to kill the static spawns for the good drops), but we often went up anyway, even at a monetary loss to ourselves (The item that would allow us to port into Hate was originally very expensive and we were always careful to have many extras onhand in case of emergencies).

It didn't matter. It was about having fun, not about loot. We led more than 20 raids - at one point running 2 a month for 4 or 5 months in a row - over the course of a year or so. Compared to a raid guild or raid club, that's not a lot. But I never wanted to be a part of a raid guild, nor did a lot of the people who chose to come with us when we led. We ran raids with almost no gain for ourselves, other than the fun of it all and the desire to help other people enjoy themselves. I learned a lot through all of this. It was an activity done in a virtual world that have had many real world implications for me. It led to a lot of insights about the type of leader I was and that I could be. You have to be firm, and you have to stand your ground over important things, but you have to remember to let the unimportant things slide or you stress uselessly. You have to really -listen- to the people that follow you, especially if someone has a voice of greater experience. It's important to lay out the rules beforehand, and not change things just to benefit yourself, else people become resentful. And most important of all - If you treat people with respect, remember to thank them for their contributions and encourage them, everyone wins. -Niki AKA Lyrisa Stormraven EverQuest - Tunare Server [EQ, F, 30]

The next story focuses on valuable artifacts known as "sigils" in Ultima Online. Ownership of these sigils grants important powers within the game.

Ultima Online: Sigils

I was the Commanding Lord (elected leader) of the True Britannians faction in UO. One of the objectives of factions is to capture various 'sigils', small gems that represent control of a given city. If you can keep a sigil on its pedestal for 24 hours straight (in theory), the sigil becomes 'corrupt', meaning you can take it to the corresponding city and place it on the pedestal there to take control of the city's finances and security. Other factions try to achieve the same goals, and when one faction has one or more sigils squirreled away in its stronghold, it's a good bet other factions are going to launch a raid to come and take the sigils. Or, they may try a sneakier approach, sending in stealthy thieves.

Only faction members can handle sigils, and only faction members can enter a faction HQ, so anyone inside an HQ is either your friend or your enemy. Through sneakiness and exploitation of enemy laziness, my faction had captured the sigils for all 8 contested cities. We'd held them all in our base for quite some time, constantly expecting an attack and trying to arrange a sufficient force to guard the base against enemy faction raids around the clock... 24 hours continuous is the requirement.

But it was difficult because people had distractions. Adults had real life responsibilities creep up and had to attend to them, kids got bored just sitting there, and were easily distracted by enemy feints in other locations. We had never taken the cities before, and the most powerful of the factions, Minax, had held the cities for literally months on end without interruption. As it became almost time for some of the sigils to start corrupting, we grew more and more nervous and started really working hard to keep our troops in place to defend.

Eventually, the expected attack came, and not one of the sigils had yet corrupted at that point. The sigil room inside the TB headquarters is a ways back from the main gate in the outer wall, and it was there that my troops had assembled their defense and dug in. When the attack came, everyone in the sigil room rushed out to the front lines to hold the fort, while I sat listening to the battle reports and waiting for the sigils to corrupt. Finally, even as our defenses were being breached and our last warrior fell dead, the sigil for the city of Trinsic became corrupted. I shouted via the party chat system for support and a distraction, and I siezed the sigil and sprinted out the front--I was going to have to run right through the front line to get out and into the countryside.

No magic can be used in transporting a sigil, so even if I made it through the line, I'd have a long ride ahead, with my enemies nipping at my heels. When a person grabs a sigil, he and his clothing are flushed with a brilliant purple color. As I rushed out the front door of our castle, two enemy raiders ran in past me. Because I was glowing purple, they mistook me for one of their comrades who'd gotten to the prize first, and kept right on going to grab sigils of their own.

When i came to our fortifications, witnessing the aftermath of a massive battle with many TB casualties and only a few dead Minax troops, I realized I hadn't participated in the construction of a barrier which had been erected specifically to make it hard to see how to get to the other side, to slow or stop the enemy advance. Unfortunately, it also slowed and stopped me, and I was trapped there unable to go forward. I wasn't about to go backwards, and it wasn't long before the Minax streaming through some other hole in the fortifications realized I wasn't one of them. I was slain, and the sigil fell into enemy hands.

But once a sigil is corrupted, it stays corrupted until it is used to seize its city, or until another faction corrupts it for their own use.... meaning they'd have to secure it for 24 hours in THEIR base. And that is just what Minax tried to do. Hours after our defeat, weary from the long night but energized by adrenaline because of coming so close to our goal which was not yet out of reach, I led three other warriors--only four of us, total-- into the Minax base. Two sentries were posted there, and no fortifications had been erected. They apparently believed they'd broken our will to fight. They were wrong. The guards were not experts at player versus player combat, and they were outnumbered 2 to 1. One of them died, and the other ran for his life.

We made off with four of the coveted sigils, most importantly the corrupted Trinsic sigil. Long before Minax reinforcements arrived on the scene, my comrades and I were gone with our prizes. I made a beeline to Trinsic with two allies in tow. When I arrived, I discovered that four of Minax's fiercest fighters (any of whom was more than a match for me) were waiting, and they had hired at least 20 NPC faction guards. They were all patrolling the area surrounding the pedestal on which I had to place the corrupted sigil to seize the city. I realized that they had not been leaving their base undefended so much due to underestimating my people, as it was due to the fact that they were making preparations to defend the Trinsic pedestal in case the sigil WERE stolen.

We made a valiant effort at distraction and a mad rush to the pedestal, but the players weren't biting on our bait and the NPCs were literally unable to do anything but guard where they had been ordered to guard. So we three died. But we were not finished yet. Remember, we had 24 hours again until Minax could corrupt the sigil for themselves. Taking it from them at any point in that window would start the timer over, giving us another 24 hours. And as long as it was corrupted in our favor, all we had to do was get it to Trinsic.

The next morning, I organized a massive assault on the Minax fortifications I rallied all available troops (about 10 or 15 of us), made sure everyone had every scrap of gear they could possibly need, gave the pep talks, and led them to the wall of the Minax stronghold. This time, Minax was literally ready and waiting. Once we got there, a tremendous battle ensued. The largest, most involved, and longest lasting PvP battle I've ever seen, participated in, or even heard of. We laid siege to their castle. Archers and mages stood atop their parapets, flinging death and destruction down at us as we huddled for cover behind earthworks and ridges near the front of their base. My people returned fire, hurling exploding potions and arrows and spells of our own. Tamed dragons were brought in, and daemons and elementals were summoned. The coordination of the Minax defenses was somewhat shaky, but there were at least as many of them holed up in there as there were of us outside.

For a long time, we slaughtered any Minax reinforcements who tried to make it in their front gate, but we weren't making any more progress at that same task ourselves. Traps had been laid and barriers placed, overlapping fields of fire and the chokepoint of the fortress gateway were murder on any of my people who attempted a breach. Gradually, we worked our way forward, destroying or removing various barriers, but we paid a terrible price in casualties. We had set up an aid station about a screen away from the front line, where our ghosts would run for resurrection and healing, but we couldn't res as fast as Minax would kill us whenever we go too close to the gateway.

Eventually our supplies began to run low, and it was hard to get anyone with a surplus to part with it for others of our team in need, unless they volunteered it themselves. Despite Minax's fortified positions, we had killed more than half the defenders, and their ability to resurrect was limited by their own supplies trapped inside with them. Attrition was beginning to work for us, but for every time we killed a Minax defender, three or four of us would go down.

I had difficulty coordinating any strategy more complex than the impromptu aid station, because when the chips are down and a person's life (and loot) are at stake, folks have a tendency to run for cover and heal up before they do ANYTHING else. A very understandable tendency, and it would take a much more experienced team of folks used to working with each other in order to overcome that natural panic

reaction. On top of that, many of my people got discouraged after a few deaths and not much progress, and several of these left and went to do other things, or logged off UO altogether. The base was too well-defended, and eventually our battle was lost after many hours (I myself had had time to go and have dinner with my family and come back home and rejoin the fight, it lasted that long). All this happened at least three years ago, but as you can tell, it was a very memorable experience for me, and I'm sure for many others. [UO, M, 29]

Sieges are an everyday occurrence in ShadowBane. The follower gamer narrates through a typical siege strategy that his guild uses, and his role in the overall strategy.

ShadowBane: The Seige

In the world of ShadowBane sieges were a part of daily life. The Siege can put all your time and effort put forth into building a city to waste. Upsetting for most people i imagine and for this reason, emotional. Through emotion we lose focus and our troops lose focus. Never a good thing when your leader is complaining or crying about mistakes, the peons just end up losing respect for you.

The Guild i was in was at War with someone new everyday, it never mattered who, it just mattered that we were enjoying a good fight. Team 3 was my squad. 8 mages , 1 scout and myself, the Barbarian. Our objective was simple, Support support support. Follow team 1 and 2 and make sure no one made it near them. We traveled in box formation with myself in the center so that my run and damage modifiers would affect all my men/women. As we approached our destination I dispatched the scout to get me a head count and check their organization. Stealthers can cause a nice bit of chaos.

Our summoners from team 4 were doing their job swiftly by calling out names in order of the people who are to be summoned to war, their secondary job was to summon the dead back to the fight, so they had their hands full and were not to be asked any favors at this time. Our Warlord is reminding people to not scatter and hold the lines 'never go off without your group' he would say. Your group without and you without your group is weaker, don't stray.

Once everyone was summoned in we moved forward with a slow pace chatting about this and that, nothing about the war, making sure people don't take it to seriously cause if they do they may not return after they die. Keep the spirits high, don't talk people down, that's the enemies job. Needless to say our arrival wasn't a surprise to the enemy, my scout had arrived a little late with a head count but that's fine, I got the info elsewhere.

Now he has to make sure no stealthers Back Stab my mages he may let one or to slip by but i wasn't worried, very few rogues escape my axe. As we approached to combat range the enemy and our allies quickly began dancing to the tune of chaos, just made our lives easier. The battle was won and the Tree was destroyed. But the Threat isn't over, now we have become targets for appearing at that war like any other, expect This war, we turned on an ally. The Panther Moderns, my guild at the time used ventrillo to communicate targets and other details for sieges and for smaller scale combat. Since the use of this type of communication at game play i cant imagine going into a group fight without it. the group not using such a tool would be the one to fall for sure. [SB, M, 26]

Dark Age of Camelot is another game where fort sieges occur on a daily basis. The following story emphasizes the overall strategy that must be used when invading another realm.

Dark Age of Camelot: Realm Warfare

We were attempting to get a relic back from the Mids (this is in DAoC) and the raid was going to be very, very complex. There were about 100 people involved. The mechanics of DAoC are such that if you take down smaller keeps, it reduces the power of the main keep you are assaulting. However, if you take down the smaller keeps slowly, the other side will have more time to get wind of something being amiss and mount a defense. So, the plan was for about 30 people to branch out to 3 different keeps and take them down in a matter of minutes. Then make sail for the main keep before the baddies could get there. Well, if anything can go wrong....

The raid began very smoothly (as they are wont to do) and then a zone crashed, tossing about half of the players out of game. Small keeps one and two were down, three was having issues and not many people were left. As we were regrouping to take three and the main keep, we were ambushed by the defenders well away from their main keep. So, dejected, we went home. However, our failed assault was apparently a diversionary tactic cause about 20 minutes after our defeat, we got the message that we had in fact taken the main keep! I still don't know what happened with that. I think we were sent to slaughter to draw the main defenders away from the keep while a second group took the big keep. Hard to imagine that many players working like that though. [DAOC, M, 27]

The following story from Final Fantasy XI describes a mission type that plays as a series of smaller goals. In the story, the player gives an example of how domain expertise is crucial in raids.

Final Fantasy XI: Expeditionary Force

The one thing that needs to be taken care of first and foremost is making sure that everybody involved understands the goals and rules. If you all need to have a specific item in your inventory, you'd better make damn sure that EVERY LAST PERSON checks to see if they have it. Otherwise, someone will inevitably have not been paying attention and will set the entire event back by not having the item. This was doubly demonstrated during a Conquest attempt I participated in recently.

You'd think it wouldn't be that difficult to go and talk to a guard, then talk to him again once everybody else has talked to him the first time. Heck, we even had a system set up so that everybody would confirm when they'd talked to him. Somehow, three people STILL got left behind because they didn't talk to him the first time, yet reported that they were ready. Thank god for those complementary warp tabs. Okay, so after warping back and retrieving our errands, we were ready to begin. The 'leader' of this rather half-assed expedition had been on ONE Conquest mission before this (and not even a successful one), and apparently hadn't understood the rules even then.

The way he explained it was that there would be six fights, and we had to locate the triggers for each in turn. Great, in theory. Unfortunately, that has nothing to do with the ACTUAL way the system works. Here, let's give a quick rundown of the process of Conquest: 1. Find the beastman flag. There are dozens of possible locations all across the zone. So split up in teams and find it. This is easy and we had it down

pat. 2. Assemble everybody at the flag, and rest/buff up for the fight. We had a few coordination issues here, but it wasn't bad. 3. Somebody tag the flag and trigger the fight. Okay, these fights are a pain in the butt. We had some problems with these, but I'll go into more detail later. 4. After the fight, somebody tag the flag AGAIN to remove the curse. Yeah, this would have been a good thing to know early on. Unfortunately, as stated before, our leader was somewhat uninformed and didn't know about this. 5. Go to #1 and start hunting again. Okay, that's the process of Conquest in a nutshell.

Supposedly, there were only to be six fights. Unfortunately, the number of fights isn't static. You fight until your conquest rating for that zone is #1. Apparently this took 6 fights for our leader's previous group. I'm going to skip describing every fight just to skip to immediately after the 6th. Supposedly after this point, something was supposed to happen. Some grand fanfare, crowds cheering our glory, masses worshipping us as gods... that sort of thing. And that's exactly the sort of thing that didn't happen. I tag the flag after the fight (we'd figured out that we had to do that by this time), and exactly nothing happens.

Well at this point people are starting to wonder, and a few (including the 'leader') bug out. Apparently somewhere along the line, I'd distinguished myself (I still haven't a clue how. I'm a red-mage, which isn't a class suited to heroics) enough to have the departing leader stick me with alliance leadership. So now I'm stuck coordinating the remaining 2/3 of our force in continuing this fight. Okay, so now flag #7 is located and we assemble and buff/rest for the fight. *tag* and we're off, and getting royally beat down.

The fight started off bad as one of our groups targets the beastman paladin en-masse and all fail to notice that he's tossed 'Invincible' and they're not doing jack squat to him. Meanwhile, the beast-Blackmage is tossing area-effect spells like they're going out of style. I manage to rally enough force to take him down while I'm Chainspell-nuking the hell out of the still-invincible Paladin. It's about this time that whitemage #1 bit the dust because of the paladin. I still have a bit of time left on chainspell so I spamcure that group up to full. Not like I'm surviving a suicidal act like that, so I'm facedown in the dirt shortly thereafter.

Anyway, half our force was eating sand at the end of that fight, but we were victorious! ... And still no fanfare. Two members more bug out while we're raising our fallen. We're now down to two parties. Again we take up the search and again the flag is located. Now we sit and rest/buff up again. You'd think this would be understood since this is our 8th time doing it, right? Apparently not. We're still prepping with most of our mages below 1/2 mp, when our idiotic thief tags the flag. We don't stand a chance and eat dirt rather rapidly. All that is to illustrate one simple point. Before you leave, make sure EVERYBODY has a complete understanding of ALL the rules and knows every step of the plan along the way. This includes, very importantly, the leader of the expedition. It can't be stressed enough that an unformed leader WILL bring about failure. So please please PLEASE make sure you know what you're about before planning a huge event like any sort of raid. Your alliance and nation will thank you for it. [FFXI, M, 21]

The Corellian Corvette is a high-level dungeon in Star Wars Galaxies that is notoriously difficult (although not difficult in a strategic sense). The following story details one player's frustrations in planning and executing the raid.

Star Wars Galaxies: The Corellian Corvette

The hardest part about a raid is getting a good leader and preparing for it. My guild was going to take on the 'Corellian Corvette' in SWG. This 'dungeon' restricts you to a max of 10 players, but is un-godly tough, and most groups of even 10 fully prepared combat characters fail it. It's fairly foolish to attempt without a full group of 10 though, and this was the first difficulty: we had eight. I was going to be the leader and go-to guy for the raid because I was the only one who had done it before.

We met in the guild hall and prepared, passing out food items, drink items, spice (combat drugs), weapon powerups (100 use each weapon boosters), healing kits to those who used them, etc... This took about an hour. Then, as I started to explain the raid to my guildmates and frantically searched for 2 more participants, they grew very impatient.

We don't use a Voice program like Teamspeak, but it would have been invaluable here. Communications, having to type everything is TERRIBLY ineffective, especially in a battle situation. Likewise, the interfaces to trade things is terribly slow. What should have been a 'Ok everyone, take one of these' became a 'trade with person 1.... slide item1 over, finish trade.... repeat for 6 other players, repeat for 5 other items that other players need to trade off' Needless to say, as I tried to find two more needed players to prevent this from becoming a complete waste of buffs, items, time and effort, my guild took off to go to the 'zone'. In transit, as I chased after their impatient selves, I did find two more people to go with us.

I've been on this raid now about 6 times, and have never completed it. It has an hour time limit and simply fighting everything in the dungeon takes far longer. Your objective is not to 'kill all' though, but is in the style of: 'throw all the switches'. Of course, it's nearly impossible to even reach some of the switches without taking on some very, nasty mobs. You cannot run by them because they will chase you down and never let up until either you or they are dead. If you die in the Corellian Corvette dungeon, you start over at beginning (which isn't so bad if you've cleared out most of the passageways to get back to your group) but you have wounds which can't be healed in the dungeon, and have lost your buffs, which makes you worthless as a fighter, since an unbuffed player won't last 5 hits there.

Like healing wounds, it's impossible to re-apply buffs in the dungeon as well (they prevent medical droids from operating, and thus, re-buffing and healing). That time my guild went, we actually did a fair amount of damage. What killed us were these totally ugly mobs that SOE felt were needed called Super Battle Droids, which for some reason can kill and deathblow a fully buffed, fully powered character in one or two hits. Only a few combat 'templates' can take more than a couple hits, and if you don't have constant healing. they die as well. Our guild is slightly less combat oriented than some of these 'uber-combat' guilds, with many members having skill points divided into crafting and adventuring skill professions.

Granted, just about all of us had at least ONE 'Master' combat profession, but this means nothing in the Corellian Corvette, since in order to have the defenses to survive, only the top armor must be worn, and you must have multiple, 'stacked' combat professions. What have I learned? I learned I *HATE* large group raids. I don't want anything to do with them anymore. Most of my guild have also expressed their hatred for them, and are displeased SOE constantly thinks all higher level content must be taken on by groups of 10 to 30. [SWG, M, 30]