

1 Fantasy Role-Play: Code and Culture

“Why do *World of Warcraft* players call monsters ‘mobs’?” inquired Richard Bartle during a lecture at the Waag Society in Amsterdam.⁸ “Because when I added monsters to MUD, I called them mobiles (for ‘mobile objects’).”

Bartle is the co-designer of the first *Multi User Dungeon* (MUD1), the textual predecessor of online role-playing games (MMORPGs). During his talk he traced the history of *World of Warcraft* (WoW) back to MUD1 (1978), arguing how the code, design, and culture of MMORPGs is always directly or indirectly inherited from its parent virtual world. Bartle concluded by explaining that “because there were no virtual worlds before MUD1” he and his co-designer Roy Trubshaw were inspired by the possibilities of networked computer technology and the pen-and-paper Fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D, 1974). At the time in the mid-1970s they were computer programming students at Essex University in England. In other words, WoW did not appear and develop in an historical vacuum, its “code and culture” is simply the latest incarnation of Fantasy role-play.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of MMORPGs in the context of previous computer-mediated and analogue Fantasy role-playing games. I believe that the contested relationship between instrumental play and role-play in WoW can be traced back throughout the code and culture of these games.

Furthermore, I show that the code and culture of Fantasy role-play came into being in the context of what sociologist Manuel Castells called the network society; a shift from hierarchies to networks in all sectors of society from the 1960s onwards.

Counter to what Bartle seemed to suggest in his lecture, we should not understand the code and culture of role-playing games in a linear way. WoW not only builds on its most successful predecessor, *Everquest* (Sony Online Entertainment 1999), its players and designers are also directly or indirectly influenced by pen-and-paper role-playing games, computer-mediated role-playing games, and

⁸ On 21 September 2005, Richard Bartle was invited by the Cyberspace Salvations research program (University of Leiden/ Erasmus University Rotterdam) to talk about “the influence of utopian thinking on the development of computer technology and its applications in the 1980s.”

live (action) role-playing games. In addition, Fantasy role-playing games (RPGs) not only relate to the code and culture of each other, they are also a product of the society in which they are embedded. In order to understand Fantasy RPGs in a non-linear historical context, I have chosen to work with the network perspective. In the tradition of Actor Network Theory (ANT, Callon 1986, Law 1987, Latour 1987, 2005), this means I reassemble the networked interactions between the human and nonhuman actors that make up Fantasy RPGs.

Fantasy Role-Playing Games and the Network Society

Influenced by the growing popularity of the Fantasy genre, the concepts of "Fantasy role-playing game" and "Fantasy role-play" emerged from the mid- 1960s onwards out of conceptual blends between the transmedial Fantasy genre and cultural practices such as wargaming, historical re-enactment, educational classroom role-play and improvisational theater. Furthermore Fantasy role-play is influenced by practices such as Halloween costuming, military exercises, children's pretend play, scouting activities, murder mystery games and psychodrama. This blending was often a collaborative process among groups of Fantasy fans, wargamers, historical re-enactors, or computer programmers, who met in clubs, universities, or at the workplace. Sometimes directly or indirectly influenced by each other, these communities developed similar types of Fantasy role-playing games throughout the world, but predominantly in the United States and Northern Europe. After the first wave of role-playing games, games were developed not only in Fantasy settings but also in science fiction and other settings. This study concerns only those role-playing games that take place in magical environments filled with elves, orcs, and gnomes, as Fantasy was the founding genre and currently 93.5% of all MMORPGs still take place this setting (Woodcock 2006).⁹

Defining role-playing games

Many designers, players, and theorists have defined the different types of role-playing games as "interactive or participatory story creation systems consisting of (qualified) rules" in which players take on the "roles of fictional characters" in order to "act out or create a story" (Klastrup 2003, Mackay 2001, Schick 1991, Tychsen et al. 2006, Williams et al. 2006). Daniel Mackay, who studied pen-and-paper RPGs as a performance art, defined them for instance as:

[...] an episodic and participatory story creation system that includes a set of quantified rules that assist a group of players and a gamemaster in determining how their fictional characters' spontaneous interactions are resolved. (Mackay 2001, 5)

⁹ <http://www.mmogchart.com/>

Fantasy role-playing games consist of a very heterogeneous group of game systems and styles of play that can range from a focus on instrumental play, role-play or a mixture. I distinguish between three types of Fantasy role-playing games, each of which requires different media to be played. These are pen-and-paper (or tabletop) role-playing games (PnP RPGs), computer-mediated online role-playing games (CM RPGs), and live (action) role-playing games (LARP or LRP).

In this thesis I argue that role-playing games are not necessarily about “interactive storytelling”; furthermore, it is not true that all players “act out the role of the fictional character”. When participating in instrumental play, players often use their character as a pawn whose characteristics, such as strength and intelligence (represented by numbers), can be improved by interacting with a fictional setting and each other. Although players often identify with their character’s role and experience game-play as creating their own story, this should not be considered to be “role-play” nor “interactive storytelling.”

I believe that in order to study role-playing games and role-play from a cross-medial perspective it is important to understand them in their own terms and not as literature, (improvisation) theater or film. Although the designers and players of role-playing games draw inspiration from other cultural practices and vice versa, we can only understand how this process of intertextuality works if we take role-playing games to be a cultural practice in itself. Building on the work of sociologist Gary Alan Fine (Fine 1983), the Threefold Model developed by a group of PnP role-players (Kim 1997) and the GNS theory of RPG designer Ron Edwards (Edwards 2004) I consider role-playing games to be “systems of social interaction” in which players (re)construct an interrelated fictional character and fictional game world. Role-playing games encourage different styles of play, of which the most important are instrumental play (fighting monsters or other player-characters, thus gaining experience points and advancing a character in level) and role-play (acting out the character).¹⁰ These styles can be combined, but as this chapter will show, their relationship is highly contested. While instrumental play is focussed on a game-mechanical development of a character in the context of the fictional world, role-play is aimed at dramatical development of the character and simultaneously the fictional world.

With regard to the role-play game-mode, role-play theorist Markus Montola formulated three “invisible” or implicit rules; the world rule, the power rule and the character rule, which form the foundation of the role-play interaction within role-playing games across media.

1) World rule: *Role-playing is an interactive process of defining the and re-defining the state, properties and contents of an imaginary game world.*

2) Power rule: *The power to define the game world is allocated to participants of the game. The participants recognize the existence of this power hierarchy.*

3) Character rule: *Player-participants define the game world through personified character constructs, conforming to the state, properties and contents of the game world.*

(Montola 2007, 93)

¹⁰ The implication of this definition is that RPGs are always multi-player games and always offer the possibility to role-play. This means that “single-player RPGs” such as Planescape Torment (Black Isle Studios 1999) are not role-playing games, as players only interact with the game system (instrumental play); role-play is not possible as it requires the possibility of social interaction.

Montola observes however that there are examples of role-play in which these implicit rules are bend or broken (Montola 2007). With regard to WoW he argued for instance that role-players in WoW often compromise the world rule by bracketing of their instrumental play from role-play: the dramati- cal development of their character and the “shared fantasy” (Fine 1983) that they (re)construct, together with other player-characters, within the context of the pre-given fictional world of Azeroth. In other words: while participating in instrumental play, Montola assumes that most players do not role-play. On a RP server this can cause conflicts between player-characters due to a misunderstanding of which part of the game experience is bracketed or not (Montola 2007, 95). What Montola describes is precisely a moment where instrumental play and role-play are contested. In order to gain a better understanding of role-playing games I believe we should not only map role-play but also the relation- ship or tension between role-play and instrumental play. Although there are role-playing games which are aimed at role-play, most are build on instrumental play (especially online role-playing games) to which role-play is added as a “mindset” (Heliö 2004).

In order to map this tension I defined the power process which takes place in the social interaction process of role-playing games. This power process revolves around conflict and negotiation; precisely what is being negotiated (and how) depends on the goal of the game and the style of play. In this thesis I used the following working definition of role-playing games that describes the power process that shapes up playing a role-playing game.

In a role-playing gameplayer-characters engage in conflict and (re)construct and negotiate net- works of individual and shared cognitive frames by means of formal and informal rules.

In chapter 3 I further contextualize this network perspective on role-playing games. What follows next is an explanation of the different Fantasy role-playing games, ordered according to the media of which they make use.

Pen-and-paper role-playing games. Pen-and-paper role-playing games are played by a group of players (two or more) who come together for several hours, often in one of the players' houses. PnP RPG groups often meet once a week, sometimes over the course of many years. Players create a fictional character on a "character sheet" and a pencil is used to keep track of the character's development. One of the players is the gamemaster (GM), who has authority of the setting and the system of the game. The GM sets up adventures, describes the setting, and controls the action of non-player characters while players vocally describe (in first or in third person) the actions of their characters. Dice are often used to (partly) determine the negotiation process, and miniature figures and a chalkboard can be used to visualize the setting and actions. PnP RPGs are developed and published commercially and independently. A commercial game system published as book (system and setting) costs approximately €60, whereas independent games are sold online as PDFs for approximately €15.

Computer-mediated role-playing games. Computer-mediated role-playing games can be played both online and offline, on a console and personal computer. This thesis is limited to discussing online textual RPGs (such as MUD1) and online graphical RPGs (MMORPGs such as WoW) that are on a computer. Players create a fictional character in the form of a virtual "avatar." The setting and the system of the game are controlled by the computer. In CM RPGs, gamemasters take on the role of game moderators. The games allow for instant peer-to-peer communication through chat functions; additionally, some players use voice-over chat (using software such as *TeamSpeak*). Online RPGs are often persistent, which means that players can play 24 hours a day together with tens to thousands of other players who are distributed over a wide geographical area. Players generally play the same game for a period ranging from a few months to a few years, after which they often move on to a new game together with friends made in the game. Textual RPGs are often independently developed and free, whereas MMORPGs are commercially developed systems for which players pay a monthly fee of approximately €10.

Live (action) role-playing games. Live (action) role-playing games are played by tens to hundreds of players over the course of an evening, weekend or week. The game space is a physical environment; a room, building, part of a city, or countryside that is sometimes modified with props in order to create a certain setting. The player physically embodies the character and often wears a costume. Instead of verbally telling what actions the character takes (as in a PnP RPG), the player performs some or all of the physical actions of the characters they are playing. A group of gamemasters has authority over the system and setting of the game. They may make use of one of the few commercially published systems and settings for LARP, but most often they develop their own system and setting. Additionally, most players' groups create their own props, and players often design and make their own costumes and latex weapons, the latter if fighting is part of the game. Generally membership in a semi-professional LARP organization is free or inexpensive, and players pay between €5 to €350 for an event, depending on the location and the duration of the game.

Among the most well-known and influential blends of the above described RPGs are the PnP RPG *Dungeons and Dragons* (1974), the textual online role-playing game MUD1 (1978), the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* (2004) and LARP as it has been developed by organizations such as the *Society for Creative Anachronism* (1966), *Dagorhir Battle Games* (1977), *Treasure Trap* (1982), and the *Society for Interactive Literature* (1981). In the three different types of RPGs, the systems, goals, and styles of play take on specific forms, as the medium determines the possibilities.

The game-play debate

In WoW, Blizzard Entertainment differentiates between three playing styles: player versus environment (PvE), player versus player (PvP) and role-play (RP). Blizzard defines PvE play as “doing quests, fighting monsters, speaking, trading, gaining experience, learning skills, and advancing levels,” PvP play is aimed at “fighting other players,” and RP is defined as “imagine that you are an inhabitant of a fantasy-based world, develop characters with a backstory who do not go blindly from quest to quest, but instead assist or hamper the efforts of others for reasons of their own” (Blizzard Entertainment 2004).

Blizzard designed different servers on which certain play-styles are encouraged by the code and culture of the game. RP is encouraged on so-called RP-PvE and RP-PvP servers. For the ethnographical part of this research, described later on in chapter 2, I played WoW on the European RP PvE server *Argent Dawn*, where there are a few thousand players on the server who are encouraged to act out their character, while participating in PvE game-play. Whereas the PvE game-play is embedded in the technical code of the game system and generates experience points as well as material rewards such as armor, role-play is only encouraged by the meta-game rules of the role-play policies (table 1) and generates no game mechanical rewards. This means that Blizzard perceives RP not as a play-style in itself, but rather as a mindset that can be added to the instrumental play-styles of questing, fighting, and leveling.

Role Play-Specific Verbal / Physical Harassment	Players that specifically target Role Players for verbal/physical abuse (not limited to offensive language)
Out of Character (OOC) Discussion and Use of General Chat	The General Chat Channel should only be used for finding Story Lines (SLs), finding Party Groups and various other discussions pertaining to Base Story Line (BSL), game-related topics, and continuity. The General Chat Channel should NOT be used for any “off-topic,” non-Story Line or non-game-related discussion Absolutely no out of character (OOC) or non-fantasy related dialogue should take place in the /Say, /Yell, or Party Chat Channels Guild Chat will not be policed for any fantasy-related violations
Non-Medieval / Fantasy Character Names	Any Non-Medieval or Non-Fantasy names (i.e. Slipnslide, Robotman, Technotron)

Table 1: Role-playing realms policy (Blizzard Entertainment 2004).¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.wow-europe.com/en/policy/roleplaying.html>

On RP servers, RP is a highly contested style of play. Many players do not keep themselves to the role-play policies. The reasons for this are multiple. Players are either not aware of the type of server they are playing on, they used to role-play but stopped doing it, or they have a different reason than RP to play on a RP server. Some assert, for instance, that the player base is more mature or that they will reach instrumental goals more easily because there are fewer competitors, as role-players tend to spend a large amount of their time acting out their character, without participating in PvE or PvP styles of play. The latter points to the fact that role-play sometimes also functions as a stand-alone play style.

The role-play policies are rarely actively enforced by the Blizzard gamemasters. Instead, they function on peer-review basis, which means that players have to negotiate among themselves as to which style of play and behavior is accepted and preferred. If players are unable to create their own balance of power, they can ask gamemasters to step in by reporting any misbehaving players.

On my server, the peer-to-peer review process in which role-play has to be negotiated led to a recurring game-play discussion on the official forum of the server that became known as the “raiders¹² versus role-players and PvPers” debate. As a dramatic intervention in the discussion, the player-character Bippi one day posted an adaptation of Martin Luther King’s landmark speech, “I have dream”.

¹² Raiding is the high level aspect of player-versus-environment (PvE) game-play, in which 20 to 40 player-characters form a raid group in order to defeat unique challenges generated by the game, such as slaying a dragon.

I Have a Dream

by Martin Luther King Jr. adapted by Bippi

One year ago, a great CM [community manager, MC], in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Roleplaying Policy. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to thousands of roleplayers who had been seared in the flames of withering l337speak.¹³ It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity. But one year later, we must face the tragic fact that the roleplayer is still not free. One year later, the life of the roleplayer is still sadly crippled by the manacles of non-rp-ing and the chains of discrimination. One year later, the roleplayer lives on a lonely island of roleplaying in the midst of a vast ocean of non-rping. One year later, the roleplayer is still languishing in the corners of *Argent Dawn* and finds himself an exile in his own server.¹⁴

¹³ The term "l337 speak" stands for "leet speak" or "elite speak". This form of chat text revolves around text modifications for instance by substituting letters by numbers and variations in grammar or spelling. Players use leet speak to show off their "inside knowledge" and technical competence. Role-players do not use leet speak while role-playing as they consider it to be breaking the coherence of the shared fantasy.

¹⁴ Bippi, Robert Cooke, official *Argent Dawn* server forum, 11 January 2006.



Figure 1: The gnome Bippi on the streets of Stormwind, one of Azeroth's capital cities.

By making use of King's powerful rhetoric Bippi demanded enforcement of the role-play policies: "a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of gaming, liberty, and the pursuit of roleplaying" and a peaceful coexistence of role-players and non-role-players on the same server. Bippi's speech shows how self-conscious role-players are in differentiating their play style from other play styles, and it illustrates how some role-players are able to position their issues within a cultural-historical context.

In his theory of the network society, Castells argued that, during the time that King spoke of his desire for a future where blacks and whites would coexist harmoniously as equals, a more discontinuous scope of social movements and subcultures started to develop. Social groups that no longer revolved around traditional meta-patterns (such as nation-states, languages, religions, classes, and so on), but instead focused on identity-driven issues of who we are and how we should lead our lives. Castells does not discuss whether the Civil Rights Movement is either typical of the network society or not, however, I believe it could be interpreted in both ways. These new forms of collective identity emerged together with networked, rather than hierarchical, power constructions (Castells 2000). Fantasy role-playing games developed during the same time period as the network society, and I propose that they can be understood as one of those networked places where new forms of collective identity emerge. The game-play debate underlines, however, how heterogeneous this identity-driven culture is. Not only the game (in this case, WoW), but also the style of play and the server are constitutive for the players' (collective) identity.

The negotiation process in which not only styles of play but also identity are negotiated is mediated through the commercial system that is WoW. Thus, the code and culture in which role-play is being encouraged or enforced is about how power is negotiated between a commercial company and its paying customers, and between the customers themselves. The code and culture of WoW enables and constrains the type of game-play, the interaction between players, and therefore how individual and collective identity is shaped. In what follows, I will map out the code and culture of influential blends of PnP RPGs, online textual RPGs, and LARP, in order to gain more insight in the contested relationship between instrumental play and role-play in WoW.

Dungeons and Dragons: Code and Culture

The concept of *Dungeons and Dragons* grew out of the wargaming community that existed in area of the twin cities of Minneapolis-Saint Paul in the first half the 1970s. The overall concept of the game was created by Dave Arneson, out of a blend between the Fantasy genre, wargaming, and educational role-play. However, the rules for the game were written down by Gary Gygax who had also designed the medieval/ Fantasy wargame rule set *Chainmail* (1971) that had inspired Arneson. The result was that the structure of D&D was very similar to a wargame, which was underlined by the subtitle: "Rules for fantastic medieval wargames campaign playable with paper and pencil and miniature figures". among wargamers, D&D was not an instant hit; it took a year for the first thousand copies to sell out through hobby stores aimed at miniature wargaming (Johnson 2004). Gygax sent copies out for review to the many homegrown wargaming magazines that existed at the time, one of which (*The Courier*) wrote:

[...] these booklets attempt to outline a system for "playing" the kind of Fantasy adventures one previously read about in paperbacks. The concept is remarkably interesting, since the same person interested in matching himself against Napoleon or Manstein might also find comparisons with Conan or John Carter enjoyable. [...] The "game" is played by various adventurers and a referee. The players, starting in near total ignorance, attempt to adventure in the wilderness around them, or in dungeons and underground chambers beneath them. The referee is informed of each action, and after consulting the maps he has made, the basic tables and information in the booklets, and his own imagination, gives the player a response. [...] Beyond the problems involved in play (find an intrepid referee), the other discouraging factor is price. These booklets are roughly comparable to "The Courier" in physical quality, but at \$3.50 each [\$10.00 for the whole set, MC] are priced rather high. Worse, all three are necessary. [...] In general, the concept and imagination involved are stunning. However, much more work, refinement, and especially regulation and simplification is necessary before the game is manageable. [...] I do not suggest these to the average wargamer."
(Arnold Hendrick, *The Courier*, 1974)

Even though *The Courier* did not suggest D&D to the average wargamer, the game gained popularity through word-of-mouth in the hobby store culture and the military, as many wargamers were (ex-)military. Next to wargamers there were Fantasy fans who developed an interest in D&D as they liked the idea of being able to play out the "the kind of Fantasy adventures one previously read about in paperbacks."

Fantasy fans playing Dungeons and Dragons

Following the popularity of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), the modern Fantasy genre came into being. The growing popularity of the "neomedieval" (Eco 1986) Fantasy genre from the 1960s onwards was due to its ability to express romantic ideologies that critiqued the discourses of capitalism, science, rationality, and materialism (Selling 2005). Rapidly, Fantasy became a trans-medial phenomenon that could be found in various media such as books, movies, television series, music, and games. The romantic Fantasy genre fused the blooming cultural social movements such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism that played an important role in the shift from hierarchies to networks in all sectors of society (Castells 2000). In Tolkien's work, women were barely visible, however, the feminist movement picked up on the Fantasy genre, changing the discourse considerably by writing novels in which freedom of choice (human rights) and women play a significant role.

Fantasy fans who started to play D&D in the 1970s were mostly students who had neither experience nor interest in wargaming, as anti-militarism was very much part of the counter-cultural attitude. The growing popularity of D&D among Fantasy aficionados made Gygax realize that the game had potential to reach a mass market. He therefore republished the first edition in a simplified version (D&D basic set, 1977) that carried a new subtitle in which "wargame" was replaced by "role-playing game." "The original adult fantasy role-playing game for 3 or more players," it said. This version of D&D was released to toy stores throughout the United States and became known as the "tabletop Fantasy role-playing game." (see figure 2 for a description of D&D as it was given in the basic set). As the game continued to be expensive, many students photocopied the rulebooks on copy machines at colleges and universities, thus spreading the game rapidly (Succo 2004).

Dungeons and Dragons

Dungeons and Dragons is a fantastic, exciting and imaginative game of role playing for adults 12 years and up. Each player creates a character or characters who may be dwarves, elves, halflings, or human fighting men, magic-users, pious clerics, or wily thieves. The characters are then plunged into an adventure in a series of dungeons, tunnels, secret rooms, and caverns run by another player: the referee, often called the Dungeon Master. The dungeons are filled with fearsome monsters, fabulous treasure, and frightful perils. As the players engage in game after game, their characters grow in power and ability [...] The Dungeon Master designs the dungeons and makes careful maps on graph paper. The players do not know where anything is located in the dungeons until the game begins and they enter the first passage or room. They create their own map as they explore. While only paper and pencil need be used, it is possible for the characters of each player to be represented by miniature lead figure which can be purchased inexpensively from hobby stores or directly from TSR hobbies. The results of combat, magic spells, monster attacks, etc., are resolved by rolling special polyhedral 20-sided dice which come with this game.

Figure 2: Dungeons and Dragons basic set (Gygax and Arneson 1977).

Even though Gygax had simplified the rules, the game was still hard to understand for players who lacked a background in wargaming. However, the concept of playing a Fantasy hero was so powerful groups of friends used D&D to invent their own rules in order to make role-play happen (Schick 1991). This individual creativity resulted in many D&D campaigns being very different from what Gygax and Arneson may have intended.

At the extremes of the spectrum there were male wargamers who used their characters as pawns to enjoy the instrumental aspects of the game at one end, and at the other end both male and female Fantasy fans who tried to enact their characters as if the game was a form of improvisational theater. For wargamers, Fantasy was an interesting setting that made their battles and adventures more appealing, while to Fantasy fans the wargaming rules were merely helpful in acting out a fantastic adventure. The wide variety of ways in which D&D was played was not only due to the different cultures and motivations of players but was also part of what we would now call the “open source” characteristics of the code and culture of wargaming. In the wargaming scene it was common to negotiate and modify the rules; this is how D&D could come into being.

Negotiating wargames

Gygax and Arneson were both active members of the wargaming scene. They met through the *International Wargamer*, one of the many homegrown magazines in which wargamers discussed their hobby (Rausch 2004). Gygax was living in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, a lakeside town about an hour north of Chicago. There he worked as an insurance underwriter who spent most of his spare time playing and designing wargames together with his friends. In 1966 they had started the *International Federation of Wargaming* (IFW) that published the *International Wargamer*. Arneson was living in the twin cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul where he was a member of the Midwest Military Simulation Association. Both of them used their basements as weekly meeting places for wargamers (Pegasus 1981, King and Borland 2003).

There are two different types of contemporary wargames: miniature wargames and board wargames. Both grew out of the military need to study warfare and to reenact or simulate battles for learning purposes (such as *Kriegspiel*, 1811). The book *Little Wars* (1915) by the British writer H.G. Wells is considered to be the first published attempt to codify rules for fighting historical battles with toy soldiers (later plastic or metal miniatures) on tabletops. The book made miniature wargaming available as a civilian hobby to the late-Victorian and early-modern bourgeoisie. During World War II, many game designers found themselves in real combat and thus it was not until the 1950s that there was a resurgence of interest in strategy games as a hobby. Charles Roberts, a soldier who wanted to practice war on a board as well as on the training field, designed one of the first mass-market board wargames, *Tactics*, in 1952. Roberts went on to found the Avalon Hill game company, selling games through mail order from his garage in Avalon, Maryland. Avalon Hill had selected the battle of Gettysburg for their new game because of the upcoming Civil War centennial (1961-1965), which was widely publicized and thus Avalon Hill hoped to cause a greater public awareness for wargames (Roberts 1983). This

indeed happened, and in the 1960s the growing amount of books, newsletters, magazines, and media reports attested to the rising popularity of wargaming.¹⁴ The book cover of *How to Play Wargames in Miniature* (Morschauer 1962) illustrated how wargames were mainly sold as “toys for the boys”: “A game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty and for that more intelligent sort of girl who likes boys’ games.”

Throughout America and Europe, groups of mostly white, middle-class men started to emerge who – like the groups of Gygax and Arneson – would meet in basements and garages to simulate famous historical battles or entire wars. Their weekly activities were locally organized and played in regular groups of friends. But in the meantime, they also organized on a trans-local level in organizations such as the IFW, for which Gygax organized get-togethers; first in his home and later in a small convention hall in Lake Geneva.¹⁵ Almost every group or subgroup had their own homegrown newsletter or magazine; hand typed and photocopied, these were distributed trans-locally (nationally and sometimes even internationally). These platforms played an essential part in the mobility of ideas within the community. The publications often contained homegrown and modified wargame rules and settings, which were in turn tested and discussed during local play sessions and conventions. In other words, these were the places where the code and culture of wargaming was being negotiated. These newsletters and magazines show how the wargame community of the 1960s may have been the source from which D&D developed.

In tune with the growing popularity of the Fantasy genre, concepts were developing that deviated from the Napoleonic and American Civil War settings, instead recreating battles from the medieval era and fantasy realms. In 1968, Gygax started the Castle and Crusade Society as a special interest group for medieval wargaming within the IFW, and he wrote his own rules for medieval wargaming titled *Chain-mail* (1971). Later he added a Fantasy supplement that included rules for giants, trolls, dragons, and magic spells; Gygax also partly made the miniatures for this himself:

[...] as the members began to get tired of medieval games, and I wasn't, I decided to add fantasy elements to the mix, such as a dragon that had a fire-breath weapon, a "hero" that was worth four normal warriors, a wizard who could cast fireballs (the range and hit diameter of a large catapult) and lightning bolts (the range and hit area of a cannon), and so forth. I converted a plastic stegosaurus into a pretty fair dragon, as there were no models of them around in those days. A 70 mm Elastolin Viking figure, with doll's hair glued to its head, and a club made from a kitchen match and auto body putty, and painted in shades of blue for skin color made a fearsome giant figure. I haunted the dime stores looking for potential additions and eventually found figures to represent ogres, elementals, etc. (Lynch 2001)

¹⁵ One of these meetings was later called Gen Con 0 as it led to the start of the annual GenCon gaming convention (short for Geneva Conference). Nowadays, the GenCon is the world's largest and longest-running annual hobby-game gathering (25,000 visitors).

With *Chainmail*, Gygax introduced a medieval battle system but also started to experiment with skirmish gaming. This meant that, instead of having each figure representing ten soldiers, the game used a single-figure combat system in which figures represented single heroic characters. The introduction of the *Chainmail* rules displayed the ideology of the wargaming culture in which the rules were open for negotiation:

Although the rules have been thoroughly play-tested over a period of many months, it is likely that you will eventually find some part that seems ambiguous, unanswered, or unsatisfactory. When such a situation arises settle it among yourselves, record the decision in the rules book, and abide from then on. These rules may be treated as guidelines around which you form a game that suits you. It is always a good idea to amend the rules to allow for historical precedence or common sense – follow the spirit of the rules rather than the letter. (Gygax and Perren 1971)

One of the wargamers who started to experiment with the *Chainmail* rules was Arneson. His group also got involved in medieval wargames and started to experiment with new playing styles. According to Arneson:

In our own games we got tired of taking the town, or the hill. So we started thinking about other objectives in a scenario, and to do that we had to give our Generals personality. We found that by doing that players started to identify with them. (Bub 2002)

His fellow gamer David Wesley experimented with wargames in which players were not necessarily pitted against each other. Instead, players controlled various factions in a fictional German town called Braunstein, set between two opposing armies (Mackay 2001). In order to control the intrigue between the different factions, Wesley came up with the idea of a moderator or referee who controlled the scenario information and could settle disputes over rule interpretation. Arneson liked this idea and started to referee his own campaigns which took place in the semi-medieval barony of Blackmoor. This is the campaign that eventually would grow to become D&D. Instead of using their characters as pawns, Arneson – inspired by educational role-play he'd done during his history lessons in college – invited his players to act as if they were natives to the world of Blackmoor. In the 1960s, role-play became a favourable teaching method in American schools and universities. In college history classes, Arneson role-played historical events and preferred deviating from the recorded history in manner similar to "what if" scenarios he created in wargames. In order to run the game, he used a modified version of *Chainmail* and its Fantasy supplement (Rausch 2004). After a year of experimenting with Blackmoor, Gygax invited Arneson to come to Lake Geneva to show him the game. Gygax:

Dave Arneson demonstrated his Chainmail game campaign spin-off, a man-to-man game where one took the role of a 'Hero' or 'Wizard' from the 'Fantasy Supplement' of Chainmail.

Each player had a principal figure, and troops were hired with gold discovered in exploration of a dungeon or outdoor adventure. These two concepts were to me obviously great ideas, and I determined then and there to design a special game system to manage something new. As Dave Arneson said in an interview in Different Worlds, he wrote none of the material, but he did contribute valuable ideas. (Lynch 2001)

Consulting with Arneson, Gygax reworked the Blackmoor rules into D&D and once this was finished, he started the company Tactical Studies Rules to publish the first edition of the game. The relationship between Gygax and Arneson soon ended after the publication of D&D, due to disagreement on the creative input in D&D. The “open source” culture of wargaming became problematic once it exceeded the low-profit hobby culture and authorship became not only a matter of credit but also of profit. Arneson took the issue to court, turning it into a legal dispute over the royalties of D&D. The outcome of the dispute was never made public; both claim the case was eventually settled amicably.

Negotiating Dungeons and Dragons

While the designers of D&D were in legal dispute over their creative input in the game, D&D – like the previous wargames – still encouraged players to modify the game to their own needs:

The rules contained herein allow only for the first three levels of player progression, and instructions for the game referee, the “Dungeon Master,” are kept to the minimum necessary to allow him to conduct basic games. This is absolutely necessary because the game is completely open-ended, is subject to modification, expansion, and interpretation according to the desires of the group participating, and is in general not bounded by the conventional limitations of other types of games. (D&D basic set, introduction)

Next to an upsurge in similar games, as soon as D&D became popular, players started to discuss “the best way to play D&D” which revolved around instrumental play versus role-play. In *White Dwarf*, a magazine published by the English wargame company Games Workshop, Lewis Pulsipher inquired, for instance: “Is D&D a talking-book or a serious wargame? Both schools of thought are analysed to discover which is best suited for ... D&D Campaigns.” In the article, which was aimed at players who wanted to start refereeing, Pulsipher divided D&D players into instrumental players and role-players – “those who want to play the game as a game and those who want to play it as a fantasy novel”:

[...] i.e. direct escapism through abandonment of oneself to the flow of play as opposed to the gamer’s indirect escapism – the clearcut competition and mental exercise any good game offers. There are two subdivisions in each division. The game-players may emphasise player skill in players-vs-monsters (and sometimes versus other players) or they may prefer players-vs-puzzles (riddles, traps, mazes etc.) to monster-slaying. Of course no D&D campaign is purely one or the other. The escapists can be divided into those who prefer to be told a story by the

referee, in effect with themselves as protagonist, and those who like a silly, totally unbelievable game. [...] There is nothing wrong with the silly/ escapist method, but it is a strange way to act, and my White Dwarf readers are presumably game-players as well as SF fans. Gary Gygax has made it clear that D&D is a wargame, though the majority of players do not use it as such. I personally consider the silly/ escapist style to be both boring and inferior for any campaign, though all right occasionally for a weird evening. (Lewis Pulsipher, White Dwarf 1, 1977, 16)

From the rules and an example of play in the D&D basic set (see figure 3), it indeed seems that the characters were not so much role-played but that they acted as tokens that were being moved through the adventure. "One player should map the dungeon from the Dungeon Master's descriptions as the game progresses. [...] One of the players should keep a 'Chronicle' of the monsters killed, treasure obtained etc." The only players who are narrating in the example below are the dungeon master (DM) and the "caller," the player who announced to the gamemaster what action the group is taking.

DM	"You're in a stone corridor, ten feet wide by fifteen feet high, running north-south."
Caller	"We're walking north."
DM	"Fifty feet up along the corridor there's a door in the east wall. It's five feet wide."
Caller	"Halfling will listen at the door."
DM	(He knows there is nothing they can hear, but he carefully rolls a concealed die.) "He doesn't hear anything."
Caller	"The fighting man will open the door. He's got his sword out, ready to strike. The halfling and the thief are right behind him."
DM	(They must enter and carefully examine the room.) You don't see anyone in the room in front of you."

Figure 3: Dungeons and Dragons basic set (Gygax and Arneson 1977).

In the D&D rules set, performative elements are only discussed in the context of the gamemaster, who was expected to "dramatize the adventure as much as possible" by giving detailed descriptions of the scenery and performing the non-player characters (NPCs) that players would meet with appropriate speech: "orcs are gruff and ungrammatical, knights talk in flowery phrases and always say 'thou' rather than 'you'."

The *White Dwarf* became an active site of discussion on both the rules and styles of play. Even in the most heated debates, most players underlined the importance of keeping D&D open for interpretation:

I have a complaint to make. I feel I must pass comment on the setting up of so-called authorities on D&D. [...] D&D is not bound by the dictates of any one group man or group of men. Although many rules need tidying up and explaining, this can be done by any GM of ordinary intelligence and there should be no need of a 'D&D Council' [...] to settle rules queries. (Ian Waugh, White Dwarf 7, 1978, 11)

In practice, the code and culture of pen-and-paper role-play was mainly consolidated on a local level, within the different groups of players. Through magazines, conventions, and later also on websites, players continued to discuss role-playing games and styles of play on a trans-local level. The effect was that from the very start, players were active in (re)designing and theorizing Fantasy role-play. Some players designed new rule systems for their own role-playing group, others published their games for a wider audience, often starting their own companies. These new role-playing games were located anywhere on the spectrum between instrumental play and role-play, often depending on the personal background of the designers and their previous play experiences.

Multi-User Dungeon: Code and Culture

As Bartle stated during his lecture in September 2005 at the Waag Society, MUD1 was developed out of a blend between D&D and networked computer technology. They arrived almost simultaneously in England. In 1973, the ARPANET reached some of England's universities and governmental institutions via a satellite link to Norway, from where a terrestrial circuit added an interface message processor in London to the growing computer network. Two years later Ian Livingstone and his flatmate Steve Jackson founded the miniature wargame company Games Workshop (1975) in London. Livingstone and Jackson were so enthusiastic about the review copy of D&D that Gygax sent to them that they started to import D&D into England (Livingstone 1977).

At that time, Bartle was still going to high school in a town called Hornsea on the coast of Yorkshire. At the age of fifteen he bought a copy of D&D and started gamemastering for a small group of Hornsea gamers. In 1978, Bartle moved to Essex to study maths and, later, programming at the University of Essex. There he encountered Trubshaw who was a member of the Essex Computing Society. Bartle joined the group that soon found itself captivated by the single-player adventure game *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976), which had found its way to them via the ARPANET (King and Borland 2003, 52). The game was programmed by Will Crowther and Don Woods both of whom worked at the company Bolt, Beranek and Newman in Boston, which developed software for the ARPANET. In the *Colos-*

sal Cave Adventure, Crowther combined his interests in programming, D&D, and caving to develop a computer game for his daughters. Colleague and Tolkien-fan Woods developed the game further by adding elements from *Lord of the Rings*.

The Essex Computing Society started discussing ways in which they could use networked computer technology in order to create a multi-player version of D&D that would completely simulate the offline version. D&D was very suitable for this, because in essence it was a wargame in which every character and action was based on a range of statistics. Pulsipher, who preferred to play D&D in an instrumental way, even suggested that the ideal gamemaster “must think of himself as a friendly computer with discretion”:

Referee interference in the game must be reduced as much as possible, because the referee is neither infallible nor completely impartial. Effectively, this means that the referee should not make up anything important after an adventure has begun. He should operate monsters encountered according to logic and, where necessary, dice rolls.

(Pulsipher, White Dwarf 3, 1977, 16)

The infrastructure that Trubshaw programmed for what would become MUD1 consisted of a database of “rooms.” The database would remember what was in each room and it would allow different players to be in a room at the same time, interacting both with the room and each other. Inspired by D&D, Bartle in turn added tasks, puzzles, and ways to improve a character’s skills and power to the game’s structure (King and Borland, 51-57). MUD1 was a text-based world in which many players could play and chat at the same time; exploring dungeons, finding treasure, battling monsters (“mobiles”) and each other by typing text commands (see figure 4 for a description of MUD1).

Multi User Dungeon

One of the nicest things about BL [British Legends/ MUD1, MC] is that it actually has an object...a goal...something which all players strive to reach: immortality. In a nutshell, you start out as a lowly mortal novice. You’ve got zero points, but that’s just a temporary condition. Your job is now to score points and move up the levels. With each level comes new power and respect...and dangers. Score a whopping 102,400 points without dying and you win! How? Well that’s a secret...but let’s just say you will be transformed into an incredibly powerful being (within the game of course... no, I’m afraid you’ll still be your boring self outside <smile>). You will be granted tremendous powers and will become a game-operator of sorts... and then the second phase of the game will just be beginning. But you’ll have to score 102,400 points to find out about that!’

Figure 4: Spirogyra the wizard “Tips for players just starting out in MUD1/ British Legends”¹⁶

Soon after the Essex Computing Society started running MUD1 on the university's computer network in 1978, an online community of enthusiastic players formed. To them the most important aspects of the game were combat: "One of our most famous sayings here is: you haven't lived until you've died in MUD." And talk: "You may shout a message to everyone in the game. Quite a lot of shouting occurs in MUD from time to time, so don't be shy about it!" (Toth 2000). In MUD1, the computer had taken over the gamemasters role of mapping the world and performing the non-player characters (NPCs). Players had the freedom to play each for themselves, without being dependent on either a caller or even the gathering of a role-play group. The game was overseen by players who had finished the game and made it to the level of a wizard or witch; these users then functioned as game operators, helping other players whenever they were stuck in the game.

Both the above game description and preferences of players for fighting and chatting show how the code and culture of MUD1 was aimed at instrumental play. In order to play MUD1 successfully, it was not necessary to act out the role of a Fantasy character. Therefore, most players used their character as a pawn. A common practice in MUD1 that has been categorized as role-play is "gender swapping," whereby the mostly male players created a female character (Bruckman 1993, Turkle 1995). Next to playing a female character, the anonymity of the online interaction also allowed male players to act as if they were female players. This should not be confused with role-playing a character, as in this case, the female character could still be used as a pawn, however, the player is role-playing an alternative player's identity. Both the Essex Computing Society and Bolt, Beranek and Newman are examples of places where the network society emerged. Infused with countercultural ideas, at a time when according to Castells capitalism and statism were at crisis, mostly male programmers who "hacked around with software" saw liberating possibilities in computer technology. Journalist Steven Levy called this attitude the "hacker ethic," which included principles such as "all information should be free," "mistrust authority, promote decentralization," and "computers can change your life for the better" (Levy 1984).

What I want to emphasize here is the fact that many of these programmers were Fantasy fans and D&D players, whose interest influenced the software they developed. In order to experiment with software, test its possibilities, and meanwhile spread their countercultural ideas, programmers developed Fantasy games such

as Colossal Cave Adventure and MUD1. The games' source code was freely distributed over the ARPANET, which enabled players in Europe and the United States to negotiate, modify, and design their own MUDs, much in the same way as players had started to negotiate D&D.

This was mostly done by students who had access to the ARPAnet and developed new MUD codes, often naming them after their universities, examples are AberMUD (University of Wales at Aberystwyth 1987) and DikuMUD (Datalogisk Institut Københavns Universitet in Copenhagen 1991).

Negotiating MUD1

Throughout the 1980s, thousands of different multi-user online text environments were developed with names such as MUD, MOO, MUCK, and MUSH. They are often collectively referred to as MU*s. Both the code and the use of the environments are heavily tweaked versions of both MUD1 and its successors, generating – just like tabletop Fantasy role-playing games – many different codes and cultures. Some took over the Fantasy theme and combat-oriented gameplay of MUD1, while others such as James Agnes, a Carnegie Mellon student who build TinyMUD (1989), created environments that were not so much aimed at combat but at social interaction. Agnes largely stripped away the game mechanics of MUD1 and enabled players to create new rooms and objects in the database. His code formed not only the basis for many social, professional, and educational environments, but also for games aimed at Fantasy role-play. Whereas MUD1 was built and mostly played by men, these social modifications also started to attract more women. MUDs that were (primarily) created for instrumental play, such as DikuMUD, were also modified into so-called role-play intensive MUDs (RPIMUDs). With the introduction of 3-D graphical MMORPGs, these textual environments did not cease to exist. The RPIMUD network, which was founded in 2005, includes more than a dozen MUDs that are still actively played:

RPIMUDs center themselves around suspension of disbelief and playing out specific character roles as if the role were real and you were your character. In general, the objective of the game is not to complete computer-generated quests or tally the most kills in order to gain levels and equipment, but to collaborate with fellow players to create complex and multi-layered storylines in a cohesive gaming environment. RPIMUDs are very different from other MUDs because of the emphasis on character interaction over hack-and-slash gaming. (RPIMUD network)¹⁷

¹⁷ <http://www.rpimud.com/>

MU* culture continued to be very open source as there are only a few small companies, such as Skotos, who run the environments on a commercial basis. Ownership became a much more debated issue with the introduction of the first online role-playing games in the mid-1990s.

Live (Action) Role-Play: Code and Culture

What became known as a “live (action) role-playing game” was developed in the early 1980s by PnP role-players. According to Sean Fannon, author of *The Fantasy Roleplayer Gamer’s Bible* (1999), it was not surprising that one of the first things to happen after D&D hit was that some gamers decided it would be more fun to “really do it”: “There were already organizations dressing up in costume and physically re-enacting swordfights and ancient battles. In fact, many of the early gamers were intimately involved in these outside activities. The marriage of the RPG to live enactment was inevitable” (Fannon 1999, 163). These organizations for “creative history” emerged from the 1960s onwards out of blends between the Fantasy genre and historical re-enactment. The most well-known and still existing organization is the *Society for Creative Anachronism* (SCA). The SCA was founded in 1966 in Berkeley, in the San Francisco Bay area in Northern California (which is also in the vicinity of Silicon Valley). The universities and early computer companies in this area were a hotbed for people with countercultural ideals and an interest in Fantasy, medieval history, and/or programming.

Counter to the traditions of PnP RPGs and on-line textual RPGs, there is not one incarnation of LARP that became as well known as D&D or MUD1. The concept of LARP was (re)invented independently by different groups of people and out of slightly varying blends.

As “larpwright” Eirik Flatland noted on the history of LARP in Northern Europe: “In Sweden, the pioneers were groups who played roleplaying games and amateur theatre both. In Oslo, Norway, they were gamers, scouts and amateur film-makers”.¹⁸ I consider all these blends, including the activities of

¹⁸ http://fate.laiv.org/in_larp.htm

the SCA, to be “live action role-play.” However, not all live role-play takes place in a gamelike context, and thus some organizations do not carry the name RPG, but “creative history” or “interactive literature” instead. These different names often point to the source cultures of the organization and related goals, system, and style of play.

Counter to PnP RPGs and computer-mediated RPGs, role-play is a natural part of all forms of LARP, as the player physically embodies the character. This means that, in LARP, role-play as a style of play is not particularly contested, however, the different styles of role-play are contested both in relation to instrumental play, as well as in relation to each other.

Negotiating LARP

In what follows, I describe the code and culture of four different styles of LARP: creative history, Fantasy battle games, LARP, and theater LARP. These styles of LARP – as well as their names – are continually negotiated and therefore many other categorizations are possible as well. I chose this categorization as it shows the main differences in source code and culture.

Only a few organizations from the United States, England, and Northern Europe are being described, but similar types of LARP developed simultaneously in Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Germany, and South Africa as well. Although the histories of the described organizations are very diverse, most of them were developed by both male and female university students and also spread via universities.

Creative history. The beginnings of the SCA date back to 1960 when Dave Thewlis and Ken de Maiffe became friends while attending Indiana University. When the army posted them both to Germany, they developed an interest in the Middle Ages and Fantasy. After returning from Europe, Thewlis and Maiffe moved to Berkeley, California, where they started to experiment with swordplay using recreations of medieval weapons. Meanwhile they became members of the local Fantasy group called the Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men’s Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society. One of its members was Diane Paxson, a postgraduate student in medieval history, who came up with the idea to organize a “last tournament” after having seen Thewlis and de Maiffe show off their medieval weaponry. What she had in mind was a “last tournament” like the Earl of Eglanton had organized in Scotland in 1938 as a form of protest against the industrial revolution. Paxson organized the last tournament in her backyard which had a similar shape as the courtyards she had seen during her trips in France. The event was set for May Day, 1966, and attendees were local Fantasy fans and university students (O’Donnell 2004). One of the attendants (William Keyes) described the event as follows:

At twelve noon, Diana and three others were standing around in costume, one of Diana’s roommates was still sewing on hers, and Diana was wondering what to do with four people in costume, other than admiring the outfits. Then it was 2:30 pm and there were people in medieval costume all over her yard. [...] Dr. Elizabeth Pope, head of the Mills College English Department, was the Official Judge. The Second Judge and official archbishop was Jon Stude-

baker, under the name of Sir Jon de Cles. These two judges would determine the winners of each fight on a modified fencing basis, where one counted a "killing" blow instead of a touch. They sat on red-covered thrones in front of a purple hanging. (Keyes 1980)

The tournament was a mix between those acting out roles, such as judge and archbishop, and those of swordsmen who participated in the instrumental play of a sword-fighting game. The tournament was so successful that it sparked plans for another event soon afterwards and they decided to found an organization, which they named the *Society for Creative Anachronism*, "because the group was trying to recreate the ways of the Middle Ages as it could have been, which would certainly be considered an anachronism in twentieth-century Berkeley, and the goal was creativity" (Keyes 1980). The purpose of the SCA was to re-create the best parts of past material culture, technology, and behavior. In order to immerse themselves in an imaginary past, SCA members take on semi-historical Fantasy roles during tournaments, wars, feasts, and revels.

Interest in the SCA quickly spread, through the "authentic" re-enactment organizations which had an overlap with wargaming, as well as through Fantasy fandom and, later, via PnP role-players. These groups all had an established network of clubs, conventions, and publications. Next to holding demonstrations during Fantasy and PnP role-play conventions, the society also started to publish their own magazine named *Tournaments Illuminated*. Herein they provided information on upcoming events, general interest articles on medieval culture and literature, how-to articles for making appropriate clothing and constructing weaponry, and some poetry and verse. However, the major growth in the SCA and other "creative history" organizations came after the release of D&D, through which the concept of "Fantasy role-play" could become more mainstream.

Fantasy battle game. In 1977, after seeing the movie *Robin and Marion* (1976) and reading Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Bryan Weise, a university student from Maryland, came up with the idea to organize Fantasy battles with padded weapons. He ran an ad for his idea on an underground radio station and gathered a group of students with an interest in Fantasy and medieval history, who participated in battles with weapons made of couch-padding foam that was duct-taped to sticks. After a few battles, Weise founded the organization *Dagorhir Battle Games* (*Dagorhir* means "battle lords" in J.R.R. Tolkien's Sindarin language) that still exists today. According to *Dagorhir's* "origin story," Weise was only inspired by the Fantasy genre: "Bryan had never heard of "medieval re-enactment," "Live Action Role Playing," or "Dungeons and Dragons." But he wanted to find a way to capture that spirit of adventure that could only come from wielding a sword or bow."¹⁹ The primary focus of *Dagorhir* is combat simulation; players call it both a sport and a game, with a secondary element of role-playing an alternative persona. Weise became, for example, Aratar Anfinhir the Stormbringer. Furthermore, *Dagorhir* combines elements of both history and Fantasy: during a battle, players dressed up as Roman Legionnaires can be found fighting next to orcs, goblins, vikings, samurai, and elves. The popularity of

¹⁹ <http://www.dagorhir.com/dagorhir/history.htm>

Dagorhir spread, under influence of the popularity of D&D, via the university and the Maryland Renaissance Festival, which is a mixture of historically accurate and Fantasy reenactment.

Live action role-play. In 1982, a group of D&D players from England founded *Treasure Trap* and started to run live action D&D games in Peckforton Castle in Cheshire. Their games closely reproduced D&D, using the same form of character creation and development, including classes, levels, and experience points. Each weekend the group would organize events in which costumed players carrying foam and plastic weapons were run through a series of staged encounters with other players who acted as the "monster crew" (Hook 2006). Inside the castle, players were expected to stay "in character," in other words, to act as the character they had designed beforehand. By participating, players generated experience points which they could use to "level up" (increase) the skills of their character. This type of LARP is also called "line games" or "adventure LARPs" as all encounters are scripted by the organizers and develop in a mostly linear fashion (Costikyan 1994). *Treasure Trap* ran until 1984 when the castle was sold, however, the game had an enormous influence on the development of LARP in England; many *Treasure Trap* players started their own groups, making use of similar game systems. Direct spin-offs from *Treasure Trap* still exist today and are part of the student societies of Durham and Cambridge university.

Theater LARP. Theater-style role-play has been developed both in the United States (called "interactive literature") and in Northern Europe (called "Nordic LARP" and "Arthaus LARP"). Although there are profound differences between both traditions, they share a style of play that tends to avoid physical combat, (or makes use of symbolic combat, for instance through "rock, paper, scissors"), and a focus on character development. Notably, one of the few commercially published LARP systems, called *Mind's Eye Theatre* (White Wolf 1999), can also be characterized as theater-style LARP.

In 1981 the Society for Interactive Literature was founded by Walter Freitag, Mike Massamilla, and Rick Dutton at Harvard University. The group staged its first LARP event, entitled *Rekon*, in 1983 at the Boskone Science Fiction convention. The game was such a success that many *Rekons* followed. Game designer Greg Costikyan describes a *Rekon* as an "interactive LARP," as players work out the permutations of the plot in interaction with each other:

In a rekon, the LARP producers devise a whole fantasy world, complete with characters and their backgrounds, plots and subplots, and rules. Players write in before hand, and receive massive packets of background information and their character write-up; they then show up for a weekend of gaming, interacting with the other characters and working out the permutations of the plot. The whole comes to some sort of satisfactory resolution by the end of the weekend. (Costikyan 1994)

Even though LARP has been developed independently since the early 1980s in Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark, they all focus on theater-style LARP, often in a more radical way than in the

United States. Scenery is very important and players stay “in character” throughout the whole event, including cooking, eating, and sleeping. Focus often lies on an in-depth (psychological) experience of the character. The concept of “Nordic LARP” emerged in 1997 with the organization of the yearly Knutepunkt conference, where LARPer from all Nordic countries gather for a few days to role-play, discuss role-play and socialize. In the context of Knutepunkt, players write role-play manifestos in which they advocate specific styles of role-play, and they theorize their experience in order to create better LARPs. A more radical part of the Nordic LARP scene is called “Arthaus LARP” or “avant-garde LARP”; they often step away from Fantasy genre and focus on themes such as politics, religion, or sexuality.

Conclusions

The name “Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game” seems to suggest that its players role-play. Paradoxically, the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* is coded for instrumental play. As the word “warcraft” in the title emphasizes, playing the game is about battling monsters and other players. In order to participate in instrumental play, it is not necessary to perform the character. The result of this is that most players use their character as a pawn. Exceptions can be found on RP servers, where *Blizzard Entertainment* encourages players to act out their characters’ roles. However, this practice is not embedded in the code of the game, but only encouraged through the meta game rules of the role-play policies. These policies are rarely actively enforced by the developer; instead they function on the basis of peer-to-peer review. On the RP server *Argent Dawn*, this resulted in a recurring discussion that players called the “raiders versus role-players and PvPers” debate. Blizzard only steps into the game-play negotiation process when players are unable to create their own balance of power. In other words, even on a WoW RP server, role-play is a contested form of play. In this chapter, I outlined how the contested relationship between instrumental game-play and role-play in WoW can be traced back throughout the code and culture to previous digital and analogue Fantasy role-playing games.

The original concept for D&D was conjured up by Dave Arneson out of a blend between medieval/ Fantasy wargaming and educational role-play. However, Gary Gygax, who wrote the rule set for D&D, based the system of game on wargaming and left out Arneson’s idea of acting out the role of the character. When it turned out that not only wargamers, but also Fantasy fans, had an interest in D&D, Gygax changed the subtitle of D&D from “rules for fantastic medieval wargames” to “adult fantasy role-playing game.” As many players were attracted by the idea of being able to play the hero in their own adventure, the concept of tabletop Fantasy role-play quickly gained popularity. While the rules of D&D were still aimed at instrumental play, players shaped their own practice of Fantasy role-play locally, over the whole spectrum of instrumental play and role-play.

Roy Thrubshaw and Richard Bartle combined network technology and the rule set of D&D to design MUD1. As a result, the MUD1 was coded for instrumental play. In order to play MUD1 suc-

cessfully, it was not necessary to act out the role of the Fantasy character. Therefore, most players used their character as a pawn. However, "gender swapping" was a common practice, whereby the mostly male players created a female character. The anonymity of the online interaction also allowed male players act as if they were female themselves. I claimed that this means they were not role-playing a character – as the female character was still a pawn – but role-playing a player. Because Thrubshaw and Bartle released the code of MUD1 as open source, players started to modify and design new textual environments over the whole spectrum of instrumental play and role-play.

As with tabletop role-playing games and online textual role-playing games, the concept of "live (action) role-playing game" was "invented" almost simultaneously by different groups of people. However, contrary to these other traditions, there is not one incarnation of LARP that became as well known as D&D or MUD1. As a result, players with an interest in role-play did not have to deviate from a game with an instrumental rule set. Instead, different game systems and styles of play developed from the beginning. Unlike PnP RPGs and computer-mediated RPGs, role-play is a natural part of all forms of LARP, as the player physically embodies the character. This means that in LARP, role-play as a style of play is not so much contested, however, the different styles of role-play thus have been negotiated from the beginning. This is not unique to LARP; in the traditions of PnP RPG and computer-mediated RPGs, the different styles of role-play became contested as well.

These three mappings of D&D, MUD1, and LARP show that the contested relationship between instrumental play and role-play in WoW can indeed be traced back throughout the codes and cultures of previous Fantasy role-playing games. In all three practices, the contested relationship between the different play-styles resulted in players creating their own game environments for their preferred play style.

The resulting do-it-yourself culture of Fantasy role-playing games is a typical characteristic of the network society (Castells 2000). As I have shown, Fantasy can furthermore be understood as representing the countercultural ideologies that critiqued the discourses of capitalism, science, rationality, and materialism (Selling 2005).

In the next chapter I present a thick description (Geertz 1973) of my role-play experiences on the *Argent Dawn* RP server. There I will further explore the contested relationships between instrumental play and role-play and between the different styles of role-play – within the game as well as out of it, online and offline. Counter to the practices that were mapped in this chapter, players who want to role-play in WoW cannot create their own game; they are dependent on the code and culture of the commercial game system. As Bippi's speech quoted earlier in the chapter shows, the result is that role-play continues to be a contested play style: it is not embedded in the code, nor enforced by Blizzard, but has to be negotiated socially among players themselves.

I Have a Dream

by Martin Luther King Jr. adapted by Bippi

When we let roleplaying ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every town and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of Argent Dawn's children, Men and Night Elves, Orcs and Trolls, Gnomes and Tauren, Forsaken and Dwarves, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Argent Dawn motto, "Free at last! free at last! thank Blizzard, we are free at last!"²⁰

²⁰ Bippi, Robert Cooke, official Argent Dawn server forum, 11 January 2006.