2 Role-Play in World of Warcraft

"Darn," I cursed at myself as I walked up to my desk to turn on my computer. It was mid September 2006, I looked at my watch, it was already 7:15 pm and I wanted to be logged onto *World of Warcraft* (WoW) around 7:30 pm. Considering that it was a Sunday evening, there would probably be a queue of a few hundred players who wanted to connect to the *Argent Dawn* RP server, just like me. This meant it would be impossible to get logged on before 8:00 pm. I tried to remember what Eiswein wrote in his post on the official server forum.

The caravan of the Argent Archives would leave for Thelsamar (Loch Modan) from outside the gates of the Alliance city of Ironforge at 8:30 pm. The dwarven Archivar Eiswein, head of the Argent Archives and organizer of the event, had asked player-characters (PCs) to arrive early so he could hand out assignments and missions. While Windows loaded, I made a quick to-do list: 1) As we would be travelling through the winter landscape of Dun Morogh I had to dress my gnome character Speckles Snapwiggle in proper clothes – gloves and furry-looking boots would be essential for a wintry feel, 2) I had to move Speckles from the Alliance capital city of Stormwind to Ironforge – the Deeprun Tram that runs between the two cities would probably be the fastest, 3) I wanted to answer some letters sent through the in-game postal system. Most of them were job offers for Speckles, who together with her twin sister Freckles forms a photographers duo called the Snap Sisters. This means they take on jobs that involve photographing characters and role-play events such as weddings, sporting events, trials, beauty pageants, markets, and, in this case, the Archives caravan.[21]

I (30, Dutch) picked up my mobile phone and rang my friend Zoe (29, Dutch), who plays the role of the character Freckles. "Are you already in?" I asked, "Is there a queue?" It turned out that she had been in-game the whole day and yes, she heard there was a quite a queue. As WoW loaded and I waited for the length of the queue to show up, Zoe and I chatted about her work (as a saleswoman in a game shop and as a teacher in a game design program), my work, and our joint experiences in WoW such as the photographer twins and the Archives.

The Argent Archives

Eiswein had started the Argent Archives role-play guild in August 2006, as a fictional subdivision of the Ironforge Library. This library is part of the pre-designed world universe of Warcraft. In-game, the library can be found in one of the dark halls of the circularly built city of Ironforge. The underground city is constructed in the heart of the Khaz Modan mountains and is home to many non-player characters (NPCs), which are game-generated characters such as explorers, miners, and peddlers, who hand out quests, teach skills, and peddle their wares. The Hall of Explorers contains both the Ironforge Library and a museum where various items such as artifacts and fossils are on display, such as a cata-

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21 The photographs and reports of the Snap Sisters can be found at: http://play.blogs.com.

pult from the Second War, which was a war between the two political factions of the Horde and the Alliance. Behind the museum lies the library, which is populated by members of the NPC guild of the Explorers League. They send players on quests to the many archaeological dig-sites where the League is researching the origin of the dwarven race. By doing these quests, players not only gain experience points that level their character, they also learn about the history of Azeroth. The game holds no further information on the library itself, which enabled Eiswein to make up his own story, without breaking the rules of Warcraft's lore as it has been written throughout the different games that Blizzard Entertainment published in this setting. During the previous two weeks, Eiswein and other members of the Argent Archives were often found in the library, where they were performing their roles of scribe or messenger. The in-character (IC) goal of the Archives is to collect information on citizens throughout Azeroth. Announcing the upcoming caravan, Eiswein wrote on the forum:

The Argent Archives have spent 2 weeks in Ironforge to resupply and restock before they set out on their great journey. In short, the guild collects information on every character of the realm, organizing it into a great archive. (OOC this means our upcoming website http://argentarchives.net) Some of the information is rather sensitive and the archives must therefore be guarded. Not to mention that the guild also carries merchandise of great value. Wine, spices, exotic animals (rabbits), tobacco and fine silk are to be sold in order to fund the guild in the future. (Eiswein, Argent Dawn forum, 12 September 2006)

Either as guards or merchants, role-players and RP guilds were invited to join the bi-weekly caravan by which the archives are moved to a new town or village where the guild members would interview the inhabitants. Out of character (OOC), Eiswein explained on the forum that his aims with the guild were not only to give his guild members (and anyone who interacts with the Argent Archives) participation in an open-ended plot line, but also to strengthen the ties between the guilds on the *Argent Dawn* server, to search for undiscovered talented role-players, and to encourage politeness, role-playing, and comradeship in the community. Many players were enthusiastic about the project, especially when they found out that the player who role-played Eiswein was Jørgen (24, Norwegian), who became well-known by founding previous role-play guilds such as the Stormwind City Watch, a succesful player-run police force in the capital.

There were 260 players in front of me in the queue – I mumbled. Zoe laughed: "Be happy if you make it by eight." "I'll get something to eat first, then," I replied.

Figure 1: The dwarven Archivar Eiswein (standing behind the stable) and other members of the Argent Archives were often found in the Ironforge library, where they were performing their roles of scribe or messenger.

The journey begins

Upon returning with tea and a cheese sandwich, the queue was down to 145. The good thing was that the queue gave me some time to clean off all the stacks of research papers and teaching materials from my desk. While eating my sandwich, I turned on MSN and started chatting with Zoe while I simultaneously went through my e-mail. As Freckles was recovering from a previous role-play adventure (in which we were stranded on a deserted island), Zoe would use one of her other characters to travel with the caravan. It was 7:50 pm when I was finally able to log on.

As she should, Speckles appeared where I had logged out the last time – in a tavern in the Dwarven district of Stormwind. The top view angle of the camera made my gnomish character look unpleasantly small, as if I was a giant looking down on her. Using my mouse I quickly turned and lowered the camera and as I zoomed in, I smiled at the combination of her funny-looking three red ponytails and the determined expression on the character's face. Even though WoW offers only a limited number of possibilities in character-creation, this gnome means more to me than "just" a pixelated avatar.

Figure 2: Speckles appeared where I had logged out the last time – in a tavern in the Dwarven district of Stormwind.

To me, Speckles' almond-shaped blue eyes tell the story of the character I designed her to represent, a character who has accumulated a personal history due to the way I role-played her during many adventures. To me, she is Speckles Snapwiggle, a gnome photographer, a character I paradoxically experience as having both her own identity as well as being part of myself. Like an improvisation actor or a puppet master I am the one performing her role and making her into a character for both myself and other player-characters.

My attention was pulled to the chat window in the lower left-hand corner of the screen when a few players welcomed me by sending "whispers." There were many players online, so text was scrolling rapidly through the chat window. This window displays not only chat messages from players in the immediate surroundings (the "say" channel) but also private messages from players anywhere in the game world ("whispers"), guild messages, world channels, and non-chat messages such as "emotes" (used to express an emotion). After typing the comment `/chatlog` into the chat prompt (allowing me to log all of that evening's chat), I opened Speckles' bags so I could change her clothes.

How to dress, walk, and behave

We would be traveling through a cold area so I put together an outfit from clothes that looked warm and carried names such as `<ragged leather boots>`, `<rough leather pants>`, `<red linen shirt>`, `<rough leather vest>`, and `<frayed gloves>`. Clothing is an important element in the gameplay of WoW. In regard to instrumental play, clothing is armor which functions as protection. Through questing, player-characters progress in level and, as a material reward, they receive more protective and higher-level armor, which in turn again enables them to advance more easily in level.[22] Clothing comes in matching sets of trousers, belts, gloves, and so on, and players are encouraged to gather all the different items to create a complete outfit. Next to protection, player-characters use clothing to show off instrumental playing skills, as high-level outfits look more extravagant and are rarer compared to lower-level clothing.

In the context of role-play, player-characters use clothing to create their own costumes (not necessarily making use of the pre-designed matching outfits) to reflect each character's identity and to create a coherent situation and interaction. For instance, dressing Speckles in a dress with slippers would in this event break the coherence of a setting in which a caravan traveled though a wintry landscape. However, a performance of the reason why she was only wearing a dress and slippers – maybe she was in such a hurry that she forgot and now her toes were freezing off? – could reinstate and even strengthen the coherence, as it would underline the coldness of the setting. From the perspective of role-play, the difficulty is that certain clothes can only be worn on a certain level. This means that

22 One of the main instrumental goals of the game is to "level" a character from level 1 (without any skills our fancy clothes or armor) to level 60 or 70 (in the latest expansion of the game). Leveling can be done through exploration of the game world, doing quests and slaying monsters. Thus the player gains experience points, skills and material rewards such as armor and weapons, that all help in further enhancing the character.

sometimes I might try to advance a character's level not out of an instrumental game-play interest, but instead because attaining a higher level would mean I could dress that character in a more appropriate outfit.

To make them easily, recognizable, Zoe and I gave our twin gnomes exactly the same appearance (except for an earring: Speckles has one in her left ear and Freckles' is in her right ear). Also, we often dress them in the same outfit; however, tonight Speckles would be alone, which meant I only had to take the setting into consideration while putting together an outfit. It was time to go! Answering in-game mail would have to wait until another time. I moved Speckles and she automatically started to run. Quickly I pressed the key with which I could toggle between running and walking. Like dressing a character in suitable clothing, walking can be understood as a code of behavior used by role-players. From forum discussions and conversations with fellow WoW role-players, I had learned that walking is not only perceived as creating a more coherent or realistic setting, it also signals "I am role-playing" instead of running around to gather experience points and level the character as fast as possible. Having pulled the camera back behind Speckles, thereby creating a third-person perspective, I tried to imagine how she felt as I made her walk to the Deeprun Tram. Archivar Eiswein had offered her a job to record the journey of the Archives in photographs, and I imagined her to be somewhat nervous. I also imagined Speckles to be carrying a large shoulder bag filled with cameras and lenses. This could not be represented graphically but I would use emotes to display emotions such as nervousness and Speckles sighing under the heavy weight of her bag. Emotes are used to let a character perform an action or display an emotion. WoW contains many standard emotes which are text commands such as /listen that have to be typed into the chat prompt. They result into an automatically generated text message appearing in the chat window: Speckles listens intently to [selected character]. Some standard emotes are accompanied by an animation that the character performs, for example, the command /wave will create an animation of the character waving (figure 3). Typing a sentence with a question or an exclamation mark will make the character raise either shoulders or hands. Besides using standard emotes, players can create their own emotes, which only appear as text in the chat window. These self-created emotes are used by players to enhance their performance and, simultaneously, emoting makes them visible as a role-player, just as wearing clothing and walking does. A well-known player-character named Dwoozle Kaboozle, who started out as a street thug in Stormwind, gives hints and tips on the official forum about how he uses emotes not only to describe the actions of his character (using visual cues and emphasizing other senses as well: sound, smell, taste, and touch) but also to involve others in his role-play:

Try to spice up emotes with adjectives and emphasis. Aiding another players' imagination is important. If your character just "picks up a barrel" there's no indication of how much of a struggle it might be. "Dwoozle struggles to to lift the enormous barrel" sends out a signal to other players and provides a hook for interaction. Could Dwoozle do with a hand? […] Something I mentioned in a thread I wrote a while ago. Write a macro that's a "signature" emote.

Figure 3: Some standard emotes are accompanied by an animation that the character performs: /wave creates an animation of the character waving.

Dwoozle used to chew Silverleaf. Things came to a head with that though when he collapsed and passed out. His bad teeth are no longer a problem. Now he checks his pocket watch everytime the town bell chimes. I don't think it's quite as memorable though. Dwoozle got a certain amount of fame for his previous sigmote! Maybe it's time to think of something else. (Dwoozle Kaboozle, Argent Dawn forum, 25 August 2006)

As I was waiting for the tram to arrive I decided to get into the role of Speckles by talking to another player-character, a human male, who seemed to be waiting as well. He walked, was dressed tastefully, and emoted how he fiddled with the lute he was holding in his hands. The name tag above the character's head said his name was Laerick, but in order to make the interaction as natural as possible Speckles would not know that. "Good evening," I typed in the say channel. The text appeared both in my chat window and as a text bubble above Speckles' head, thus broadcasting my greeting to all players in the vicinity. In reply he nodded and smiled.

It was exactly 8:00 pm when Speckles arrived in Ironforge and I made her run towards city gates while emoting how she was tightly holding on to her heavy shoulder bag. Although no one might have been paying attention to my performance of Speckles I often find myself role-playing a character – even when alone – as it gives me a chance to practice performing, to develop her character, to create atmosphere, and to possibly attract other role-players.

Outside the of city gates of Ironforge I found small groups of player-characters standing on the snow-covered plateau that looks out over the mountainous area of Dun Morogh. The in-game sound effects were those of the whistling sounds of the wind and the crackling of the fire burning in braziers. It reminded me that I forgot to pick out the appropriate music to play during the caravan.

Music and multitasking

As I had been playing WoW almost every day for over 18 months I could not stand to listen to the game soundtrack anymore. I had switched it off and listened to either only the game sound effects or my own music that fitted the atmosphere but would not distract me from the game, such as ambient i-Tunes channels, Scandinavian and Irish folk music, or movie soundtracks.

I play WoW in windowed mode, which means that the game is not full screen but shows in a window, which enables the player to quickly switch between the game and other software applications. In practice this means that next to WoW I always have other programs running such as Skype, MSN, Firefox browser, Word, e-mail and a music player. While playing WoW I often switch to another application in order to look something up (for instance lore information or English words), to make notes (both role-play and research related), or to do something else when I have to wait in the game. Depending on how interesting or demanding the instrumental play or role-play is, I chat simultaneously over Skype or MSN. Zoe and I sometimes also have a phone connection open over Skype, which enables us to talk directly instead of having to type. While playing we comment on remarkable events, ask each other for advice, or we simply laugh out loud. The fact that we can always talk creates a cozy feel-

ing of sitting next to each other while playing. During events like the caravan, however, my multitasking activities are kept to a minimum – there is too much happening in-game. This meant I only switched on i-Tunes and quickly went back to the snow-covered plateau in front of the gates of Ironforge.

Waiting for the Caravan to Leave

A colorful group of player-charachters had started to gather. There were gnomes on their mechanical striders, sturdy-looking dwarves, some of whom were carrying guns, humans who arrived either on foot or horse, and stylishly clad night-elves. In small groups they discussed the cold weather, Stormwind politics, and the upcoming caravan.

The screenshot and the unedited chatlog (see figure 4) of my first minutes on the plateau illustrate the interplay between the 3-D graphical environment and text in role-play. Players use a combination of text (chat and emotes) and actions in the pre-designed game environment to perform their characters. The chatlog displays some interesting things in regard to the use of language in role-play; note the dialect and phonetic writing ("'Ello, dun want yer catchin a cold"), highly descriptive emotes ("Laerick takes out his lute, and starts playing a soft tune, closing his eyes"), my emote between *stars* in order to save time and keep the emote close to the chat and Regi whispering "boo" to me in Dutch ("Regi whispers: boe!").

Argent Dawn is an English-language RP server, which means that English is the main language in all public chat channels. Player-characters can be banned from the server for not complying with this rule. Players come from all over Europe, and it sometimes shows in their use of language that they are not native speakers. However, I was often surprised at how quickly non-native speakers learned English through role-play and, just as native speakers, displayed creativity and humor in their chat and emotes. For non-native speakers, the game is often bi-lingual as they will – like Regi here – speak their native language in private channels. Between non-native-speaking players, this is sometimes a signal that the message is OOC as everything IC is in English. For another way of signaling that a message is OOC, players either put double brackets around their text: ((...)) or OOC: ... in front of it, all other text is considered to be IC and thus part of the performance. While waiting on the windy plateau I had, for instance, this conversation with someone who was concerned about Freckles' absence:

        9/17 20:13:10.265 Elaniya says: ((its Speckles!!! Where's Freckles?))
        9/17 20:14:21.671 Elaniya whispers: ((Where's Freckles? :)))
        9/17 20:14:37.968 To Elaniya: ooc: not here =P

As in other forms of chat this example displays the use of emotes :) and =P. This is accepted in OOC talk but is generally seen as by role-players as an inappropriate way to display emotions in IC conversations.

Speckles tapped a male gnome on the shoulder and asked him what was going on. "Some caravan goin' somewhere" "An' from wha' i figured out tha' dwarf over there is the leader" he said, while pointing Eiswein out. I spotted the Archivar standing in front of a table that was positioned underneath a simple tent. In order to have a better look I scrolled the mouse wheel forward to turn the camera into first person perspective. The older dwarf had a long white beard and was wearing a gray robe combined with a silver-gray tabard that displayed a compass, and green gloves kept his hands warm. Player-characters had lined up to talk to him and he was using a combination of chat and emotes to hand out assignments and missions.

Gamemastering

"Oh, hello, miss Snapwiggle." Eiswein said. "Yes, hullo," I replied. "Here I am." While I waited for my turn to talk to the Archivar, the group of player-characters wanting to join the caravan grew fast and as a result it became almost impossible to follow all conversations taking place in the vicinity. I pulled the camera back to third person so I could focus on the chat of the player-characters nearby, which showed up in the text bubbles above their heads. Also, I stretched the chat window out over a fourth of my screen, buying myself more time to read the conversation taking place around Speckles. Meanwhile Eiswein ordered three scouts to check out the rumor that there were bandits seen further down the road and a sturdy-looking dwarf was commissioned to hand out water to everyone (figure 6).

In a pen-and-paper role-playing game (PnP RPG) or live action role-playing game (LARP), Eiswein would have been called the game-master (GM). In a PnP RPG the gamemaster is responsible for the setting and the system of the game. The game-master sets up adventures, describes the setting, and controls the action of non-player characters (NPCs). In WoW, the setting and the system of the game are controlled by the computer. The term game-master is reserved for customer support representatives who are online 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to assist players when they experience trouble either with the game or with other players.

As the previous chatlog showed, player-characters will spontaneously role-play interactions, often using the environment and sometimes NPCs and quests as backgrounds or triggers for their performances. This means that in WoW, players mostly negotiate role-play among themselves. Some players, however, such as Eiswein here, will organize events or set up plots, sometimes with the use of alternative characters (alts), who function in the same way as NPCs in analogue role-play. Eiswein's style of gamemastering has similarities to dramatic LARPs, in which gamemasters use the physical environment, and players who perform NPCs to create events, that is, a context in which players can interact. By handing out PCs assignments and missions, Eiswein aimed to give players a trigger to respond to and perform their characters. "Now, I will need you to take as many photographs of those that are with us here," Eiswein told Speckles. "Do not fear the price of the film you use. The Archives will pay." Eiswein continued by asking Speckles to join the Argent Archives: "Ah, that reminds me. Do you wish to wear our tabard as well? I think I have one somewhere here with your size." In so doing, he turned an OOC question, "Do you wish to join our guild?" into role-play.

Good. You, dwarf. I have a mission for you.

Figure 4: Eiswein using a combination of chat and emotes to hand out assignments and missions.

9/17 20:02:19.890 Cinandra pats the flower tucked into her hood.
9/17 20:02:23.203 Xarch says: aye
9/17 20:02:23.593 Speckles taps Sarges on the shoulder
9/17 20:02:24.093 Cinandra says: Oh aye.
9/17 20:02:24.906 Ratakar smiles at Cinandra.
9/17 20:02:27.890 Xarch says: and yersen ?
9/17 20:02:30.968 Ratakar says: I'm glad
9/17 20:02:34.156 Sarges says: 'Ello
9/17 20:02:36.593 Speckles says: Whats going on here?
9/17 20:02:42.218 Laerick takes out his lute, and starts playing a soft tune, closing his eyes
9/17 20:02:43.125 Thralion says: Shield are helpin'. Thought I join in.
9/17 20:02:47.062 Cinandra says: Had a little charm put on it, so it wont fade.
9/17 20:02:49.031 Xarch nods
9/17 20:02:54.281 Sarges says: Some caravan goin' somewhere
9/17 20:03:04.234 Ratakar says: I'm happy to hear that
9/17 20:03:08.359 Speckles says: Ah, so my lucky guess was right
9/17 20:03:17.125 You smile at Sarges.
9/17 20:03:18.031 Cinandra smiles at Ratakar.
9/17 20:03:25.062 Xarch says: be careful now thral,
dun want yer catchin a cold, can be deadly at yer ole age
9/17 20:03:28.796 Xarch grins broadly
9/17 20:03:34.578 Sarges says: An' from wha' i figured out tha' dwarf over there is the leader
9/17 20:03:38.843 Sarges points at Eiswein.
9/17 20:03:43.578 Thralion says: So can every thing else.
9/17 20:03:58.156 Ratakar peers at the asembled people a bit
9/17 20:04:00.078 Bergoth says: Who wanna duel?
9/17 20:04:08.015 Bergoth says: Anyone?
9/17 20:04:13.062 Laerick sighs at Bergoth.
9/17 20:04:13.062 Speckles looks in the direction Sarges is pointing and smiles slightly
9/17 20:04:27.890 Speckles takes a deep breath
9/17 20:04:31.078 Xarch says: damned cold!
9/17 20:04:34.375 Evangeline says: I do not duel.
9/17 20:04:39.390 Bergoth smiles at Evangeline.
9/17 20:04:39.421 Regi whispers: boe!
9/17 20:04:40.593 Speckles says: *mumbles* Here we go then
9/17 20:04:48.062 Laerick says: I'm a lover, not a fighter
9/17 20:04:48.062 Speckles says: Wish me luck, eh
9/17 20:04:52.265 Sarges says: Good luck

Role-play guilds

I replied in a positive way by making Speckles say that she could try the tabard on to see if it would suit the rest of her clothes. The chatlog below (see figure 5) is edited – I pulled out only the conversation between Eiswein and Speckles. The time-stamps show the time gaps there are in the conversation. This was due to the fact that as guild leader and event organizer Eiswein was overrun with whispers from players asking what they should to do: "Can I join the raid plz? When does the Caravan leave? Im going to be late. Will you wait? Whats going on here? Do I line up the guards now? Where are we going? Hi! Eiswein! Havent seen you in a long time! Whats going on?! :D" (Jørgen, comment on this text, January 2007)

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9/17 20:18:38.812  Speckles says: What do expect of me?
9/17 20:18:46.109  Eiswein says: You have your camera with you?
9/17 20:18:51.968  You nod.
9/17 20:19:05.640  Speckles says: How could I not..thats were you wanted
to pay me for..right?
9/17 20:19:15.906  Eiswein smiles.
9/17 20:19:35.812  Eiswein says: Ah, that reminds me. Do you wish to
wear our tabard as well? I think i have one somewhere here with your
size.
9/17 20:19:58.328  Speckles says: Depends, whether it suits the rest of my
clothes or not
9/17 20:20:11.000  Speckles says: What colours does it have?
9/17 20:20:40.140  Eiswein points at his silvergrey tabard with the golden
trim and compass.
9/17 20:20:56.078  Speckles changes her shoulderbag with camera's from
her left to her right shoulder
9/17 20:21:13.078  Speckles says: Hm...could try
9/17 20:21:40.046  Eiswein smiles.
9/17 20:21:51.843  Eiswein invites you join the Argent Archives.
9/17 20:22:10.000  Eiswein says: Now, I will need you to take as many
photographs of those that are with us here.
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Figure 5: Edited chatlog from the conversation between Eiswein and Speckles.

Only after being invited into the guild was Speckles able to wear the guild tabard which had been designed by the Eiswein in consultation with the rest of the guild shortly after it was formed. According to Blizzard Entertainment, guilds are "a collection of players who have joined together to create a mutual beneficial relationship with each other [...] Guild members benefit from each other by loaning or giving cash to each other, by trading items to each other for little or no charge, and by donating equipment to each other."

Although most role-play guilds use WoW's guild format in this way, their primary function is to keep a group of role-players together by a common theme such as running a tavern (the Fingels Quest), being a city guard (the Stormwind City Watch), an evil alliance (the Demonologists), organized crime (the Legitimate Business Club), military force (the Stormguard), a family clan (O'Brandin), or a rescue squad (the Gnomish Rescue Squad). The guild tabard allows players to create a uniform appearance and the guild chat channel enables them to communicate easily. Their guild background stories often form the communal context in which guild members role-play:

The Legitimate Business Club (LBC)
We are a consortium of companions whom share similar beliefs as in Business, pulling funds together we look after members interests both on a Business and on a personal level, We like to think of ourselves as a Social Gathering of investors, owners and tradesman set for the betterment of Life in Stormwind and will aid as best we can to the authorities. The LBC is an underground organisation with a strong public face based around the Pig and Whistle tavern in Old Town. With an 'insurance' firm based in the dwarf district they claim both areas as their 'turf' and fiercely defend it against rival organisations. First started after the fall of the Old Town Blades the club has slowly grew to a sizable stature. (Argent Dawn Content Wiki)[23]

Besides role-playing together, role-play guilds often help each other during instrumental play as well. The mutual benefit of role-play guilds is that they develop a tightly knit community for role-play, instrumental play, and OOC social relationships. This often shows through the intense use of their player-run guild forums and websites. As soon as Speckles was added to the Archives I had a look at the guild information screen. With Speckles included, the Argent Archives consisted at that moment of 14 characters. Eiswein (Jørgen) had picked most of them up by announcing the project both in-game and on the official forum; others were offline friends or players, like me, who he knew through previous role-play projects.

23 http://adcw.beche.se/

Before the Argent Archives

It was in the middle of the night on a snow-covered road near Ironforge – almost a week after the release of WoW – when I met Jørgen. He was playing a gnome mage named Highfart and I was leveling my first character, a gnome warrior named Yara. While creating Yara I had been very aware of the fact that my first character would greatly determine the course that both my online role-play and research would take. However, as I could not foresee which type of character would lead me where, I simply designed the green-haired Yara based on my previous role-play experiences and a girl whom I had met that day. I was waiting in front of a traffic light with my bike when a girl about four years old sitting on the back of her mother's bike caught my attention. When her mother asked, "What does Yara want for dinner?" the girl answered – while she was looking at me – "That is not my choice to make." I smiled at the way she tried to sound both wise and determined. Besides, I agreed with her that four-year-olds should not decide what was going to be had for dinner. I had liked the name Yara for a long time already, and while I continued biking back home I considered the possibility of making this Yara into a role-play character. Due to previous tabletop role-play adventures I developed a love for the gnomish race and therefore I made Yara into a gnome, with cute looks: green eyes and green ponytails. In order to underline her strength and willpower I chose the warrior class.

Some time before the release of WoW, Zoe and I had agreed to play together once in a while. We did not know each other very well at that time, but I knew she had played in the beta version of WoW, which meant she could teach me some of the game mechanics. In turn she was curious about role-play, which hopefully I could teach her. Zoe's character Kilaomi, a night elf druid, was a remake of the character she had played in the beta.

"Kila? Where are you?" I typed into the say channel while I was gathering experience points by finishing a quest that ordered me to fight some game-generated wolves and bears. Running over a hill I noticed her standing on the road that connects Ironforge to a town called Kharanos. She was talking to a sturdy-looking dwarf and a gnome with grey hair and a mustache. The name tags above their heads learned that they were respectively called Arren and Highfart. I ran towards them and used the standard emote /smile: "Yara smiles at Highfart." Highfart...who would use such a name on RP server? I remember thinking. While Kila talked to Arren, Highfart offered Yara something to eat. He handed her a muffin by making use of the trade-interface which allows players to trade in-game money and items. Mage characters can conjure muffins, which can be used to restore health when a character gets hurt in a fight (fihure 6). I clicked on the muffin and Yara started to eat. To my delight this was accompanied by an animation in which she moved her hand towards her mouth which made it look as if she was actually eating. Suddenly I remembered the /burp emote "Yara burps rudely in Highfart"s face." Surprised by the rudeness of the automatically generated emote I said: "Oops, I did not mean to be that loud." Highfart laughed. As Yara's health was up to 100%, the muffin seemed not to be meant as a health-boost but as an opening for role-play. I concluded that even though Highfart's name did

not appear to be either medieval or Fantasy-like, this had to be a player with the intention to role-play. I knew this for sure when Highfart changed his language to gnomish and made Yara a compliment. All races can speak common but they can also speak their own racial language, which can only be understood by player-characters from the same race. "Yara your eyes sparkle like the metal in your chain mail. It's wonderful," could thus only be read by me as it came out as gibberish for Arren and Kilaomi. Following this, Highfart suggested we form a party in order to travel together. This form of grouping allows players to share experience points and talk only among themselves via the party chat channel. As we traveled from Kharanos to Brewnall Village, Highfart took the lead in most activities such as questing and swimming in Iceflow Lake. "Brrrrr. Cold!" He shrieked as he jumped into the lake.

Our journey only lasted for an hour, but made an enormous impression on me. The experience reminded me of the role-play I had loved during childhood pretend play: when building a treehouse in the backyard is enough to imagine living out in the wild and when flapping your arms can make you fly to long-forgotten realms. During this form of play, all sense of time seems to disappear. PnP RPGs and LARP started to fascinate me as they can sometimes create a similar sensation. I was pleasantly surprised that MMORPGs seemed to bring back the experience of childhood pretend play in an even more enthralling way.

Figure 6: Mage characters can conjure muffins, which can be used to restore health when a character gets hurt in a fight. As Yara's health was up to 100%, the muffin seemed not to be meant as a health-boost but as an opening for role-play.

At the end of our journey we rested by a campfire in Brewnall Village and, as if we were on a holiday, Highfart suggested to take some screenshots with all our characters laughing. He counted to three and we simultaneously typed in the /laugh emote to have our characters displaying our happiness. Satisfied, I turned my PC off that night, as there was not only a beautifully designed world out there to discover but also many PCs who would make the world come alive, as if it was a persistent improvisation theater. It dawned on me how interesting it could be to use the beautifully designed surroundings, the quests, the food items, and clothes as tools and props to play and narrate our own adventures. The next day I wrote Yara's background story, which would give me a context in which I could perform her.

In order to stay in touch with Highfart, I used the in-game postal system to send him a letter. Therein I narrated my instrumental progress in the game from the perspective of a Yara who was impressed by Highfart's muffins, compliments, and leadership. We ended up sending IC letters back and forth, but we would not meet again until a few weeks later. This was due to the fact that we kept our communication IC, meaning we could only meet again by coincidence or appointment.

I remember this. It was torture. But it made the gaming experience with Yara all the better. In stories characters are always sooo happy to see each other when they meet each other, then talk to each other and ask what has happened since last time. But when one constantly talk ooc through whisper this magic disappears. Why spend time doing so if you already know the answers? (Jørgen, comment on this text)

In the meantime, Highfart's name was changed into Alabast and he started a role-play guild called the ArchMages. "Did you know I started my own guild today? The ArchMages had their first meeting and it was a success. I've never had more fun in my life! Maybe you would like to join us someday?" he wrote in one of his letters. When I later asked about his name change he explained that other players did not like his name much and reported him for violating the role-play policies, looking back on his decision to name his gnome Highfart, Jørgen remarked:

Highfart was.. well.. just some very bad humour from my side. I didnt want him to be a very serious character, and I wanted him to be quite energetic. Thus I named him "high" (as in the english meaning of the word) "fart" (Which means this and that in english, but "speed" in norwegian.) The name to me signified that he was both energetic and at the same time did not take himself very seriously. As I went on however, I realised that people found the name absolutely disgusting. Even if I roleplayed as best as I could and were very polite, people would give me rude gestures and tell me they would report me.. even before I said anything. (Jørgen, e-mail interview, April 2006)

Role-playing a romantic relationship

Compared to other player-characters, Alabast stood out for me because, even after Yara had joined the ArchMages, we continued to keep our conversations IC. This made the relationship that was slowly developing between the two gnomes compelling to role-play. Next to writing letters, Alabast surprised Yara with gifts and an evening picnic during which he asked her to join him for a wedding party:

```
[02:07][Alabast] says: Silvia.. a former member of my guild is getting married
[02:07][Alabast] says: Me and Kimchan recieved letters, asking us to attend to
the ceremony
[02:08][Alabast] says: we were also told to bring as many of the Guild as pos-
sible..
[02:08][Alabast] says: however..
[02:08][Yara] says: thats is wonderful for you
[02:08][Alabast] says: although I could be surrounded by Guardians, appren-
tices and other guildmembers..
[02:08][Alabast] says: nothing would honour me more than having you by my
side..
[02:09][Yara] says: really...?
[02:09]Alabast looks at Yara with anticipation.. nervous anticipation
[02:09]Yara blushes
[02:09][Yara] says: that...
[02:09][Alabast] says: heh.. having Captain Brek as my dancing-partner would-
nt be much of a show..
[02:09]You giggle.
[02:09][Alabast] says: I mean.. it would be quite a sight but..
[02:10][Yara] says: o, i would love to see that!
[02:10][Alabast] says: have you seen the man run? Anyone who runs that bad
must be quite a dreadfull dancer
[02:10]You giggle.
[02:10][Alabast] says: I would rather hold your hand during the ceremony.. if
you wouldnt mind..
[02:10]Alabast smiles shyly at you.
[02:10]You smile shyly.
[02:11]Yara blushes even more
```

Figure 7: Unedited chatlog from a converstion bewteen Alabast and Yara.

Love affairs are a common theme in both tabletop role-playing games and LARPs, however, in online role-play, romance seems to be one of the most important subjects. In-game wedding ceremonies are a form of role-play that not only take place on RP servers but also on PvE and PvP servers. Although on these servers the wedding refers not so much to the relationship between characters but between players, whereas on RP servers the first intention is role-play and not the development of a relationship

between players, although this is sometimes the effect. Love affairs in role-play can create a positive tension but can also be a resource for conflicting feelings over the interrelation between IC and OOC, in-game and out of game, online and offline. Romance is an often mocked theme on the forums: role-players involved in IC relationships are accused of an OOC interest in "zyb0ring" (cybersex) and zyb0ring is often used as a way to mock role-play in itself.

Even though I had role-played a few romances in PnP RPGs, I wondered whether I would have performed Yara's crush on Alabast had we been talking OOC as well. Because we kept our conversations IC, the role-played relationship was not only more "realistic", I also felt more secure that there could be no confusion between IC and OOC. To me it was enough to know that I liked the role-play style of the player who was performing Alabast; he or she made me laugh and thus I enjoyed performing a shy gnomette in love. That the player behind Alabast felt the same way as I did became clear when he posted a question for travel hints and tips on the official role-play forum. Another player responded by informing about the gender of Yara's player:

Bloody muffins! I cannot find a single travel bureau in Stormwind! I just promised my dear love Yara to travel with her around the world and see what it has to offer. But I cant even find a bloody map for this task! Any guides and hints will be appreciated. (Alabast, Argent Dawn forum, 9 October 2005)

In normal pvp/pve servers, 80% of the female characters has a guy playing it. I guess its different on RP. Or is it? (Fukkstar, Argent Dawn forum, 10 October 2005)

Yara is for all I know a dutch 50 year old child-canibal. She could be a 21 year guy boy with driving disabilities. She could be my mom for all I know!! But this is a RP server, so I dont care who it is. All I know its a great RPer which should be treated respectively. Yara! You are the best!! (Alabast, Argent Dawn forum, 10 October 2005)

My preference for keeping all role-play IC was strengthened when a male dwarf fell in love with Yara. The interracial element and his growing jealousy of Alabast could have been interesting hooks for role-play, but I decided to end our interactions when he simultaneously started to talk OOC to me while sending love letters to Yara. However, in regard to Alabast I realized that if I wanted to write about my experiences from Yara's perspective that I had to talk OOC to the player in order to get his consent and be able to interview him. Eventually I decided to take the risk of ruining our role-play by telling Alabast who I was and that I was writing a PhD on role-play in online games. Luckily he responded in positive way; he thought my research was "quite exciting" and from that point on he patiently answered my questions and commented on my writings.

Jørgen turned out be Norwegian and living in Canada where he is studying creative advertising. He has a background in gamemastering PnP RPGs and describes himself as someone who loves to create enthralling experiences for other players:

I would describe myself more like a gamemaster than a player. I play the game since I want to see storylines unfold. Others storylines. I want to see other characters develop, I want to see other people have experiences, I want to enhance other peoples stories. When people whisper me with: "Your character is sooo funny" or "You should be proud. People are arguing over what to do with you." , that is when I smile and become encouraged to play on. (Jørgen, e-mail interview, April 2006)

Role-play development

Next to organizing activities, ranging from guild meetings to sieges and fishing trips for the ArchMages, Jørgen made Alabast highly visible on *Argent Dawn* by organizing meetings for the guildmasters of different role-play guilds.

The turnout was both its greatest success and its greatest downfall. Because of the sheer amount of players that showed up, nothing could be decided upon. It was also a great deal of conflicts of interest. Some people wanted to RP the whole thing. (Made impossible by those who wanted to go home/not RP). Some wanted to simply organize events. (Made impossible by those who regarded the gathering as a anti-horde military gathering.) Etc etc. All in all there were too many people and too many points of view. (Jørgen, comment on this text, January 2007)

After a few attempts that ended in chaos, he focused on his own guild again and decided that, in order to generate more role-play, the ArchMages needed a theme. Thus he started The Academy of the Arch-Mages as an in-game school where new PCs could take classes ranging from fighting to learning the elfish language taught by the members of the ArchMages. His descriptions of the guild, as posted on the server forum, showed the way in which Jørgen's perception of role-play guilds was changing from "role-play and comradeship" to "more than a bunch of friends". Over time he found out that one way to make a role-play guild successful was to come up with a theme that structures the behavior of players. Therefore the later Academy of the ArchMages revolved around lessons given by members, these lessons formed the trigger for role-play:

The ArchMages

The ArchMages in game purpose is to "Forge a Unity between Steel and Magic, bent at de-stroying the evil that threatens the civilized lands of the Realm." We are divided into several divisions which cooporates to further aid the goals of the Guild. Every class is accepted, but Warlocks would have a really hard time to explain why they would join us. (from an in game perspective of course.) In the end we are a guild who values nothing but true roleplay and comradeship. If you like to use words like "W8" and "Can I join U plz, need this quest to" you have no business here. Argent Dawn is a rp-server and should stay that way. (Alabast, Argent Dawn forum, 15 April 2005)

The Academy of the ArchMages

These days the guild of the ArchMages is reforming its ranks to become more than a regular "bunch of friends" guild. We will now soon open the Academy of the ArchMages which will offer promising and young adventurers a place for learning, adventuring and comradeship. The accepted students will participate in a two week program where they learn everything from baking murloc-muffins to urban survival skills. Very soon the first trial of the Academy will take place. If you apply now you have a chance of being in the first class of the Academy! All you need to do is write Principal Alabast an in game mail stating who you are and why you would like to be a student. You will then be contacted in game with more information on where and when the trial will take place. (Alabast, Argent Dawn forum, 20 May 2005)

Jørgen's project after the Academy of the ArchMages, was the Stormwind City Watch. Having learned that themed guilds worked best and inspired by both his army background and his studies in creative advertising he started this strictly organized police organization in the capital city. The Watch was run by his arrogant night-elf named Nath Shadoweyes. Also, he played one of the human sergeants, M.B. Eldal, who he designed after a sergeant he knew in the army.

I always wanted to form a military guild. Due to my RL background [in the army, MC] I have great respect and appreciation of rules, regulations and teamwork. There is nothing more beautiful than a group of people working towards the same goal. […] I investigated the situ-ation in Stormwind. At first I wanted to create a tradesmans guild. But since my advertising program have learned me one thing: Look for the creneau. (Look for the hole) I regarded the other guilds in Stormwind first. I found a lot of heroic generic guilds, some demon worship-pers, some secret orders and some criminal guilds like the Old Town Blades. When Nath en-tered Stormwind he had therefore a plan: Create a townguard, but recruit corrupt people and create a group of criminals that will keep the need for the townsguard present. My plan was to give Stormwind 2 things I believed it lacked: An opposition to the rest of the criminal guilds and a hardcore roleplaying consept. Nath was designed to be a villain, a character that would drive other peoples lives forward. Someone who would stay in the background and enhance

the overall atmosphere of Stormwind. My aims were to collect a group of so hardcore roleplayers that they would not even ask for an ooc channel. If it is the right way to run a guild, or the best one can be debated. Truth is, it worked. The Watch was (because of its amazing members) a success and has been copied even in other realms. (Jørgen, e-mail interview, April 2006)

The guild attracted new recruits on a daily basis who were only accepted after an IC job interview in which the player had to display his or her role-play capacities. Next to the daily assignment of patrolling the streets Jørgen had designed a plot behind the Watch in which Nath Shadoweyes had less noble plans with his newly started police force. Over time the player-characters who interacted with the Watch slowly discovered Shadoweyes' plans and eventually he was trailed and banned under his own laws. Jørgen handed the leadership of the Watch over to another player-character, went back to Norway for the summer and decided he should quit playing WoW as the time investment was becoming too much.

I was surprised to receive an MSN message at the end of the summer in which Jørgen stated "I am afraid to start WoWing again"; he had a plan to create more role-play on the server and told me his idea for the Argent Archives "a guild consisting of a travelling group of storytellers, journalists, merchants and their bodyguards." His plan was to organize every weekend a small gathering where the guild could tell stories, trade goods and give news and weather forecasts. "The stories they tell are short and revolve around real players that they've met in their travels. The storytellers are looking for great tales. Great heroes. Real people. Not NPCs or poweremoters with big egoes." This way he hoped to discover new role-play talent on the *Argent Dawn* server and encourage their play. Furthermore he aimed to record these role-players and their stories on a website, in order to create a portal into server's role-play communities. "We tell tales of you; the people of AD [Argent Dawn, MC]. And of course, under all this, there is a story and a greater plot, the same way Shadoweyes were having a greater scheme with the Watch. So there will be enough for the guildmembers and its freelancers and affiliates to do as well." "Would you have a character interested in joining me?" he asked. (Jørgen, MSN conversation, August 2006) I decided that it would be most logical to join the Argent Archives with Speckles as she could portray both the caravan and the citizens of Azeroth. This is how Speckles ended up on the windy plateau in front of the gates of Ironforge.

I looked around and noticed more and more delegates from role-play guilds arriving, and when it was time to leave approximately 30 player-characters had gathered. While a cacophony of IC and OOC conversations was taking place, Eiswein started to yell out the tasks for each guild and individual traveling with the caravan:

Role-Play in World of Warcraft

Ok, time to get this on the road. Please, hold your mouths and have patience with me. All non mercenaries, scholars, noncombatants, archivars, librarians, nobles, merchants and whatnot, gather around the table behind me. All fighting forces, have a good look at them, these are the people you will be protecting. [...] Ok. This is the situation. There are rumors of bandits in the area, even members from the Horde. This means we need to keep quiet when we hit the road. No orders are to be yelled except from me, the leader of the Shield and the leader of the Squad. [...] Squad: Your priority is the City Watch Messenger. Protect him at all costs. Your position in the caravan is the far back. Archives gather around me. Guards: To your positions. We leave in 2 minutes.

Meanwhile he had added all participants to a raid group. Raids are groups of more than five PCs and are typically used to defeat unique challenges, such as slaying a dragon, at high levels. On the forum, Eiswein announced that he would use raidchat to "describe different atmospheric details as the caravan travels on." It was time to start the journey.

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The Caravan Hits the Road

Slowly the caravan started to move over the road that leads down into the snow-white valleys of Dun Morogh. Archivar Eiswein had ordered the scouts to stay one minute ahead in order to make sure there were no bandits waiting to attack the caravan with all its valuables. As player-charachters chatted with each other Eiswein gave the first descriptions to add to the shared imagination of the group.

> 9/17 20:41:15.015 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: A snowfall have made the paths outside the road thick and hard to walk in. The caravan itself consists of the ar-chivars and librarians, all pushing the wagons in front of them or pulling a cart stuffed with books.

Meanwhile players performed their characters, sometimes making use of the descriptions that Eiswein gave and vice versa, as a gamemaster Eiswein responded to the actions of players. These edited parts of the chatlog show for instance the ways in which role-play and gamemastering was shaping a shared fantasy:

Making music
9/17 20:46:21.031 Laerick sings a lonesone song, playing a sad tune on his lute
9/17 20:46:56.578 Milthas takes up a harmonica and starts to play a tune…. It blends in the cold wind.
9/17 20:47:43.765 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: The frosty tune from Milthas harmonica can be heard throughout the whole caravan.
9/17 20:48:08.234 Teedot finds the tune comforting in the cold.
9/17 20:48:28.078 Milthas looks at Laerick smiling slightly.
9/17 20:48:46.515 Laerick mutter something about paladins getting more recognition in an army, combat and music.

Taking snapshots
9/17 20:42:51.234 Albie waves at you.
9/17 20:42:58.562 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: A member of the Archives, Speckles, is run-ning around taking snapshots of the group. Sometimes a flash blinds you and makes seeing through the snowy weather even harder.
9/17 20:43:01.718 You wave at Albie.
9/17 20:43:10.562 Speckles says: Hello!
9/17 20:43:16.875 Speckles says: How good to see you here
9/17 20:43:28.765 Albie says: Same to you, miss Snapwiggle
9/17 20:43:42.140 Speckles smiles holding up her camera
9/17 20:43:52.296 Albie says: Snap duties today?
9/17 20:43:56.406 Speckles says: Yes, this is hopefully a job that pays well
9/17 20:44:01.328 Albie nods at you.

Figure 8: Edited chatlog which shows the ways in which role-play and gamemastering was shaping a shared fantasy.

IC Eiswein had asked Speckles to document the trip in snapshots "so that nothing becomes lost or forgotten." This not only meant that I would perform the role of photographer but also that I would take screenshots during the event. Later Jørgen used the screenshots taken by both himself and others to make what he calls a photo reel, a report of the caravan (figure 9). Zoe and I do something similar with our Snap Sisters project; we go to events, perform our roles as photographers, take screenshots and edit these into reports.

Figure 9: Photo reel of the second march of the Argent Archives (below). (Jørgen Støvne 2006)
Also available at: http://argentarchives.net/secondmarch/

CROSSING THROUGH DUN MOROGH EVERYTHING SEEMED FINE AT FIRST EXCEPT FOR A COLD UNLIKE ANYTHING I'VE SEEN IN THESE PARTS FOR A WHILE.

WE LEFT THE GATES OF IRONFORGE. THE SHIELD, BLADES AND THE GUARD ON OUR FLANKS, THE SQUAD GUARDING THE REAR AND THE MERCENARIES UP FRONT.

REGI

I FELT A LOT SAFER WITH LADS LIKE THIS AROUND!

SWORD OF KICK ARSE

DETERMINED LOOK

HAND MADE SHOULDER PADS

SIZE 67!

THE QUARRY

TWO GOOD FRIENDS

Come, lets go !

500's rest

AS WE PASSED THE QUARRY A SCOUT GAVE ME TWO PIECES OF DIRE NEWS; BANDITS HAD BEEN SPOTTED IN KHARANOS.

TWO GOOD FRIENDS

Come, lets go !

BOOTSES RESCUE PARTY

THE QUARRY

AT ALL TIMES SOME MERCENARIES WITH A WOLFHEAD LED THE MERCENARIES...

AS WE PASSED THE QUARRY A SCOUT GAVE ME TWO PIECES OF DIRE NEWS:

BANDITS HAD BEEN SPOTTED IN KHARANOS.

BOOTSE, THE TOMEKEEPER WAS FOR UNKNOWN REASONS STILL IN IRONFORGE!

DISPATCHING A TRIO OF MERCENARIES TO LOCATE THE TOMEKEEPER, I SENT THE SHIELD OF LIGHT TO KHARANOS TO ROOT OUT THE BANDITS. A GRAVE MISTAKE...

SPECKLES GOT A GOOD SHOT OF THE BANDIT LEADER

SIZE G7!

SRC PADS

NOT ZUBIN... I HOPE...

CITY WATCH MESSENGER

EVERYTHING SEEMED CALM AT FIRST. FIRST THE MESSAGE OF AN ATTACK AT OUR REAR MADE THE CIVILIAN PART OF THE CARAVAN PRESS ON WITHOUT MUCH PROTECTION AT THE FRONT.

BUT ONLY SECONDS AFTER THE FIRST BUT ONLY SECONDS AFTER THE FIRST SCOUT REPORTED OF UNDEADS IN THE AREA THE FIRST ATTACK CAME UPON THE CARAVAN. THE TOMEKEEPER GOT A GOOD NOGGIN ON THE HEAD AND BRAVE MERCENARIES GAVE THEIR BLOOD WHILE PROTECTING US!

BANDITS!

IT HAPPENED SO FAST. FIRST THE MESSAGE OF AN ATTACK AT OUR REAR MADE THE CIVILIAN PART OF THE CARAVAN PRESS ON WITHOUT MUCH PROTECTION AT THE FRONT. WHEN WE FINALLY LEFT THE SOUTH GATE PASS THE BANDITS WERE OVER US! BUT BEFORE TOO MANY VALUABLES WERE

THANK THE LIGHT FOR THE SHIELD OF EH~ LIGHT

THE CARAVAN QUICKLY GATHERED ITSELF AFTER THE AMBUSH AND PRESSED ON TO THELSAMAR AND... SAFETY?

Bandit~

THE MAIN FORCE OF THE HORDE GAVE US HELL WHEN WE ARRIVED IN THELSAMAR

THELSAMAR IN FLAMES.

ATTACK AT OUR REAR MADE THE CIVILLIAN PART OF THE CARAVAN PRESS ON WITHOUT MUCH PROTECTION AT THE FRONT. WHEN WE FINALLY LEFT THE SOUTH GATE PASS THE BANDITES WERE OVER US! BUT BEFORE TOO MANY VALIABLES WERE ROBBED, THE HORDE CAME DOWN UPON THE ALREADY CHAOTIC GROUP AND ALLOWED FOR THE ARCHIVES ESCAPE.
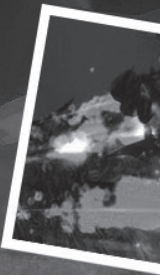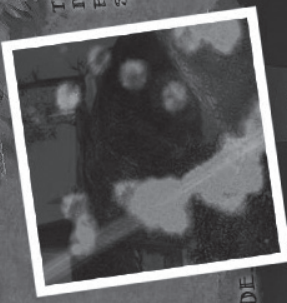
SPECKLED ... THE SHOT OF ... BANDIT LEADER

GO GO TEEDOT!

BASTARDS!

THE CARAVAN QUICKLY GATHERED ITSELF AFTER THE AMBUSH AND PRESSED ON TO THELSAMAR AND... SAFETY?

THELSAMAR IN FLAMES!

THE MAIN FORCE OF THE HORDE GAVE US HELL WHEN WE ARRIVED IN THELSAMAR.

SWOOSH! KRAKOW! KERPLASCH!

LUCKILY THE GUARDS KNEW HOW TO GIVE THE HORDE HELL AS WELL. NOT TO MENTION HOW GREAT WE LOOK WITHOUT A SHIRT ON!

COMPENSATING FOR SOMETHING?

AMARAL AND FIMBLE-SHANKS TOOK A STAND!

THE IRONFORGE GUARD DID WHAT THEY DID BEST...

BALD!

THE IRONFORGE GUARD
DID WHAT THEY DID BEST:
GUARDING!

ALWAYS WATCHFUL,
GUARDIAN RACHID,
BODYGUARD OF SPICERS.

MESSENGER
TINKLETON REACHED
THELSAMAR IN TIME.

PALADIN AMAR,
SOMETHING,
KEPT THE INN SAFE!

...BUT FIERCE!

A MILLION THANKS
TO THE HEALER
WHO TENDED TO
THE WOUNDED!

THE IRONFORGE GUARD BROUGHT THE ARCHIVES INTO SAFETY
WHILE THE MERCENARIES AND PALADINS
INSIDE THE INN WHILE THE RESQUE SQUAD DEFENDED THE VILLAGE.
ASSISTED BY THE RESQUE SQUAD WILL BE REMEMBERED IN OUR SONGS.
THE BATTLE WAS FIERCE AND WILL BE REMEMBERED THOUGH...
I CANNOT BUT WONDER AS WE VENTURE
WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS WE VENTURE
FURTHER AWAY FROM CIVILIZED LANDS?

MERCS! yer gettin paid well tonight

The Snap Sisters

Zoe and I started the Snap Sisters in January 2006 as two gnome sisters who had just returned from a long journey and decided to rent the top floor of the Visitor's Center in Stormwind. We did not consider the Snap Sisters as a research project. As friends we wanted to do something together and as role-players we aimed to participate and contribute more actively to the role-play community of *Argent Dawn*. However, our friendship, our experiences as role-players, and, of course, our academic backgrounds also helped to shape the project and, in turn, these aspects were influenced by our experience with the Sisters.

The Snap Sisters started out as fashion photographers because Zoe and I share a fascination for both photography and street fashion. Inspired by (online) magazines for street fashion photography such as the Japanese *FRUiTS* and the Finnish HEL LOOKS, we came up with idea of a role-play fashion magazine called *Stormy Fashion*. This was plausible because photography is part of the narrative environment of WoW. There is a quest in which players are commissioned to take a snapshot with the "Super Snapper FX." The camera is a device made by gnomes, a race which is renowned for their knowledge of mechanics. Which is why we chose to play gnomish photographers as that would make it possible for Freckles and Speckles to invent their own cameras. A few months after the start of the project we posted the following character background story onto the *Argent Dawn* Content Wiki (ADCW), a collection of player-generated content from our server:

Freckles and Speckles Snapwiggle are twin sisters and photographers. Having spent most of their childhood in Ironforge, they started travelling a few years ago. Inspired by their father's paintings and mother's engineering devices they experimented from an early age with photographic paper in their home-workshop (Freckles called it room - or box photography). In Booty Bay they bought the Snap-O-Rama 3000, a camera developed by miss Cracklebell Sparklecog. That moment their love for photography really took off. On a warm summer evening in Southshore they came up with the idea of a photo studio and a projection device, which they later called the Beam-O-Rama. Stormwind seemed the place best suited for their business and a few months later (January) they rented the top floor of the Stormwind Visitor's Center in Trade District. (ADCW)[24]

The gnome Cracklebell Sparklecog is a player-character who introduced the Snap-O-Rama 3000 camera both in her role-play in-game (she was a gnomish inventor) as well as on the official server forum where she made an IC post to show photos (screenshots) taken during her many travels. Inspired by her ideas we made up other cameras such as the Snaps H60 (with zoom lens) and the Snaparoid (a Polaroid camera). Our aim with the Snap Sisters was to trigger role-play with our performance. Also, we set out to document the wide variety of characters and stories that are being enacted by players on the server.

24 http://adcw.beche.se/tiki-index.php

Player-generated content

Players document role-play characters and experiences in drawings, stories, screenshot modifications, machinima and podcasts which they often post either on the official server forum or on one of the various player-run forums. This is player-generated content in two ways; first of all, players shape the identity of their characters both in background stories and through role-play, secondly, they represent their own content in artwork. Neither, however, exists separately from the game world; the characters and role-play are inspired by and are only possible through WoW; also, the artwork is often heavily inspired by the narrative and graphical context of the game, or makes direct use of screenshots and animation.

Players who post their artwork mostly receive very positive responses and talented artists are commissioned by other players to portray their characters. This is often done in return for in-game money which otherwise is earned by questing and the sale of items and clothes through the in-game auction house. In their writings, players often tell their own IC story, to which PCs respond by telling their story. This practice shows how networks of player-characters are formed within which players perform their characters. In order to encourage players to expand their role-play beyond these networks, a player-character named Tismet Embers started the above-mentioned ADCW.

It would not be a huge collection of official lore content, because there are several already, but instead a web of articles about families, relationships and histories connected to player characters. I have some experience in using wikis to create and expand worlds for pen-and-paper RPGs, and I think it would be possible to reach consensus about what is generally acceptable content and what is not (the half-vampires, NPC bastards, fake royalty, you know what I'm talking about...). I think it would be great to be able to make connections between my newly created character and the character of a player I don't know, through eg family history or something similar, connections that would be acceptable to everyone involved because you would have a place to discuss it until you've agreed (or agreed to disagree in-game, of course!) on what the connection looks like. (Tismet, Argent Dawn forum)

This quote underlines the fact that player-generated content is not a free-for-all practice. Taking the lore written by designers as a starting point, players negotiate and make up their own rules about what is "generally acceptable content and what is not." Especially during the first months of the server, the official forum was home to intense discussions on whether for instance the stories of (half) vampires or player-characters who imagined they descended from a powerful NPC were acceptable player-generated content. Players who do not act according to the general consensus are sometimes ignored and are thus forced to change their character or story. However, there are networks of player-characters who agree on rules that deviate from the general consensus on the server that enables a player to perform their character only within this specific social context.

Player-run newspapers and magazines

Another popular way to document role-play is by publishing online newspapers and magazines. As it is a time-consuming activity to gather content and design publications on a regular basis, they often exist only for a few months. For a while, *Argent Dawn* had a player-run newspaper called The Voice (March-July 2006). The newspaper was run with blogging software by Arving, a German communications student, for whom the project was part of his University diploma thesis. His aim was to experiment with taking *Argent Dawn* as a real world and a source of news. Thus, unlike newspapers run by role-players on other RP servers, *The Voice* included IC role-play news as well as OOC interviews with players on their instrumental play.[25] Arving's goal with *The Voice* was not only to contribute to the community of the server, but also to learn more about news publications. This dual motivation can be found in almost all players who document their characters and stories. It is experienced as a practice in writing, drawing, or moviemaking, and peer-to-peer comments are appreciated and used to further develop a practice. Even though all of these practices exist outside of the game, they are the result of events in-game and in turn they affect not only the artistic skills of the players but also play and social relations in-game.

In order to integrate player-generated content in the game besides chat and emotes, role-players make use of different player-made interface add-ons. Blizzard Entertainment encourages players to program add-ons or modifications of the basic user interface of the game. The changes range from the purely cosmetic to the way things are displayed on the screen, or they provide additional information or functionality. Often used in role-play are FlagRSP (Florian Kruse, 2005), MyRoleplay (Moncader, 2006), and Ephemeral (Slaighe, 2005). Both FlagRSP and MyRoleplay allow players to add role-play specific features about their characters (such as surname, title, outward appearance, preferred role-play style: casual or hardcore, character status: IC or OOC) which can only be seen by other users of these add-ons. Ephemeral allows players to create items such as books, props, containers, keys, and instruments. These user-created items can be sent to other users of the add-on. Ephemeral, for instance, is used by the Stormwind City Watch to distribute their Book of Laws, and the human warlock Kalistra O'Brandin, a sharp-tongued journalist, uses Ephemeral to sell her IC articles and interviews for in-game money. For a while she could often be found standing on one of the corners of Trade District in Stormwind, where I recognized her immediately by the indigo outfit that she is often wearing. Kalistra became a well-know player-character when she started with a series of series of IC interviews with characters in November 2005, calling herself the chronicler of *The Azeroth Portrayer* (TAP, see figure 10 for an excerpt of one of Kalistra's interviews).[26]

25 Gizmopolitan, a lifestyle magazine for women (EU Earthen Ring server, http://www.gizmopolitan.co.uk/) and Azerothian Weekly, a newspaper (EU Moonglade server, http://www.azerothianweekly.com/).
26 As Freckles and Speckles Snapwiggle, Zoe and I developed a bond with Kalistra both IC and OOC. IC-ly she became an important collaborator of the sisters and OOC-ly we built a TAP website in which we gathered the interviews, articles, and stories that she wrote. The articles of The Azeroth Portrayer can be found here: http://www.play.blogs.com/tap/.

Sgt. Eldal greets me with a voice not dissimilar from what I expected: warm toned, quite strong and with an accent that anyone could place somewhere south-west of the capital. For those who never met him personally, Eldal is in his middle-age, a corpulent man of sturdy built with short greying hair and lively blue eyes, gleaming with an authoritative yet pleasant expression. He straightens up, holding a notebook he will grasp as a precious possession during the whole interview, and after a quick briefing with one of his officers, he nods to me to proceed upstairs where the interview will take place. I sit on a little stool – furniture is remarkably scarce in the room – but Eldal slightly tightens his uniform belt and says: "I prefer to stand… it keeps me fit and ready for duty."
While I sip the coffee from the mug I have been kindly offered, I start with the first question:

TAP: "How old are you, and where you were born?"
Eldal: "About the exact age, I cannot be precise… around forty-five. It is a bit of a paradox that I have never stopped and considered that thoroughly. But I do not know for sure. As for the place, I was born in Westfall."

TAP: "The granary of Azeroth… once quite a peaceful place. There was in your childhood some episode that triggered in you the wish of becoming a constable?"
Eldal: "My parents were killed by the undead, and now I am here hoping to slay my inner demons…"
- Eldal takes a deep breath and sighs - "No. There was no such incident. I wish I had some exciting story to tell but in fact I lived quite a boring life. I.. erm, applied for training at the Cathedral when I was fourteen and …"

Figure 10: Excerpt from Kalistra O'Brandin's first interview with Sergeant M.B. Eldal (December 2005).

With the Snap Sisters, Zoe and I aimed to keep our activities IC and therefore wanted our report to be part of the role-play discourse of the server. However, Ephemeral cannot hold pictures and therefore we decided to use blogging software, not in the least part because we felt it was useful to learn the functioning of this software. In order to make the blog part of the narrative world of Azeroth we came up with the idea of the Beam-O-Rama, a gnomish projection device which can be found in the office we claimed in the Visitor's Center. In this house, which is located at the main road in the capital's Trade District, players can find NPCs who help them to form a guild and design and buy tabards. The top floor is empty and we "claimed" this to be our office, imagining that we would pay rent to someone.

WoW is a static game world, which means that, unlike many other online role-playing games, players cannot build their own houses or even decorate existing ones. However, there are many rooms and houses throughout Azeroth that players will use in role-play, for instance by negotiating ownership over a location. Most commonly this is done with taverns where players run their own businesses. In Stormwind there are a couple of player-run inns, such as the Fingels Quest, where player-characters can come in for a drink and a chat. The Fingels Quest was started in August 2005 by the gnome player-character, Fingelsbrew Steepsprocket. When I heard about the tavern Yara wrote Fingelsbrew a letter: "Dear mister Steepsprocket, I heard you're going to open a tavern in the Park of Stormwind City. Are you still looking for personnel? I have some time on my hands and could use a job." After a successful job interview she started to work in the tavern.

Playing and researching WoW

Fingelsbrew was played by Jonte (18, Swedish) who started the Fingels Quest while he was finishing high school. Just like Arving, he used his gaming experience for a project in school, in which he studied the community of *Argent Dawn* and narrated his own experiences with Fingelsbrew and the Fingels Quest. Arving and Fingelsbrew are not the only players who studied WoW; through the forums players often ask for help in a WoW research project that they are doing in the context of their studies. This may not be surprising considering the fact that a large part of WoW's player population is made up of students (Yee 2006). Jonte's research into the community of *Argent Dawn* underlined again that there are different playing styles, which he divided into player groups of role-players, PvP-ers, and raiders:

The players I have interviewed say that they benefit from playing WoW and loose from it, some loose time when they should be studying (I recognize this myself) and for some it dampeners their social life. But some of the benefits are like those which can be reached with meditation or even study (typing English for example). Thus it comes both good and bad from playing, but one must always be watchful so that he/she does not get addicted to the game. The community is, according to the interviews, a friendly one, but divided into different blocks, RP'ers, PvP'ers and Raiders. Neither this was a huge surprise to me, although I hadn't thought of Raiders as a block of their own, but more mixed into the PvP'ers, so that was a very interesting aspect for me. (From 2006, 30)

After reading Jonte's ethnography on the Fingels Quest I was struck not only by the enormous effort he had made to create a coherent role-play experience but also by the ways in which he described how online role-play is time consuming yet worthwhile because of the excitement of unexpected events and the feedback from other players. Jonte started out by performing Fingelsbrew as a waiter in an inn filled with NPCs:

Now those of you who are familiar to the game might ask yourselves "How can you serve in a tavern?" The answer is very easy; every time anyone entered the Blue Recluse [an NPC-run tavern in Stormwind, MC] I stood there, using my macro which I got fairly quickly, "Welcome

to the Blue Recluse! I am Fingelsbrew, the waiter. Please take a seat and I will be with you shortly." Most of the players then seated themselves and I went forward to get their orders. I couldn't make any brews myself, and thus only sold what the NPC-bartender-vendor sold (5 different alcoholic beverages). I was using a building which had many NPC's in it and pretended to be one of the staff. (From 2006, 102)

However, he enjoyed the experience so much that he started his own tavern in an empty building after he had role-played how he was fired from The Blue Recluse:

After much comforting and about 200 drinks later my good friend Cracklebell (who's actually Fingels "cousin"... well sort of) came up with the idea that I should open up a business of my own. I liked the idea but I had nowhere to be in. That's when Cracklebell"s fiancé came up with the empty tavern in the Park District, there was only one guild that was there and I often had them as customers, so it would be no big deal in talking them in to letting me being there a few hours a week. (From 2006, 104)

After more than a year Jonte decided to quit playing WoW, because working on the Fingels Quest had taken its toll: "I had let the game take over a major part in my life, I denied party-invitations because I 'had' to be logged in every day, otherwise I might miss something. I got to bed extremely late and missed much school and social life because of it" (From 2006, 109). After Fingelsbrew was murdered in an event set up by Jonte, other players continued the Fingels Quest.

       Inspired by the example of the Fingels Quest, Zoe and I also decided to claim ownership over an in-game location as we felt this would add to the realistic coherence of our company; it would be a place other role-players could always find us, without having to answer OOC whispers asking for our whereabouts. In the office, the Beam-O-Rama is represented by a painting. When a PC comes by to view his or her photos we emote how we switch the device on and the painting changes into the different photos. Through OOC whispers we then redirect players to our website.

Figure 11: The twinsister photographers Freckles and Speckles Snapwiggle. Zoe and I started the Snap Sisters in January 2006 as two gnome sisters who had just returned from a long journey and decided to rent the top floor of the Visitor's Center in Stormwind.

After leveling Freckles and Speckles to level 8, Zoe and I simply started our performance of the Snap Sisters by asking well-dressed characters on the streets of Stormwind if we could take a snapshot of them. While one of us played the photographer, the other one would pull out a notebook and ask fashion-related questions such as, "Where did you buy those lovely green boots?" In the first week after we created the Snap Sisters, we did our performance for a few hours every evening in order to gather enough material for the first edition of Stormy Fashion.

One unfortunate evening we ended up being hunted down by a dwarven hunter and his tiger. In a panic we ran over the streets of Azeroth until we had the idea to hide in the office of the Stormwind City Watch. After being saved by one of the constables and reporting the crime, we were invited to the Lakeshire Sport Event the following day. This player-run event was organized by the human player-character Jorendo Ashgard, who had claimed the small town of Lakeshire as his home. Stormwind had grown to be the main location for role-play and his aim with the Lakeshire Sport Event was to create more role-play throughout the enormous 3D environment of Azeroth. We photographed the event which consisted of fighting, swimming, and a fishing contest, and made a report about it that we posted on our blog, which we then advertised through both the official and player-run forums. Shortly after we published the edition of Stormy Fashion, Freckles and Speckles soon became visible characters and our in-game mailbox started to fill up with requests to shoot other sports events, portraits, and wedding photography. While our roles often trigger role-play by others, their requests are in turn triggers for our role-play, such as Eiswein asking Speckles if she could document the caravan.

The Caravan Continues

While we were still waiting for the caravan to leave I had time to change my game settings into what I call "photography-mode". "With or without chat bubbles?" I asked Eiswein through an OOC whisper. "Without please," he replied; I turned off not only the chat bubbles but also the name tags above character's heads. By pressing two keys I could now easily toggle between an image of the game with interface and a "clean" image without interface, chat window, name tags, or chat bubbles. As we started to move down the road I was ready to begin my snapwork.

By using both chat and emotes I performed Speckles' role as a photographer. As part of my performance, I encouraged player-characters to use animated emotes in order to make the images livelier. Meanwhile I would toggle to the image of the game without the interface, and I turned my camera view to first-person perspective so I could make the screenshots look as if they were snapshots taken by the Snap-O-Rama 3000. While I move the camera with my mouse, I look for interesting shots, thinking about the types of photos Speckles would make, as well as looking for the right framing and lighting of a shot. While continuously pressing the printscreen key, I captured every possibly interesting image. Once in a while I would emote a change of cameras. Zoe and I had introduced the Snaps H60 camera with a "zoom lens." This zoom lens is an in-game item called `<ornate spyglass>` which allows players to look far into the distance. We often take screenshots by making use of this item as it not only enables us to take screenshots from a distance but also because it lightens up the colours. While doing in-game photography I often feel the same way as when taking photos in a physical environment. The computer screen simulates the screen on the back of a digital camera and, by concentrating on the images, I feel in both cases as if I am shut off from my surroundings. In-game this feeling is enhanced by the fact that, without the interface on, I am unable to read the conversations that are occurring.

Focusing on taking the right snapshots, I barely noticed Eiswein yelling: "Take a right. We are camping at the quarry for a few minutes." "Stay alert. We move out in five minutes. Rest and fill your waterbottles." The caravan turned right and entered the Gol'Bolar Quarry for a break. Albie of the Gnomish Rescue Squad heaved a relieved sigh: "Ah...coffees," while the City Watch messenger Tinkerton shared his thoughts: "I do hope there is a gift shop." I smiled, because I enjoy it when players manage to perform humor by playing around with the Fantasy setting. WoW allows for this as WoW designers themselves played with Fantasy conventions by including "easter eggs" (hidden messages in media products) that refer to pop culture. Using the standard emote /dance on humans, for example, results in an animation of a dance similar to John Travolta's moves in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977).

A Break at the Gol'Bolar Quarry

"Some troggs outside the quarry, ahead. I'll get a few, but be careful when ye set back out!" We had barely entered the quarry when the human PC Thralion warned the caravan about the troggs wandering around. Troggs are simple humanoid life forms that, according to WoW lore, are the result of a failed experiment from the Titans to create life from stone. The Gol'Bolar Quarry is a large dig site and home to a small dwarven camp of the Miner's League. These NPCs hand out quests to exterminate the troggs which have overrun the mines and excavation site. By warning everyone about the troggs, Thralion made the creatures part of the caravan's adventure, thus creating his own quest. While others sat down near a campfire, a group of guards and mercenaries went into the quarry to kill the troggs one by one. They would not gain any experience points for this as Dun Morogh is a low-level quest area and most of the guards were high-level PCs for whom killing the troggs was too easy. However, protecting the caravan from the troggs would add to the role-play atmosphere and give them social credits within the community of role-players.

During the break, Eiswein continued to hand out missions, such as picking up one of the librarians who was still in Ironforge (a player-character who had logged on late) and assigning another PC to be Speckles' bodyguard. Meanwhile, most players were chatting about previous adventures, while emoting how they roasted marshmallows and drank coffee. As the chatlog in figure 12 below shows, one player did not role-play and grew more impatient as time passed, as could be noticed by his OOC questions both in the say and raid channels.

```
Ironforge gates
9/17 20:34:16.750  Nightgarde says: ok...and then we go ..ok????
9/17 20:39:43.265  Nightgarde says: can i get in a group?

On the road
9/17 20:40:14.250  Nightgarde says: can i join a group ???
9/17 20:40:41.281  Nightgarde yells: HEHE
9/17 20:47:16.625  Nightgarde says: where are we going?
9/17 20:48:47.750  Nightgarde has joined the raid group
9/17 20:50:16.734  [Raid] Nightgarde: what is there in that town we going to?

At the quarry
9/17 20:55:10.062  [Raid] Nightgarde: ok..what now???
9/17 21:01:30.562  [Raid] Nightgarde: OK:::LETS GO
9/17 21:03:05.625  [Raid] Nightgarde: can we go..or what!!?!?!?!???
9/17 21:03:12.046  Nightgarde cries.
9/17 21:08:32.593  Nightgarde yells: why do we walk when we can run?
```
Figure 11: the player-character Nightgarde did not understand what was going on.

Nightgarde can be considered a "griefer," a player who deliberately sets out to harass other player-characters by using or abusing game mechanics (in this case, chat) with the aim of having a negative impact on others, thus causing grief. Occasionally during role-play events, one or a few player-characters barge in and try to ruin the event by talking OOC in the public say channel, yelling, dancing naked, or jumping around. There can be many reasons for doing this: sometimes these are players who do not understand what role-play is and only see a large gathering of player-characters, sometimes these players simply enjoy griefing, and sometimes these are players who have been excluded from the community due to unacceptable behavior and try to get revenge by griefing. Nightgarde did not seem to grief on purpose, however, he just did not understand what was going on: "Why do we walk when we can run?" he asked. As Nightgarde was ignored by other players he was unable to find out that walking is part of role-playing a coherent caravan experience.

  To me, the journey became even more atmospheric when it started to snow, one of the weather effects that had been implemented a few months before, in order to make the game world less static. "Two minutes till we leave. Warm yourself, get some coffee in yer bellies. Adjust your armor!" Eiswein yelled over the camp site. As we moved back to the road, Eiswein narrated the atmosphere in raidchat:

> 9/17 21:02:06.593 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: Something in the air gives the more nervous of you an erie feeling of someone watching the group from the mountains...

The Caravan Gets Attacked

For a moment I considered that this eerie feeling of "someone watching the group" might be the Horde attack that was discussed on the forums. The Horde faction, consisting of orcs, trolls, tauren, and undead is the opponent of the Alliance (human, elves, dwarves, and gnomes). According to the lore, these two parties have fought many wars in years past, but now they have settled into a tenuous peace. The ongoing power struggle between the two factions, who cannot communicate verbally, plays an important part in the game-play of WoW. As *Argent Dawn* is an RP-PvE server, player-characters must fight and kill each other on battlegrounds designed for this purpose. Outside these battlegrounds, players can only attack each other in enemy cities or when they manually switch on their PvP flag, indicating that they are up for a fight. This is called world-pvp and is used by role-players to simulate a battle between two opposing groups.

Role-play battles

In the forum thread in which Eiswein announced the caravan, a Horde player-character named Tardon suggested attacking the group of travelers.

Well, I might be there, depending on how long my raid lasts... its set to last until 20:00, but we usually do some overtime in BWL to get a little further, sometimes up to 22:00 or 23:00 :S BUT, if time permits, I have a question or two: I dont want to ruin anyones event. Now, I'd love to make a little attack on it, but if you would preffere not to, I'll stay away :) (Tardon, Argent Dawn forum)

Players who read the forum (not all players do) knew the caravan could possibly be attacked, and they turned on their PvP flags which would enhance the feeling of danger and possible death. After the caravan had left the quarry, I stayed behind somewhat in order to take snapshots. Even though I had read Tardon's forum post I shivered when the emote /Tardon growls menacingly at you appeared in my chat window. Quickly I moved my camera to see where he could be hiding and as I made Speckles run towards the caravan, I saw that the attack was already happening at full speed.

```
9/17 21:15:27.937  Rezoc yells: WATCH YOUR BACKS!
9/17 21:15:43.140  Eiswein yells: Stop that maniac! Dont let him get to the books!
9/17 21:15:44.640  Amarae yells: AMBUSH!
9/17 21:15:51.281  [Raid] Elaniya: TARDON!
9/17 21:15:56.406  Borislew yells: Form up!!
9/17 21:16:02.796  Nightgarde yells: RESS if you CAN!!
9/17 21:16:03.562  Rezoc yells: Three men Downs!
9/17 21:16:21.546  Eiswein yells: Healers, get these people back on their feet! MErce-
naries, spread out! Scout the area for more!
9/17 21:16:24.281  [Raid] Elaniya: ((That,was,cool. :D)
9/17 21:16:51.703  Amarae yells: It seems the undead have taken an interest! Be on
guard!
```

Firgure 13: Excert from chatlog when Tardon attacks the caravan.

As the unedited chatlog shows (see figure 13 above), the fight was a combination between role-play ("Stop that maniac! Dont let him get to the books!"), fighting according to the game mechanics (when someone dies, Nightgarde orders players to "ress" –resurrect – which is the fastest way for a player-character to get back to life again) and OOC remarks ("That, was, cool :D"). After the fight, most of the player-character who died according to the game mechanics did not use the possibility to resurrect, as they consider this to be magic which can only be done by very powerful sorcerers. Also, players will treat those who are dead according to the game mechanics as wounded, because many role-players consider it incoherent for characters to die over and over again. When a character dies, its ghost appears in a graveyard nearby, while the dead body remains where it was. In order to come back to life,

the player-character has to run in ghost form from the graveyard back to the body in order to reunite them. During this attack, several players did this, but waited next to their characters' bodies in ghost form, until they were healed and bandaged by fellow travelers. With a few wounded to carry (player-characters cannot carry each other but will emote this as they walk closely to each other), the caravan slowly and silently moved through South Gate Pass, which leads to Loch Modan. As the Caravan exited the Pass and entered the warmer region of Loch Modan, an unpleasant surprise waited in the Valley of Kings. Two role-play guilds, the Demonologists and the Legitimate Business Club had organized a bandit hold-up. This was also published on the forum but, whereas Tardon had done so OOC, news of the bandit hold-up was published IC:

Kiach looks at the crumpled soggy note he found lying in a puddle outside the Pig & Whistle, looking at the first sentence and trying to desipher what "N.ed m.r.c.n.ries te" .elp Z.b.ns lot H..d u. te' Ar.ent Ar.hi.es car.v.n on S..day 17't. a. 9pm. Al.ta va.ub.es ab.ard app.r.tly. G.th.r te' m.r.c.n.ries in t'L.C te'.e.her an' l.ts f.nd o.t wh. t.is C..av.an '.s i. it." could mean... "I'd bes' show this te' t'cap'n..." he says, as he trudges off towards the new watch office as it starts to rain again... (Kiachideon, Argent Dawn forum)

Kiach Ideon is a dwarf who works for the Stormwind City Watch. The character is being performed by a player who was at that time also leading the Legitimate Business Club with his gnome character Duckular. To be part of both a criminal organization and the law force enabled Duckular to trigger events such as this one in which players are encouraged to participate in either the "legitimate business" or fighting the crime. Most players do not know the different characters or alts played by others. This is often kept semi-secret as players want to focus on the role-play, and feel that not knowing who plays the other characters enhances the tension in a plot or event.

"Go Go Go!" one of the bandits yelled, and in no-time the caravan was surrounded by approximately 15 player-characters from the two criminal guilds. "Bandits!" Archivar Eiswein shrieked. "Oh dear...," the Watch messenger mumbled while the bandits started to rummage through the contents of the caravan carts. "No

one moves! No one...gets hurt," a gnome bandit promised. "Halt you dogth!" another threatened. Eiswein tried to gather group of travelers close together and urged everyone not to fight. For a moment the group seemed to be frozen to the ground. Not moving and barely talking. Eiswein handed over some valuables to the menacing priest in front of him. Then he slowly raised his hands in the air. Suddenly the City Watch messenger in the back panicked and everyone started to move. "Anyone that moves... dies!" a bandit yelled, but it was already too late.

The Horde had joined in with the bandits and, before I realized, it Speckles was standing in the middle of a bloody fight. I emoted how surprised Speckles was to see Duckular among those robbing the caravan. Duckular had been the big love of her twin sister Freckles over the last few months. Speckles knew something about his illegitimate activities, but being robbed by Duckular was obviously taking things a step too far. To me as a player, Duckular's presence gave the event more depth, because previous interactions that had shaped Speckles, Freckles, and their relationship, became part of the experience. Duckular's banditry in the Valley of Kings would create a backlash effect in the future: due to his criminal activities – including this hold-up – his relationship with Freckles eventually ended; she could not accept this side of his personality.

In the chaos of the fighting and yelling, Eiswein looked at Speckles and loudly said: "Speckles! Are you getting this?" I nodded and quickly ran to the top of a nearby hill so I could take better snapshots. This time the battle was "dueled" (dueling is a system in which players from the same faction can invite each other to a fight), partly PvP and partly a so-called emote fight, in which players use emotes to either enhance or replace the game mechanical fight. While everyone was busy fighting, the Archivar tried to get the caravan carts moved out of the valley; "Caravan! Move out! Get those wagons moving! Help with the wagons! Push them! Let's get to safer grounds!"

Permanent death

As part of the caravan moved to the final destination of Thelsamar, the battle continued. Halfway through the battle, the following OOC message appeared in raidchat:

> 9/17 21:39:03.406 [Raid] Evangeline: ((This time, the young huntress was too wounded for Elune's grace to save her, and her body would lay on the road to Thelsamar for good))

Evangeline, a night-elf hunter who had traveled with the caravan as a scout had been wounded during the first Horde attack and now she had been "killed" again, and the player decided it was time for her character to die. Permanent death is not part of the game-play, which means that a player-character can come back to life endlessly. In role-play, however, some players find this incoherent and choose to let their character permanently die at a certain point. Sometimes this is unplanned, as was the case here, sometimes players script the death of their character because they do not want to continue playing the character or because they are quitting the game (as Fingelsbrew did).

```
9/17 21:39:25.437  [Raid Leader] Eiswein: ((Evangeline, that is so sad... sobs..
9/17 21:39:32.171  [Raid] Bergoth: (( Your not ressing her?! ))
9/17 21:39:51.281  [Raid] Spiffie: (( Pah. We didn't get any fancy schmancy ressing. ))
9/17 21:40:46.109  [Raid] Bergoth: (( Wot she isnt going to res?!
9/17 21:41:42.421  [Raid] Fimbleshanks: OOC: What are the rules about ressing? If we
die, are we dead for the rest of the event or what?
9/17 21:42:00.156  [Raid] Bergoth: (( Sho Eva is never coming back? :/ ))
9/17 21:49:49.953  [Raid] Bergoth: OOC: What happend to Eva?
```

Figure 14: Player-characters discuss the permanent death of Evangeline.

These fragments of the chatlog show how Eiswein commented OOC-ly on the sadness of the situation but accepted her choice, whereas Bergoth continued to ask why Evangeline was not going to bring her character back to life. Months before, Jørgen himself had caused a forum discussion on "perma-death" after permanently killing his City Watch character Eldal when he became annoyed by his own over-visibility and the continued attacks on the police force which he experienced as griefing instead of role-play:

I was soo tired of the bombings and the assassinations. But even worse was the constant peckering of the watch. We were supposed to be a dysfunctional comical gang of watchmen, but people treated us like we were either the Judge Dreads of Stormwind (ignored our laws since it was not according to "lore" etc.) or as we were the most effective task force in Azeroth. [...] The Watch was the most sought after guild at the time, and we had people scheduled for meetings and recruitment every day. When I entered the office and these two bandits jumped Eldal and threatened him not to interfere with the caravan that left Stormwind the

next day.. something just died in me. […] I realised what had happened. Eldal was stopping people from interacting with the rest of the Watch. Everyone hated Nath, and they mainly ignored the others because of Eldals rank. And at the same time I felt so disgusted about the constant attacks on watchmen, so when Ilsen started cutting Eldal into pieces (he was un- armed and unable to defend himself) I let it go. Time to show that actions had consequences. And they did. Ilsen and Xarch had to use 2 months to redeem themselves both IC and OOC. (Jørgen, e-mail interview on the forum discussion, April 2006)

The discussion that took place after the event highlighted the ways in which role-play interaction is about negotiation between player-characters who have different ideas about what constitutes role-play. The attackers were accused of using "power-emotes" in which a player-character enforces a certain type of behavior on the other player, for example, "murderer stabs Eldal with his sword." To most play- ers, this is unacceptable behavior as it leaves out the negotiation phase. One player simply decides what happens. An acceptable emote would have been: "murderer tries to stab Eldal with his sword." This would have left Eldal the option to decide what his response would be. In this case Eldal decided to let his character die from the stab wounds. In doing so he hoped to offer the attackers the experience of role-playing a murder with actual in-game effects. The attackers however, never expected Eldal would play along and let his character die. In the forum discussion that ensued, Ilsen and Xarch were accused of killing an important character; at the other end of the spectrum, Eldal was accused of power-emot- ing his death upon his murderers. There are still no detailed rules in the community about permanent death, and Fimbleshanks' questions reflect this: "what are the rules about ressing? If we die, are we dead for the rest of the event or what?" Evangeline's death did not cause a similar discussion as in Eldal's case. However, both she and her murderer Tardon did use the forum to explain the events. Evan- geline wrote:

I know I didn't reply in raid, but IC and all that etc :-) It was fitting that the young huntress' body remain where she fell. It fit the scenario. […] Eiswein, I thought about ressing a sec- ond time, but you know… it just fit better to stay dead. It felt more IC for her, for her purpose scouting for the Archive Caravan. it worked and I felt good about it :-) (Evangeline, Argent Dawn forum)

As soon as I had read Evangeline's message in raidchat, I quickly moved back into the valley to find her and take a few snapshots of her dead body as it lay stretched out over road. I emoted how Speckles kneeled and focused the zoom lens on her peaceful-looking face. Speckles' bodyguard, Rachidi Hamud, stayed close, because in the background the battle was still in full progress. Meanwhile, Eiswein nar- rated in raidchat how the caravan pressed on, moving towards Thelsamar. "The sounds of battle can be heard behind them as the mercenaries.. well.. whatever is happening back there.. The Softer elements of the Caravan is reaching Thelsamar, pushing the wagons in front of them. Finally the books and the Argent Archives are safe."

Figure 15: "This time, the young huntress was too wounded for Elune's grace to save her, and her body would lay on the road to Thelsamar for good" (Evangeline, raidchat) I quickly moved back into the valley to find Evangeline and take a few snapshots of her dead body as it lay stretched out over road. I emoted how Speckles kneeled and focused the zoom lens on her peaceful-looking face.

Arrival in Thelsamar

After taking a few last snapshots of the fight, I felt a rush of excitement as Rachidi and I ran towards Thelsamar, which is located at the edge of the huge lake from which the region Loch Modan takes its name. In front of the village tavern, Eiswein was thanking the different guilds and individual merce- naries while he paid them in-game money in return for their escort. Soon more and more travelers arrived and, as they emoted how they looked tired from the journey, the Archivar urged them to enter the tavern for a well-deserved beer. The fights however, had slowly moved up the road and suddenly both the Horde and the bandits had the village under attack. In a chaotic last battle, one of the bandits was captured and group attackers decided to retreat. Eiswein kept a close eye on the happenings and as soon as the Horde and bandits moved out he reported this through the raidchannel in order to create both IC and OOC closure of the event. Whereas his first sentence in the next excerpt is IC, the second and third sentences are recognizable as OOC; they are no longer descriptive but focused on commu- nicating action. Everyone was urged to move to the tavern for a group photo and afterwards Eiswein invited players to have a look at the photo reel that he would start to make right after the event.

> 9/17 22:34:05.421 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: A drum can be heard from far away. The Horde seems to have given up. The Archives should be safe for now.
>
> 9/17 22:34:36.406 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: Anyone that wishes should hurry back to the Inn and line up at the front for a special snapphoto by Freckles. Look your finest. :)
>
> 9/17 22:38:01.796 [Raid Leader] Eiswein: The Archives are safe. See http://ar- gentarchives.net for a photoreel of the caravan and make sure to visit in the future as we will reveal more of what our plans are for AD. Thanks for partici- pating.. Now: Drink. be merry.

The aftermath

Eiswein's closure of the event did not mean that players stopped role-playing. Outside the tavern, the Archivar continued to thank and pay player-characters while inside the tavern the wounded were taken care of by a priestess. Others sat down for a drink and narrated to each other the events of the evening. Meanwhile, in one of the rooms of the inn, the captured bandit was being questioned. He turned out to be the night-elf Trias Tempestrunner, the brother of Elaniya, one of the members of the Argent Ar- chives. "I needed money," Trias, who was a former lawyer weakly defended himself. Together the PCs used the events during the caravan as a trigger to perform a much longer-running interaction between their characters. A few weeks later, Trias was imprisoned and a poster on a city center notice board (a message posted on the official forum) called for an execution without a trial. Apparently the bandit hold-up was only one small crime in his repertoire of unruly deeds.

Crime and fighting crime are important role-playing themes on the *Argent Dawn* server and in line with this player-characters have set up law firms and a number of trials have been organized in the Dwarven Halls of Stormwind. The event in which Trias would be executed displayed some of the difficulties of player-character gatherings. Taking up the role of gamemaster, Trias carefully planned the Sunday evening event, for which a large group of player-characters showed up. However, unlike the caravan, where everyone is a participant with a different mission, the setup of a trial requires a very visible performance of a small group of player-characters (the organizers: the lawyers, those on trial, the guard, etc.) while a large group of player-characters performs the role of onlooker. This differentiation often leads to tensions: most players dislike what they call "scripted" events, in which a gamemaster has already predetermined the outcome, and organizers of trials want to have feedback from the audience in order to create an improvised happening. This clashes with the fact that an audience's role mostly involves being quiet; otherwise, if everyone actively performs their role as audience by talking and emoting, then the actions of the organizers get lost in the cacophony. Disappointed by the chaotic execution event (during which he was saved from death), Trias commented that the role of onlooker can be participatory in a fruitful way, not by a visible performance during the trial, but simply by being there (thus creating the atmosphere of a trial) and using the event both as an opportunity for internal character reflection and as input for role-play beforehand and afterwards:

You don't attend something without being changed, emotionally, in whatever way. Even at a party you end up coming out of that experience with one more memory, good or bad. Maybe if your character's experience at the party was to be gawked at cause she couldn't dance, well then maybe she's not as eager to attend another party or maybe goes out for dance lessons to learn how to better dance, determined to prove those who laughed at her wrong. Every rp that happens provides a way to enrich other rp. Sometimes it's the most interesting when it enriches it indirectly. (Trias, Argent Dawn forum, 4 December 2006)

Compared to the often-chaotic and abrupt endings of trials, the caravan ended slowly, with Thelsamar settling back into its peaceful quietness as player-characters either logged out or continued their travels. While I lingered on to take some photos of the characters who stayed behind, Eiswein whispered to me "Well, that was enough for a day.. yaiks.." "Did you get any good pics?" I told him I hoped so, and he decided to log on as his Horde character, so he could thank Tardon for the attack. It was 11:30 pm when I finally said my goodbyes and logged off. Feeling exhausted, I stumbled to the kitchen to get something to drink before I sorted out the screenshots I had taken during the evening.

When I got back to my desk, I opened the folder in which the screenshots were saved. I had made few hundred screenshots of our three-and-a-half-hour journey. There had been approximately 30 participants, not counting the 15 or so bandits and the small group of Horde PCs. While chatting over MSN and Skype with Zoe and a few non-WoW-playing friends who were still awake, I created a folder where I could save the screenshots that I liked. Next I opened the screenshots and, using a program called IrfanView, sorted them one by one. I judged the screenshots based on content (did I

have a snapshot of every player?), framing, and lighting. I also included screenshots that were only partially useful; I knew Jørgen would cut these apart to make the photo reel. A total of approximately 100 screenshots was the end result. "All done," I told Jørgen over MSN. "God, that was an exhausting event!" he replied. I agreed. While I loaded my zipfile with screenshots, we talked about the event and Jørgen commented on how hard it was to gamemaster an event for almost 50 player-characters of which he was not only the organizer but also performing one of the most visible characters:

I wanna get this photoreel up as quickly as possible. Though the shots this time was horrible. Waaay to much time managing all the newbie roleplayers. [...] I realised the enormous scope of keeping everyone in line when we were halfways. I dont want to script it too much either. But with a lot of people comes a lot of talking. It is hard to keep track of.. well.. anything. And its hard to organize anything since everyone seems keen on talking to.. well.. Eiswein. :P (Jørgen, MSN conversation)

It was past 01.00 when I turned my computer off to get some sleep; the next day I had to get up early for work. In the morning I woke up with a bang when the alarm bell of my mobile phone rang. My shoulder and right arm ached from the position I'd been sitting in so long while behind my computer: my legs pulled up underneath myself, and hunched slightly forward while continuously moving my mouse and using my keyboard to make Speckles move, talk, and take snapshots. In my dreams I had walked with the caravan again. I was tired and vowed again to read or watch something else after playing WoW next time. In the afternoon I had a look on the official forum and several guild forums to find out how other players had experienced the event.

Evangeline: "It was lots of fun. That fellow on the horse, the really brusque one Brusiah, I think it was? Ordering everyone to keep up with the caravan, leave the dead where they were, absolutely priceless. Whomever it was, it was possible to see him chivving slaggards along, making them run to get back to the safety of the main caravan. The scouts out in front... once the environment changed to a feeling of being watched from the mountains, well, we ran with it. It was great. There was just enough time between that and the actual first attack for us to relax! (Evangeline, Argent Dawn forum 17 September 2006)

Duckular: "OOC: Was a very enjoyable (if short) RP holding up the caravan, even if Duck was very confused at the time after recieving a nasty blow to the head about thiry minutes earlier at the market from an Undead Rogue, but still managed to stand there masked and with a gun in his hand... Oh, and shoot someone during the getaway of course..." (Duckular, Argent Dawn forum 17 September 2006)

Albie: "Nice event, if a bit hectic at times. As usual, the best fun was just hanging around chatting with friends after the event :)" (Albie, Gnomish Rescue Squad forum, 18 September 2006)

Winzy: "That was awesome! Those guys are really serious! I am looking forward to the continuation of this. In my opinion this is probably one of the best ideas I have seen performed in WOW, especially if they manage to get this into enemy lands without getting a complete chaos. I will join as far as possible, at least until it gets chaotic. I hope the rest of the Squad also will, the more we are the merrier!" (Winzy, Gnomish Rescue Squad forum, 18 September 2006)

Two days later, Jørgen posted the photo reel on the website of the Argent Archives. In a combination of edited screenshots and text, he narrated and commented on the journey mainly from the IC perspective of Eiswein. Partly the photo reel looks as if the character Eiswein has made it, at the same time, however, the reel is humoristic as it plays on the edge between being IC by making use of comic-like exclamations such as "Swoosh, Krakow, Kersplasch," and OOC screenshot comments on, for instance, a human male carrying an enormous sword: "Compensating for something?". (figure 9, page 98)

In the fall of 2006, Jørgen organized five caravans, one every two weeks. Additionally, he created specific assignments and missions that took place in and around the town or village where the caravan would stay during the two weeks in between. The event sheets he created for this (posted on the Argent Archives website, see figure 16) encouraged guild members to conduct interviews in the area and to advertise the existence of the Argent Archives. Furthermore, he invited player-characters to do predesigned quests in the surroundings that he embedded in the storyline of the Argent Archives. Most characters in the Argent Archives are player's alts, which means that while most player-characters participate in the caravan they are seldom online in between, except when Eiswein would log on. For each character players can create a friends list, which shows when players are on- or offline. When the Argent Archives members would see Eiswein log on, they often switched to their the Argent Archives character and only then would they be involved in either interviewing or questing. The IC interviews, which included questions regarding age, relatives, occupations, likes, and dislikes, resulted in simple character profiles, and Jørgen made character portraits for many of these.

During the last event, in which the caravan traveled from Refuge Pointe in the Arathi Highlands to the seaside village of Southshore, there was another Horde attack which ended in an enormous PvP fight. This battle caused a sharp discussion on the official server forum between three groups: 1) Alliance players who traveled with the caravan, 2) Horde players who used PvP in order to role-play an attack on the caravan, and 3) Horde players who simply attacked the caravan. The Alliance players felt that the event had been ruined by the Horde PCs who, according to them, did not attack the caravan for role-play reasons but to grief the travelers by "ganking" or "corpse camping." Ganking means to

Loch Modan

17.SEPT. - 1.OCT.

AS A START TO THE JOURNEY THE ARGENT ARCHIVES
WILL SPEND A TWO WEEKS PERIOD AT
THE STOUTLAGER INN IN THELSAMAR.
THIS MEANS THAT THE GUILDMEMBERS TRANSPORT
THE ARCHIVE TO THE NEW LOCATION DURING
THE CARAVAN ON SUNDAY.
YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO CONDUCT ALL INTERVIEWS IN THIS AREA,
PLUS SPEND AS MUCH TIME HERE AS POSSIBLE TO SHOW PEOPLE OUR PRESENCE HERE.
THERE IS NOTHING THAT STOPS YOU FROM TAKING A GRYPHON ELSEWHERE HOWEVER.
BUT EISWEIN WILL STAY AT THE STOUTLAGER AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE.
IF YOU WANT TO CATCH HIM FOR A MISSION ITS A GOOD IDEA TO
HAVE YOUR HEARTHSTONE TO THELSAMAR.

LOCATION GOAL:

INTERVIEW 20 ALLIANCE MEMBERS

ASSIGNMENTS WHILE IN LOCH MODAN:

- USE THE GENERAL CHANNEL TO TELL OF OUR STUFF.
THESE ARE THE OFFICIAL ONES:
(PLEASE: NO MORE THAN EVERY TEN MINUTES!
WE ARE NOT SPAMMERS!)

/1 THE ARGENT ARCHIVES ARE LOOKING FOR GUILDS
TO INVITE TO THEIR EVENTS. CONTACT GUILDMASTER
EISWEIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND TELL
HIM OF YOUR GUILD SO THAT WE CAN INVITE YOU
AND RECORD YOUR GUILD INFORMATION
AT HTTP://ARGENTARCHIVES.NET

/1 THE SCRIBES OF THE ARGENT ARCHIVES ARE
LOOKING FOR EXCITING MEMBERS OF THE ALLIANCE
TO INTERVIEW. SEE A SCRIBE TODAY AND ARRANGE
YOUR PERSONAL INTERVIEW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

- TELL PEOPLE OF THE NEXT CARAVAN AND THAT WE
NEED BOTH MERCHANTS AND GUARDS.
MAYBE THEY WILL DECIDE TO JOIN IN ON OCT. 1ST!

OPTIONAL MISSIONS: (PLEASE SEE OOC REQS BELOW)

1. I WANT TO EXPLORE THE NORTHERN RUINS IN LOCH MODAN.
THERE ARE, HOWEVER, A LOT OF RUMORS THAT OGRES HAVE SETTLED
DOWN AT THIS LOCATION.
IF ANYONE WISHES TO ESCORT ME, SEE ME AT THE INN.

2. I HAVE A TOP SECRET MISSION THAT WILL REQUIRE AT LEAST
TWO GUARDS AND TWO SCRIBES. NONMEMBERS CANNOT COME.
THIS IS TO IMPORTANT TO BE KNOWN BY OUTSIDERS.

3. IVE HEARD A VERY INTERESTING RUMOR OF A LOST SCROLL
IN THESE PARTS. IF ANYONE COULD FIND A PERSON THAT KNOWS
THE AREA WELL THAT WOULD BE GREAT.
SEE ME AND ILL GIVE YOU DIRECTIONS FOR WHERE TO LOOK FOR IT.

Figure 16: the Argent Archives event sheet for Loch Modan (Jørgen Støvne 2006).

HERE IS A SHORT LIST OF WHO'S WHO IN THE ARCHIVES AT THE MOMENT:

SCRIBE ELTOORA
SPOKESPERSON AND EISWEINS RIGHT HAND

LOREMASTER TEEDOT
RESPONSIBLE FOR LENGTHIER INTERVIEWS AND TALES

SCRIBES:
CRUDELIA
REGI
DOBBLEY

MESSENGERS:
AIREICYL
ELANIYA
FLARN

GUARDS:
RACHIDI (RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURING THE MERCHANDISE)
DOOTSE: (TOMEKEEPER: RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURING THE ARCHIVES)

NEXT WEEK:

THE RUMORS WITHIN THE GUILD SPEAKS OF GOING FURTHER NORTH.
SOME SAY MENETHIL, OTHERS SAYS THE REFUGE POINT.
EITHER WAY THE NEXT LOCATION WILL HOPEFULLY FEATURE THE FOLLOWING HAPPENINGS:
TRAVELLING MARKET
HEIGHTENED HOSTILITIES
FIRST GUILD INTERVIEW

Send all backgroundstories etc to:
contact@argentarchives.net

1. OOC Reqs: 2 hours available. Minimum 2 partymembers must approach Eiswein.
1 Messenger/Guard must be present in the party.

2. OOC Reqs: 1 hour available. Minimum 4 members must be present. No outsiders!

3. OOC Reqs: 1-2 hours avalable. 1 Guildmember and 1 Non guildmember must be present.

hurt someone's feelings, but in MMORPGs it is used to describe an "unfair" PvP kill during which an attacker kills a player and then waits around the victim's corpse until its ghost returns to resurrect, and then the attacker kills the player again. These three comments on the event illustrate the tensions between the different types of instrumental and role-play taking place on the same server:

Nhars (Horde attacker, 3): "First of all id like to say it was the most fun ive had in weeks, thank you. Second atleast i am in no way trying to bring back world pvp i do it for my own personal enjoyment, i love world pvp. World pvp is ganking, corpse camping and blueboying like it or not. (Argent Dawn forum, 22 October 2006)

Albie (participant in the caravan, 1): "The problem is not world pvp as such. Feel free to run a blitz through the caravan killing everything in sight - we keep pvp on to enable this being a possibility. Heck, that would even be nice, if we were allowed to pick up the pieces, tend to the wounded and RP our losses." (Argent Dawn forum, 22 October 2006)

Zimbad (Horde attacker, 2) who I recently had a conversation with the "spiritual leader" of Free Cookies. And his mind appears rather odd. Apparently, PvP is all about annoying other players and they enjoy it when people whine about them because it shows that their job is done, because they annoyed people enough to make them whine. All I can say is: Sad, sad person. (Argent Dawn forum, 22 October 2006)

Because the Horde managed to steal a few carts from the caravan, the Argent Archives was forced to stay in the village of Southshore for a while. Simultaneously, Jørgen stopped organizing the caravan, as he told me that his daily life became too demanding. The silence of the Argent Archives started to worry players, and on the forum one of the regular travelers considered the impact of the PvP fight during the last caravan:

the Argent Archives Caravan is by far the best RP-event I have been part of in my two years in WOW, it would be very sad to see it fall apart because of some lunatics harrassing us. We should not let them win! If there are anyone left of the initiators of this project, let us get it going again. I can not promise anything but my participation, but I have reason to hope that there will be more protectors to follow you if you continue. (Trumper, Argent Dawn forum)

Jørgen responded that this was not the case and that he would organize new events once he had the time. At the time of writing he picked up on the project again, which consists of the in-game the Argent Archives guild and a web portal "where players can present their characters, guilds and role-play experiences (stories, screens, art work etc.) and at the same time check current news, read stories and see others work" (Støvne 2007, 2). His motivation is not only to encourage role-play and and the creation of a role-play community, he also uses the project to practice his advertising and graphic design skills.

"I had always assumed that the 'RP' in MMORPG was ironic," stated psychologist Nick Yee in his recent survey on role-playing across MMORPGs, including World of Warcraft (WoW). "After all, most MMORPGs have had to deliberately set aside designated role-playing servers, and these have always been in the minority. This suggested that role-playing wasn't something most players wanted to do in an MMORPG. At the same time it was clear that a role-playing subculture existed that operated with its own rules and etiquette" (Yee 2006).

Yee's irony over the role-play aspect of MMORPGs is not surprising. As I have discussed in chapter 1, role-play is a contested style of play in both computer-mediated and analogue role-playing games. At the same time, the detailed description of the Argent Archives caravan in this chapter illustrates that the WoW RP-PvE server Argent Dawn indeed harbors a role-playing (sub)culture that operates with its own rules and etiquette.

The role-play culture is a very heterogeneous one; not only is the relationship between instrumental play and role-play highly disputed, the different role-play styles, rules, and etiquette are also under constant negotiation. Furthermore, role-play is not only a matter of online, in-game, and in-character behavior. The role-play experience is negotiated across the constructed boundaries of real and imaginary, game and nongame, online and offline.