

Playing Together is as Fun as Playing Alone

RuneScape Study

SI 689 Computer-Supported Cooperative Work, Fall 2011

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Figure 1. The RuneScape interface provides a “dashboard-style” window into a fantasy world.

Introduction

Understanding collaboration and social interaction between roles within a system in a work-oriented environment long has been a central goal in the field of CSCW. As technology has become more pervasive, computer-supported cooperative “work” outside of the work-place has emerged as a new object of study. A rapidly growing area of computer-mediated collaboration is represented by massively multiplayer online role play games (MMORPGs). RuneScape is a very large MMORPG that holds the Guinness record for largest number of registered users, with approximately 10 million active accounts per month and over 156 million registered accounts.

Several longtime RuneScape players of varied ages are known to the researchers. They greatly enjoy the game, play it together, and talk about it frequently. The researchers are not gamers and did not understand the allure of MMORPGs; consequently, we were interested in examining the game from a CSCW perspective to understand what about this game as a system inspires such loyalty and ongoing interest among the players. In addition, our research also examines the competition aspect of the game, to understand how players deal with the tension between competition and collaboration.

Before starting our research, we had several expectations. Primary among these was that opportunities for open competition between players, such as player-killing and non-fatal combat, would be most interesting to players. We also expected to find that the most "action oriented" aspects of virtual adventuring, such as sword-fighting or magic spell combat, would be by far the most savored.

We performed our research in the first three weeks of November 2011. We did participant observation by trying the game ourselves for several hours, each researcher undertaking typical player actions, such as creating a character and exploring part of the RuneScape world. We also held semi-structured interviews with 7 current players and one former player; some of the players showed activities onscreen so we could do non-participant observations of play. We also read scholarly literature on MMORPGs and game planning, examined RuneScape-specific fan sites, and read hundreds of posts on forums and a RuneScape-centered wiki.

Relative to our expectations, we had three surprise findings:

- At least some players experience their highest enjoyment in cooperative play activities such as trade and team monster hunting or “dungeoneering” rather than on openly competitive ones such as player-to-player combat.
- Preparation through learning outside the game in anticipation of both solo and group play sessions inside the game is a major aspect of enjoyment.
- RuneScape’s Chat feature is not simply a tool for playing. Instead, it lets the game serve as much as a social network or CMC as it does a “game” for users. Players enjoy RuneScape as a "Third Place" to hang out.

We had other findings that were not surprises:

- Virtual items are valuable to players. Items -- especially rare or even impractical ones like colorful capes or character titles (e.g. "Sir") -- serve as intrinsic, individual status rewards that indicate longtime membership or completion of high-profile quests.
- Management of items as assets is complex and requires players to employ clever strategies to avoid losses and especially to ensure availability during timed team activities.

- The game's rules and events follow real-world mental models. RuneScape is internally consistent and rewards logic, planning, and anticipation of consequences to actions. Players appreciate this aspect of the game.
- Players value the game's almost continual content updates because they offer extensive freedom of action and personal choice.
- Although the game, like other MMORPGs, has its share of rogue players, many RuneScape aficionados take following rules seriously and cooperate with administrators to maintain order. A sense of player ownership is present within the game and the related forums. Many players view cooperation with administrators as important for ensuring that the game in which they have invested so much time -- and a not-insignificant monthly fee -- remains fun and fair. Having rogue players not ruin the game is a common topic on forum posts.

There surely are other reasons players enjoy RuneScape that were not found in our research.

Also, a different sample of players than the small number we interviewed and observed might emphasize other elements that make the game fun to play. We are confident, however, that our study has determined key aspects of this game that largely explain its popularity. Based on these findings, we discuss some design suggestions for a group learning system for schools.

About RuneScape

Elements of the game

RuneScape is an MMORPG that promotes itself as “The World’s No.1 Free Online Multiplayer Role Playing Game,” according to Guinness World Records, which placed its user base at 175,365,991 registered users as of November 23, 2010 (“Most popular free MMORPG,” 2010). As in many such games, users assume the role of a character in a Medieval European-style fantasy world, here named Gielinor, in which swordplay is commonplace, magic is an everyday ability, and demons and goblins menace the land. Playing for free is one of the game’s value propositions, but serious gamers usually choose to become “members,” which costs \$5.95 per month and offers access to more adventures, abilities, and geography to explore. The “member” option also removes advertisements from the game interface (“Members Benefits,” 2011). With either option, the game, which is web browser-driven, is run around the clock on 152 servers in 16 countries, including Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States; each server is called a “world” and allows 2,000 characters to connect simultaneously (“Server,” n.d.). At various times when we played the game, about 60,000 users were advertised as being online. The URL is www.runescape.com.

The playing interface includes a main view window that shows the immediate area around a player’s avatar in 3D perspective. (See Figure 1). Keyboard keys rotate the view, allowing the player to see 360 degrees around the avatar. Non-Player Characters and other players’ avatars enter and exit the view window frequently. When players mouse-click on the various avatars, conversation bubbles appear, along with right-click and left-click options for available, context-sensitive actions the player can choose. Clicking a location on the screen triggers the player’s avatar to walk to that spot. Clicking an object allows the character to examine it, take it, or do take some other action with it. Clicking on a monster can initiate combat or conversation. Doors can be opened, ladders climbed, and skills gained using a variety of right- and left-clicks. Below the main view window is a chat space. Players can type messages visible

to players who are in the same geographic vicinity in the game world, to friends, and to other acquaintances.

Along the right side of the screen is a “dashboard-style” set of indicators. These include a radar-screen-like map of the character’s immediate area, point value indicators for Experience, Health, and Prayer. Also along the screen’s right side is a control panel that shows the player the items and assets the character possesses. Among these are spells, armor, weapons, inventory goods the character is carrying, a list of quests, and even a list of RuneScape musical selections the player can listen to while playing. Additionally, there is a notepad that contains up to 30 brief notes the player can enter for reference later. A remarkable amount of information can be accessed easily within one or two clicks on the control panel or indicator dashboard. “RuneScape offers young people [and others] a less complex, although arguably no less challenging, experience” (Crowe & Bradford, 2007, p. 219).

Besides the main playing interface, the RuneScape site contains a forums area with 70 sections allowing user comments on topics including teamwork ideas, quest spoilers, monster strengths and weaknesses, advice for skills training, guides to the RuneScape lands, and dozens of others. Any member or free player who has achieved a moderate experience level in the game can post on the forums. Several thousand posts are available for reading. (“RuneScape Forums,” n.d.). Additionally, a wiki with 18,911 pages (“RuneScape Wiki,” n.d.) exists to provide an extensive amount of game information. According to players interviewed for this paper, the forums and wiki are used frequently by players to prepare for quests, skill-building or other activities inside the game.

Brief history

RuneScape was developed in 2001 by gamer and programmer Andrew Gower while he was an undergraduate student at Cambridge University; he initially operated RuneScape from his parents' house (Dodson, 2003). In December of that year, the company Just About the Game Experience, Limited, better known as Jagex, Ltd., was formed as a business entity to manage the game (“History of RuneScape: The first four years,” 2011). Although the company wanted to offer the game entirely for free, sponsored by Internet advertisements, the costs of maintaining and improving the game proved higher than anticipated,

and the “members” version was launched in February 2002. Jagex needed 3,000 paying members to make the game sustainable and surpassed that figure in the launch week (“History of RuneScape: The first four years,” 2011). The free option remained, but the larger geography, enhanced skills options and additional quests available only to “members,” and the no-advertisements interface make the \$5.95 subscription popular among serious players.

Gameplay improvement continued, and in 2004 the company released a significant upgrade to both the player interaction and the graphics. A new faux-3D, high-definition mode provided better textures, improved lighting, and shadows (“An Image of the Future,” 2008). The game has gained a reputation – and popularity with its fans – for adding new quests and other features every few weeks. Its developers created a proprietary scripting language called RuneScript and an in-house game map editor to allow rapid creation of game content. The game holds a second record at Guinness, this one for “The most prolifically-updated MMORPG” because it “has been supplemented with extra features 465 times as of November 2010” (“Most prolifically updated MMORPG,” 2010). As if to underscore this aspect of the RuneScape universe, during the time frame in November when this paper was being written, the RuneScape site’s artwork was altered significantly, causing a bit of confusion for the researchers.

In 2007, a review by the online gaming review site “Just RPG: The source for role-playing game information” stated that RuneScape is a “fun, addictive game, and while the graphics may not be perfect, for a game written in Java, they aren't bad. The skills are varied, the community is alright, and it'll eat up your time if you aren't careful” (Gasperazzo, n.d.). The game’s site states that it has more than 175 million registered users, both free and paid accounts (“Beginner's guide: What is RuneScape?” n.d.). A norm in the game, evidenced by comments from all eight of our interview subjects, is that users join the game because friends are playing it and persuade them to try RuneScape; after they have played a few quests and gained experience in the virtual world, many become paying members.

Personas & choosing identities - Avatars

Getting started in RuneScape requires very little time. New users can visit the site, create a character and start learning how to get around within 10 minutes. “This instant accessibility seems to

make it very attractive to younger people” (Crowe & Bradford, 2007, p. 219). Most players are teenagers (Dodson, 2003) and an overwhelming majority – about 95 percent – are male, according to a 2009 survey (Bilir, 2009, p. 51).

After creating an identity, a player creates an avatar to represent their character. Unlike many other MMORPGs, such as World of Warcraft, or even off-line RPGs, RuneScape does not allow characters to be various races such as elf or dwarf. Characters always are human. RuneScape also does not use designated professions such as magic user or paladin, in which various game abilities are determined by choice of profession; rather, all players are able to achieve any level of proficiency in a skill. This aspect of the game will be explained further in the “Skills building” section of this paper. New players do select a gender (male or female). They also select a character “type” from among 20 options that include farmer, adventurer, mage, thief, priest, and miner; however, these “types” are simply cosmetic and have no bearing on game play. Other choices required for avatars are selection of a skin tone ranging from very light beige to dark black, a hairstyle, and a facial hair look (for males). Dozens of costumes in an array of colors also are available. Players select a name up to 12 characters long.

After the avatar is created, the new character appears in the game world, ready to take part in the game. Earlier incarnations of RuneScape provided a tutorial to (literally) walk brand new players through key learning activities, but that approach was replaced by a short tutorial adventure involving dragons. Recently, the game was changed so that new characters arrive in the world in a village, Lumbridge, where on-screen messaging and various conversations with Non-Player Characters help the new player learn how the game operates; the game controls are now so straightforward that a tutorial or “learning quest” is deemed unnecessary. From the minute they arrive in Lumbridge, players are full participants in the game.

Roles

From a CSCW perspective, there are five roles present in RuneScape: “Newbies,” “Experts,” “Player Moderators,” “Forum Moderators,” and “Staff Moderators.” The roles are dependent on time involved with RuneScape, experience, and ability to effect change in the game world. Newbies (“N00bs”) are relatively ineffective at first but can learn and gain abilities rapidly. Those who spend time playing the

game and actively exploring its features are almost certain to eventually become Experts. A longtime player who has become proficient can gain status on the High Score boards and achieve success at even the most challenging quests and games. Such players who have shown commitment and prudent judgment can attract the attention of the Jagex staff and be invited to become Forum or Player Moderators, although far fewer than 1 percent of the accountholders in the game are granted that status. Staff Moderators are immensely powerful and possess the ability to make changes to the game at the code level; however, misuse of their powers would be reported swiftly by the gaming community on forums and through the red “Report” button displayed prominently on the player interface (See Figure 1).

The approximately 6,000 Player Moderators are “ambassadors of the game and help to maintain an enjoyable in-game environment” (“Player Moderator,” n.d.). Pmods have no special abilities in game play and no identifying characteristics within the game world display. However, in the chat window, a silver crown always appears next to their name, and they have enhanced chat abilities so what they type is seen even by players who have turned off the “public chat” option. This allows them to make announcements to players in a particular location in the game and know that everyone will see the message. There are two very highly valued privileges pmods possess. They can report players who appear to be violating game rules, and pmods’ reports are given high priority by the Jagex staff. They also can administer temporary, 48-hour mutes to players who appear to be defying rules, such as using harassing language or advertising an illegal “scam” to other players. When a player is muted, “other players can no longer see his or her text. A pmod’s mute is a safety precaution to help prevent the player in question from causing any more harm to themselves or others, as it will effectively stop any attempts to freely talk” (“Player Moderator,” n.d.). A pmod who abuses mutes without proper reason or issues too many unfounded abuse reports may have his status revoked. Ultimately, Player Moderators provide administrative eyes and ears within the vast RuneScape world to maintain a pleasant playing atmosphere, which is particularly important in a virtual world largely populated by minors. The position has a combination of intrinsic status rewards and extrinsic rewards through pmods’ ability to exercise legitimate authority when dealing with problematic players in the game.

Similar in authority and ability to the pmods are the Forum Moderators. These are the players who have been chosen by the Jagex staff to monitor the forum boards and remove inappropriate content. There are about 180 Forum Moderators. When they post on forums, the messages are shown on a green background with a green crown beside the name. The Forum Moderators do not receive any other benefits in forums or in the game world (“Forum Moderator,” n.d.). Because the forums are so heavily trafficked by players seeking hints and advice in preparation for in-game activities, the role of Forum Moderator is considered very important. There are 137 Forum Moderators who also are Player Moderators; these few individuals are known as Dual Moderators (“Moderator,” n.d.). Forum and Dual moderators, like pmods, are rewarded intrinsically by status and extrinsically through their ability to effect immediate change when necessary to keep RuneScape a civil, pleasantly social, virtual place.

One other type of moderator exists in RuneScape, the Jagex Moderators, all approximately 400 of whom are employees at Jagex. They also are known as admins, Jagex Mods, jmods, or Staff Moderators. These moderators typically appear in the game world to play-test and debug; when they are there, regular players can interact with them, although only one of the subjects interviewed for this paper said he ever had encountered a Jagex Mod. As game developers who can alter the code of the game, these administrators are authorized to give their characters a range of godlike powers, including the ability to turn invisible, travel anywhere instantly, and walk through physical objects. Perhaps of greatest importance to regular players, the JMods can ban other players, although RuneScape’s online documentation states that would be done only in instances of serious rule-breaking (“Jagex Moderator,” n.d.).

Chat/CMC

The game provides the capacity for robust, instant computer-moderated communication among players with its chat feature. There are four types of chat: private, friends, clan, and public chat, all of which are accessed in the main interface screen via selector buttons and an input field. Players type a message and press the Enter key to send it. Sent and received messages appear in the chat window. Each chat type connects players based on the relationship that exists between them.

Private chat lets players send messages privately to another player by typing the appropriate character name into the chat interface. Private chat allows messages to be sent and received without regard to which world, server, or virtual geographic location the players' characters occupy at the time ("Chat," n.d.).



Figure 2. Players can create a Friends List. Friends chat allows a player to send a message to everyone on the Friends List simultaneously. In the list at right, the players are indicated as “Offline” or playing on a certain world (server). To the left of the Friends List, the dark blue messages inside the chat window indicate Public chat, and the aqua-blue messages above the chat window are Friends chat messages or indications that Friends have logged in or out (“Talk: Archive 9,” 2010).

Friends chat lets players talk simultaneously with players whose character names previously have been placed on their own chat Friends List. Placement on this list is one-directional, so a player may include someone on a Friends List, but that status might not be reciprocated. All occupants of a Friends List see the sent message. Like Private chat, Friends chat messages are world- and location-agnostic (“Chat,” n.d.). By allowing each player to define who is in the group receiving the message, it is similar in concept to a private message list, which allows all members to efficiently receive the same email.

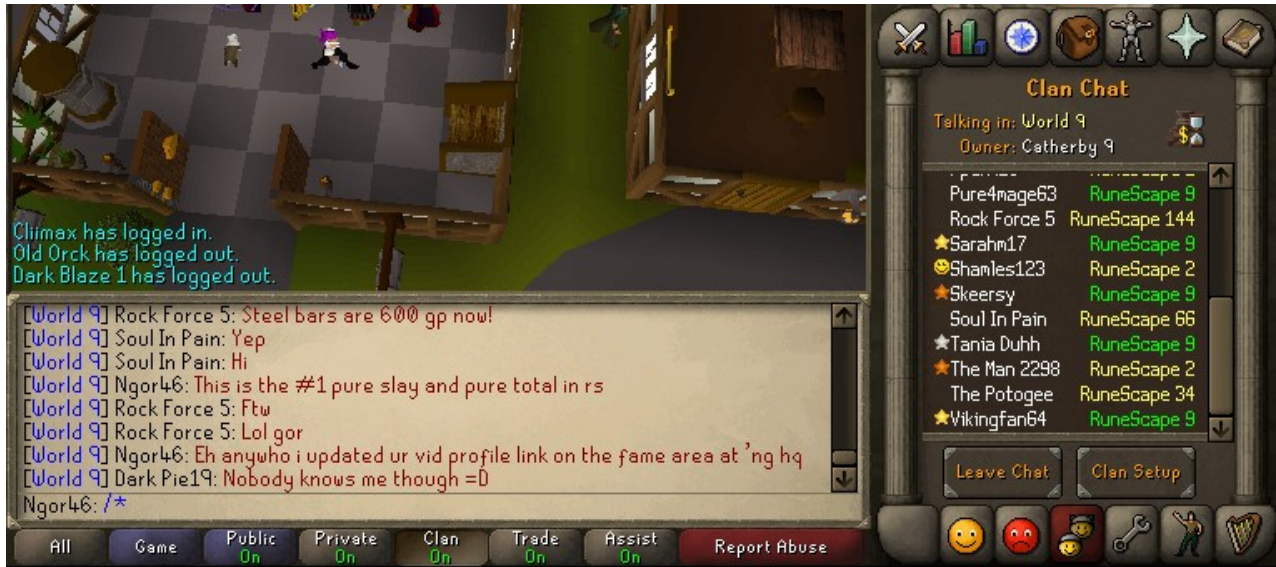


Figure 3. Clan chat lets all members of the clan view messages efficiently. In the box at right are the names of players in the clan. Names followed by a green label are currently signed in players. (“National Guard of Gaming,” 2005).

Clan chat shares messages among players who are members of the same clan. Clans are groups of players who join together as a fellowship recognized by RuneScape to accomplish some shared goal, such as raising skill levels, adventuring, or trading. They are similar to guilds in World of Warcraft or fraternal organizations in the real world. RuneScape recognizes more than 1,000 registered clans (“Clan,” n.d.); they have names such as “Skillers United” and “Mayhem Makers” (“Hiscores,” n.d.). When a message is sent by Clan chat, all members of the clan receive it, which allows efficient and private communication, which is particularly necessary when groups are forming strategies. It is similar to Friends chat in that it efficiently allows a group to receive messages, but it is dissimilar because the clan member does not personally select the recipients who receive the Clan chat messages. This lack of individual selectivity makes Clan chat more like workplace departmental e-mail groups that are determined solely by being part of a department within the organization, although RuneScape players have the free choice whether to join a clan at all; they are not assigned to one the way employees are in an organization.

Public chat recognizes the spatial relationship between players as caused by the proximity of avatars in the RuneScape virtual gaming world. It lets players send and receive messages to the players whose avatars are nearby. This allows players to communicate as teams during minigames and dungeoneering expeditions, as well as execute player-to-player item trades and simply converse.

There also is an Ignore List that allows players to eliminate unwelcome contact from other players. The list effectively blocks incoming messages sent by the ignored players. Additionally, the chat feature includes a filter to remove offensive language, although this feature is criticized by some players on the wiki and forums for being too sensitive (“Chat,” n.d.).

Chat is a core RuneScape feature. This is indicated by the prominent location of the chat window and controls in the game interface. It is used for gaming and non-game purposes. All of the players interviewed for this paper mentioned chat as one of the most useful and appealing features RuneScape provides. The researchers noted during participant observation that any session of gaming includes many incoming messages -- mostly via Public chat -- updating in real time, which creates a sense of vigorous activity among players.

Skills building

Like other MMORPGs, RuneScape offers players an huge array of opportunities to build up character skill levels; this activity is called “Skilling” or “Leveling” when a player spends time practicing a particular ability to develop it. There are 25 skills that can be advanced. The highest level is 99, the achievement of which requires hundreds or thousands of hours performing appropriate -- often repetitive - - tasks. Skill increases happen relatively easily under level 50; after that level, the amount of experience points required to jump up a level begins to rise exponentially. A few of the 25 skills are attack, strength, herblore, cooking, woodcutting, firemaking, slaying, smithing, and mining.

This game is not based on spatial progression – in which the player solves puzzles, or overcomes other characters, unlocking access to additional areas or different/better equipment (the convention in games such as “Tomb Raider”) – but on gaining experience through in-game tasks or challenges (centered on fighting or working, for example). As characters undertake their activities so their experience in that area grows and their ability to perform certain tasks increases (in RuneScape only the best cooks are able to cook shark, or the most experienced miners can prospect and mine gold). ... There are quests – or adventures – to be undertaken but in RuneScape, these are not necessarily central to the game dynamic and many users simply become skilled craftspeople earning a living from their virtual labours (Crowe & Bradford, 2007, p. 218).

What follows are some examples to illustrate various ways skills can be developed.

Slaying lets players destroy monsters that otherwise are very difficult to harm in combat. The player seeks a Slayer Master, who assigns a particular monster to be killed. As the player beats the assigned monsters, he or she gains experience points related to the slaying skill and combat experience; additionally, the monsters slain as part of this skill frequently “drop” rare or highly valuable items that the player can then pick up and add to personal inventory. About 18,200 players have “maxed out their slayer levels” by reaching level 99 (“Slaying,” n.d.). One of our interviewees talked at length about how slaying was one of his favorite RuneScape activities because it is a fun activity to do and he wants the “drops.”

Farming allows players to grow crops or fruit by planting seeds, waiting for them to mature, and then harvesting them. Crops can include vegetables, fruits, herbs, mushrooms, or even hops or cacti. A strategy common among players is to plant the seeds and then either go to a different area or to sign off while the crops become ready to harvest. The harvested items have wide range of uses but mostly are used to train up skills such as herblore or cooking, or simply are eaten as food. Many players sell their harvest for a significant profit (“Farming Training,” n.d.).

Construction skill permits a player to build a permanent house that can be used as a home base, and then create furniture to go into the rooms. The different types of furniture require various materials, such as sawn planks (which the player can cut himself or purchase), steel bars, bricks, and glass. Higher construction skills are necessary to build more complicated items, such as a treasure room or table for the dining room.

A wide range of materials, costs, and activities play a part in the development of the skills. This gives the game much of its distinctive character. Most of the players interviewed for this paper discussed skilling as a positive aspect of the game that distinguishes it from other MMORPGs. Some said skilling activities can be relaxing because the aesthetics of the game during farming or fishing are pleasant; others said that they could background attend the game to undertake repetitive skills development tasks while focusing attention on chatting with friends, watching a movie, or doing homework. In his study of RuneScape economics, Bilir (2009) describes the clear logic behind the game’s emphasis on skills development and the ongoing effect they have on play:

If players need to eat food, they have to find the food first. At that point, players may fish in a small pond to catch shrimps with a small fishing net. To cook shrimps, they need some kind of fire, so they have to find a hatchet and cut a tree. Logs can be lit using a tinderbox, and shrimp may be cooked over the fire. During the cooking process, players may burn the food, just like in real life. ... Leveling provides an achievement sense to the player and loyalty to the game (pp. 59, 62).

There appear to be at least two norms related to skills building. One is that players genuinely enjoy activities of skill-building and undertake them for the fun and status of leveling up on favorite skills; the leveling up brings the status reward of achieving high ability in a skill area, and the players with the highest skills -- those who have achieved level 99 -- appear on the high scores board visible on the RuneScape.com site. Several thousand players have reached level 99 in each of the skills, so the scores board is less obvious a reward than it was back in the early days before millions were playing the game. The second norm is that because skills contribute heavily to success in Minigames and quests, players work at skilling as an aspect of preparation for whichever such activities they wish to undertake. Therefore, each player has favored skills that he has chosen to level up for fun, and others that are necessary but not as inherently enjoyable; this is determined by personal preference, and the game architecture enables this freedom of choice.

Items

An ever-present aspect of game play in RuneScape lies in item management. Success in skills development frequently depends on procuring raw materials, tools, or magical items required to complete any training regimen. Success in adventuring often hinges on possession of the necessary weapons, tools, or barter items that will allow an individual or team to complete a quest. For many players, simple possession of rare items or large quantities of currency, typically gold pieces (GPs), is an indication of successful play. Players have several options for storing item. They can keep 28 in their personal inventory, which is the collection of items on the character's person. The players also have the option of using their own houses, deposit chests, deposit boxes, and bank accounts for long-term, safe storage of items (Bilir, 2009, p. 74). Items stored outside of personal inventory will continue to be available if a character is killed and resurrected; however, players must strategize to make certain they have not left

necessary items in the bank when they depart on a long-distance quest. This element of resource planning and management is a real world skill that teaches presumably useful lessons to many young RuneScape players.

Items a player needs or wants can be gotten in several ways. Characters often can produce the items they want by using a skill, such as construction to build furniture or smithing to make bladed weapons. Players who take great interest in the skills that tend to yield items, such as farming or smithing, tend to make those items for themselves and for trading with others, according to interview participants. Items also can be gotten as drops left by monsters after they are slain. Certain items, such as magic cloaks or special helmets, are related to particular quests, which creates incentives for players to undertake those quests.

Trading items among players occurs frequently. This can be instigated by using a forum specifically for trade to find a buyer or seller. Trades also can be made by utilizing Public chat in a heavily populated area to find a trading partner, and then using the interface controls to bring up a “Trade Screen” to exchange money and item(s). While the game interface is designed to make sure the trade actually happens without one player running off with another’s money or items, players still must be vigilant that they don’t pay far above market value for the item when making a purchase. Additionally, because rare items in the game are scarce goods, profit generally is high on them (Bilir, 2009, p. 79).

Players also can buy and sell items in 36 types of stores in many locations across the virtual map. Typically, towns will have general stores, but specialty shops exist to sell jewelry, food, magic, weapons, armor and a host of other kinds of goods. Every store’s inventory is unique to each player, so different players are offered somewhat different items when transacting business in them. Most shops do their sales through an NPC merchant with whom the character deals directly (“Stores,” n.d.).

The most frequently used trading method in RuneScape is the Grand Exchange. It is similar to a real world commodities exchange or stock market, although simplified. It allows players to place bids on most of the kinds of items in the game. The computer anonymously matches buyers with sellers at a market price and completes the exchange, frequently within seconds. This is a major time saver for players who are trying to quickly prepare for a quest or dungeoneering raid or who are seeking quantities

of materials for skilling and do not want to go through the sometimes time-consuming ritual of locating the desired items in a store or owned by another player. It has had the effect of saving time and effort, as well as reducing the need for players to interact with each other (Bilir, 2009, p. 86). The Grand Exchange page on the RuneScape.com site features charts with daily and 30-day moving averages for prices, market movers, gainers and losers, and most-traded items (“Grand Exchange,” n.d.). Two interview subjects commented that they had spent considerable time during their years playing the game trying to understand the Great Exchange and making money by doing the virtual equivalent of day-trading. One said he was far more interested in the real world stock markets now as a result of his experiences with the Great Exchange over the prior year.

A player’s “inventory” is the collection of items she currently carries. A reward for players mastering the art of having only the necessary items in their inventory to accomplish their current activity (e.g. quest, skilling, dungeoneering), and not nonessential items, is that they do not lose much when their character is slain. This is a form of risk management. They also save time during quests by taking precautions to possess the proper items; they can avoid having to leave the quest at inopportune times to buy items. Interview subjects commented that handling items well “saved time” and lessened frustration during adventures.

Rules and cheating

One type of exchange that RuneScape does not allow in any form is “real money trading,” known among gamers as RMT or as “gold farming.” Jagex has been a strident opponent of the widespread practice of trading virtual assets in return for real money. The game has instituted a variety of policy- and technology-based solutions to eliminate this practice, although several online sites such as RuneScape Gold (“RuneScape Gold,” n.d.) easily located via a simple Google search, offer RuneScape gold pieces for sale in real U.S. currency. In an online magazine interview, RuneScape’s content chief, Imre Jele, said:

Illegal real world trading is pretty much like cheating. It can be fun to have unlimited health for 10 minutes, but after that the game becomes boring because there is no other challenge. And those people who buy their way through the game are going to experience this. Anyone who is

using real-world trading and actually getting money is effectively cheating the game and going to get bored and leave. Anyone not doing that is going to be annoyed by these people because they have an unfair advantage. It breaks the game model pretty effectively (Purchase, February 2008).

Closely related to real money trading is the use of repetitive programmed scripts, also known as “bots.” Jagex long has worked to confound the use of bots in the game because the automated scripts allow for rapid accumulations of valuable items or high skill levels without actual game play as the means of achievement. In October 2011, the game code was overhauled to make the current generation of bots unusable. “(We) anticipate that this update will be a defining triumph in our battle against the bots which you’ve clearly told us have been harming your game. ... We are dedicated to battling bots and gold farming on every front. We have also recently detected and banned over 1.5 million botting and gold farming accounts” (“Bot Busting and Bonuses for All,” October 2011). The interview participants for this paper were critical of bots and any player who would use them, and expressed pride in their ability to develop skills and accrue wealth without “cheating” in this way.

Two other methods of cheating are “Scamming” and exploiting a bug. Scamming is using deceptive behavior to trick other players into giving away gold or other items. The RuneScape Wiki lists 39 distinct forms of scamming that game administrators consider unacceptable behavior (“Cheats and scams,” n.d.). Exploiting a bug or “glitch” is discovering a programming flaw and exploiting it for gain in the game. At least some players consider some of the manifestations of bugs to be simply humorous, such as treasure chests that repeatedly dispense the same treasure if players close and open them, or dungeons that allow special weapons to be brought in despite supposed safeguards to stop such transport. However, more severe glitches have caused havoc; one called “the Falador Massacre” allowed players to attack other players in areas where Player-versus-Player combat is not supposed to be technically possible (“Glitch,” n.d.). Minor violations can prompt temporary mutes or bans, but serious ones can lead to permanent bans. The administrators recommend on the site that players who notice other players violating rules or who discover glitches report the issues swiftly.

Combat

In a Medieval Europe-themed fantasy world filled with all manner of demons, goblins, and brigands, combat is to be expected. RuneScape fulfills that expectation with seemingly endless opportunities for fighting. However, most skirmishes are between players and Non-Player Characters because all monsters are NPCs. Unlike in some other popular MMORPGs, such as World of Warcraft (Ducheneut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, April 2006, p. 408), players cannot fight each other except in a few voluntary activities in specific areas, such as in the Castle Wars minigame, duels in the Duel Arena, and as Player-versus-Player battles in a rough-and-tumble territory called The Wilderness (“Combat Skills,” n.d.). PvP fighting previously had been allowed anywhere in the RuneScape world until 2007, when it was greatly curtailed in response to complaints from new players about being slain by experienced players soon after creating a character.

Fighting occurs in three basic categories and involves several combat abilities, which are distinct from the other skills in the game. The three categories are melee, ranged, and magic. Melee attacks are close range using weapons such as swords, clubs, knives, or bare fists. Ranged attacks involve projectiles such as knives, arrows, spears, and darts. Magic attacks involve use of spells to damage an opponent. The game allows players to utilize all three categories of attack or combine them as the situation warrants (“RuneScape,” n.d.). A character’s combat level, or ability, is determined by a mix of his or her abilities in attack, strength, defense, constitution, prayer, and summoning. The types of attack used, strength of opponent, and other variables affect the outcome.

When a character’s Life Points fall to zero, death ensues. The character can be resurrected at a Respawn Point with all but three pre-selected items from his or her inventory lost. Often, depending on the way the character died, there are ways the lost items can be recovered. In this way, RuneScape allows players to fail in combat and die but not completely lose a character or even the items earned along the way. There is one exception, though: In PvP combat in The Wilderness, the character who initiates the fight runs the risk of permanent death because if he loses and dies, the character does not resurrect.

Several of the players interviewed said they are very wary of The Wilderness and would not initiate PvP combat there for fear of permanently losing their characters or items.

Adventures

The MMORPG genre is perhaps best known for providing quests, which are a series of pre-set activities with clues and a definite goal that marks the conclusion. They last between 10 minutes and several days, depending on difficulty and degree of character preparation. In RuneScape, these adventures involve a storyline, with some quests advancing a larger story arc. They involve item collection, activity skills such as cooking, logic skills, puzzle-solving, and skill development, intermingled with monster slaying. There are 179 quests available on RuneScape; 20 are for all players, and 159 for members only. One typical quest is Gunnar's Ground, in which a dwarf poet falls in love with a Barbarian leader's daughter but the leader does not trust outsiders. Through a variety of tasks, players work out a way that the daughter can fall in love with the dwarf while her father learns to accept outsiders. Another quest, The Knight's Sword, has the player helping Sir Vyvin's squire, a Non-Player Character, find a replacement for the ceremonial sword he accidentally lost, without Sir Vyvin finding out ("The Knight's Sword," n.d.). Completion of a quest typically results in the character receiving a large amount of gold pieces, jewelry, rare items, skill points such as for smithing, and Quest Points. Another benefit can be access to some previously restricted areas on the RuneScape map that are available only to players who have completed certain quests. Quests generally begin with a conversation with an NPC who asks the player's help to accomplish the goal, so some element of player altruism usually is present in the adventure, even if this is rapidly replaced by less virtuous motives.

Players typically prepare for quests by doing outside-the-game research on the RuneScape forums, the RuneScape QuestHelp area, the wiki, fan sites such as RuneTips (www.tip.it) or Zybez.Net RuneScape Help (www.zybez.net), and RuneScape-related videos on YouTube ("YouTube RuneScape's Channel," n.d.). Key rewards for this preparation are decreased frustration during adventures, saved time, and lower potential of being killed because the character is not caught unprepared.

A shorter form of quest is called the miniquest, which is less complex – and less rewarding – than full-fledged quests. Almost all quests are undertaken alone, but a few are considered multiplayer or team quests.

The most common form of cooperative adventuring is Dungeoneering, in which one to five players get together to explore a level of a dungeon to build up their Dungeoneering skill and find gold pieces. While this can be done alone, interview subjects indicated that the teamwork and preparation involved made dungeoneering a highly enjoyable element of RuneScape. Dungeoneering events involve procurement of keys to unlock doors, movement through the dungeon on foot or via teleporting, and copious monster slaying and puzzle solving. They conclude with a “boss battle” in which players work together to slay a very tough monster that usually cannot be killed without teamwork. There is a leader role, which is called “Keyer” because this leader rapidly gathers the keys and sprints to unlock doors; he is not expected to do a lot of fighting because the teammates handle the monster killing. Preparatory research is expected by high-performing teams, so players plan ahead for a particular dungeon by researching the skills, monsters, tasks, and rewards involved in a dungeon before they gather and go in. Teams can be groups of friends, members of clans, or random individuals who have formed an impromptu group specifically to conquer a dungeon level. When the team consists of random players, the norm in RuneScape is that the player who initiates the dungeoneering raid is the Keyer. The raids seldom last more than two hours. Dungeoneering bears some similarity to real-life pick-up basketball at an open gym, in which various players bring different skills to the game and team chemistry can work either well or poorly. Interview subjects lightly criticized friends who were not considered good dungeoneering teammates but criticized harshly some unnamed “worthless” random teammates with whom they had recently shared a dungeoneering event.

A third form of adventure exists in RuneScape, the Minigames (“Multi-player Minigames,” n.d.). These are limited-scope activities that allow players alone or in teams to achieve a clearly identified objective and generally reward players with experience and items. Among the 40-plus Minigames available, there are three types: “no combat,” in which characters do not fight monsters and thus cannot be killed; “safe combat,” in which characters do not lose items if they are slain; and “dangerous,” in

which items are lost if characters are slain. A few Minigames are available to free players, but most are for members only. According to the interview subjects, a few popular ones are “Barbarian Assault,” in which a team of five fends off waves of attacking creatures; “Pest Control,” in which a team protects a Void Knight; and “All Fired Up,” in which players light beacons that are located along the edge of The Wilderness. Some are primarily combat related, while others focus on skill building. As with dungeoneering, teams can be formed in advance, or they can be pick-up teams of random players who have expressed a desire to take part in a particular Minigame.

Methodologies

We studied RuneScape through ethnographic fieldwork including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, participant observation, and reading of documents such as RuneScape forums and wikis, and relevant scholarly CSCW literature.

Interviews and observation

While building understanding and knowledge toward the behaviors and motivations in RuneScape, a total of eight in-depth interviews, and field observations of seven current players and one former player of RuneScape were conducted. In order to find people who were familiar with RuneScape, researchers recruited personal contacts and posted fliers to find interview subjects. We recruited eight male subjects of various ages and stages in life. The interviews were conducted November 1 through 10. Four subjects were minors known to the researchers, so parental informed consent was procured. Five of the subjects were interviewed in person, and three by phone. U01 through U04 were first interviewed as a group and then separated for one-to-one personal interviews. The group interview lasted for 45 minutes, and each individual interview session lasted about an hour. Follow up questions were conducted through personal calls.

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Occupation	Location	Method
U01	Male	16	High school Junior	Michigan	In-person interview
U02	Male	15	High school Sophomore	Michigan	In-person interview
U03	Male	14	High school Freshman	Michigan	In-person interview
U04	Male	17	High school Junior	Michigan	In-person interview
U05	Male	26	Research engineer (MS in Engineering)	Indiana	Phone interview
U06	Male	24	Graduate student at the University of Michigan	Michigan	In-person interview
U07	Male	20	Undergraduate Engineering student	Indiana	Phone interview
U08	Male	27	Tour guide at a park	Illinois	Phone interview

The interview protocol consists of three sets of questions (See Appendix A). The first set of questions focuses on the group activities offered by the game. The second set of question focuses on individual activities and motivation: Why people play the game, reasons that keep them playing, the preference of playing solo or playing with a group, and what they perceive as competitive aspects of the game. After 6 interviews, the protocol was changed slightly. We modified descriptive questions about the game and focused more on the reasons behind player activities and preferences. We added questions for each major activity that can be done in RuneScape, the purpose behind the activity, and the interviewees' enjoyment related to it.

One member of the team was designated as the lead interviewer while the other members of the team took notes and clarified unclear questions or answers as needed during sessions. The lead interviewer greeted interview subjects and obtained consent for participation and recording. All team members were present for all sessions, except for the individual interviews of U01-U04, which were handled one on one. After each interview session, the research team debriefed to discuss significant observations and interpret them.

Participant observation

Besides interviews, we also did participant observation to experience game play in the RuneScape world from a player perspective. Each researcher logged into the game and played it for at least three hours between November 15 and November 28. The activities involved the following:

- Create a character
- Join a friend chat, try local chat, try private chat
- Undertake a short quest, converse with NPCs, solve clues
- Try combat against NPC, develop skills
- Acquire items through finding, trading, purchasing
- Use all navigational controls to maneuver through town, countryside, dungeon
- Use items, including magic teleporting spell

After individual participant observations by the researchers were completed, a discussion was held to share impressions about the game.

Findings & Interpretations

1. Collaboration preferred over open competition

While we anticipated that collaborative activities would be an important part of the game, we also expected to find more significant open competition between players.

However, open competition between players did not emerge as such an important aspect of the game. RuneScape's game design supports both PvM (Player versus Monster combat) and PvP (Player versus Player combat), and most of the interviewees focused on PvM. Moreover, players seem to be strongly motivated to achieve shared goals such as killing the boss in dungeoneering. One interviewee told us, "*I train different skills that help the team fight better.*" Of the 8 interviewees, 7 made comments that showed they valued this type of "collaborative combat" play more than other types of fighting.

Types of competition

Scoreboard

Scoreboard is the ranking of all RuneScape players based on their 25 skill levels. A longtime player who has become proficient can achieve success in the most challenging quests and games, and gain status on the High Score boards. Such highly ranked players eventually can attract the attention of the Jagex staff and be invited to become Forum or Player Moderators, although far fewer than one percent of the account holders in the game actually are granted that status. Most of our interviewees, however, did not care much about the scoreboard. On one hand, they weren't interested in checking out the scoreboards for the skill level of other players before team play. One interviewee said, *"There are scoreboards of top skills where players can show off high skill and experience levels, but I didn't look at them"*. Another subject said, *"A group of friends -- we are going to be a team: people you know, you know their skill level."*

On the other hand, our interviewees did not express interest in being on the scoreboard themselves. Sometimes players start by being interested in higher scores and keeping track of them, but the practice does not continue for long. Given the sheer number of people playing the game, for most players it seems impossible to be ranked on the higher lists, and tracking progress is frustrating and exhausting. Said one interviewee: *"I used to pay attention to the list of top scores, keep up with who's the highest. I don't really pay attention anymore, mostly now I compare my skills with my friends."* Another said, *"It's kind of fun to compare with your friends [not the high scores board], see who's higher than another or lower than others."* Comparison with one's friends does not require a scoreboard: One subject talked about how he used to take screenshots of his skills panel and send them to his friends for "bragging rights." What we see, then, is that "global", community-wide competition, as represented by the scoreboard, is often replaced by a more localized comparison of scores within a community of friends. Whether this comparison counts as competition -- and to what degree -- depends on the norms and goals of that community. The way in which four of our interviewees who are mutual friends talked to each other about their skills suggested that within a community of players status might be conferred by the diversity of one's skills in addition to the level achieved within any particular skill.

Player-versus-Player combat

In RuneScape there is only one place in which players are allowed to attack other players and to engage in PvP (Player versus Player) combat, The Wilderness. Three players said The Wilderness was the most dangerous place in the game. The risk of being killed is balanced by the valuable rewards available there, for example, the opportunity to earn three items at the same time. Going to The Wilderness is sometimes required to accomplish quests. However, most players we interviewed did not enjoy the PvP combat aspect and expressed no interest in leveling up for visiting The Wilderness to engage in PvP. Said one, *“Occasionally I go there to train agility, but I don’t carry much stuff in there because I don’t want to lose it.”* Pressed on the matter, he added: *“I don’t want to attack real people. I don’t like causing other real players pain. ... Those are real players, and there is real pain when they lose their items.”* This is a telling quote as it highlights the influence of a player’s personality, view of the world, and system of values on game preferences. Certainly not all players are so considerate. Players often create a team to reduce vulnerability when they go to The Wilderness to look for valuable items, but one of our interviewees said he knew of an instance in which a player was attacked by a team member while there. The interviewees said that to avoid such treachery from strangers, they prefer to form a team with trusted friends from the real world when they go into The Wilderness. We can conclude, then, that the competition among players in The Wilderness is generally among strangers, not friends.

Types of collaboration

Trade

Trade is very common in RuneScape because players need various items to finish the quests and dungeoneering or inflict more damage on NPC. These items are usually obtained by attacking NPCs, which drop the items when they die. Players can also obtain the items through trading with other players. A trade is a private deal between players, and trades in this world are freely made, for mutual advantage. Players usually make deals with others nearby. They negotiate the items and prices by chatting and using the trading interface. Deals are made when buyer pays for the items and seller drops the item. However, some players cheat by not dropping the items after getting the money. Said one interviewee, *“Some*

people would cheat you -- take your money and run away without giving the items. Now Grand Exchange is easier.”

Some players prefer to acquire items in the Grand Exchange, the game-wide public trading place. For some players, the Grand Exchange is the most enjoyable reason to play RuneScape. They mine rocks for producing ore and chop trees for logs, after which they take these items to the market to sell them. One subject said, *“Some people’s main interest is in Grand Exchange merchanting -- playing the market.”* The Grand Exchange also plays a key role in helping players complete their quests and dungeoneering. Another subject said: *“The Grand Exchange is there to allow all the players to buy items more easily. It’s way faster, and made game more fun.”* One interview subject said he visits the Grand Exchange and makes deals at least once a week.

Dungeoneering

In our interviews, dungeoneering emerged as the most common form of cooperative play. Before starting play in a new dungeon, the players get to determine the number of players, any number between one and five. This choice determines the overall level of difficulty of the dungeon. If players set a higher difficulty, they will get more experience by completing the activity. One of our interview subjects said, *“Personally, I’ve done most of my dungeoneering solo. It’s not the optimal way to train a skill.”* Asked about why he plays solo rather than with a team, despite the disadvantages of doing so, he said it was challenging to synchronize with his real-time friends, to find a time when they are all online and can play for an extended period without interruptions. Medium dungeons, for example, require about 45 minutes of continuous play, interviewees said.

Successful dungeoneering requires significant coordination between players:

“It’s not mindless. You have to formulate strategies. You face new monsters. The bosses all have some kind of gimmick, way to be beaten but you have to work together. In one of the dungeons that requires five players, you have to surround the boss during the battle so he can’t reach the food. If you don’t do that, or you have less than five players, you can’t beat the boss” (Interview subject).

Cooperation is part of the game mechanics in more ways than one. For visiting another floor and looking for the monster, players have to open the door of dungeon; this requires a particular skill level. If

players do not have enough skills to open the door and visit another floor, they have to find another player who is able to do so and form a team with him. One of the interview subjects described to us in an amused tone how sometimes a bunch of people hang out in front of a dungeon door, waiting for somebody with the appropriate skill level to come by. We were also explicitly told, *“Dungeons make it important to care about teammates’ well being. If anybody dies, the survivors get fewer experience points and tokens.”*

Each player has implicitly his or her own role and responsibility on a dungeoneering team based on type of skills possessed and levels in each. One interviewee characterized the process as follows:

“How the team works together depends on the monster you go after. You need different skills. You have one person take care of inventory, the other gets the attraction from boss, some people focus on damaging the boss. Roles depend on who has the most health points, best inventory, sometimes you need specific combat skills mix.”

Another subject had a similar comment: *“I go with my brother, just the two of us. We split the responsibility; he has a higher combat level, so he kills the monster. I search for keys and unlock doors; I’m the keyer.”* Everybody can carry keys and teleport-capable “gate stones,” but usually the leader carries the gate stone and acts as the “keyer.” This symbolic honor conferred to the player who initiates the activity can be interpreted as a recognition of the coordination effort usually required for dungeoneering. However, it is also possible to play the game in a more spontaneous manner. One interviewee also said the following: *“Ideally, we decide on the strategy ahead of time. Depends on how you got the group together; it might be figuring things out throughout the game, on the fly. It depends on the team members. If you are equally strong, it doesn’t matter so much.”*

In the group of four friends we talked to, not all the players were equally strong. Three of the more experienced players gently teased their younger friend about his poor performance during dungeoneering. Endearingly, they referred to his tendency to stay out of the action as “camping in the basement.” Yet, the preference for playing with friends rather than with strangers was shared by them too, mainly for reasons of trust. People who know one another understand each other’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the weaknesses seem to be more predictable and acceptable among friends. *“I play with people I know because I know they are reliable. They won’t leave in the middle of the game or*

do nothing in the game.” One player stated that if he can’t coordinate with his friends when school is session because of school-related time conflicts, he will just train up his skills during school and hope to dungeoneer with them during vacation.

2. RuneScape as much a social network or CMC as it is a ‘game’

The RuneScape world is structured so that players have a large degree of freedom to do what they want to do -- go questing, train the skills, or chat with friends. Playing with friends significantly adds to the fun, challenge, and perceived competence in the game (Gajadhar et al., 2008). The virtual world of the game becomes a place where people can not only perform activities, but also just “hang out.” The game itself serves as a common ground for people and invites talk about game related topics as well as random chatting.

RuneScape as a ‘third place’

The game as a “third place” provides informal social interaction among players. A third place is a place besides home or work where people can socialize and feel comfortable. Though the term third place has been primarily applied to physical spaces in academic studies, it can also be used to describe a virtual world that provides people with spaces to socialize and feel comfortable. (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006)

RuneScape has a robust chat function that allows players to talk publicly and privately. The chat function provides players with an implicit goal to keep playing the game, by motivating them to log in regularly just to keep in touch with their friends. Said one interviewee, *“If I need to talk to my friends, I know if they are in the game or not by using the tool bar to check if they are logged in before I log in.”* People play the game not only for the sake of personal achievement but also to keep in touch with friends or to meet new people. RuneScape can be a powerful tool for social interaction. RuneScape becomes a huge, fantastical place where people can come and go easily. In the virtual world, wherever they are, people can always talk to each other as long as they are on each other’s Friends List. As a result, the

constraint of “location” in the game, which affects the *character’s* abilities, including their ability to communicate, does not limit players’ communication with each other.

Social reasons motivate players to continue using RuneScape

According to our interviews, the chat function is used frequently among players, partly for game-related discussion -- because it is crucial for players to communicate with others to play the game cooperatively -- and partly for strictly social interaction.

All eight of the interview subjects said they joined the game for social reasons. Players in RuneScape began to play the game either because their friends were playing the game and recommended it, or because they thought it would be a good way to stay in touch with people. Interviewees made the following comments: *“The players I knew in the game are my friends in real life.”* *“I want to have more social interaction.”* *“I left home in 2005 and have lived in different states. I can catch up with my brothers while we are playing the game.”*

As a game, RuneScape attracts people not only through its game dynamics, adventure, and promise of personal achievements, but also through its social aspects. RuneScape provides people with a place to have shared fun and to engage in a common activity. By facilitating cooperative play and communication among friends and teammates, the game provides a shared space for people to hang out, to socialize or to meet people with similar interests. Extant social ties can be maintained or strengthened; new ties can be created.

Chat is used to share game information and informal communication about real life

In the game, players can perform multiple tasks, and communication with other players is one of the most frequent tasks. All the communication in RuneScape is text-based interaction, which is ubiquitous but unintrusive. Because chat itself has multiple channels, including private, group and public, players constantly deal with simultaneous game-related tasks and communication. For players, when they are not co-located, it is crucial to have chat channels to help them navigate through the virtual world as well as coordinate group activities. When a new quest comes out, or items need to be traded, players talk to each other to share the information. One interviewee said, *“If I need something, I’ll talk to other*

people. If you are selling stuff, other people will talk to you.” The chat function facilitates information exchange in the game play. Besides information sharing, it is necessary for people to coordinate group activities through chatting. Due to the characteristic of MMORPGs, people are present in the virtual world with their account name as a proxy for their physical figure. Virtual “name” presence in the chat function allows people to communicate, which in turn allows work to be distributed. One interviewee provided evidence for this, saying, *“There is lots of chatting to coordinate dungeoneering efforts. Chatting is necessary to coordinate group activities.”* To facilitate group activities, the chat function provides an accessible place to coordinate.

In addition to sharing game information, a lot of informal communication takes place within RuneScape. The Friend List allows people to talk privately, which opens up an opportunity to develop casual and non-game-related talk. During our interviews, we found out that people use the chat function as a private message system or social network system where they can share their real-life events that are not related to the game. Sometimes it is simply informal chatting without any game context, and sometimes game-related topics will pop up in the conversation. Said interviewees: *“Sometimes I just hang out and talk with friends, not really doing RuneScape adventure stuff,”* and, *“I usually chat about what’s going on with my life and what we are playing with friends. I can easily talk to my friends through RuneScape.”* The mixture of communication about personal topics and game sharing is a substantial source of game enjoyment for the players.

3. Preparation for play is a major aspect of enjoyment/reward structure

Normal play assumes that players will prepare for team or individual activities by learning about upcoming adventures on RuneScape forums, RuneScape QuestHelp, RuneScape.Wiki.com, RuneTips, or YouTube. Some of these resources are part of the official game site and others are independent fan sites. It is interesting to note that at this point in time most, if not all, of the fan sites are supported by Jagex. Support takes the form of contributed content such as interviews with Jagex representatives, teasers for new game features, and prizes for competitions. In response to the question of why Jagex supports fan sites, the company says, “We’ve always loved the fact that fan-run sites often develop their own

collective personalities, and we find a lot of useful, honest feedback comes from their communities.

(“Support”, n.d.)

One factor influencing players’ preference of using one site over the another is the perceived accuracy of the information presented. One of the interviewees said of The Knowledge Base, RuneScape’s official game information site: *“(It) has been historically inaccurate; their own people get it wrong. Fan-site information is more reliable because you get info from people who are actually playing the game.”* At the same time, players are not necessarily loyal to only one source. They will pick and choose according to their needs. The same user has commented on about the RuneScape Forum: *“I do use it -- the Grand Exchange information. I suppose the information is really good.”* A second factor is the perceived timeliness of the information. Another interviewee talked about using the official site to find out about new content, because RuneTips took longer to make the news available. At the same time, however, he was a regular user of the latter’s skill calculators to determine how much effort would be required to level up in various skills.

With the exception of one interviewee, the interview subjects mentioned using the fan sites and forums regularly for assistance and get updates about the game. *“For most part, before I go to fight that [boss monster], I check out the Tip.it guide or watch a YouTube video, to know what I need to do, and how I’ll need to set up the inventory or what item I need to bring.”* *“I go to Tip.it at least once or twice a week to check the stuff they have on new content. That appears one or two days later after it has been introduced in the game.”*

Initially, the players’ regular use of help sites to prepare for (and sometimes even preview) the game surprised the researchers. Our main concerns were, first, isn’t it cheating? and, second, doesn’t it ruin the fun?

The interviewee quoted above talked about how he prepares for boss battles. Other interviewees mentioned consulting the quest guides. Quests are an interesting example because they encode the story element that players identified as a major appeal of the game. Quests also have tangible rewards, in the form of valuable items, quest points, and further “skilling.” We interpreted the items to be gained during the quest as a reward for dedicated play; being able to get the reward without putting in the required effort

did not seem just. As it turns out, however, according to the norms of the community, the use of helper sites is not considered cheating; it is a respectable way of playing the game. As one interviewee said, *“RuneScape has its own help page. RuneScape really wants me to figure it out.”* It is important to note that such norms are game-specific and a matter of game design. Some games encourage getting help and actually provide (or let players post) walk-throughs, while others identify sharing quest solutions as cheating in their official rulebooks and try to enforce the rule both socially and through game design. (Karlsen, 2008) From what we have seen, RuneScape fits in the former category. A possible explanation for why quest guides or monster hunting tips are not considered cheating in RuneScape relates to our discussion of the forms of competition in the game. Quests are not a way to gain limited resources that other players might also vie for, and so completing a quest with help does not constitute cheating in the sense of having an unfair advantage over other players. Because completing most quests is a solo activity, competition among others undertaking the same a quest isn't obvious to players. Furthermore, the help is available to all who seek it, so even if an advantage were to exist, it would not be unfair.

We also expected that knowing beforehand what one needs to do would reveal the storyline and, because storyline was identified as an attraction of the game, learning the storyline in advance would interfere with the fun of playing. However, many types of information exist on the help sites. As one player described it, *“Tip.it has quest guides, a bestiary of the monsters and the things they drop, calculators and planners that give skill-training details, maps, an items database, and guides to monster hunting, boss killing, and minigames. All free.”* Furthermore, on some sites the quest guides are set up in such a way that the players are in control of what and of how much they find out. (See Figures 4 and 5). On RuneTips, a player can look into the quest database for a basic overview that identifies the difficulty level of a quest, its estimated length, whether or not it is for paying members only, and the number of quest points gained upon successful completion. The individual quest guide adds more information such as starting point, prerequisite quests, items and skills, rewards, NPC involved, advancement, and a walkthrough that is hidden by default so as not to present an unwelcome “spoiler.”

Black Knight's Fortress				
Overall Difficulty:	Novice	Requirements:	Easy	Length: Medium
Start location: Falador, in the White knight's Castle.				
<i>The black knights are up to no good. You are hired by the White Knights to spy on them and uncover their evil scheme.</i>				
Required:				
Skills: 13 Quest Points				
Items: Cabbage (from anywhere except Draynor mansion), Iron chainbody, Bronze med helm				
Quests: None				
Monsters: Black Knights (Level 33)				
NPC: Sir Amik Varze (upstairs in the western tower of the White Knights' Castle in Falador).				
Walkthrough Hide/Show :				
Reward:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2500gp 				
Quest points gained upon completion: 3				
Advancement: This quest is needed for:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King's Ransom • Recruitment Drive 				
Written By/Credits: Cameron				
Special thanks to: Aurhora, Howlin1, Jimmyw3000, Oddfaery2				
Thanks to: atreyu615, Go4the1, lzzwyen, Jaffy1, pie baker1, rackbone, xd_mewbie_xd, yatagara				
Last updated: December 5th 2011				

Figure 4. By default, the quest walkthrough is hidden on the RuneTips quest guide. However, other “spoiler” information (most notably, items and rewards) is displayed.

DESCRIPTION:
The black knights are up to no good. You are hired by the white knights to spy on them and uncover their evil scheme.

DIFFICULTY:
Novice

LENGTH:
Medium

QUEST REQUIREMENTS:
None

SKILL/OTHER REQUIREMENTS:
Must be able to survive attacks from level 33 Black knights.
13 Quest Points.

QUESTS UNLOCKED/PARTIALLY UNLOCKED BY COMPLETING THIS QUEST:
Recruitment Drive
King's Ransom

ITEMS NEEDED AT QUEST START:
Bronze med helm, Iron chainbody, and Cabbage (Only use the ones near the Monastery).

ITEMS RECOMMENDED FOR QUEST:
Food, Armor, and a Weapon (if you have a low combat level).

ITEMS ACQUIRED DURING QUEST:
Dossier.

QUEST POINTS:
3


REWARD:
2,500 coins.

START POINT:
White knights' castle, located in the very center of Falador city.

TO START:
Speak to Sir Amik Varze on the third floor in the White knights' castle in Falador.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Talk to Sir Amik Varze, he will tell you that the Black knights are planning to destroy the White knights. He will ask you to spy on them. Accept his challenge.



Talk to Sir Amik Varze / 2 more options


2. The next place you need to go is the Monastery. It is located east of Ice Mountain. When you reach it, go north and you will see some Cabbages. Pick at least two. Only one is needed but it is common to accidentally eat it.

Introduction

The Black Knights are up to no good.
You are hired by the White Knights to spy on them and uncover their evil scheme.

Quest Information

- **Members Only:** No
- **Start Point:** White Knights' Castle, Falador
- **To Start:** Speak to Sir Amik Varze
- **Quest Length:** Medium
- **Minimum Requirements:**
 - 13 Quest Points
- **Useful:**
 - Able to evade or kill level 33 Black Knights



Investigating the Black Knights' battlements

Development Team

- **Developer:** Paul Gower
- **Conversion:** James B
- **Quest/Help:** Nihal K
- **Audio:** Ian T

Rework

- **Developer:** Maz C
- **Quality Assurance:** Jennie T

Spoiler:Quest Rewards

For Quest Rewards go to [Black Knights' Fortress - Quest Rewards - \(Spoilers\)](#)

Spoiler:Walkthrough

For Walkthrough go to [Black Knights' Fortress - Quest Walkthrough - \(Spoilers\)](#)

Facts

- This quest was originally named *Spy Quest* before membership was released.

Figure 5. On the site www.runehq.com, the walkthrough is visible by default and cannot be hidden. In contrast, virtually no “spoiler” information about the quest is displayed on the official RuneScape wiki page.

The quest information pages in the official RuneScape game guide display even less information upfront. Players have to drill down to find information about the rewards of the quest or tips on what to say to characters to elicit clues from them. Some interviewees said they do seek out the story. *“I learn about the story from blog, magazine, and website.”* Others, though, prefer not to know it. *“I don’t want to know the storyline. I like to know what items I need to bring.”*

Finding out what items are needed for an adventure emerged as the main reason for checking out a help site, for quests and as well as for other activities such as monster hunting. Bringing *only* the items one needs turns out to be at least as important as bringing *all* the items one needs because death results in item loss for the player. Players talked about how setting up the inventory beforehand saves time during the quest: one can buy all items at the same time, rather than going back and forth to the market during the game, as the need for certain items arises. Time is a concern for team play, when the members need to coordinate a meeting time and ensure that everybody can finish the activity. One player described the preparation for a team effort to fight a fierce monster as getting supplies and a good armor, adding that it *“takes a while, up to half an hour or forty minutes.”*

In general, status within the group, how you are perceived by your team members, is a strong incentive for being well-prepared for a team activity. One interviewee described the mixed results of playing on an ad-hoc team: *“Sometimes people know what they are doing. ... Sometimes you meet people who have no idea what they are doing, and they are complete idiots.”* Most people prefer not to be considered idiots, and one way to avoid such perception is to prepare well by learning in advance what items they will need for a group activity.

4. Virtual items are a pillar of game play

Virtual items are a key reward of successful play. Procuring raw materials, tools, or magical items is required to level up skills. Items are essential resources necessary for continued play. Many RuneScape activities conclude with players obtaining items and tools that contribute to further play, either by being used in a quest or a dungeon, or by being traded in the market. One interview subject said he fights

monsters to get “rare drops,” which are powerful items that often are very expensive to buy and sell; they can be for traded to others. Acquisition of items is a common occurrence and takes place in the four ways: purchase in Grand Exchange, player trades, monster drops, and finding them during adventures. Players can train their skills to get raw materials like wood from woodcutting and fish from fishing, and then trade them for other items. While some players prefer to buy items via trade, others like to seek rare items by visiting The Wilderness and playing Minigames. The former method is more focused on efficient preparation for dungeoneering and quests, while the latter is about enjoying the process of gaining items. Furthermore, while items are regarded merely as external resources for further game play by some people, one interview subject said skillfully using the Grand Exchange became his main interest in the game. These different patterns are based on player’s preference and game style.

Besides aiding game play, items can be intrinsic rewards. Some players are proud to possess rare items, or large quantities of items, or impractical items such as capes or titles; evidently, the procurement of items can become a significant goal of play. One interview subject said he has enjoyed for several months the activity of acquiring items like wood via woodcutting. He said that even though he can buy all the items he wants at the Grand Exchange, he is proud of gathering his own resources by cutting trees and making them into logs and then planks. Using the items he generates, he uses other skills to make a workbench or furniture for his RuneScape house, and then stores them. He said he likes constructing his house and finds value in building a house and improving it with the materials he has. He said he even likes the noises of woodcutting, which makes him want to cultivate this skill further rather than leveling up a new skill such as fishing, which he described as “boring.” Clearly, buying, finding, getting, and making items in RuneScape is a major aspect of play.

5. Connections with real-world mental model are valued

Similar to other game designs, RuneScape adopts elements of real-life logic in the game. Although there are not as many variables as there are in real life -- and they are more abstract and symbolic in the game -- the logic, objectives and rules are drawn from from real life interaction. The

structure of the game, or the process of a task are simplified but are familiar to the players. As a result, the behaviors players choose can match closely with their cognitive models in reality. For example, in RuneScape there is a cooking skill. In order to master the skill, players have to first find raw food (e.g. fish, milk, cheese) either by going to the Grand Exchange to buy it or get it by themselves (go fishing, go milk a cow), then set up campfire and cook the food. It is similar to real life but simplified. In order to cook, the preparation is important just like in real life. Real life experience helps players proceed in the game. Said one interviewee: *“The logic is from real life. It’s simple. For example, fishing and cooking skills are just life real life.”* The real life familiarity is appreciated by the players because it matches with their existent mental models. Said players: *“RuneScape teaches links between real-life inputs and outcomes,”* and *“What I like about the Dungeoneering is that you need to use your common sense and judgment.”* At other times, players learn lessons from playing RuneScape too, from preparation to negotiation. Said interviewees: *“There is a real world economics lesson: It’s cheaper to buy ingredients, make things, and then sell them with higher prices,”* and, *“I can deal items with other players and set items’ price, and someone can negotiate the price.”*

Players are rewarded in multiple ways when they tap into the logic of the game. When the risks the players take are higher, the rewards they receive generally are higher, as well. For example, if players go to more dangerous places to mine, they get more valuable material. Though they learn these things from playing the game, they can also leverage real life experiences to help them to make decisions in the game. For example, when a player has high skills, his expertise is valued by other players. Players try to master the skills they train because once they achieve a higher level, they can earn the respect of others. Applying mental models from real life, players can be rewarded in the game in ways not dissimilar from reality.

Also similar to real world, where people who are new to a skill or organization need more time to adapt to the environment before they perform to their potential, new RuneScape players can do far less than more experienced players, but have the same opportunities to increase skills as the others do. The time spent training increases personal skills enhances the ability to work successfully with others, and opens up more paths of action in the game world.

6. Frequent content updates are enjoyed because they offer extensive freedom in player choices

An element of RuneScape that contributes to players' enjoyment is its combination of a vast virtual world, copious amounts of frequently expanded content in the form of new quests, minigames, and items, and few restrictions on players' freedom to engage that content in any order they wish. This element of enjoyment was stated by several interview subjects, with comments such as *"The game has the complete freedom of an open playing field, huge amount of stuff to do, and you can do whatever you want,"* and *"The game is always changing; it is not static. The company works at improving the game"* and *"It's an immense world. New content gets added weekly or by-weekly."*

Players' appreciation of the game's mix of voluminous content and freedom of action takes several forms. First, the game's free version is open-ended and allows players to use a large subset of the game's total features, so a new player or a longtime free player can enjoy 20 full quests, develop most of the available skills, and try minigames and dungeoneering in ways that are almost as complete as those available for member players. The game's interface is not limited by the free status, either, so all the maps, controls, and chat function as in the paid status. One interview subject emphasized this as a reason he found RuneScape more enjoyable than its many competitors: *"RuneScape has a really good free version. You could do pretty much anything from the very start. World of Warcraft gives only a seven-day trial, which is just bad."*

The game, in either paid or free form, allows players to partake in many quests in different sequences, as long as the various prerequisite skills have been developed to sufficient level, necessary items purchased or made, and an adequate number of Quest Points have been earned. Skills development can be done in whatever order a player wishes through skilling or combat. The Grand Exchange allows players to purchase items as they discover need for them. Quest Points are accrued at the conclusion of any quest. As a result, no sequential order is required for more than two dozen quests. One such quest mentioned by an interview subject is "The Fremennik Trials," which can be undertaken by a player who has finished no prior quests; however, crafting, fletching, woodcutting, and combat skills must be developed to sufficiently high levels through skilling, and a few common items – a knife, hatchet,

tinderbox, and a raw shark – must be acquired. Several other items such as armor, food, and teleport runes are listed as recommended for success (“The Fremennik Trials,” n.d.). Players said this quest frequently is one undertaken by newer players but emphasized that the game did not require it to be undertaken in any order.

Additionally, many simple quests that are prerequisites to other quests require a half-hour or less to accomplish, making the time required to prepare for some more advanced quests almost negligible. One example mentioned by an interviewee was “Fairy Tale Part I: Growing Pains,” which is listed in the RuneScape Wiki as an “Experienced” quest. The four prerequisite quests are “Lost City,” “Nature Spirit,” “Priest in Peril,” and “The Restless Ghost”; however, these are all short quests that require less than a half-hour each and can be done in interchangeable order. A player who wanted to do “Fairy Tale Part I” and who had not previously done any of the other four quests could easily play the all these four and then embark on Fairy Tale all after completing an afternoon’s school homework. Newly added quests, such as the holiday special quests, are not just for experienced players; relatively inexperienced players often can step right into them as well.

The value this element of freedom of choice with quests provides to RuneScape is evident in several comments by interviewees. *“You just start to explore. It has lots of freedom.” “There is so much to do, so many different ways to play; there is no place where I can say I’ve done everything because there are always new things to do.” “The three best parts of the game are that it’s customizable, that you can advance and progress, and that there always is new content for the major holidays.”*

Another important element regarding freedom is the ability to be in the RuneScape world without participating in quest or minigame activities even for extended periods of time. The game is not driven by pre-scripted activities such as quests, and progress frequently takes the form of personal accomplishments, which makes it somewhat similar to Second Life (“What is Second Life?” n.d.) Said one interviewee, *There’s a “storyline behind the quests, and you can do that, but you don’t have to.”* Another participant said he appreciated that the RuneScape developers put so much attention into skilling as play activity as an end in itself. *“There is variety. Some people like this and they do this; some people like that, and they do that. There are all of these different niches [in skilling] for whatever your game*

style is.” Another interviewee said of this game aspect, *“I like to achieve everything. Some people like to fight; I try to do sort of everything in the game; that’s my goal: try to achieve all things.”* Crowe and Bradford mention a similar finding. “RuneScape differs from the more traditional gaming structure in that, depending on how they choose to interact with the world, gamers are not bound by either linear plot or function” (2007, p. 219).

The seemingly endless possible options that come with frequent content updates might not be universally welcomed by players. One interview subject expressed some resignation that the game grows faster than he can keep up with, voicing some frustration in his comment, *“You can’t beat the game unless you play twenty-four/seven.”*

It also is important to note that perceptions about the amount of player freedom can vary significantly, and interviewee comments about ease of entry into quests might be overstated. All but one of the interview subjects considered himself at least intermediate level, and they all had played longer than a year, so memories of early experiences with the game might be shaded by many subsequent months of higher-level play as an experienced character. Nonetheless, subjects emphatically expressed that the game allows great freedom to try new actions or play in whatever manner they wished, and the three interviewees who said they had tried other MMORPGs said RuneScape was exceptional in this regard.

7. Rule-following and cooperation with administrators is widespread but not universal

It appears commonly understood among many RuneScape players that rules regarding game play and harassment must be enforced by both the moderators and players themselves for the game to remain enjoyable. Ample evidence exists that many players do violate rules, especially those about harassing language, bots, and scamming, and that administrators must intervene regularly to keep order. Administrator intervention was expressed as necessary and positive by both the interview subjects and thousands of forum posts on the RuneScape site and fan sites.

Some example statements from our interviews include these: *“Foul language isn’t allowed, but it has to be reported for someone to be stopped.” “Jagex takes harassment reports seriously. Punishment for anything can be a temporary ban, or they can mute you. ... Sometimes they can ‘roll back’ your stats to lower levels.”* One interviewee said he thinks perhaps three out of four players are *“good citizens in the game”* but then also added that’s just his guess.

Five interviewees said they had reported other players for harassment, scamming, or using bots, but that sometimes it’s impractical to report cheaters. The game interface lets players send a report of abuse to Jagex administrators; the report contains a video log of the character’s game interaction during the prior 60 seconds. *“If a scammer does something to me, I report them, but the scam had to be really recent. Some scams are kind of complicated and take more than a minute, so you can’t really show the whole scam in the report,”* said one interviewee. He told of one scam he encountered in which a scamming player offered to give his character at no cost a teleporting artifact that the interviewee knew would teleport his character into the Lava Maze in the Deep Wilderness, a highly dangerous place where players can be killed in PvP combat, and most of their items seized by the killer. *“I took the artifact, but then I didn’t use it right then. I mean, how dumb would you have to be to be given a free teleporting item that sends you to a place where you could be killed? And the guy couldn’t do anything about it because he’s just a stupid scammer.”* The interviewee said in this case the attempted scam resulted in his character getting a powerful artifact for free, and he thought eventually that player would do something *“to get himself banned.”*

Interviewees were harsh in their criticisms of bots and players who use them because they go against the point of actually playing the game. They also said they themselves had never thought about using bots because the penalty -- being banned -- is so severe. *“Bots are just stupid; if you don’t want to really play the game, then you shouldn’t.” “Bots hurt the game. You see a guy doing the same thing over and over and never talking, and you know it’s a bot. Somebody needs to report it.”* One interviewee said he once contemplated trying a bot to level up some skills but quickly dropped the idea when several friends told him he was crazy to risk his experienced character, and also let him know that they wouldn’t respect his high skills anymore. Another interviewee said he respected Jagex greatly because getting rid

of bots in October 2011 removed about 5 million mostly paid accounts. *“They did something to make the game better that must have cost them a lot of money, and that is pretty awesome.”* This sentiment was echoed in forum posts praising the anti-bot changes, such as this one in a thread dedicated to bot removal: *“From player Hawasli: ‘love you jagex !! thx for all the hard working effort that you are putting in all games’”* (“Bots Got Nuked,” November 2011).

In contrast with the prevailing disparaging attitude towards bot use, the use of insulting or harassing language does not seem to strike players as being such a serious offense: *“Some idiots say mean stuff. It doesn’t bother me if someone harasses me, I’ll just ignore them. They are just 13 years old.”* Another interviewee mentioned he had been banned for one week because he had said in Public chat during a Minigame that the other team “was lame”; he voiced the opinion that being reported for using “harassing language” in that way was too sensitive, but also added that the administrators generally do a good job keeping things fun and that they have to maintain order. We have also heard from another interviewee that about two years ago he was temporarily banned because his account was hacked by a rogue player; he had to change his password to the account, and the moderators activated the account about a week later. Although the event angered the interviewee, he said, he realized later that it was really the best way to handle it and the action *“wasn’t punishment.”* Five other interview subjects stated in various ways that moderators benefit the game because without them, the game community would disintegrate. *“The Player Moderators have to keep order. They don’t always get it right, but it’s better than having chaos all over the place.”*

A forum thread initiated in April 2010, which succeeded an older, similar thread, is called “Mod Appreciation Thread” and contains 1,981 posts generally praising moderators’ actions. A few examples include *“From player Va: ‘Thanks for all your help Mod Poppy, i wouldn’t know what i would do without you!’”* *“From player GoodCat17: ‘Thank you mod timbo for taking the bots out’”* and *“From Gregyz009: ‘All J-Mods have always treated me with respect and for that I respect and thank them’”* (“Mod Appreciation Thread, 2011).

Although it is possible the game administrators cherry-pick the appreciation comments for the official RuneScape Forums, many messages praising moderators and defending their efforts to maintain

order against cheaters are visible on fan sites. One example comes from the “Rants” forum on RuneTips. Alex_I posted an 843-word message critical of the way his character was muted by a Player Moderator after Alex_I’s character tried to draw other players into a “dicing” activity, which is considered a game scam. Alex_I complained that Player Moderators had too much power (“Terrorist Player Moderator,” 2010).

After Alex_I’s post, about a dozen subsequent posts criticized Alex_I, defending Moderators and telling him his actions in advertising an illegal activity game within RuneScape warranted discipline. In one such post, Kaida23 expresses indignation: *“Really? Another ‘I’m running a legitimate scam and was unfairly muted by a corrupt p-mod’ rant? ... Did it occur to you that you were most likely muted for spamming the chat box, not for scamming?”* (“Terrorist Player Moderators,” 2011).

Notably, even in his own rant, Alex_I acknowledged the importance of P-Mods’ actions to keep order, though he makes an appeal for a more “fluid and nuanced” approach towards punishment:

*“I do understand the need for this auto-mute, if someone is threatening real life safety, account safety, or maybe RWT/bot advertising, but I think Mods should be held accountable for their mutes. ... Now obviously scammers and offensive language users are still bad for the game, but in these lesser cases, I think that Player Moderators should be able to report them to Jagex so that they can review the abuser themselves and if they judge the person to be a rule breaker, they can issue an *appealable* ban/mute instead of the Player Mods’ unappealable, unreliable, corrupt and countless mutes”* (“Terrorist Player Moderators,” 2011).

Another forum thread contains evidence that RuneScape’s overall atmosphere is one of respect for rules despite instances of cheating, and that it fares well in comparison with other MMORPGs in this respect. A July 2011 RuneTips exchange between poster Diomedus and poster Son_Of_Judas discusses Son_Of_Judas dealing with having been tricked out of a large number of gold pieces and Diomedus offering empathy.

Diomedus: “What kept you motivated to play after those kind of losses?”

Son_Of_Judas: “What kept me motivated is the fact that RS remains the nicest game MMORPG I’ve ever played. ... Besides there are scammers in every game and [World of Warcraft] is probably the game that has the most hacked accounts ever. So after all RS isn’t so bad. The best thing to do is not to worry too much about in game value and just have fun in your own way” (“Got Scammed,” July 2011).

The widespread, though far from universal, respect for rule-following and moderator rule enforcement fits well with players’ goals of enjoying pleasant social interaction and feeling a sense of

achievement gained through successful honest play. RuneScape appears to have avoided creating an atmosphere in which game administrators are widely disliked; rather, the players respect the administrators and view them as necessary for the game to continue ensuring enjoyable play. This is interesting, given the contrast found between our study's findings regarding RuneScape and the findings of Muramatsu and Ackerman, who reported in their study (1998, p. 99-102) of an early multi-user online game, pseudonymously named Illusion, that players of that game (called mortals) feared the administrators, (called Immortals) because:

The immortals command an absolute position in the status, authority, and power hierarchies. They solely have the power to control the game. They can change the scores and attributes (e.g., experience points, hitpoints, intelligence) of the mortals, they can destroy characters ("deleting"), and they can even banish players ("site-banning"). As an indication of their power over mortals, immortals can "snoop" on mortals, thereby seeing what the mortal sees and types without the mortal's knowledge. ... Illusion belongs to its immortals. (Muramatsu & Ackerman, 1998, p. 100)

Elements similar to those found in Illusion and identified as a reason for fear appear in RuneScape as well. RuneScape's moderators can invoke invisibility at will, mute or ban players, "roll back" stats to lower levels, and see more than what the players see. However, by involving selectively chosen Player Moderators -- from a player's perspective, "some of our own" -- RuneScape appears to have reduced the potential opposition between two distinct groups, players and administrators. One interview subject said one of his friends at school was selected as a Player Moderator last year after playing RuneScape for several years. Only one interviewee said he had encountered a Jagex Moderator, but added that it was not uncommon to come across one of the 6,000 Player or Dual Moderators. Because Player Moderators belong to both groups, they can demonstrate through their activity that the goals of the players and of the administrators need not be incompatible. As further illustration of how the goals and players and administrators do align, some of the players interviewed for this paper admitted to having reported rule-breaking players, which made them feel a sense of ownership of the game with the administrators. The fact that they pay \$6 a month as members likely adds to their sense of ownership and desire to see the site maintain its pleasant atmosphere. With dozens of millions of player accounts, RuneScape is much too large for the type of intimate brushes with godlike administrators that happened in Illusion; the 400

mighty Jagex Moderators are too scarce and the Player Moderators simply not powerful enough to create a sense of fear among players. With more than 100 million player accounts and only about 6,580 administrators, the rule of law must prevail to prevent the disintegration of a carefully structured, very large-scale gaming environment. The result: A collegial game atmosphere that is fun while respectful of players and the game's rules.

It remains possible the small sample of eight interviewees simply is unusual among RuneScape's colossal player base, and that the norm is for players to fear administrators as in Muramatsu and Ackerman's findings. However, there is additional reason to believe these players -- even the one who believed he had been unfairly banned for his criticism of the opposing minigame team -- are sincere in their appreciation for the administrative structure of RuneScape. Game designer, writer, and director of games research & development at the institute for the future Jane McGonigal (2011), explains, "When you strip away the genre differences and the technological complexities, all games share four defining traits: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation" (p. 21). These four traits work together as follows to explain the enjoyable, structured experience of a game (p. 21):

The goal is the specific outcome that players will work to achieve. The goal provides players with a sense of purpose.

The rules place limitations on how players can achieve the goal. By removing or limiting the obvious ways of getting to the goal, the rules push players to explore previously uncharted possibility spaces. They unleash creativity and foster strategic thinking.

The feedback system tells players how close they are to achieving the goal. It can take the form of points, levels, a score, or a progress bar. ... and it provides motivation to keep playing.

Finally, voluntary participation requires that everyone who is playing the game knowingly and willingly accepts the goal, the rules, and the feedback (McGonigal, 2011, p. 21).

It is easy to see from the interview subjects' comments and many forum posts that players appreciate the game's rules and favor their enforcement because they keep the game enjoyable. The developers have created a socially engaging and pleasant game with social goals (fun interaction), a feedback system designed to apply equally to all players (scores, experience, gold pieces, items), and rules that prohibit harassment and use of bots and exploitation of bugs (which ultimately distort the feedback system). We repeat again the critical comment by one interviewee, regarding bot use: "... *If you don't want to really play the game, then you shouldn't.*"

Design Implications

RuneScape engages millions of players each day in cooperative and solo play. On their own, players prepare mentally for group dungeon adventures by reading fan sites and RuneScape forums to learn what resources will be required and what tactics might be effective. They prepare “physically” by leveling up in various skills, including combat and life skills such as cooking or hunting. Players are motivated to continue playing and to improve their performance through rewards for individual and group achievement. They communicate all manner of information rapidly via four chat levels.

These attributes make lessons gleaned from RuneScape’s design potentially useful for the design of systems to be employed in settings that emphasize the related goals of skill acquisition and the continuous improvement of individual and group performance. We envision several RuneScape-derived design ideas working successfully in cooperative-work systems used in college or secondary schools for project learning. A comprehensive course-management/learning system could be developed that assists – even helps motivate – groups to achieve cooperative success at a project level while encouraging individual skills acquisition and rewarding both endeavors. Such a system, in ways analogous to RuneScape, would encourage preparation and thoughtful resource management, reward high performance, encourage improvement, motivate individual participation, facilitate shared learning, limit social loafing, and allow rapid communication among classmates, teammates, and individuals.

This could be accomplished using the following design concepts:

Rewards are related to activities, are frequent and are obvious to users. In RuneScape, the various rewards come almost continually. This helps establish and strengthen the perception of a causal relationship between effort and positive outcomes. Skill points and levels rise explicitly but gradually as players practice the 25 skills; gold coins accrue swiftly as monsters are slain and dungeons are cleansed of evil foes. This can translate to the educational system by granting points through a variety of small assignments designed to reward individual skill improvements, such as reading comprehension, analytical ability, writing, programming, or any other desired achievement area. Furthermore, the reward structure can be designed so it not only adds to a one-dimensional class point tally but includes different types of

points, such as cooperation points, verbal points, math points, and so on as relevant to any particular course. By officially recognizing the diversity inherent in a “skills set” and rewarding students for incremental improvement of their skills, both individual progress and contributions to a group project become more easily quantifiable and more visible. In the case of group work, this could motivate individual participation and limit social loafing.

Failure or lower-than-desired performance is not catastrophic to the project, individual success, or self-esteem. In RuneScape, being killed in combat (except when initiated in The Wilderness), brings little long-term cost to players, who typically lose some items and must re-purchase them. A comical “gravestone” appears where the fallen player’s items are left, offering some levity in the situation. In the envisioned educational group-project system, poor performance at the various skills assignments would not automatically mean low grade for the whole project; instead, students would be encouraged to keep trying and given opportunities to remedy their failures and low performance until they achieved mastery in the necessary area. Use of humor could ease the sting of initial failure. Lighthearted animation or music – such as a dancing mallet smashing words on the screen – could offer encouragement without making the student feel inadequate; the aim is to put the student in a state of positive affect and “maintain a positive psychological climate. Psychological factors are important to effective problem solving. Minimize excessive anxiety among students and help to create a sense of self-efficacy among students for improving their skills” (Andre, as cited in Schunk, 2008, p. 317). When skill mastery is achieved, the score for doing so would replace the earlier “failing” score on the skill assignment. This would encourage improvement and motivate individual participation.

We recognize that there are significant practical limitations to giving students the opportunity to keep trying until they do things right. Real-life projects have a timeline that cannot be manipulated at will; actions have consequences that can be mitigated, but not erased or completely reversed. In a learning environment, however, complex projects could more easily be split into small tasks. Frequent feedback would ensure that the potentially negative consequences of doing something wrong would not have such a significant influence on the state of the world and it would be possible to go back to the previous step and try again almost as if nothing had happened.

Achievement of major project deliverables and projects themselves is configured like a series of quests. The way this works in RuneScape has been described previously in the paper. For an educational system, utilizing this principle would require achievement of specific milestones that unlock resources and instructions for the next quest. For example, in an Interface Design class, the first “quest” could involve learning what requirements gathering is and how it is done. Individuals would need to undertake small exercises such as writing requirements protocols, finding users to interview, and executing the interviews. Only when that “quest” is finished and a certain number of points in all the required areas have been accrued does the next “quest” (first paper prototype, for example) become available.

As we have seen, players are motivated to prepare for in-game activities. They actively seek information in order to apply it to the group activities in RuneScape. The intention behind designing longer, more involved projects as series of quests is to recreate in group members a similar kind of interest in researching what lies ahead and preparing individually for group activities. How wonderful it would be if students could approach team meetings with the same sense of purpose with which players approach dungeoneering! A group-project course management system should make information that is needed for successful group work available while motivating students to expend effort and some time to procure it. For example, providing learning resources or discussion forums which have previous course discussion would help students to pick up what they need to do.

High ability in skill areas is explicit within system. In RuneScape, the players who possess high-levels of skill are known publicly in the game. In the group-project system, participants who are accomplished at the various identified skill areas for the course would be made known within the confines of the course or educational program; for example, someone who achieved very high “interviewing” skills in SI 501 would be noted as an “Expert”. A benefit to the student for having this recognition is that her skills might be tradeable (within reason) for other skills within the context of the course, such as trading some interviewing expertise for some graphics help with someone who has a high standing for “graphic arts” skill. Another possible benefit is to appoint highly recognized students as a peer tutors or as administrators of certain domains like “Social Cognition” and let him or her help other low-level students

with extra credits in the system. Obviously, there are FERPA considerations and individual privacy concerns that must be addressed with care; however, a smart design could facilitate shared learning and teach resource management.

Rapid communication among individuals and groups is easily accomplished. In

RuneScape, the four chat levels allows adequate privacy while enabling efficient sharing of information. Conversations among friends are frequent and fast. Sharing among groups of friends and clans happens often and can bring success in adventuring without requiring copious effort by players. In the educational project system, a three-level chat system that connects individual friends, group-mates, and the class at large would be useful for handling all types of information. Using chat in education is not a new concept; instructors across University of Michigan can configure their course-management platform to include a chat window, for example. However, this allows only one level of chat. All messages posted by any student are seen by all other students. Allowing teams to chat only to the team, individuals to chat directly to each other, and everyone to see chat messages posted to the entire class would be very helpful to the students and instructors. Besides, the chat discussion is temporal which makes the discussion more valuable at the moment.

Interestingly, efforts to use aspects of adventure games in college classrooms have been happening for years. A game design course at Indiana University is itself structured as a game, “with students working in teams called ‘guilds’ to earn ‘experience points’ that they can apply to defeat an ultimate ‘boss’ – the final exam” (Ferrara, 2011). Although our suggestions do not retain the gaming world language Indiana University uses, we are nonetheless optimistic that the RuneScape-inspired design concepts listed above could form the heart of an effective system that encourages collaborative group-education.

Conclusion

The researchers were interested in examining RuneScape to determine what about the enormous MMORPG was so appealing that players -- who are predominantly male -- ranging from middle school age to adults would spend hours each week clicking at their screens. We found several factors that answered this question, including three that surprised us.

Where we had expected the surge of satisfaction from competition to be the prime reward for players, we found that at least some value cooperative play far more than competitive activity. Interviewed subjects' comments clearly provided evidence that the mix of social interaction and achievement of team adventures is a major source of enjoyment in the game. Subjects expressed a desire to improve their characters' abilities in order to contribute effectively to team adventures. Trade to mutual advantage is common. A game norm is extensive sharing of quest information among friends and through fan sites and RuneScape's main forums.

Competition among players did not emerge as a major aspect of game enjoyment; however, some player comments indicated that some forms of inter-player competition are considered a worthy use of time. It also is clear that the game designers carefully monitor the reward systems, such as skill scores, Quest Points, gold coins, and magical items to maintain a sense of competition among players. We believe there may be an element of "otherness" at work in the competition/collaboration elements because players expressed enthusiasm about activities with Friends and Clans, but made less positive comments about (less able) strangers with whom they interacted when adventuring; this difference in social ties could explain the emphasis on collaboration as the main source of enjoyment among friends, with a less openly spoken but nonetheless present competition with strangers for gold pieces, skill scores, and other tangible score-keeping scales in the vast RuneScape universe. We sense a potential analog here with pick-up basketball on open public courts, in which a team of friends' collaborative success against strangers on the hardwoods is considered more enjoyable and memorable than all-against-all competition.

A second surprise for the team was learning that the game's simple but effective four-layer Chat system allows the RuneScape world to function as a social "third place" for (primarily) young people to

hang out. This often takes place as the players background attend the Chat as they do school homework, watch TV or movies, and monitor low-attention game activities such as leveling up "mining" or "farming" skills. Players said they often discuss real-life happenings via RuneScape Chat, further supporting this finding.

A third surprise finding, which fits naturally with the collaboration finding, regards the high emphasis players put on being prepared for team adventures. They spend hours at fan sites learning about quests, dungeons, monsters, skill, and magic spells in order to employ that knowledge in team play. They also use it when questing solo, but said it is far less important to be fully prepared when alone because a player can leave a dungeon to go add skills or buy items, but can't do so without seeming unprepared to teammates on a group adventure. The norm, at least among some fans, is being prepared.

There are other elements of RuneScape that did not surprise researchers but that are considered highly important by players. The ever-updated content, including a continual stream of new items and skills, rewards RuneScape members. Also, though it features magic spells and fantasy creatures within its virtual world, the game is relentlessly internally consistent and rewards logical progressions of activities in both quests and skill development. This is evident in the importance placed on even basic skills like fishing and cooking for keeping warriors healthy and hale! We noted a strong sense of ownership by all the interview subjects, most of whom were "member" players and had been involved with RuneScape for three years or more; they expressed appreciation for Moderators' ability to keep order so rule-breakers don't get away with unearned gold or high skill levels. Rule breaking by rogue players does happen, but forum posts and our interviewees' comments indicate that many gamers dislike such behavior and believe it diminishes game enjoyment. Orderliness in a game populated by millions of players was expressed as a positive feature, and obeying administrators was viewed as necessary and not unpleasant.

To be sure, there are other elements of RuneScape that contribute to players' enjoyment. However, in these findings, we believe we have determined some key aspects that explain why RuneScape has such a devoted, large, and longtime following. These aspects provide ideas for RuneScape-inspired design ideas that could be implemented in group-project learning systems used by teams or groups in educational settings.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocols

1. Group Questions

Overview

1. Would you explain about RuneScape briefly? (character, system, game rule, activity and so on)
2. How is the community organized?
3. Would you explain about your game pattern and style or how did you plays last 10 days? can you show us the game screen and explain us?
4. What are the 3 best parts of the game? What's most fun? Why do you think so?

Collaboration

5. Is there a situation that you need to complete tasks together? Can you complete it by yourself? If yes, then why you want to complete the tasks with others? Are there any benefits for players working together? What are they?
6. How do you work with others to complete one task?
7. How to you distribute the work among teams: Who does what, when you work together, how do you decide?
8. Do you use forums, chat? How? How do you communicate?
9. Do you usually work with someone you know? Why? Have you ever worked with someone you don't know? Why? And after that, do you have the chance to work again?
10. Do you have to do group projects for work/school?
11. What is a FAIL in RuneScape?

Group activity

12. What is the Wilderness? Do you go there? Do you go with a group or alone? Is it fun? Why, why not?
13. What is dungeoneering? How does it work? What is fun about it? What is not?
14. What kinds of activities have you done that within guilds? Be specific.
15. Is there any time people are breaking the rules? [Do things they shouldn't do] Tell about it.
16. What will happen when people break the rules? Can players stop this from happening? How? Do they get punishment?

Trade

17. How do you get items Can you buy them? Exchange? Within RuneScape or outside?
18. What is the process when you need to buy things, or exchange things?
19. Is there any rules for exchange things?
20. Can you exchange stuff outside the game? Do you do that? Why?

2. Individual Questions

General/Frequency/Motivation

21. For how long have you been a player? When do you start to play this game?
22. Have you played other different/similar games before? How is this game different from other games? What arouse your interest that make you want to play this game at first?
23. What keeps you playing? What are the 3 best parts of the game?
24. How often do you play it and how long each time do you play it? When do you usually play? where?
25. What kinds of activities have you done this past month?(specifically and reviewing the game screen) Please describe how you play this game, please walk me through the process once you

open the window[your role in the game, describe what's the role's goal, and what tasks you need to accomplish]

Competition

26. Have you played RuneScape with your friends in the same areas? or have you heard that some players do that?
27. Do you prefer playing a game alone or in a team? Why?
28. How can you win others? Or how do you define you are winning [over] others?
29. Is there time you feel like you are losing? When you feel like you are losing, what would you do? Do you get upset when you lose in the game? How upset?
30. Do you feel envious when your friends are doing better than you do? Do you feel like among your friends, who is most skilled? Or who is winning others the most?
31. Are you playing with someone you know together? Or you play it by yourself?
32. [After finding out what collaborative activities they do: X, Y, Z...] What do you like about doing X, Y, Z? Which of these activities do you prefer? Why?

3. Modified Questions

General

33. How long have you been a player?
34. Why did you start playing RS?
35. Have you played other different/similar games before?
36. How is this game different from other games?
37. What keeps you playing?
38. What are the 3 best parts of the game?
39. How often do you play it?
40. How long typically is each session?
41. When do you usually play? Where?
42. Do you have a regular group of friends you play with?
43. Do you also play with strangers?

Game Specific

44. What kinds of activities have you done this past month? Please describe how you play this game, please walk me through the process once you open the window
45. What are your top favorite **skills** in RuneScape among 25 skills?
 - a. How do you train your skills?
 - b. Tell us about the most recent skill you developed... please walk us through the process of what you did.
 - c. Why this particular skill?
46. Do you do **quest**? Is it fun?
 - a. Why, why not?
 - b. Tell us about the most recent quest you tried. What was it... walk us through what you did.
47. Do you go to **The Wilderness**?
 - a. Do you go with a group or alone? Is it fun? Why, why not?
48. Do you do **dungeoneering**?
 - a. Do you go with a group or alone? Is it fun? Why, why not?
 - b. Is the activity time-sensitive? (You don't do certain things in time it affects you) Does it affect how you play this game?

Collaboration

49. Do you prefer playing a game alone or in a team? Why?

Alone

50. What activity do you do when you play by your self?

51. What you enjoy most when you play by yourself?

Team

52. In a team: are you playing with someone you know together? Or you play with someone you don't know? what activity do you do with a team?

53. Is there a situation that you need to complete tasks together? Can you complete it by yourself? If yes, then why you want to complete the tasks with others? Are there any benefits for players working together? What are they?

54. How do you work with others to complete one task?

55. How to you distribute the work among teams: Who does what, when you work together, how do you decide?

56. After complete the task, how do you guys distribute the rewards? For example, one person takes it all or equally? What if there is only one item?

Chat/Technical/Lessons

57. Do you use forums, chat? How? How do you communicate?

58. How did you learn to play the game?

59. During play, have you been faced with technical or design limitations of the game? Can you walk us through one of these instances?

60. What would non-RS players be most likely to misunderstand about RS?

61. What misconceptions might they have about it?

62. My teen-age son is playing the game ... what lessons might he be learning from it that are positive? Why those?

63. What lessons might he be learning that are negative? Why?

64. What haven't we asked you that you would like to talk about?

Appendix B: Interview Notes

Interviewee U01

Wilderness

U01 usually doesn't do anything in wilderness during school week, he usually does quests for his game level up and practicing 25 skills.

U01 In wilderness, I can attack any other players even though they are the same team. so that when we build out team, we make our team with the trusted players, usually friends in real world.

U01 there are kinds of events announced in game homepage. i usually check them and try them.

U01 the reward from skill-up or doing quests contribute to increase game-level and get a higher score of 25 skills

Mini-game

U01 there are list of mini games on the server. I can choose world and mini games there. for example, Soul war.

U01 I build up teams entering some sections which restricted to certain number.

U01 I can get information about mini games, and rules in website (http://runescape.wikia.com/wiki/Soul_wars) and read it by myself.

U01 no one doesn't explain about mini games. after building up team, we just start the game.

Dungeoneering

U01 I am doing dungeoneering during a vacation with my friends.

U01 can make your own team in the game if I don't have friends to play with,you.

U01 I can look for the game player typing F42, N42 ..meaning you are looking for game player

U01 if I try to do something in game, I need enough skill level. for example, if I want to oepn the door, I need to have more tha 95 experience in a certian skill.

U01 I practice my skills which make my level up in completing quests.

Quests

U01 it is the series of task, you can finish up one by one.

U01 said that quests contribute to level up. but depending on our current skills, some quests you can not play.

Grand Exchange

U01 visited grand exchange at least once a week to buy or exchange items.

U01 deal items with other players. and set item's price and someone can negotiate the price

Interviewee U02

Background

U02: Has been playing for about 4 years.

U02: Introduced to the game by friends.

U02: RS is the biggest game he plays, has played other games ocasionally.

U02: In previous years (less busy) was playing every day, now he plays about 2 times/week, for a total of 3-4 hours.

Why play?

U02: Things that keep him playing: interaction with friends, and storyline that keeps getting added to.
U02: The three best parts of the game are that it's customizable, that you can advance and progress, and that there always is new content for the major holidays.

Style of play

U02: Prefers to play in a team, specifically, with people he knows, because they can build on previous relationships

U02: What he likes about the dungeoneering is that you need to use your common sense and judgement.

U02: About 20% of time is spent in team activities, and the rest as an individual.

U02: He values individual play because it furthers the things you can do with the group. It gives you resources.

U02: Most of the group time is spent dungeoneering. He likes to do this with people he knows because "I feel I can trust them".

U02: "Some people don't help at all".

U02: "You do it with friends because you care about the well-being of your friends." Somebody's dying does not help others.

U02: He might play other games [other than dungeoneering] with unknown people.

U02: Has become friends on Facebook with just one other person he met in the game.

U02: "Harder to form friendships with people you meet online if you don't play everyday".

U02: He doesn't feel that competition for resources is an issue -- "you can just go somewhere else". Has only encountered harassment during hunting.

Interviewee U03

Individual

U03 - Play this game for 3 years, never play other online multi-player game

U03 - He played this game because his friend introduce this game to him so he started to play it

U03 - For him, he likes to set goals for himself to achieve, so when he plays the game, he spent a lot of time playing it. He'll play it once a day, and each time 3 to 5 hours. He plays this game on and off, sometimes for a month he doesn't play this game.

U03 - use the money in the game to buy food, weapon.

U03 - If he needs to talk to his friend, and he knows they are in the game (he has a tool bar which can tell him other people are in the game or not) if his friends are in the game, he'll log in to chat with them.

U03- He like to do quest the best, he likes to explore the storyline.

U03 - For him, quest and dongenereing are his two favorites part.

U03 - 90% play it by himself, 10% with his friends.

U03 - When playing Dongenereing, he plays with someone he knows because he knows they are reliable, they won't leave in the middle of game or do nothing in the game.

Interviewee U04

General

U04 Played 5.5 yrs (since 2006)

U04 Has played bunch of different mmorpgs but likes RS best for social connections.

Game rewards

U04 Loyalty reward. His character name is Sir G'Kows. "Sir" is only available to players who have played a certain amt of time. Must buy the title, though, using game money.

U04 His character is more focused on Combat Magic abilities. Less so for Melee & Ranged abilities.

Game play

U04 He started playing RS b/c social reasons - friends were playing it.

U04 Main reason to continue playing is social connections

U04 Also continues playing b/c RS also keeps improving graphics, content is updated regularly, keeps improving, new quest each month. Each year RS adds a new skill. New variety.

U04 plays 2-3 times/wk, about 1hr per session. Usually weekends and late evening. Often during homework. (Background attending)

Skills

U04 Sometimes some activities don't need much oversight, such as mineral gathering for the Mining skill. Can study while doing mining skill training.

U04 is training skills of Crafting and Agility to prepare for the quest "Ritual of the Mahjarrat". The quest will give him new magic spell that does a lot of damage on monsters very quickly. he also has been saving money for better magic robes that will help his abilities in dungeoneering..

U04 trains a different skill that helps him help the team fight better. "I play alone to be in a team." If the team does something, I want to do it too.

U04 Likes to train, get experience, usually about 60,000 skill pts /hr.

Inventory and bank of items

U04 has about 100 items in his bank. He says U01 and U05 have about 400. Maximum for paid players is 500. Free version only allows 78 spots.

U04 fights monsters to get "rare drops" - powerful items you can trade to others. Example: a dragon ring that lets you do more damage. U04 sells the stuff he finds. "I usually buy the stuff I want, use it, sell it to someone else when I'm done.

U04 says U05 likes to get stuff from drops and collect it. Put it in your "bank."

Trading

U04 Only can buy 100 units of weapons & armor per 4 hours in Grand Exchange..

U04 RS changed the rules a few years ago b/c huge volume sales were affecting prices (playing the market)

U04 disliked the restrictions on how much you can trade in the Grand Exchange. Here's an example of why: Crafting skill can be improved by making battle staves but need thousands of pieces of wood. But you can only buy 100 per 4 hours.

Interviewee U05

Motivation

U05 Social is main reason to play. My friend play it and I started to play it.

Game style

U05 "I'm a completionist. I try to do everything possible and don't focus on just one area."

U05 I like to achieve everything. Some people like to fight, I try to do sort of every thing in the game, that's my goal, try to achieve all things.

U05 complete freedom of an open playing field, huge amount of stuff to do, you can do whatever you want

U05 There are over 200 quests, storyline behind the quest and you can do that but you don't have to

U05 Some people train the combat, other people try to train your skills

U05 You can play with other people, you are not required to be on teams to play

Solitary play

U05 I'm mostly a solitary player, maybe 80-90% of activities are by self
U05 20% of time playing with others [fighting monsters or mini game]
U05 But when playing, chat a lot with my friends.

Skills

U05 like to develop the 25 skills to high level, up to 99. Getting to 99 level takes millions of points, lots of time and effort.

U05 fighting and stuff that's more like actual life

U05 recently did farming, pick some crops, do some more. Farming's not fun to actually do but has good rewards.

U05 How to do farming, for example: Walk to a location, click on crops to harvest for 15 minutes -- click to plant, click to water. It's U05 time-sensitive. Then go offline and it keeps growing.

U05 The reason for doing this: farming is one experience, more experience you gain, you get higher level. it also unlock the things you can do , so that you can gain experience.

U05 To do a quest, you need to have certain skills to succeed.

U05 Farming skill is solitary skill. They[other characters] can walk around with you, but it's by yourself.

U05 Cooking is another skill. It helps you heal faster if you can cook well.

U05 Some other skills are group oriented. Ex: kill the monster, you can fight in group,

Dungeoneering

U05 Not done for a while. Usually 5 people, get keys to unlock different rooms, kill the boss, finish the dungeon.

U05 Lots of chatting to coordinate dungeoneering effort

U05 People can form teams to go dungeon. One person starts a dungeon, invites others on a team. Norm is if you start a dungeon, you're the leader = you carry the gatestone. Leader is also the 'Keyer' who unlocks doors. Others then fight the monsters so leader can unlock.

U05 Some common strategies, such as using teleport. Example: explore separately, but one player go to the "Teleport Marker". Create a Gatestone and put it in a room. Teleport to the teammates individually and a group Gatestone to teleport to. One person is designated Gatestone carrier.

U05 Good teams designate a Leader to carry the gatestone. Using personal and group gatestone helps team move a lot faster in dungeon.

U05 Everybody can carry keys and gatestones, but usually one person be the leader, if they need help, call other people to help them, a lot of coordination among different players.

U05 Some players don't know what to do. When you have experienced people then you can finish the dungeon quickly.

Chat

U05 Can use Friends Chat to chat with friend whenever what world they are on

U05 Sometimes I just hang out and talk with friends, not really doing RS adventure stuff

U05 Chatting necessary to coordinate group activities

U05 Most of friends I know in real life. I knew people in real life. I know them in real life, and I know only one player and have become friends with his friends just in the game.

U05 I don't usually talk to random people.

U05 Some other people will open conversation

Language

U05 Foul language isn't allowed, but it has to be reported for someone to be stopped.

U05 Some idiots say mean stuff. it doesn't bother me if someone harasses me, I'll just ignore them. they are just 13 year old

U05 Jagex takes harrassment reports very seriously.

Wilderness

U05 I go to the Wilderness only occasionally.
U05 Only place you can attack (and kill) other players. You can take their stuff.
U05 Lots of risk and also big rewards for going to the Wilderness.
U05 I don't go there to fight other players.
U05 I go to play minigames or finding treasure and killing monsters, getting cool items
U05 Rewards = There are treasure trails = find a Clue Scroll, solve riddles to get a treasure chest. Those trails often lead you into the Wilderness.

Clans

U05 not part of a clan.
U05 A group of friends, we are going to be a team: people you know, you know their skill level.
U05 Clans are extended friend lists. You can fight together, do mini games.
U05 Clan Chat not useful rather than Friend Chat b/c your clan is just usually your friends anyway
U05 A Clan can help you form a team that isn't just random.
U05 Clans in RS are same as Guilds in WoW

How RS rules broken

U05 Biggest example: they use bots to play players to do repetitive activities to gain skill levels
U05 Other players: often to save time, create new account, use them to do Gold Farming, create a lot of gold to exchange real cash, often on the Internet (search google for Runescape Gold).
U05 Lots of people complained about the BOTS
U05 BOTS are serious problem. two weeks ago RS redid the code, break 90% of the bots.
U05 It seems to have worked! Now about half as many people log on (about 90K vs. 180K logged in before - half were BoTS)

Punishment for cheating

U05 Caught using BOTS, admins ban your character, remove your stats.
U05 Instead of deleting the account, they can just ban you for several months.
U05 Punishment for anything can be temporary ban you or mute: you won't be able to talk to other people
U05 Sometimes they "roll back" your stats to lower levels.

Authority

U05 Admins are the only ones who can administer punishment
U05 Players can only report, but they can't do anything themselves
U05 Role: Player Moderators were created who can temporarily Mute players.
U05 When PM's report cheating, it has higher priority to administrators.

Trade

U05 Can trade with other player when you're nearby.
U05 Original way of trade only from player to player. With computer players, you can't trade everything
U05 How trade helps you. Example: Get stuff from killing monsters and then selling it to other players
U05 Mine rocks => ore, chop trees => logs, can trade items like logs or ore for armor. Or just sell or buy.
U05 You can give stuff away for free, too.
U05 There are shops throughout the game. They just have limited selection, and it changes over time, so if you sell something to one shop, going back there doesn't mean it will be available.

Grand Exchange

U05 Grand exchange. main purpose is to allow all the player buying items more easily. Way faster, made game more fun.
U05 You can put in offer to buy or sell items at a specific price.

U05 On the Grand Exchange, you never pay more than offer, but you might pay less.
U05 There is a “current” price that changes daily. Bidding above market price can get you stuff fast. GE is the matchmaker between you - it just happens.
U05 likes to gather his own resources cut trees -> logs -> planks. But you can just buy stuff on GE.
U05 Some people’s RS main interest is on GE merchenting - playing the market.
U05 You don’t need to be the same place with other to trade in the game
U05 In old days you can find a really good deal but it could take a long time to find stuff you need
U05 GE was created b/c players used to create ad-hoc market worlds - chaotic places to buy/sell.

Mini games

U05 There are hundreds of mini games. There are specific monsters you fight - navigate around, try to get the reward
U05 The most recent U05 played was “The Barrows” - specific monsters have special tactics. You move in a crypt, get rewards.

Status and rewards/extrinsic rewards

U05 There is a high-scores list.
U05 It’s kind of fun to compare with your friends, higher than other or lower than others
U05 I take pride that I didn’t cheat to get my score. I earned them through time & effort.
U05 You don’t get to see everyone’s full list of scores, just the really high level scores

MMORPG in general

U05 mmorpgs let people make real-life-like decision on their own independently.
U05 Teaches links between real-life inputs and outcomes. Example is Economics: a) A new quest released needs certain skills, b) Many people train for skill, c) Items on GE to help training, d) price goes up as people buy it.
U05 But lessons in preparing and thinking about outcomes in many ways in RS
U05 Researchers at Indiana University created a sociology project mmorpg to study politics. Set up countries with different rules and watched to see where players migrated, changed behaviors.

Interviewee U06

When do you play it? Stop?

U06 - Play from 2001 when he was in middle school, play it for 2 years. Play 4-5 hours a day.
U06 - got into it because friends were playing it. My 4 or 5 close friends played it so I played. I play when the game just started.
U06 - Stop: either my friends stop playing, or the game get boring. Other game with better graphics, better play started to emerge. I move, a few of my friends moves. At that time, one point is fun, once things open up you do. But it never ends and you waste a lot of times. It had 15 skills. Skill levels were capped, but they kept raising the cap. “I can never beat the game” That’s why I stopped. I don’t play mmo anymore and usually it cost money to play good game. I stop playing when they feel repetitive.
U06 - It was a new game. I played mmo for the sake of achievement, to show off once you get certain level
U06 - Now plays first-person shooters, strategy games. Now I pick games to play based on storylines or great graphics.
U06 - Few favorite company: square enix [square software]
U06 - Likes to play solo most of time. 50% play with friends, 50% play by myself
U06 - I learnt about story from blog, magazine, and website.
U06 - In a lot of ways, RS is more like Second Life rather than a typical mmorpg. RPG as second life, you are just in a different place, there is no story
U06 - Didn’t do a lot of combat. His defense ability was pretty high because he ran away a lot.

Gaming style and pattern

U06 - Team play: you can play with unknown people. In college, it's hard to play mmorpgs b/c schedules are so varied. Other mmrpg: Arenas: You play with other people, usually with random people.

U06 - Life and death: you can't disconnect, you should continue for your team.

U06 - If I only have 15 minutes, I don't wanna play it under pressure cause I can't disconnect or leave in the middle of game.

U06 - I play with team for quest or for leveling up. Teams also good for big battles. "It's a rush to be in battles of, like, 16 people vs. 16 people."

U06 - During that time every one's schedule is set, you play for a bit with your friends since you have the same schedule. Play everyday.

Approaches

U06 - The way you approach the game, for me I am there at the every first stage. It's competitive at first, everyone is exploring the thing. Everyone is in the same situation.

Rewards/comparisons

U06 - You can't see other people's stats, but can **use screen shot of stats for bragging** rights. compare the skill with your friends, you compare with other people

U06 - You have certain skills like mining, smithing, for weapons and armor, you have to smith to gain them, after that you make a lot money, buy stuff

U06 - People pick skills based on personal interests, such as hunting or carpentry

U06 - People pick skills out of desire to make lots of money, like smithing

Skills building

U06 - Mining : Find a good mining places: dangerous place whereas many people; or buy from some one, make profit.

U06 - skill goes higher, failure percentage is smaller

U06 - perform action, you gain skill

U06 - Smithing skills - You need to mine to get ore. You smith to make the ore into weapons or armor. Smithing can earn you a lot of money.

U06 - Fishing skill and cooking skill were unique - never saw them in any other RPG. Fishing trips: Go in, go to a fishing place, catch lobsters. Cook them. Have food to restore HPs.

U06 - You can FAIL at a building a skill. You get some experience for failing, but more for succeeding.

U06 - How to make a weapon from scratch: Get ore by mining or buy it. Need to find a good mining spot. Good spots are usually pretty dangerous. If I need a lot, or need it fast, I probably buy the ore. Then ... go to a smithing location, convert ore to bars. Certain bars require certain ore, ex: Bronze ore -> Bronze bars, silver+coal-> silver bars. Take bars, use weapon-making skills to make weapon. Use or sell it.

U06 - since there are no goals there : I don't really like combat

U06 - Minigames: "Left for Dead" was a good game.

Trade

U06 - Real world economics lesson: It's cheaper to buy ingredient, and then sell things with a higher prices.

U06 - You can buy/sell/give stuff to other players you come in contact with

U06 - You just drop or pick up items.

U06 - Selling used to be all player-to-player, using chat. Now has Grand Exchange, easier.

U06 - Some people would cheat you - take your \$\$ and run away without giving the item

The Wilderness

U06 - The Wilderness This is where you can kill or be killed.. "It's the most dangerous place, but it has big rewards." Good to go there with friends, for protection.

Chat

U06 - Used to chat with typing

U06 - Unless I need something, I might talk to other people. You are selling stuff, other people will talk to you

U06 - you could not private talk to other people, they have to be in front of you.

U06 - A group chat function like clan or friend chat is really needed.

Cheat

U06 - Cheating. mine: auto click: start; cheating is limited to clicking, write a certain script to clicking. "It was kind of a free-for-all."

Like the game cause...

U06 - No rules, regulations, you just start to explore. It had lots of freedom. There were friends and competition.

U06 - You could attack people. There were weapons.

U06 - There was not a particular story that you had to be a part of to be "playing"

U06 - Finding out all the rules from watching people, being attacked by others, and by clicking.

U06 - The interface is really simple: two bars+ three boxes with conversation window

U06 - logic from real life. simple: fish, cook

U06 - save it when you log out, other mmo do

U06 - it's really fast, load super fast in those days

U06 - You can play for just a few minutes ... easy to get into and out of fast

Interviewee U07

General

20 years old, major in engineering, Jacob, 20, indiana tech univ, working

Runescape

U07 I have played Runescape for several years, 4 or 5 years.

U07 I play Runescape once a week, for a 4-hour per each session

U07 I started to play because I am interested in playing online multi-player game

U07 I want more social interaction, but like computer game at the same time.

U07 Runescape is really cool. It's the matters of skills. There are different skills I can gain, quest I can solve, free chat where I can say anything I want (some other games I can only say limited words)

U07 Terraworld is similar to Runescape, but it isn't that developed, the graphic is 2-dimensional, and use keyboard mainly. Runescape I mainly use the mouse which I prefer.

What did I think is cool about it?

U07 There are several positive lessons to learn - to be helpful. quests are based on helping others.

Perseverance.

U07 negative aspect of gema is lots of alcohol-related messages. Also demonic influences are there; in game, not all demons are bad, and I can end up summoning a demon for my purposes.

Best 3 things about it

U07 Mini game---> Barbarian Assault, it's fun, don't do it all the time. Other minigames are Pest Control.

U07 Most minigames are multiplayer.

Game style

U07 I play it once a week, one session for 4 hour.

U07 Usually it's the only thing I am doing, sometimes I watch movie. Depends on what action I am doing. I have two monitor, watch movie, 30 seconds glanced the monitor to do action.

U07 I'll tell my character to do fishing, click on it each 30 seconds.

U07 Stranger: play with stranger on a team

U07 the Tipit(it's an RS-related website, tip.it), they sometimes schedule fight and gather together using Tipit as a common announcement.

U07 most mini games, I don't go with my friends, I go with strangers.

U07 I have certain group of friends I talked to, but not certainly do things with them.

U07 I usually play with strangers who also want to play when I have time and desire to play this.

Chat

U07 Free chat is also cool. Some games are allowed to send only pre-scripted msg.

U07 I, through friend Chat, easily talk to my friends (talk to other people about game or just things go on in our life)

U07 I like friends chat while on RS but usually don't do things with group.

U07 I usually chat about my lives and what we are playing with friends

Skills

U07 I think that it is cool there are many skills to train and practice.

U07 Skills take a long time to train, and can be boring. I really earn them.

1. slayer:

U07 It works that talk to slayer master, he gives me assignment, a number and a type of monster, such as kill 100 demons.

U07 Always NPCs. As I kill, it gives me slayer experience. All level goes from 1 to 99. Slayer gives me guidance in combat.

Woodcutting

U07 I prefer to train Woodcutting over fishing which is kind of similar, it is a easy skill to train. I also like the noises of it more than fishing.

U07 I get woodcutting hatchet, go chopping down tree, get a log in my inventory, the higher level of tree logging, the higher level I have. Find a tree and chop it. There is no risk in this skill.

U07 I like to make cool things for my house. that is the reason why I train construction

U07 Once I have woodcutting, I can construct them into things, build furniture, chair. I can only have so much of each kind of furnishing in my home. If I want to gain experience, I have to get rid of an older chair and build of a new one.

U07 If I have a workshop, I can store item in my house.

U07 When I go to build something, I can see image of chair, and click on it, and choose what type of chair I want. [the game indicates visually what options I have for construction].

U07 I can also construct out of clay & limestone bricks.

U07 Here's how woodcutting and construction work together for building stuff for his home. I cut logs, take to sawmill, get plans & nails. Build benches, beds, chair, furniture for house. If I have a workbench in the home, I can build as much furniture as I want and the good part is I can store them as "Inventory" items.

Fishing

U07 Fishing, because I got "aura" for fishing, which help me fish better.

U07 Recently membership loyalty program, give loyalty points, so as a paying member, I can buy something. then I buy it.

U07 Why: I don't really like fishing, if this object can help me train fishing faster, I felt I am strong in combat already.

U07 Fishing I find it boring, dip net repeatedly in the water, the sound doesn't appeal to me.

U07 I can just give instructions ever 30 seconds while I do something else, like homework.

Scoreboard

U07 There are scoreboards of top skills where players can show off high skill and experience levels.

U07 I didn't look at them.

Combat

U07 Unlike some games, my combat level: it isn't a skill from my skills. RS calculates it from my HP, my attack abilities, defense abilities and other skills.

House

U07 Each player has their own house, when I start, I don't have a house, but it's easy to get my house.

U07 In my house, it starts empty, I build (bedroom, kitchen, workshop, dungeon, different part of my house)

U07 Portal room lets I teleport to 3 diff places in Runescape.

U07 I have my porto room send me to two big cities and the land of Moritania.

U07 I can train skills @ house, also can store my stuff.

U07 The house is in a different realm, so I get to it through a teleport portal.

City

U07 Each city in Runecape has reason to go there.

U07 Salador is good for mining. Ardon is good market, stalls for thieving; is far away so teleport to it.

U07 Every city has at least one bank, where I store my inventory.

U07 Each also has a general store where the computer buys and sells items that are just at that store (not part of the GE).

Grand Exchange

U07 Where I buy and sell with other players; computer is intermediary.

U07 If nobody I want to buy at my price, I can't sell it.

U07 Transactions can happen even while I're offline.

Quest

U07 Quest: I can go through the storyline, quest are cool things to do and fun

U07 I love quests, storylines. Sometimes there is a story of multiple quests.

U07 Quests usually go like this: Find an NPC, talk to them to find out what they need; they'll tell I what they need, I lost my cat or need to fight a demon or something, it usually starts it up small, then bring I in the storyline why I need to do this quest to help them.

U07 I might need to travel far around RS, solve puzzles, slay monsters ... developing the storyline, some quests are isolated events, once I done I get experience and some money.

U07 But some quests are game-altering: they give I access to areas in the game, and even change who I might talk with during the game. Example: Montania is only avaiable afte rI complete the Priests in Peril quest.

U07 I am currently work on a quest called Regicide.

U07 The story background of Regicide is that the country of Ardonne split into East Ardonne and West Ardonne (sp?). Each has a king. Quest is to kill the king of West. Need to travel to the elven lands, meet elves, talk with NPCs to get advice about doing this. It's not even clear whether I SHOULD kill the king. Need to find him, talk with NPCs, get verbal clues.

U07 In quests, the story is the same, the puzzles are randomized.

U07 Actions can change some endings.

U07 Quest puzzles can be things like a puzzle box that I move panels to form pictures. Or message puzzles that are cryptic and I have to guess the answer to the riddle.

Help

U07 Help site in tipit and workthrough. RS has it's own help page: RS really want I to figure out.

U07 Up to the player preference. I prefer figure it out by myself.

U07 Using help sites isn't considered cheating, but is a respectable way of playing the game.

Wilderness

U07 Occasionally go there to train agility, but I don't carry much stuff in there b/c don't want to lose it.

U07 Place changes over the year.

U07 It's a really dangerous place.

U07 How good it is balances it with how dangerous it is.

U07 Dangerous but rewards are high.

U07 PVP combat is allowed, only place in game.

U07 If I kill a player, I got all the thing the players drop. "I never go PVP. Other people can kill me but they get almost nothing."

U07 if I die in combat after being attacked, I lose all my items I have on I and then I "Respawn" at my "respawn point." I get full health but lost the items I were carrying except for three I choose to keep.

U07 If I attack PVP, a skill appears over I -- "I're 'skulled' " and if I die I lose all I are carrying: weapons, armor, and my Inventory.

U07 The Inventory is everything I carry, which can be LOTS of stuff.

U07 Different strategies. One is to only bring one cheap weapon into the wilderness so I don't lose much.

U07 "I don't want to attack real people. I don't like causing other real players pain. ... Those are real players, real pain when they lose their items."

Technical Issue

U07 Sometimes I get disconnected, if we have thunderstorm. I need to log back to log in screen. Apart from that I don't really experience with technical difficulties.

U07 Standing in one spot, or killing a monster go back continue killing the monster, when I go back I'll probably just standing.

U07 All the aspects in multi-players and things depend on what I are doing.

Collaboration and competition

U07 Depending on what I think before I come here. I find a fun place to work with player: I met with other players and work with them with same goal, but some people might come here to beat other people, they might underscore other people's effort.

U07 I used to pay little attention, I care about how I am doing.

U07 I look at my skills, but doesn't really care other people. more to train myself.

U07 Another reasons: RS has a really good free version. but it's still pretty good.

U07 By comparison, World of Warcraft gives only a 7 day trial, bad.

U07 The main reason for me to become a member it's because the quest. I become the members, a lot more skills, a lot more quest, bigger world.

Interviewee U08

Background

U08: 28, currenty lives in Illinois; works at the education center at Norrthern Illinois University field center

Occupation: assistant coordinator, organizes school field trips

Game Play

U08: Has been playing since since 2005.

U08: Does not play so much any more, a couple of times a week nowadays, probably a couple of hour each session.

U08: Not really playing with other people right now.

Why did you start to play

U08: I heard about it from my brother. And since I moved away from home, I really like the idea of playing with my brother, chatting.

U08: I play few other online games. Some are strategies games or small games.

U08: RS: massive rpg game, it's nothing like other games.

Why do you like it

U08: there is so much to do, so many different ways to play, there is no place where I can say I've done everything because there are always new things to do.

U08: It's an immense world, new content gets added weekly or by-weekly. You can't beat the game unless you play 24/7.

3 best parts of the game?

U08: First best part of the game. Variety: some people like this they do this, some people that that, they do that, there are all of these different niches for whatever your game style is.

U08: Second best part of the game. The game is are always changing, it is not static. The company works at improving the game.

U08: Third best part of the game. His favourite skill is Slayer, likes that it has built in variety. You continually get new bosses and targets to kill. Slayer monsters also have great drops. Some monsters are more fun to kill than others; for some monsters "you just sit there, click and hack at them with a weapon". For others you need strategy, skill.

U08: "I like fighting. Killing monsters. I train everything. Most combat skills maxed out. Most other skills are at medium."

U08: "Most of my higher skills are combat skills, I really like fighting the monster. I don't have really really slow skills, I like variety so I train everything. While doing quest, you need different skills."

U08: Fourth best part of the game. He likes the quests that RS has: it's more storytelling, lore. At one point had completed all the quests, but since then the company has added more storytelling to the game.

U08: [Favorite quest: I have quite a few: ? wild gothix sleeps ? while guthix sleeps? RS's first grandmaster quest, it had the highest level requirements, longest quest to complete, required completion of other quests. "Really amazing quest, really well-done."

U08: Most recent activity: solo, finished a slayer task, then did a Halloween event quest, got a holiday reward item, mostly cosmetic.

Play with whom

U08: Doesn't usually have a regular group of friends he plays with.

U08: He plays with his two brothers, occasionally with his sister. "Most of the time I play by myself, other than my family and Joel, Joel's cousin."

U08: Group stuff favourite: boss hunt. Get a group, fight a boss with a team. It's usually a fansite-organized event or he can gather people he knows. If there are specific bosses you want to kill, you can go to forum to find it

U08: He met a couple of people on RS, through activities in the game, such as dungeoneering, got together and then added each other to the friend's list.

U08: People also meet each other as part of fansite activities.

Forums

U08: I go to tip.it at least once or twice a week, check the stuff they have on new content, appears one or two days later after it has been introduced in the game.

U08: RS forum: "I do use it. The grand exchange information. I suppose the information is really good."

U08: Also on RS official site, the Knowledge Base: has been historically inaccurate, their own people get it wrong. Fansite information is more reliable, because you get info from people who are actually playing the game

U08: Posts on tip.it are moderated. Any user can enter information, but it will be verified.

U08: Tip.it has quest guides, bestiary of the monsters and the things they drop, calculators and planners that give skill training details, maps, items database, guides to monster hunting, boss killing, minigames. All free.

Team coordination for boss killing

U08: A lot of bosses attack one player. How the team works together depends on the monster you go after. You need different skills. You have one person take care of inventory, the other gets the attraction from boss, some people focus on damaging the boss. Roles depend on who has the most health points, best inventory, sometimes you need specific combat skills mix.

U08: Ideally we decide on strategy ahead of time, depends on how you got the group together, it might be figuring things out throughout the game, on the fly. It depends on the team members. If you are equally strong, it doesn't matter so much.

Other points on boss killing

U08: I go to runescape forum for boss-hunting...specific name of boss.: godwords king..four different boss.

U08: Other boss: you can do a lot of damage to it, early on. (?) percentage of the game, less attractive

U08: For most part, before I go to fight that, I check out the Tip.it guide or watch a YouTube video, to know what I need to do, and how I'll need to set up the inventory or what item I need to bring

U08: Items you have and skills really determine what you can skillfully kill. I spend some time training, I will avoid a boss I am not ready for. For example, Nex takes out maxed out skills, best armor and weapons in game to try to defeat.

Dungeoneering

U08: Personally, I've done most of my DG solo, it's not the optimal way to train a skill.

U08: Why? I don't have a team, and sometimes I went to one of the DG worlds where there's a bunch of other teams. It's hit and miss, sometimes people know what they are doing and they're nice, sometimes you meet people who have no idea what they are doing and they are complete idiots. Sometimes people can get mad at one another and quit halfway.

U08: "It's very frustrating if you don't have a team".

U08: When you go in the dungeon there's a level you can change. you can choose a small number of people to go with small dungeon.

U08: The size of the group will affect how many things you can do in the dungeon but at the same time you get less reward in the end. So most of the time people will do DG with the highest complexity.

Chat

U08: There is general world chat, you can talk to anyone. Friend chat specifically made for a group of people: people not in the group can't chat. Friend chat: basically each person has a chat channel, all of you. You have to join specific chat channel. Clan chat... I am not in clan..anyone can chat in clan.

U08: I am not in a clan, not sure which one I'd join. I found it difficult to find out what sort of players are in different clans. RS has recently made improvements. I'd like to find a good clan and join it, but none of my friends are in a clan... so nobody is urging me to.

U08: I did not really experience rude chat. Some chat is rude, but you can ignore them. They can't private message you, so you can just ignore that player. You can add a person to your ignore list. The friends list and ignore list have a limit of 200.

Competition

U08: I used to pay attention to the list of top scores, keep up with who's the highest. I don't really pay attention anymore, mostly now I compare my skills with my friends.

U08: There's a compare feature, you can compare with your friend's skills or with others in the game. But, you can only see the rank skills.

U08: You have to be within the top 1 million. If you have really low skills, you won't see it.

Mini games

U08: Most of the mini-game I am not a big fan of, I play occasionally, I play for fun.

U08: I like the "pest control" minigame, You and team protect a knight from monsters for a certain amount of time. It's fun, it's a lot of variety, you can train your combat skill. Mostly try out new items and new equipment, to see how it works. It's safe, if you die you don't lose any items.

Social aspect of the game

U08: You can play anywhere in the world, connect with your friends in the game, no spatial limitations.

U08: You can connect with them, and do activities in the game

?why runescape rather than facebook?

U08: "I've never played games in facebook, that's rather stupid, that's not what facebook is for!"

U08: I lived in 8 states since 2005. I can catch up with my brothers while they're playing the game.

U08: We'll talk about stuff in the game, catch up about what's new in our lives.

U08: The majority of chat is not game related, but it varies from time to time, if a new update just came out we'll spend time talking about it. But most of the time we talk about what happens in our life.