Cyber-Synchronicity: The Concurrence of the Virtual
and the Material via Text-Based Virtual Reality

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This dissertation titled
Cyber-Synchronicity: The Concurrence of the Virtual
and the Material Via Text-Based Virtual Reality

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This dissertation investigates the experiences of participants in a text-based virtual reality known as a Multi-User Domain, or MUD. Through in-depth electronic interviews, staff members and players of Aurealan Realms MUD were queried regarding the impact of their participation in the MUD on their perceived sense of self, community, and culture.

Second, the interviews were subjected to a qualitative thematic analysis through which the nature of the participant’s phenomenological lived experience is explored with a specific eye toward any significant over or interconnection between each participant’s virtual and material experiences.

An extended analysis of the experiences of respondents, combined with supporting material from other academic investigators, provides a map with which to chart the synchronous and synonymous relationship between a participant’s perceived sense of material identity, community, and culture, and her perceived sense of virtual identity, community, and culture. An original theoretical instrument, the Cyber-Synchronicity model, is used to further explicate the interconnectedness of participant’s overall lived experience while engaged in play on Aurealan Realms.
In sum, the research and analysis of respondent interviews demonstrates that there is significant synchronous and synonymous interconnection between a MUD participant’s material and virtual lived experience. Further, the Cyber-Synchronicity model is demonstrated as appropriate to graphically represent the nature of the material-virtual interconnection, as well as providing labels for the different aspects of the overall experience, represented as disparate yet connected and interrelated categories.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, there was an incident in cyberspace that brought into question the notion of a separation between the virtual and material worlds. In his article, *A Rape In Cyberspace*, Julian Dibble (1998) wrote about the incident, which occurred in a text-based virtual reality known as LambdaMOO, and detailed how a participant in that virtual community, named Mr. Bungle, was able to force other participants to engage in behavior that they neither instigated nor consented to. This incident occurred in front of other participants who were occupying the same virtual space within LambdaMOO at that time. These actions were violent and sexual, and were immediately seen by the participants and the observers as having been forced upon the individuals who Mr. Bungle made perform the violent and sexual acts. The reaction of the victims to these forced actions indicated their sense of shock at having control over their virtual identities taken from them, control they felt entitled to maintain.

LambdaMOO represents one type of Multi-User Domain (MUD). According to the MudConnector, the top-ranked MUD networking site, a MUD is defined as:

[A] a computer program which users can log into and explore. Each user takes control of a computerized persona/avatar/incarnation/character. You can walk around, chat with other characters, explore dangerous monster-infested areas, solve puzzles, and even create your very own rooms, descriptions and items. (¶1, 2008)

On LambdaMOO, which stands for “MUD, Object-Oriented,” the virtual world exists in a giant database, and everything in it, be they living participants, computer-controlled
non-player characters, objects, or locations. LambdaMOO is currently open to the public, and participants are able to connect to the LambdaMOO database through the Internet, from anywhere in the world they have online access. Players are able to choose any name not already in use by another participant, make themselves appear any way they choose, create their own virtual spaces and objects, and interact with others. (Dibble, 1998)

Dibble’s examination of the incident brought to light the emotional impact such extreme behavior could have upon participants in a text-based virtual environment. He was also quick to point out, however, that there were other occasions when a similar result could occur. As an example, Dibble explained that consensual online sexual relations could also provoke strong feelings, and physical responses, in participants:

Netsex, tinysex, virtual sex -- however you name it, in real-life reality it's nothing more than a 900-line encounter stripped of even the vestigial physicality of the voice. And yet, as many a wide-eyed newbie can tell you, it's possibly the headiest experience the very heady world of MUDs has to offer. Amid flurries of even the most cursorily described caresses, sighs, or penetrations, the glands do engage, and often as throbblingly [sic] as they would in a real-life assignation – sometimes even more so, given the combined power of anonymity and textual suggestiveness to unshackle deep-seated fantasies. And if the virtual setting and the interplayer [sic] vibe are right, who knows? The heart may engage as well, stirring up passions as strong as many that bind lovers who observe the formality of trysting in the flesh. (¶15, 2008)

Based on Dibble’s examination of the rape in cyberspace, the suggestion that virtual interactions that have physical and emotional elements can have an observable effect
upon the material participant as well as the virtual participant seems reasonable. Consequently, the reaction of the participants of LambdaMOO in calling for some severe form of punishment to be enacted upon Mr. Bungle for his actions, and for that punishment to take place within the virtual community his crime had occurred in, was also significant and not wholly unexpected.

On LambdaMOO, an extreme situation caused the lines between the virtual and material to become blurred, and resulted in what Dibble described as a group of virtually-interacting people, all drawn together by one heinous act, becoming “the community so many of them already believed they were.” (ibid.) He notes that participants in a text-based virtual reality recognize “in a full-bodied way that what happens inside a MUD-made world is neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but nonetheless profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally true.” (ibid.) The LambdaMOO community banded together to seek an appropriate response to the incident and their discussions, while not ultimately resulting in a decision, did nevertheless influence the community and culture of LambdaMOO by resulting in the banishing of Mr. Bungle and the creation of a democratic system of conflict resolution that allowed the community to self-police itself from that point on, and define itself in its own terms. (ibid.) The public rape of two virtual entities by a third virtual entity, within a virtual environment, created a real and lasting effect on the LambdaMOO community and culture, both virtually and materially.

Danilo Yanich (2004), in his article Crime Creep: Urban and Suburban Crime on Local TV News, described the phenomenon wherein local television viewers are, by the nature of the stories the newscasters choose to run, given a skewed perspective on crime and safety in their local areas. Yanich observed, “The findings indicated that crime was
the major public issue that occupied the newscasts, more than all other public issues combined. In fact, the presentation of crime was wildly unrelated to its actual occurrence in the cities and suburbs in the television markets.” (p. 3)

The crystallization of the LambdaMOO community, and the formation of a unique culture made up of both virtual and material elements, resulted from extreme behavior on the part of a participant. Many examinations of virtual identity, community, and culture hinge on similar incidents. Like the phenomenon cited in Yanich’s article, much of the literature on virtual realities tends to focus on extreme cases and examples, presenting to the non-participant observer an equally skewed perception of virtual individuals, communities, and cultures that is not representative of the phenomenon as a whole.

To provide a suitably representative view of participation in a text-based virtual reality like a MUD, the day-to-day crossover between the material and the virtual must be examined, with specific attention focused on the three general issues found in Dibble’s account of the incident on LambdaMOO: Identity, community, and culture. To focus solely on the occasional or the sensational would provide an incomplete perspective of the phenomenon, as would focusing only on the virtual and excluding the material, or vice-versa.

Multi-User Domains (MUDs) have offered a text-based virtual reality experience to the Internet-using public for 30 years. The first MUD went online at Essex University in Essex, in the United Kingdom, in 1978. Written by then-students Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw, MUD1 allowed computer users anywhere in the world, provided they were at an institution that was connected to the Internet, to collaborate and participate in a
game simultaneously. (Bartle, 1990) Prior to the creation of MUDs, there were no
computer games that allowed participants to play cooperatively and simultaneously
without being physically in the same geographic location.

Bartle and Trubshaw cited both the single-player computer games “Adventure”
and “Zork” as inspiration for their creation. (ibid.) These games were a sort of interactive
computerized fantasy books, allowing the players some limited choice with regard to the
path their characters in the game followed through the game’s story, and also allowed
them limited interaction with the game environment: Players could manipulate
computerized objects, examine computer-controlled personalities and monsters, and
interact with the game world to open doors, set off triggers that caused changes in the
game world, and even bring their game personas, or avatars, into conflict with computer-
controlled opponents.

MUD1 sought to make those same in-game elements more sophisticated and
usable by any number of players who could participate and navigate the game world,
separately or in self-selected groups, simultaneously. Their primary limitation, which
modern MUDs also share, was that their virtual world was presented using only the keys
on the computer keyboard, and the symbols, letters and numbers that could be created on
the screen. A MUD, therefore, is a virtual world presented to participants in words and
symbols. There are limited images, but they are presented using only the characters on a
keyboard rather than as the type of images users of the World-Wide Web are familiar
with.

Aurealan Realms MUD, which served as the virtual location for this study, began
similarly to MUD1. James Rhone was a freshman at the State University of New York
Institute of Technology in Utica, New York, pursuing a degree in Computer Science. In early February of 1995, Rhone and friend Steven Nevid took an existing MUD program, called CircleMUD v2.2, and began attempting to improve it, adding new features to what it could already do. Their version of the CircleMUD code, called “Realms of Aurealis” (RoA), was placed online and opened to the public on March 23rd, 1995. Rhone and Nevid were the administrators of the MUD, with Rhone serving as head programmer as well. (J. Rhone, personal communication, July 10, 2008)

RoA provided a virtual setting, utilizing traditional fantasy elements, for its participants to explore and interact with. The MUD itself, to borrow movie industry terminology, provided pre-generated sets, props, and computer-controlled extras. The players were the lead actors and actresses, and could experience a number of pre-written storylines. The player were not restricted to those storylines, however; they could create their own storylines as well, using the MUD world as a stage for improvisational interactive storytelling. This could be done individually, interacting only with the MUD construct, or collectively and including other players.

Over the next several years, RoA grew and attracted a diverse population of players, authors, and administrators. The population of the MUD was young, predominantly high school and college students, and while the population was largely from the United States, players from Canada, England, Russia, China, Japan, Australia, and several other countries around the world also participated in the game on a regular basis.

Rhone continued to alter the core program, eventually changing so much of the program that he was able to release his own version to the general public for others to
run, calling it RoAMUD v1.0. Rhone also began learning Windows programming, and created a client program, the RoAClient, that people could use to connect to RoA. Using this client allowed participants to experience special features such as a windows editing box for text input, sounds, and a world-mapping feature. The population continued to grow, and as some players moved on, others arrived to join the game.

In October of 1999, Rhone announced his intention to discontinue operating RoA. He had graduated from college with his Bachelor’s Degree in Computer Science, and had taken a position with Lockheed-Martin as a programmer. He no longer had the time, or the free resources of the University, to operate RoA. This author, who was RoA’s second-in-command at the time, persuaded Rhone to transfer ownership of the MUD and allow it to continue operation. The MUD was renamed “Aurealan Realms” (AR) and was placed on a private server owned by this author, who assumed the duties of primary programmer and administrative head of operations.

At its peak, Aurealan Realms had hundreds of active players, and thousands of characters that could appear in the game world at any time. Interested players of AR met at a series of yearly face-to-face summer gatherings starting with a single day at Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio in 1998, and expanding to a weekend festival, then a four-day weekend camping event. Over the course of the MUD’s existence, nine “RoA Fests/AR Fests” were held, from 1998 to 2006.

Aurealan Realms continued to function as a successful online game for several years after the transfer of ownership, but slowly became less and less populated as the core playerbase grew up, graduated, and moved on to other hobbies. MUDs in general were in decline, new players did not join AR to replace those who left, and the MUD
population gradually dwindled. During this same period, the computer gaming industry was becoming more accomplished, and saw both the rise of gaming platforms like the X-Box, the Playstation, and the Nintendo 64, and the creation of the computer game Everquest, the first Massively Multi-Player Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG). Everquest, and the other MMORPGs that followed, were games similar to MUDs, but utilized full graphics rather than relying solely on text and text-based images. The population of the MUD continued to decline, until it lapsed into disuse in 2007. Aurealan Realms currently remains accessible online, but is not regularly played. It exists mainly as a historical artifact, visited from time-to-time by former players.

During their tenure on AR, players were bound by three different levels of rules when participating on the MUD: The rules imposed by using a computer to connect to the game, the rules imposed by the limits of the game itself, and the rules created by the MUD administrator to govern conduct within the game world. The first set of rules is largely immutable, given that the Telnet program that is used to connect to MUDs of all kinds has not changed significantly since its inception in the 1970s (Edmondson-Yurkanan, 2002). The second set of rules was dependent on the skill of those responsible for writing the computer program of the game itself, and laid out the limits of the game world: The places that could be explored, the types and abilities of objects and creatures that could be encountered and interacted with, and the types of beings that could be chosen as avatars, as well as their representations. The third set of rules was based solely on the desires of the administration charged with overseeing the operation of the game. In the case of AR, it was a series of policy statements dealing with issues not covered by the
programmed limitation of the game, such as player-to-player behavior, cheating, reporting errors in the MUD program, and so on.

One unique element of any MUD is the required assumption of an alternate persona. When players logged onto AR, they were instructed to choose an online representation within the traditional fantasy theme established for the MUD. Participants could choose to be a human being, but were also given over a dozen other choices of species, and then told to choose a fantasy profession as well. Because the AR game world was placed in a medieval fantasy setting, there was no opportunity for someone to choose an avatar that accurately represented their offline self. In essence, they were instructed by the second and third levels of rules to adopt a virtual mask of sorts, and to interact with the game world, and the other participants, while wearing that mask. Thus all online interpersonal communication with other players or staff was done, at least initially, while masked.

MUDs, like chat rooms, utilize synchronous communication to allow participants to interact, i.e. messages from the MUD to participants, from participants to the MUD, and from participant to participant, are delivered in real time as they are sent. This is different from a ListServ, E-Mail, or a World-Wide Web bulletin board forum, which utilizes asynchronous communication, where information is sent by a participant, and is received whenever the recipient chooses to view the appropriate Internet location or operate the appropriate program, such as an E-Mail client like Microsoft Outlook.

Unlike chat rooms, a MUD can be utilized for more than just communication between two or more participants. MUDs allow players the opportunity for shared activity, challenge, and reward through game play within the game world. Because of the
game nature of a MUD, however, each player must decide whether the communication, for whatever purpose, is delivered as coming from their constructed avatar or from the person at the keyboard, the person behind the online persona. Each player has a choice to remain behind the mask they have created or to step out from behind that mask and communicate as their offline self via the online medium.

As suggested in Dibble’s examination of the LambdaMOO community, there are more options than are readily obvious in the choice of masking behavior, and the decision-making process that participants go through when deciding whether or not to unmask. These choices can have a significant impact on interpersonal reactions to, as well as their intrapersonal perceptions of, their quotidian material and virtual identities. Masking-related choices can also affect their interactions with the other players and administrators who make up the game community, as well as that community’s interactions with them.

As the administrator of *Aurealan Realms*, this author possessed an unparalleled opportunity to witness, on an anecdotal level, a very wide variety of personalities, behaviors, interactions, and community activities. Only after initial attempts at research regarding online multi-user text-based role-playing games did the behaviors observed and personally experienced on *Aurealan Realms* seem at odds with the available academic literature.

Based on casual conversation and the author’s own lived experience of the MUD community and culture, there seemed an unexplained disparity between the stories told and the events experienced, and the academic view of similar phenomena. Through the personal and professional connections forged while acting as MUD administrator, this
author was able to reconnect with past members of *Aurealan Realms* MUD who were willing to recount their experiences interacting with the MUD, its other players, and its online community as a whole. These connections proved invaluable, as the resulting interviews yielded the data necessary for this study.

As a result, the purpose of this study is to examine *Aurealan Realms* MUD as a historical artifact, and by interviewing former players and administrators of this text-based virtual reality, to examine the process players engaged in when creating their virtual representations, and to examine the choices involved in choosing the role of masking in their interactions with other players and administrators. This study will also examine the emergence of a perceived virtual community amongst players and administrators of AR, and the indications of a shared culture resulting from their combined efforts.

Finally, this study seeks to provide a new working theoretical model that allows for a more representative understanding and explication of the elements of identity, community, and culture, as existing synchronously and synonymously with the material lives of the participants. This instrument will serve as a lens through which any behavior in a virtual environment, be it day-to-day or occasional and sensational, can be viewed and understood both in a virtual and a material sense.

The following research questions, therefore, are an attempt to uncover evidence to support the hypothesis that the virtual and the material are not entirely separate elements in the lives of MUD participants, and that participation in such virtual communities, and activities within said communities, occur synchronously and synonymously with their material lives. The research questions this study will seek to answer are:
RQ1: “How is identity created in a virtual community when enforced assumption of an alternate identity is required and what, if any, relation does that assumed identity have to the participant’s sense of their material identity?”

RQ2: “How is community created where enforced assumption of an alternate identity is the norm for participants in a virtual world and does participation in that virtual community have an observable effect on the material life of the participant?”

RQ3: “Does the creation of, and engagement with, a virtual culture have an effect on a participant’s understanding and acceptance of their virtual identity and their chosen virtual community, and does the created virtual culture have an observable impact upon the material life of the participant?”

RQ4: “Do the answers to the first three research questions, and the subsequent research, support the theory that the virtual and material experiences of participants are observably interconnected and, as such, cannot be studied accurately without the inclusion of information from both experiential arenas?”
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of text-based virtual realities is a relatively young field of research. Analyses to date have examined many facets of virtual life, and while such prior research does, in some cases, address the general issues examined herein, thus far no single study, nor any combination of prior studies, fully answers the aforementioned research questions. While noted scholars like Turkle, Rheingold, and Dibble, among others, uncovered individual elements that were useful in such an examination, none has asked this particular combination of questions. The vast majority of previous research has studied virtual realities solely in their own terms, without delving into the material world factors that could influence virtual behavior and expression. In order to appropriately examine a more complete view of how virtual reality affects the individuals who participate in it, this study will attempt to create a rubric by which the full spectrum of the interconnection between the virtual and material worlds, and the connection to one-another, can be understood. To begin, existing work on virtual worlds, virtual identity, virtual community, and virtual culture will be examined to establish a grounding from which this study can extend.

2.1 – Virtual Environments: A Definition

The acronyms MUD, MUSH, MUX, and MUCK, among others, are used fairly interchangeably to describe a type of text-based virtual reality. Such online games are utilized primarily for entertainment and socialization by participants from all over the world, via the Internet. The acronyms noted above refer to types of environments differentiated by both programming and participatory experience, but they all share two common words: The “MU” stands for “Multi-User,” indicating that they are set up to be
played synchronously and simultaneously by any number of individuals, who each may play by themselves or with others as they choose.

*The MudConnector* is the Internet’s top-ranked repository and index of MUD listings, reviews, discussions, and advertisements. It also provides an introduction to MUDding for those new to MUDs, and explains the elements involved. As noted previously, the MudConnector (1999) defines a MUD as “a computer program which users can log into and explore. Each user takes control of a computerized persona/avatar/incarnation/character. You can walk around, chat with other characters, explore dangerous monster-infested areas, solve puzzles, and even create your very own rooms, descriptions and items.” (¶ 1) This definition well describes a MUD, but does so in terms that might not be easily understood by those truly new to such concepts.

While not an empirical research resource, the online user-edited encyclopedia Wikipedia provides what this author feels is a more understandable definition of what a MUD is and what participation in a MUD entails, and so is included in the hopes of assisting the reader in achieving a better understanding of what a MUD is:

[A] multi-player computer game that combines elements of role-playing games, hack and slash style computer games, and social instant messaging chat rooms. Typically running on a bulletin board system or Internet server, the game is usually text driven, where players read descriptions of rooms, objects, events, other characters, and computer-controlled creatures or non-player characters (NPCs) in a virtual world. They may interact with each other and the surroundings by typing commands that resemble a natural language, usually English. (¶ 1)
Thus, a MUD is a virtual world rendered in text. The locations, objects, creatures and individuals are all described with words, as opposed to graphic representations, and all interaction on the MUD is done through typing. Players perceive each other as textual representations and, as such, are able to fully manipulate how they “appear” to one another, given the ability to write themselves however they want to “be.” Most MUDs are created around a genre-based theme, sometimes tied specifically to the works of an author or film series. Such MUDs usually inform those who would play them of the expectation that participants will create online personas that fit into their particular world. The only exceptions to this rule are what are called Social MUDs, where the MUD program is utilized solely to facilitate chatting, similar to Internet-Relay Chat (IRC). The difference between a traditional MUD and a Social MUD can be likened to the difference between a conversation that takes place on a large stage filled with sets, props, and costumed extras versus a conversation that takes place in an empty room with a table and two chairs, respectively.

Except for the Social MUDs, which represent only a small percentage of MUDs, when players join a typical MUD, they are expected to assume an identity consistent with the theme, genre, or published history of the virtual world in question. Thus, they are instructed to conceal themselves behind the mask of an alternate persona, and to create their “self” within that world’s rules and structure. This masking behavior, and its effect on issues of identity, community, and culture, is an important element of this study.

As of December, 2009, there were 1,201 active MUDs listed on The MudConnector, while MMORPG.com, the portal site for Massively Multi-Player Online Role-Playing Games, listed only 397 MMOs, some of which are not yet open to the
playing public. Even with the explosion of such heavily graphics-dependent games, MUDding as an online social phenomenon continues to be sought out by a wide variety of players. And, while the number of active MUDs has diminished in previous decade, just as novels and other written literature survived the subsequent invention of film, radio, and television, MUDs are surviving the inception of MMORPGs. MUDs are still being actively created, maintained, and played worldwide.

Given MUDding’s place in history as the birthplace of multi-user online game culture, any study of online culture must acknowledge this. *Aurealan Realms* MUD, although now considered an inactive MUD, provided an online “home” and community for players for over a decade. In its historical context, it allows for an accurate view of the types of identity, community, culture, and communication issues found within MUDs in general and as its own unique MUD environment.

2.2 – Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is the study of the use of computers as a communication tool. Santoro (1995) defines CMC as:

The name given to a large set of functions in which computers are used to support human communication. CMC can be defined narrowly or broadly, depending on how one defines human communication. At its narrowest, CMC refers to computer applications for direct human-to-human communication. This includes electronic mail, group conferencing systems, and interactive ‘chat’ systems. At its broadest, CMC can encompass virtually all computer uses.” (p. 11)

December (2007) defines CMC as “the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems (or non-networked
computers) that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages.” (¶3) Such networked communication, commonly referred to now as Internet communication, can be broken down into three general categories: Communication, either one-to-one or one-to-many; Interaction used for play or learning; and the dissemination and retrieval of information (Ibid., 1996).

Christine Hine (2005) examined the process of researching online phenomena, and posited that such studies delving into CMC can be divided into two stages:

The first phase corresponds to the use of psychological approaches depending on experimental methods to understand the potential of computer-mediated conferencing. [...] The second phase of research into CMC corresponds to the growing application of naturalistic approaches to online phenomena and explicitly ethnographic approaches have increasingly claimed online contexts as field sites in their own right. (p. 7)

CMC and online participation, from Hine’s perspective, acknowledge and encourage a more in-depth examination of the workings of virtual communities.

CMC focuses on areas related, but not integral, to this study: The use of CMC as a tool for teaching (Ellsworth, 1995, Grünberg & Armellini, 2004, Hough, 2004, Liu & Lee 2005), the effect CMC has upon language-usage in communication (Eisenlohr 2004), and the impact of CSC on academic conduct and standards (Mitchell & Erickson 2004). Most of this category of literature also focuses on investigations of asynchronous communication methods such as web bulletin boards, e-mail, and newsgroup postings. Regardless of the nature of the community, however, CMC research is helpful in
understanding online communities. “The Internet provides a unique window into underground cultures that are otherwise difficult to access.” (Sanders, 2005, p. 77)

Some CMC literature does focus on issues relevant to this study, but again examines it only as it pertains to asynchronous communication methods (Whitworth, Gallupe & McQueen, 2000, Coffey & Woolworth, 2004), or real-time CMC communication done via voice on cell-phones or satellite in addition to the internet (Cook, 2004). One author examined the effect that CMC had on trans-cultural communications, but only as far as how CMC facilitates the interaction of people from two disparate physical communities via CMC. (Olaniran, 2001) The pertinent information from the world of CMC will be included within the specific topic categories below.

2.3 – Identity in Virtual Environments

MUDs, MUSHs, and other text-based multi-user online systems have been described as “a kind of virtual reality, an electronically-represented 'place' that users can visit.” (Curtis, ¶2, 1993) As in most environments, however, virtual or otherwise, each system develops its own cultural structures, a process determined by the nature of the community: multi-user virtual world, World-Wide Web-based discussion forum, newsgroup, and so on. These unique cultures are a hybrid of shared online cultural perceptions, off-line “real life” perceptions, and a set of behaviors developed uniquely within each virtual world.

Since this study focuses solely on masked text-based virtual environments, a convenient launching point is the existing literature on multi-user text-based virtual environments, and Multi-User Domains in particular. Each user, while aware that she is
“in a quasi-fictional context” (Ihde, 2002, p. 130) online, plays a role which is an inherent part of almost every MUD, and seldom if ever the “I” she is in the off-line world. In fact, it is common for users in MUDs to have multiple virtual selves, each attributable to either a realized or projected personality facet. But as a singular or multiple phenomenon, each role, each mask, each virtual persona, must be considered, compared to, and contrasted against, the user’s sense of “self.” Each persona is often a deliberate representation by the user of a type of person he would like to be, or wishes he could be, in real life. “The character a person chooses to build for himself is, to a large extent, a manifestation of his personality and his unconscious desires” (Hahn, ¶4, 1999).

Some CMC researchers feel that MUDs are the “most indicative of emergent cyberculture” (Sempsey & Johnson, 2000, ¶ 3) although little MUD-specific scholarship has looked at the social, cultural, and community aspects of these online worlds. The current findings lead scholars like Henry Seiden (2001) to believe that individuals who participate in CMC are more open to expressing their feelings than those who participate in similar relationships face-to-face:

Like a murmur in the dark, the Internet invites an acting out, a filling in, a fantasizing, a rounding out. Like a candle in a window, the message on the monitor is an invitation to projection, to longing, to passion, to intimacy, to risk. (p. 188)

Supporting Seiden’s position regarding passion on the Internet, Sempsey and Johnson (2000) suggest that it is absence of a sort that encourages speedier intimacy:

It has been postulated that this phenomenon may be attributable to the lack of regulating social context cues (e.g., body language, tone of voice, etc.) and
that the lack of such cues are read as an obscuring of the boundaries which
delineate the forms of behavior which are deemed acceptable or unacceptable.

(¶ 6)

Gender also plays in important role in determining identity within a text-based
virtual construct. As Consalvo and Paasonen (2002) suggest:

As the Internet is increasingly used for communication, consumption, and other
leisure-related uses, it is important to analyze critically the ways in which these
practices have been gendered, how they are entwined into the structures of
everyday life, and how women make use of them. (p. 5)

Since virtual gender is chosen, and may or may not be indicative of material gender, the
choice likely influences participant identity and formation and maintenance of
relationships online.

The quality of relationships forged through Computer-Mediated Communication
continues to be debated. Some Internet scholars argue that such relationships are void of
the warmth and depth that signify what a “relationship” is supposed to be, while others
feel strongly that the warmth and depth of the relationship is not only unhindered, but
accentuated and made possible, by CMC. (Sempsey & Johnson, 2000) Within the context
of a MUD environment, both types of relationships can be said to contain qualities that
make them valuable, depending on the circumstance, but such a claim can also be made
regarding face-to-face (FTF) communications as well. This seems to indicate that both
virtual and non-virtual relationships have the same potential for quality, but also the same
instabilities and difficulties, thus suggesting that an “either/or” reading is inappropriate.
Research into Computer Mediated Relationships (CMR), a somewhat different area, has demonstrated that such interactions create an enhanced sense of intimacy between participants, largely in part to compensate for the lack of other cues and bonds that are normally formed in FTF relationships. Such compensations are necessary for the creation of solid relationships through CMC because “…self-disclosure cannot purely be restricted to one’s highly intimate relationships or else social isolation and loneliness could ensue” (Merkle & Richardson, 2000, p. 189). Thus, MUDs, utilizing CMC as their sole means of interaction between the users, foster so-called “MUD Romances” often, and as a common element. Some dissolve online; some remain; and some grow into FTF relationships, with varying degrees of success.

In addition to the absence of normal conversational cues, MUD participants must also learn the intricacies of virtual masking, or what Jaffe, Lee, Huang and Oshagan (1995) call “pseudonymity.” MUDs are almost always “themed” and, as such, participants must pick a virtual representation that fits into the virtual world’s chosen theme. Thus, participation in MUDs is essentially synonymous with socializing at a masquerade ball, but cannot be contained within that analogy. The lack of normal conversational and visual clues as to the actual identity of one’s conversational partner(s) adds an additional dimension to masked virtual relations. Jaffe et. al explain that such masked communication puts participants more at ease, and they thus find that they are “more comfortable, more willing to reveal personal information. Pseudonymous anonymity may foster social interdependence, and perhaps even intimacy, by reducing the constraints of stereotypes that prescribe more socially independent behavior.”
(ibid., ¶ 28) They believe that such behavior, so common on MUDs, indicates participants’ “masks” are often chosen to hide explicit identity yet simultaneously reveal a personal facet of the author. Further research into the role pseudonymity plays in the development of a user’s sense of virtual self remains incomplete. Thus, its implications as factors in developing social networks and virtual communities are waiting to be addressed.

Another element of MUDding is similar to that found in a variety of other media. Part of the ability to accept the quasi-reality of a MUD world is the concept, pioneered by Sherry Turkle (1995), that most users prefer to be allowed to take what they see on their screens at interface value, meaning that they can accept the workings they see visually and have faith in them without understanding the underlying technical functions that make them possible. This figures in offline human communication as well, since we commonly communicate without understanding the intricacies of language; we simply accept that it functions as it does and utilize it for general and specific purposes.

The same inherent offering of trust and faith in that which is not seeable is part of the willing suspension of social belief that allows online communities to emerge and function. Such communities are considered young, culturally, having only formed within the last three decades, but are capable of altering the lives of those who have touched them and been touched by them. As Turkle explains:

The technologies of our everyday lives change the way we see the world.

Painting and photography appropriated nature. [...] Computers, too, lead us to construct things in new ways. With computers, we can simulate nature in a
program, or leave nature aside and build second natures limited only by our powers of imagination and abstraction. (p. 47)

Turkle also specifically addresses the issue of identity creation. As previously stated, MUD users are required to assume an alternate identity when entering a MUD world. In this choice, they can declare themselves as something resembling their real-life identities, or choose something totally foreign to their current sense of self. As a player, you “play a role as close to or as far away from your real self as you choose. For many game participants, playing one’s character(s) and living in the MUD(s) becomes an important part of daily life.” (Ibid., p. 183)

This assumption of identity, and the choices that go into it, can reveal much about the underlying personality of the individual player. Through these characters, we gain the ability to give voice to the pieces of our whole selves that we usually suppress:

MUDs imply difference, multiplicity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation. Such an experience of identity contradicts the Latin root of the world idem, meaning “the same.” But this contradiction increasingly defines the conditions of our lives beyond the virtual world. MUDs thus become object-to-think-with for thinking about postmodern selves. Indeed, the unfolding of all MUD action takes place in a resolutely postmodern context. (Ibid., p. 185)

Issues of identity are still being explored by scholars. This inquiry does not seek to determine the absolute definition of identity, nor the rules and methods for its creation. Rather, this research will examine how virtual identity affects non-virtual identity and vice versa, seeking to understand the working relationship between both, and the negotiation of each with regard to the other. Additionally, this research will investigate
the role of pseudonymity in the formations of identity, and of social relationships and a
sense of community as well. To date, no research has yet sought to explicate this
phenomenon fully.

2.4 – MUDs as Community and Social Discourse

Communication on the internet takes one of two forms made distinct by their use
of time and silence. Marvin (1995) states that communication online can be split into two
categories: synchronous and asynchronous. Asynchronous communication is embodied in
web forums, newsgroups and e-mail. These conversations take place over a variable span
of time, and that time creates variable-length silences between speakers. Synchronous
communication is exemplified by MUD systems and instant messaging, in that they
happen in “real time” between participants.

Marvin explains that what separates face-to-face synchronous communication and
online synchronous communication is the lack of a sense of sending in online forums.
There is generally no sense that a message is being sent, that someone is speaking
textually. There is a message, then there is silence, then there is another message. The
only exception to these conditions occurs in some instant messaging programs that
provide a message when another participant is typing. This does not resolve the anomaly
completely, however, as said user may begin a sentence and be called away from the
keyboard, thus creating a “pending silence” and a different type of uncertainty. Thus,
even the vocal non-verbal cues available to participants in a phone conversation are
missing from online synchronous communication.

This lack of “sending cues” makes virtual communication somewhat less certain
topically than face-to-face conversations, but Marvin further asserts that the concept of
“threads,” more common in asynchronous communication as a means of topic identification, is adapted and utilized by those engaged in synchronous online conversation as well. This “synchronous threading” in essence allows participants to carry on conversations about two or more topics at once, filling in the silences with responses to other topics, thus abridging the lag-time between statements.

MUDs offer a unique forum in which to carry on conversational relationships. The computer program of a MUD facilitates all communication, handling it as would a narrator. Danet (1995) calls this a form of “virtual puppetry” where participants’ actions are presented to others in third person by the computer program. While no research as yet investigates the possible effects of this third-person-based communication style on those utilizing it, it seems fairly safe to contend that the inherent nature of synchronous internet communication renders the third-person style of communication transparent to most of today’s Internet users.

In her master’s thesis Cultural Formations in Text-Based Virtual Realities, Reid (1994) addresses several salient points regarding MUDs as means of communication and formation of social discourse. She discusses several facets of the history and development of MUDs, and explicates many of the technical aspects of their use. Language is, given the textual nature of the medium, the primary element of MUDs, and of most internet-related cultures:

Language on MUDs serves not only as a vehicle for communication but as the context for that communication. There are no external referents in the game world—nothing to be seen or heard or touched. All there is are words, which serve both to define and represent the stimulated environment. (¶57)
In a text-based world, language is everything. People, places, things, emotions, and action, all are conveyed through language converted to alphabetic form.

Another major factor in MUDs is a form of institutionalized otherness, Danet’s pseudonymity. All participants in MUD culture are instructed, by the very nature of the medium, to assume roles other than their own, be those of another race, another species, another social role, another gender, or any combination thereof. Anonymity is a necessary part of forging online identities. In being able to leave the non-virtual world behind, each participant can create her virtual persona from the ground up (Reid).

Within such anonymity, actual relationships occur, but the “Mask of the Mud” affects each relationship in a positive or negative way. The medium itself becomes a conduit for people to express their freedom while hiding behind the mask they’ve selected. Participants in masked online culture come out from behind that mask only when they feel comfortable doing so, as opposed to being instructed to in a general “un-masking” such as at a masquerade ball. According to Reid:

Players of MUD systems love and hate in their virtual environments as strongly as anyone does in actual life, and the manifestation of such emotions is made possible by tools that give virtual realism to the imaginings of players. The exercise of imagination is necessary for the creation of a social context within which to act. By utilising [sic] the dramaturgical tools provided by MUD programs, players create the basis for shared social understandings. (¶76)

MUDs also provide a sense of accomplishment, a sense of productive interactivity with both the computer and the other users on it, within the context of a game. The social
structure of each MUD is wrapped up in its game-ness. And in that game, each participant is as she desires, subject only to the rules of the game environment.

2.4.1 – Virtual Communities

Virtual communities have existed since before the beginning of the home computer movement, originally starting out on university mainframes connected to ARPANET. As the years have passed, however, many people have become alarmed at what they view as an increasing retreat from the conventional methods of social interaction in favor of the more “impersonal” technological methods available now.

As Rheingold (1993) points out:

These critics often voice their sadness at what people have been reduced to doing in a civilization that worships technology, decrying the circumstances that lead some people into such pathetically disconnected lives that they prefer to find their companions on the other side of a computer screen. (p.23)

He explains that while this may be true, such a viewpoint fails to consider those who find written communication far more effective than oral. For those who are otherwise shut out of, and away from, social interactions in the non-virtual world, the virtual world re-opens social horizons that would otherwise be unavailable for them.

According to Rheingold, MUDs present a rare opportunity for individuals in the world of gender and racial stereotyping: the ability to be whomever, whatever, and however they desire. Through MUDs, users are even able to give voice to their inner other, “trying on” different personalities and social roles as one would try on clothing. Such practices give credence to Gergen’s (1991) concept of the “pastiche personality” by
allowing users to deliberately construct personality facets that they may then draw on experientially when composing their multiple selves.

Others have examined issues regarding virtual community, but have done so utilizing methods that have, by their very nature, limited the information accessible. Baym (2000), in *Tune In, Log on: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, performed an ethnography of soap-opera fan newsgroups; she utilized participant observation, and supplemented it with discourse analysis of posts and online surveys. Her surveys were made up of pre-scripted, open-ended questions, and all respondents were given identical surveys, thus casting her data within a framework inherently pre-established by her intent and choice of methodology.

Utz’s (2000) examination of the development of friendship in MUD environments, *Social Information Processing in MUDs: The Development of Friendships in Virtual Worlds*, looked at users of three German MUDs and attempted to quantitatively analyze a correlation between the time spent using MUDs and the ability to make friendships through the MUD interface. While an interesting concept, the study suffered from both a flaw in definition and research, and from an attempt to quantitatively measure friendship which, being a fluid emotional state, is virtually impossible to measure statistically.

In June of 2006, Tracy Kennedy, a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Toronto, and a scholar of virtual communities, created a community for Xbox Live called *GamerchiX* which provides a type of haven and support system for female gamers. Their “manifesta” reads:
If you play games, you’re a gamer chick. Xbox GamerchiX don’t talk trash about other women. Ever. Xbox GamerchiX support each other. Xbox GamerchiX are good role models for young gamer girls. Xbox GamerchiX are not pin-ups. It's about games and companionship, not T&A. You can be a member of any clan or group, but while you're part of GamerchiX, you don't talk trash about other gamers. (2009)

This community was formed to be self-sustaining and self-supporting, and with it came the creation of a unique virtual culture as well. An announcement celebrating the second birthday of GamerchiX revealed that “GamerchiX include students, professionals, full-time Moms, professional gamers, soldiers and sailors, artists, game developers, grandmas, and chiX that knit, race motorcycles, design tattoos, teach school. What we've all got in common is GAMES!” (ibid.) While not directly related to MUDs, this virtual community nevertheless indicates a connection to and for participants that may extend beyond the virtual.

2.5 – Virtual Culture

Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, (2008) in his book Primitive Cultures, originally released in 1871, defined culture as the sum of all that makes a society notable:

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which included knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. (p. 1)
According to Tylor, culture appears to be a self-defining concept, in that it is identifiable after it has been created and become used by a society.

O’Neal (2008), however, adds that culture, as a social concept, isn’t a static phenomenon to be once identified, then relied upon forever:

Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Our written languages, governments, buildings, and other man-made things are merely the products of culture. They are not culture in themselves. (¶ 2)

Where virtual culture is concerned, the concept takes on a new facet. When participants begin their virtual journey into the world of a MUD, they are choosing to enter into a culture that exists prior to their entrance, but also a culture that may be changed by their entrance and participation. The question then becomes whether or not culture is a mass-oriented phenomenon, a single entity-oriented phenomenon, or somewhere in between those two extremes. Anthropologist Stephen Mizrah (2008) believes it to be a single-entity-originated phenomenon:

In today's mediated (and therefore possibly virtual) society, I am, as is every individual, the center of culture for myself. It is from this individual culture that common belief, meaning, and value that make up the so-called mass culture are derived.” (¶ 1)

But culture, according to Tylor’s definition, refers to en masse, and suggests that there must be someone to perceive the cultural choices an individual makes in order for those choices to be understood and possibly influence a shared culture. Fernback (1997), a scholar specializing in virtual communities and culture, notes:
Cyberspace is a repository for collective cultural memory – it is popular culture, it is narratives created by its inhabitants that remind us who we are, it is life as lived and reproduced in pixels and virtual texts. It is sacred and profane, it is workspace and leisure space, it is a battleground and a nirvana, it is real and it is virtual, it is ontological and phenomenological.” (p. 37)

Because virtual culture is a concept still being explored a clearly defined set of rules by which something so nebulous can be measured, evaluated, and clearly understood, is still being developed.

Ascott (1989) describes virtual culture as a combination of cultural fusion and creation of new culture, as “when sensibilities from diverse cultures from all parts of the globe interweave, collaborate, conjoin, and become reconstructed, new cultural forms emerge; new potentials for meaning and experience are brought forth.” (p. 88) Ascott seems to indicate that, based on the personalities of the inhabitants, a MUD culture is both more obvious and more clandestine simultaneously.

It is because the area of study under examination in this research is still relatively young, and because suitable evaluative processes have not been fully developed, that the literature in the field has not yet answered the questions we want to pose here. While many scholars have addressed isolated issues, or skirted the edges of the subjects under examination, none have viewed the subject matter through the particular lens employed in this research.
3.1 – Relevance of Study

Consideration of the interplay of the virtual and the material, and their impact on issues of identity, community, and culture for the participants of text-based virtual realities, has been limited by the absence of data on non-virtual (material) elements associated with players in online domains. For purposes of this study, the term “identity” refers to an individual’s sense of self, the term “community” refers to an individual’s sense of the others around him, and the term “culture” refers to an individual’s sense of place within his social group(s). In some of the literature on MUDs, while issues of identity, community, or culture have been examined, the emphasis has been on either virtual or material manifestations, not their synchronous and possibly synonymous interaction.

As the Internet finds its way into more and more homes across the globe, virtual communities are becoming more prevalent, blending virtual and material environments. The Internet has also begun to re-define what community has traditionally meant, moving away from geographic locations to realms unstructured by spatial boundaries. In a virtual community, geography no longer dictates participation so long as internet access is available.

Howard Rheingold (1994) examined what now seems a rather primitive virtual community over a decade ago. Sherry Turkle (1995) studied virtual identity and its deployment by those who engage in online opportunities. More recently, Laurie Kendall (2002) added to the literature by focusing on how, in a social online community, the participants’ virtual identities were negotiated within the virtual construct. None of these
studies, however, sufficiently investigated what effect a MUD’s required masking of virtual identity would have on the negotiation of a user’s identity, participation in the MUD’s virtual community, or ability to influence, and be influenced by, the MUD’s virtual culture. As the review of literature indicates, studies of virtual community and culture have not really explored the synchronous interconnection and influence of the virtual and material worlds upon each other, nor the possibility that such interconnection and influence could also be synonymous. Much previous text-based virtual reality research focused primarily on occasional and extraordinary events, giving little insight into routine day-to-day events and interactions that participants in text-based virtual realities commonly encounter. In order to better understand the interconnection between virtual and material worlds, analysis must examine a participant’s experiences – specifically those that touch the virtual and material realms simultaneously.

For this study, masking is assumed to facilitate the conjunction of virtual and material environs. For MUD participants, virtual masking seems likely to affect their virtual sense of self, sense of other, and sense of role in their social groups. That MUD players are instructed to hide behind a virtual mask would seem – on its face, to invoke a deliberate pun – in itself to shape negotiations of self, other, and social roles within their virtual world. Thus, any study of MUD participants must initially acknowledge masking as a factor in virtual interactions and social groupings.

Previous studies of online identity, community, and culture used either quantitative methodologies, or deployed asynchronous communication data-gathering techniques, such as sifting information from newsgroups, e-mail, or web-based discussion forums. No study has utilized the synchronous and synonymous
communication, which MUDs use, as their primary data-gathering method; MUD participants have been previously interviewed in what is, to them, an artificial setting – one outside of their normal virtual environment. Only Kendall capitalized on the synchronous nature of the medium, and only for focused questions as follow-up to participant observation as her primary data-gathering method.

Because analyzing only the virtual dimensions of a virtual community is insufficient to illustrate participants’ motives and relationships, qualitative interviewing of participants about their experiences in both their material environment and their masked virtual environments can reveal a good deal about how virtual communities are constructed. To do so requires a new scholarly lens through which issues of identity, community, and culture can be viewed. This means of examination must allow for the possibility of overlap between virtual and material worlds, with specific attention to the shaping of the participant’s lived experience or, at least, how he or she thinks that the confluence has shaped his or her experience.

3.2 – Theoretical Grounding

No single existing theoretical model provides an accurate view of issues of identity, community, and culture in a virtual environment, and their potential relationship to these issues in a material environment. To provide a suitable means of analyzing these phenomena, elements from three different theoretical concepts will be combined to form the basis for a new way of understanding these issues: Identity theory, community theory, and phenomenological existentials. With this hybrid lens, a more accurate view of the phenomena may be achieved, and a more thorough understanding may be possible.
3.2.1 – Identity

Attempting to define identity is like trying to name the color of wind: For every person asked, a different answer will be given. As James Fearon (1993) notes:

Our present idea of identity is a fairly recent social construct, and a rather complicated one at that. Even though everyone knows how to use the word properly in everyday discourse, it proves quite difficult to give a short and adequate summary statement that captures the range of its present meanings. (¶ 3)

Some approaches link the concepts of identity and self. Erikson (1950, 1968) expanded upon Freudian psychology by positing that a person’s sense of self is based upon that individual’s perceptions of psychic states in the past, present, and future. According to Erikson, a person constructs a sense of self by moving through a series of eight stages, each dependent on successful navigation of the previous one, in a process that takes the individual from infancy to middle-age and beyond.

Marcia (1980, 1987), who formulated a neo-Eriksonian framework called “The Identity Status,” perceived identity for an individual as being achieved through a process of questioning identity, undergoing an identity crisis, and then committing to a post-crisis identity. Marcia theorized that the choices individuals made in their adolescence provided the basis for the self that would follow.

Others have perceived identity to be created on the basis of acknowledged experience. Schechtman (2009) chose the phrase forensic identity to represent how an individual builds identity out of constructed referential experience:

The narrative self-constitution view of forensic identity, roughly put, holds that someone constitutes herself as a forensic person and creates her identity as such
by forming an autobiographical narrative – a story of her life. This means that being a forensic person involves coming to conceive of oneself as a forensic person, expecting one’s life to follow the basic form of a forensic person’s life. To do this, one must have a conception of where one comes from, where one is going, and how one’s past, present, and future are interconnected. (p. 80)

While perhaps more dynamic than other conceptualizations, Schechtman nevertheless suggests a singular identity adjusted by experience throughout the life of an individual.

Young (2008) describes identity as that which “makes us unique and distinct, reflecting our ‘oneness,’ and connects and binds us, reflecting our ‘sameness.’” The tensions between identification and separation, the two opposing functions of identity, profoundly influence the way scholars study and understand identity.” (p. 277)

Individuals must find something both unique and similar in order to gain a sense of identity within a community. Young gives an example taken from the Goth subculture, explaining that “individuals attempt to set themselves apart from others through their distinctive choices regarding appearance (asserting individual identity), yet the markers of difference they embrace also indicate similarity, a means of finding others with similar ideologies.” (Ibid.)

Slutskaya and Schreven (2007) posit that identity is deeply connected with an individual’s sense of physical self:

Human beings are inescapably both mimetic and social; they learn by imitating others (both as a part of childhood learning and through professional training); they participate (for better or worse) in the nature of their models. Bodily behavior by which we initially develop and mature is a function of external
mirroring and repetition of ‘appropriate’ behavior. Through repetition we learn to adopt the role of the other in relation to ourselves. In this sense the body is formed on the basis of a selection process that produces just an illusion of the body as a complete object. (p. 174)

The self, in their view, is a composite experience and perception. The result is a fusion of structure and de-structure, an “opposing dichotomy of both sustaining and configuring wholeness, and fragmenting and dismantling it by encompassing/returning to loss.” (p. 175)

Landzelius (2006) suggested that an existing connection between a sense of geographic place and identity also carries over onto the concept of identity in online communities:

Home and identity – always already in play through local-global articulations – become newly inflected by virtual flows of images and ideas; newly refracted, in the mediated politics of representation and (dis)information; and newly reflective, even meta-reflective, as subjectivities are traversed by mediascapes and other cosmopolitan influences. Via information-communications technologies, home and identity also become newly equipped to respond to such challenges and opportunities. (p. 3)

Concepts of ”home” and “identity” are cross-affecting, and as individuals find online homes, as suggested by such cyber-commentarists as William Gibson, their identities may become tied to new virtual homes in addition to geographic homes.

While approaching the concept of identity from radically different foundations, these theories all share one common trait: Identity exists as a whole that may evolve
throughout the life of the individual, but at any given time that “self,” even if a variation of a core “self,” represents the individual’s understanding of his identity as he perceives it. Logically, it follows that experiencing “self” at any given moment is healthy. “Selves,” however, would be an aberration.

According to these and similar theories, there is always a constructed “single core identity” that is perceived to be the “self,” even though it may be subconsciously assumed, or imposed from without. Material identities may include, for example, a sense of self at home or at work, a sense of self as perceived by others in a given work or social situation, and so on, but all are parts of the core identity, and all “exist” singularly – only one such identity may be experienced at a time. Virtual identities, however, have the distinction of being the most consciously constructed of any identity an individual may create, and a virtual identity is not limited by physical strictures or environmental factors. The number of virtual identities are limited only by the virtual domain the user is engaged with and by her imagination. And virtual identities may be experienced simultaneously with material identities, in conflict with the traditional view of such phenomena.

Compounding the difficulties in defining so hybrid an identity are two other elements. First, in a virtual domain, a player will commonly construct more than one identity, each of which may or may not bear any direct resemblance to his sense of material identity. Second, experiences gained through such virtual identities may be familiar, or may be of a kind unavailable to the player in his material world. Regardless, all such experiences provide growth potential for the player himself. The “single core identity” concept does not ordinarily allow for the healthy inclusion of these types of
additional identities, which may be due to the fact that this technology did not exist when theorists began to grapple with the puzzle of identity.

Those who participate in virtual worlds do so after having been instructed to take on different identities, roles they are to play within that world. This study advances the possibility that virtual roles can influence and alter the perception of the “self” of the participant. Those who enter virtual worlds can choose to create a single virtual “self,” or many virtual “selves,” who can then become a recognized element of the individual participant’s overall sense of identity.

That seems to be the case with the players of Aurealan Realms. While virtual roles may or may not function as “stages” similar to Erikson’s, juggling a plurality of selves, and successfully shifting among them, is essential to participating in virtual worlds.

A perhaps more capacious theory has been advanced by Kenneth Gergen, a professor of psychology at Swarthmore College, and a noted identity scholar, who examines the plurality of self as a normal and understandable phenomenon. In writing about what he terms the “saturated self,” Gergen (1991) explores identity not as a “single core identity” but as a multiple-self, a “chorus of the mind.” Gergen’s findings, while formulated prior to the Internet boom, are nevertheless applicable to a discussion of the interconnection between virtual and material identity as well.

Gergen suggests that our culture embraces two traditional versions of self: the romantic and the modern. For the former:

The vocabulary of moral feeling, loyalty, and inner joy is largely derived from a

romanticist conception of the self. [...] It is a perspective that lays central stress on
unseen, even sacred forces that dwell deep within the person, forces that give life and relationships their significance. (Ibid., p. 19)

By contrast, the modern version of self is one “in which reason and observation are the central ingredients of human functioning. This latter view pervades the sciences, government, and business, and has made many inroads into the sphere of informal relationships” (Ibid.) Again, this version appears germane to virtual identity and can be understood as incorporating similar dichotomies.

More recently, Gergen argues that a “pastiche personality” subsumes notions of self; it is informed by significant relationships, not dependent on either romantic or modern states: "The pastiche personality is a social chameleon, constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation." (Ibid., p.150)

Unlike Erikson’s and Marcia’s singular self, Gergen’s pastiche self, made up of more flexible, multiple states, has been embraced by contemporary culture. Multiple selves, represented by “voices,” may be necessary to survival in a noisier, more invasive society:

If each voice portrays the individual a little differently, then the very idea of an “isolated self,” independent of the voices themselves, begins to teeter. Is the person “merely a biological creature,” “a bundle of atoms,” “an array of learned habits,” “a computational automaton,” “a pattern of personality traits,” “a rational agent?” As the chorus of competitive voices builds, “the person” as a reality beyond voice is lost. There is no voice now trusted to rescue the “real person” from the sea of portrayals. (p.140)
In Gergen’s formulation, MUD players, because they live within the “technologies of social saturation” that lead to a “populating of the self, reflecting the infusion of partial identities,” illustrate the dynamic of multiple voices, multiple selves. (Ibid., p. 49) Again, although Gergen’s concept initially precedes Internet studies, it can be argued that “virtual identities” qualify as diverse voices in the chorus of the “I” that Gergen understands to represent self. Within Gergen’s multi-self framework are few distinctions between selves played out in the mind, selves played out in various material social situations, and masked and unmasked selves played out in virtual environments – each would be another facet of a fragmented but still coherent identity. And, by extension, as this MUD study will argue, there is no reason to think that the selves constructed in the material world are more privileged than those constructed in a virtual environment.

More to the point, even a modest application of Gergen’s theory can make a place for masked virtual identities as part of the “chorus of the mind.” If identity has no bedrock singularity, masked virtual identities can be among those forming additional layers of the whole. Suler (2004) agrees, suggesting a possible interaction between material facets and virtual facets, if only because participation in online communities may allow people to exhibit otherwise repressed facets of their personality. Research on text-based virtual realities, however, has not yet examined how the masking itself, and the decision-making involved in choosing to unmask, affects the lived experience of both the player unmasking and the other player(s) to whom this unmasking occurs.
3.2.2 – Community

Community has often been defined as “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings.” (McQueen, McLellen, Metzger, Kegeles, Strauss, Scotti, Blanchard & Trotter, 2001, p. 1929) Such definitions privilege proximity, as in the concept of a neighborhood or a suburb.

Other definitions are not so grounded. Ferman and Kaylor (2001) maintain that the decline of traditional ties attendant on swelling urban populations in ever larger centers requires the fashioning of other bonds in their place:

In the absence of the natural ties of kinship, as in the rural communities studied by the Chicago School sociologists, or the ties of ethnicity, as in the older urban communities, some entity must be present to create, and even more important, to sustain, community. Increasingly that entity is neighborhood institutions. (p.54)

Additionally, Ferman and Kaylor recognize that, in globalized contexts, the term “neighborhood” may now be “a-spatial” – no longer restricted by material geography. (p.53)

Similarly, Cohen (1985) writes that community has become considerably more symbolic, in substance and in interaction, as relationships extend beyond geographical boundaries:

The community itself and everything within it, conceptual as well as material, has a symbolic dimension, and, further, that this dimension does not exist as some kind of consensus of sentiment. Rather, it exists as something for people “to think with.” The symbols of community are mental constructs: they provide people with
the means to make meaning. In doing so, they also provide them with the means to express the particular meanings which the community has for them. (p. 19)

Virtual communities offer opportunities for relationships previously unavailable to human beings. Virtual “community” differs from material versions in that the former type is one that can be entered into without leaving one’s material community, although the kinds of interactions to be found there are often typically to be found in the latter.

Additional ideas relating to community, both material and virtual, aid in understanding the subjects. Gibbs, Nekrassova, Grushina, & Wahab (2008) explain that much of the current academic material on virtual-vs-material communities creates an artificial boundary because they “rely on dichotomous comparisons between virtual and non-virtual or co-located teams. Such measurement may explain the previous assumption that virtual teams are ‘deficient’ when compared to face-to-face teams.” (p. 202) Edley, Hylmö & Newsom (2004) posit that it is the relationships between individuals that better define community:

Our definition of the alternative organizing community is not exclusively bounded with cyberspace nor is it conceived of as simply a social aggregate. Our concept of community is constituted in interpersonal relationships and sense of belonging rather than simply as social aggregate. (p. 89)

Katz, Rice, Acord, Dasgupta, and David (2004) suggest that the primary differences between material and virtual communities are not that virtual communities are more limited, but rather that they are more limitless, noting “most of the ways analysts distinguish virtual communities from physical ones are merely reversed statements of physicality. That is, they are communities without physical limitations.” (p. 327) They go
on to suggest that differences between material and virtual communities are becoming less observable as virtual communities become more common.

In order to discuss and evaluate community, one definition must be chosen. Robin Hamman (1997) has formulated a flexible framework:

The sociological term community should be understood here as meaning (1) a group of people (2) who share social interaction (3) and some common ties between themselves and the other members of the group (4) and who share an area for at least some of the time. (¶ 4)

At the same time, Hamman agrees that there must be one agreed-upon definition in order to have any meaningful discussion of community because to proceed on any other basis would render such discussions incoherent. (Ibid.) Because Hamman’s approach lends itself well to consideration of virtuality, her points shape the research here.

3.2.2.1 – Types of Communities

Several types of communities commonly occur in academic literature:

Communities of the mind, geographic communities, neighborhoods, interest communities, and belief communities. A MUD, this dissertation argues, can encompass all five types simultaneously. A MUD exhibits specific features of each.

3.2.2.1.1 – Communities of the mind.

Virtual communities are communities of the mind, envisioned by those who participate in them much in the same way a reader of novels visualizes fictional settings. As such, “virtual” may be used as a synonym for “imagined,” given the nature of its “reality” to the individual participant. Anderson (1991) defines the concept of a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and
sovereign” and believes that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.” (p.6) Anderson’s concept of imagined communities, as linkages that establish shared dimensions and one’s place in them, can apply to a virtual community.

3.2.2.1.2 – Geographic communities.

Virtual communities are nonetheless geographic. MUDs are structured as defined “spaces” of cyber-dimensionality. The virtual geographic environments of MUDs are not that dissimilar from even the proxemic traditional communities favored by McQueen, McLellen, Metzger, Kegeles, Strauss, Scotti, Blanchard & Trotter. Participants in a MUD must traverse “distances” and locate themselves in specific sections of the cyber-setting of the game.

3.2.2.1.3 – Neighborhoods.

Almost as a corollary, virtual environments can also function as neighborhoods. Fuentes (2000) elaborates:

Once, the words neighborhoods and communities were interchangeable. A community was defined by the bricks-and-mortar region a person chose to occupy. Increasingly, they are being defined separately: A neighborhood is a place where one lives, and a community is the social circle one chooses to inhabit. Chat rooms, online communities, and message boards have allowed like-minded people to connect with one another in the same way neighborhoods once did.

(p. 60)

The MUD domain is a construct and as such a unique symbolic assemblage, a virtual embodiment of the elements catalogued by Cohen. A “room” in a virtual world does not
exist physically, but has been constructed deliberately to represent itself as “real,” as are the creatures, objects, and other elements which the various users move and manipulate in their interactions with other users. This places a participant’s avatar “in the world,” within a social circle of his choosing, on a cyberscape that he may not have picked, but that he elects to occupy nonetheless.

This quasi-geographic “a-spatial” neighborhood of course stretches the traditional definition of a neighborhood. Computer users are often already comfortable with a “network neighborhood.” A virtual environment as a constructed space, however, moves beyond metaphor. Degrees of mutability separate material and virtual environments; changes in the first take longer, although some alterations can be perceived as they are occurring (e.g. observable construction of a building) in material spaces, whereas in the second, changes can occur in compressed time. In a virtual world, participants more likely will grasp changes quickly, as they register on neighborhood occupants. Moreover, given the infancy – even crudity – of available technology, the “geographic” features of a virtual construct still pale beside the density of a real neighborhood. Offsetting that limitation is the foreshortening of time that allows for rapid and constant modification of the virtual construct.

3.2.2.1.4 – Interest communities.

Obviously, virtual communities are bound by interest. The participants of a MUD are drawn together by the theme the MUD has chosen as its own, or by social interest in other participants of the MUD. Within the MUD itself, however, a player’s goals commonly differ from those of her fellow MUDders. Some players desire a role-playing experience, some seek action like that of a video game, and others seek to pit themselves
against other MUD players in contests of virtual strength. Multiple motives create a self-organizing community within the framework of the MUD world.

While the owners and managers of a MUD – commonly called Immortals, Wizards, or Gods – help maintain the virtual world and may help enforce its rules, the community that emerges does so on its own. The staff of a MUD is primarily reactive, intervening only when asked to do so, or when a rule violation has occurred. Otherwise, players are free to establish their own sub-communities in the MUD world, and commonly do so. A MUD resembles Stephen Johnson’s ant colonies: Johnson (2002) compared the self-organization of ants to the creation of Slashdot.org, an asynchronous online web community. According to Johnson, the creator of Slashdot solved the problem of maintaining the quality of the community through “a mix of negative and positive feedback, structured randomness, neighbor interactions, and decentralized control. From a certain angle, Slashdot today resembles an ant colony. From another, it looks like a virtual democracy.” (p.154) Randomness, control, interactivity, and feedback all govern the formation of community on a MUD as well.

On a MUD, absent direct instruction from the staff, players will establish sub-communities through their interaction with the virtual environment and each other. Each sub-community will develop its own societal rules and taboos, and each will have entrance requirements, formal or informal, that influence who can or cannot join that sub-community. Again, a MUD’s staff will only interfere if there is a violation of gameplay rules, or to investigate a participant. As in Johnson’s examples, MUD communities, both general and specific, are primarily participant-constructed.
3.2.2.1.5 – Belief communities.

Some off-line communities are structured around spiritual, philosophical, or social belief. A MUD can also function as a social belief community. Just as fans of a professional sports franchise may believe in the superiority of “their team,” satisfied MUD players may believe in the superiority of “their game.” Members of social belief communities are often vocal in defense of the ideals or values of their chosen group, and will attempt to persuade and recruit others to join them in their dedication. Affirmation and reinforcement are also common among MUD players, who find enjoyment and satisfaction in their chosen game and attempt to bring others into the game to enjoy it with them. Many current commercial role-playing games offer bonuses for recruitment, and word of mouth is a successful method of growing a game community.

3.2.2.2 – The Multi-Faceted MUD Community

MUDs, then, can include communities of mind, geography, neighborhoods, interests, and beliefs. MUDs blend these types into a comprehensive “virtual community” model.

Commenting on Rheingold’s work, Hamman (1997) notes that “members of virtual communities join together online to do everything that others do in the physical world. The obvious difference is that members of online communities interact, many times exclusively, via text on computer screens.” (¶ 8) While Rheingold (1995) maintains that the only real difference between the material world and the virtual world is the interface of the latter, Gajjala (1998) suggests that “what is happening online is an actual replacing of the discourses that circulate within real-life communities.” (¶ 3) Both
Rheingold and Gajjala, however, seem to suggest that traditional communities and virtual communities are distinctly separate, and have only limited effect on one another.

To be sure, virtuality involves a departure of sorts from one place, and an entrance into another place, experientially rather than physically (Hine, 2000), a “dis-placement” of consciousness on the part of those transitioning between them. Such displacement, characterized by literary critics as a “willing suspension of disbelief,” can take place when one reads fiction or watches television, but those media do not permit the interactions of a virtual environment.

3.2.3 – Phenomenological Existentials

Qualitative interviewing will provide the methodology for data acquisition in this study. Researchers gather lived human experience, usually through qualitative interviewing, and have, since the 1980s, extended their research into the field of lived virtual experience. Sherry Turkle, perhaps the preeminent scholar to treat the diffusion of the computer into human life, relies extensively on qualitative interviewing, as part of ethnography, in *The Second Self* (2005) where she gives her rationale:

Like all the research reported in this book, my research with children was ethnographic. The observation of styles of programming, of emotional responses to the animate qualities of computer toys, the weaving of computer experiences into the development of identity – all these phenomena are accessible through interviews and observations in natural settings.” (p. 313). Turkle’s ethnographic interviews structure successive publications, including her latest book, *Evocative Objects*, because of their suitability for digital subjects.
Accordingly, this study employs qualitative interviewing to illuminate participants lived experiences. It is an adaptive use of the technique in that it conducts interviews online, on *Aurealan Realms* MUD, the “natural setting” for members of that community. Online synchronous interviewing, like face-to-face interviewing, benefits from intimacy, flexibility, and follow-up. And, also like standard qualitative interviewing procedures, on-line encounters can elicit information arranged by themes the researcher thinks important. For this study, the themes chosen are borrowed from phenomenology. Called *existentials*, they refer to segments of the lived experience of an individual:

> Our lived experiences and the structures of meaning (themes) in terms of which these lived experiences can be described and interpreted constitute the immense complexity of the lifeworld. And, of course, we can speak of the multiple and different life worlds that belong to different human existences and realities.

(1990, van Manen, p. 101)

Van Manen posits that four existentials describe an individual’s lifeworld: “*Lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality),” and designates them as “guides for reflection in the research process.” (p. 101)

This study structures its investigation of the synchronous, and possibly synonymous, nature of lived material and virtual experience around van Manen’s four existentials: lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation. To these, however, have been added four existentials that mirror his originals: lived virtual space, lived virtual body, lived virtual time, and lived virtual human relation. These eight
existentials provide the basis for a new theoretical model through which participation in virtual environments may, it is hoped, be more accurately viewed.

3.2.3.1 – Lived Space

“Lived space is felt space.” (van Manen, 1990, p. 102) Human beings seek to understand their environment through sensory apprehensions that defy measurements of mathematical precision: As van Manen construes it, lived space refers to how an individual experiences physical space, rather than merely describes it scientifically or geographically. Indeed, van Manen likens it to the feeling of walking into a large empty church, or a small office, or a wide open expanse of grassland. It is a consciousness not simply of dimension but of inhabiting. Perhaps it is an awareness of details. Every space can be felt differently by each inhabitant, depending on his perception. One person might find a large auditorium intimidating, which makes him feel small, possibly lost. Another person, however, might experience the same large auditorium as freedom, savoring openness. Lived space, then, refers to how a space is apprehended in a uniquely personal way by its inhabitant.

Extrapolating from van Manen’s lived space, we can say that the senses of lived virtual space are those a player may experience when encountering a space in a virtual domain, or so say those interviewed in this study. For example, when a MUD character climbs a mountain peak, or crawls through a narrow tunnel, the player inhabiting that character may experience the exhilaration of the height, or a sense of suffocation. Lived virtual space, then, alludes to how a space is apprehended, through a virtual character and in a uniquely personal way, by the person “wearing” and controlling the MUD character.
3.2.3.2 – Lived Body/Lived Self

According to van Manen (1990), we experience the world physically, bodily, tactiley through one conduit or another: Our information about the world comes to us through our senses, so that “we are always bodily in the world.” (p. 103) Our physical awareness is an extension of self that we feel continually influences, among other things, our initial conclusions about others. Van Manen further explains that “in our physical or bodily presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we always conceal something at the same time – not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves.” (Ibid.)

The sensations of lived virtual body refer to a player’s sympathetic relationship to the body of her avatar in the virtual domain. On a MUD, a player’s success or failure in the game is tied closely to the “health” of her avatar. Although perhaps not to the same degree as a person in the real world, a player will be attentive to her avatar’s “physical” status at all times, and will be aware of her virtual body as a lesser extension of her material body, especially since game injury and death are often consequences of a lack of awareness.

Due to the lack of “body” in a virtual setting, however, the term Lived Body was modified slightly to reflect a participant’s sense of personal, as opposed to merely physical, being. The term Lived Self thus encompasses the concept of Lived Body while acknowledging the different individual awareness possible within a virtual domain.

3.2.3.3 – Lived Time

As lived space is said to be felt space, lived time is felt time (our awareness of the progression of subjective time). Following van Manen, Sokolowski (2000) breaks lived
time down into three phases: world time, internal time, and the consciousness of internal time. In other words, time as quantified and agreed upon by society (an hour is sixty seconds), can be distinguished from time as it registers in the person, and is experienced (“this class is taking forever today!”). Despite one’s sense of subjective time passing, says van Manen, the quantitative measurement of world time remains unaltered.

The experience of lived virtual time can be similar. Like material lived time, the progression or duration in a MUD can be experienced as virtual world time, virtual internal time, and the consciousness of virtual internal time. An additional element, however, is a consciousness of the difference between material and virtual time. The experience of virtual lived time is complicated by the player’s having a foot in both worlds; he is synchronously aware of both lived time and lived virtual time. Moreover, MUDs divide times more artificially, allotting fixed intervals for completing a task on a journey. Accomplishing a goal within set time limits is often tied to success or failure in the game. Thus, participation in a virtual environment compounds an individual’s experience of time and demands more attention.

3.2.3.4 – Lived Human Relations/Lived Other

As van Manen uses the term, lived human relation refers to the matrix of associations that link individuals. It is closely tied to the sense of lived body in that it assumes corporeal awareness of:

the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. As we meet the other, we approach the other in a corporeal way: through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that he or she is physically present to us. (1990, Van Manen, pp. 104-105)
Even in the absence of physical presence, van Manen maintains that we have created in our minds a representation of the other, a filling in of the blanks, until actual physical representational information is available.

The associations that make up lived virtual human relation provide insight into the “virtually physical” relationships between avatars, but also into the more tenuous relationships between players as themselves and other avatars, and between players who have never seen each other. Van Manen’s notion of “filling in the blanks” is pertinent here because it explains how avatars conceptualize other avatars in a text-based environment. On another level, perhaps, it operates so that a player can visualize the other players “behind” their masks.

Similar to the Lived Body/Lived Self progression, the concept of Lived Human Relation was modified to acknowledge the plethora of encounters possible in a virtual environment, not all of them with other human beings. Lived Other allows experience with human and non-human (computer-controlled) interactants, while still keeping the essence of van Manen’s Lived Human Relation intact.

3.2.4 – Application of Phenomenological Existentials

Van Manen’s phenomenological existentials, as shown in Figure 1, can be said then to exist as a set of four inter-locking and inter-relating elements that can affect each other, directly or tenuously.
Figure 1. Phenomenological Existentials as explained by Gus Van Manen and their interrelationship with one another as well as their connecting axes.

Each existential influences, and is influenced by, its interconnectivity with the other three existentials. If we add in the four proposed virtual existentials, as shown in Figure 2, the result is a more complex matrix that can graph experience as the two environments map onto each other.
Figure 2. A set of eight cyber-existentials, based on the four phenomenological existentials posited by van Manen & Sokolowski, used to illustrate the interrelation of, and interactivity between, the four primary facets of lived experience in the material and their corollary facets in the virtual.

These existentials can be powerful tools for exploring virtual and material communities. Such communities share more than overlap, if only because virtual worlds, however fantasy-driven, are modeled on material environments. Each type has its own rules that govern identity and social bonds. In at least some sense, virtual and material are reciprocal. Just as a Macintosh and an IBM are radically different computers, both can interact via the internet by way of the TCP/IP protocol which integrates their communication. So too, the protocols of the virtual and the material share dimensions and characteristics of communication and experience. The key lies in the rule-based organization of each. Phenomenological existentials help to explain that organization.

Given similar rule systems inherent in virtual and material communities, operations applicable to one should be applicable to the other as long as the differences
inherent in the interfaces are taken into consideration. (Rheingold, 1995) As Turkle (1995) maintains:

Virtuality need not be a prison. It can be the raft, the ladder, the transitional space, the moratorium, that is discarded after reaching greater freedom. We don't have to reject life on the screen, but we don't have to treat it as an alternate life either.

(p. 263)

Combining the theoretical perspectives of Gergen, Hamman, van Manen, and Sokolowski creates an instrument through which the lived experience of players of *Aurealan Realms* can be examined. The goal of the instrument will be to demonstrate in a comprehensive manner the levels of interconnectedness of a participant’s material and virtual experiences.

3.3 – Methodology

Qualitative interviewing has been utilized as a data-gathering method for research involving human communities for many decades. Fontana and Frey (2000) explain that qualitative interviewing “involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but interviewing can also take the form of face-to-face group interchange, mailed, or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. It can be structured, semistructured, or unstructured.” (pp. 645-646) Thus, qualitative interviewing allows for loosely structured conversations with volunteers; it encourages story-telling, self-interpretation, and follow-up questions by researchers.

Interviews for this study collected data from eleven players of *Aurealan Realms* MUD, all of whom volunteered to share their individual histories and lived experience within that virtual environment. Subjects included those who were only players of the
game (i.e. those for whom the MUD was a form of entertainment) and those who were members of the staff charged with overseeing the running of the game. Subjects were questioned until noticeable redundancy began to surface in the data.

In each case, the interviews aimed at five goals, as articulated by Lindlof (1995): 1) to clarify the meanings of concepts and opinions, 2) distinguish the decisive elements of those opinions, 3) find out why people formed the opinions they did or chose to act a certain way, 4) classify the complex attitude patterns into themes, and 5) try to understand the interpretations people attribute to their motivations to act. (p. 178)

Since participants were often engaged with both their material community and one or more virtual communities simultaneously, qualitative interviewing permitted data concerning multiple communities to be gathered at one time. Because this study acknowledges the possibility that both material and virtual communities are synchronously and synonymously interconnected, gathering data in such a manner could support or undermine those relationships.

One benefit of the methodology was to establish the actual ages, professions, genders, and education of the interviewees. Unless volunteered in interactions with other players, these demographics tend to be unknown in a virtual environment such as a MUD, where they are often significant. Another form of data collection might not have elicited these factors.

Historically, qualitative interviewing has been seen as a continuation of an investigator’s fieldwork, a second phase of research, but not an end in itself. Inherent in “fieldwork” is interaction with the subjects, seeing their culture first-hand, and “shaking
hands and rubbing elbows.” Traditionally, qualitative interviewing has involved face-to-face interviewing or hand-written letters, although more and more such fieldwork has begun utilizing the telephone and, more recently, e-mail. To those who suggest that virtual qualitative interviewing is too far removed, Hine (2000), applying such techniques to ethnography, has countered:

Virtual ethnography is adequate for the practical purpose of exploring the relations of mediated interaction, even if not quite the real thing in methodologically purist terms. It is an adaptive ethnography which sets out to suit itself to the conditions in which it finds itself. (p. 65)

Again, there is a distinct difference between synchronous electronic communication (chat rooms, instant messengers, or MUDs) and asynchronous electronic communication (newsgroups, text messaging, or World-Wide Web bulletin boards). Most qualitative internet community studies rest on either synchronous offline techniques, such as face-to-face interviews, or asynchronous online techniques for data-gathering. Reid (1994) drew on textual analysis of newsgroup postings and logs of MUD interaction, as well as on e-mail interviews. Turkle (1995, 2005) favored face-to-face interviews, conducted mostly in her office. Parks’s (1995) ethnography of newsgroups, focused on how friendships develop in such communities, resulted from web-based surveys. Stone (1995) analyzed newsgroup postings and interview transcripts. Hine (2000) balanced face-to-face interviews with textual analysis of postings. Baym (2000) selected participant observation in, and textual analysis of, a soap opera fan newsgroup, and augmented these with online surveys. Abbot’s (2001) ethnography of young men writing personal webpages used keyword searches to find likely candidates, then e-mail
interviews and e-mail follow-ups. Christine Smith (2001) focused solely on web-based surveying as opposed to e-mail surveys.

Those who preferred participant observation (Baym) were nonetheless limited to asynchronous online interaction. Rheingold (1995) and Cherny (1994) both supplemented textual analysis of newsgroup postings (asynchronous) with participant observation in MUDs (synchronous). Kendal (2002) also chose both, but in a way closest to the method proposed here: She employed textual analysis of newsgroup postings as preparation for joining a MUD community, but selected participant observation as her primary data-gathering method once she joined the community itself.

3.3.1 – Virtual Qualitative Interviewing

Interviews of Aurealan Realms participants were conducted online. This technique has occasionally served, albeit asynchronously, to bridge substantial geographical distances between researcher and subjects, or co-researchers. (Abbot, 2001) For the Aurealan Realms study, however, it seemed appropriate that interviewing actively make use of the interface when the virtual community was engaged, since it was a) the online area within which the interview respondents were most comfortable, and since it b) affected their perception of the community. Silver (2000) suggests that second generation cyberculturalists exploring virtual identity and culture have not paid attention to issues of Human-Computer Interaction that derive from how the design of the interface can shape the online area. In accord with Silver’s suggestion, the interviews conducted on Aurealan Realms MUD allowed the participants to recount their experiences from within the environment in which those experiences occurred.
Some researchers think that travel is a necessary and inherent part of studying such unique cultures. According to Hine (2000), connecting to a MUD constitutes a type of journey; while “visiting the internet focuses on experiential rather than physical displacement,” it is travel nonetheless. (p. 45)

The interviews in this study were semi-structured in order to examine several specific topics within *Aurealan Realms* MUD. Topics of interest could be starter questions, or be inserted into the conversational interviews when appropriate. As was hoped, some of the information most germane was offered as part of the conversational flow (unasked-for) or in response to posed questions in ways not anticipated. Allowing the conversation to flow from one subject to the next made participants feel sufficiently at ease to talk normally about their stories and experiences.

The transcripts of completed interviews were subjected to qualitative thematization, to speculate on how the various interview respondents chose, embodied, and interacted with their virtual identities, community, and culture. Thematization revealed interrelationships and interconnectivities between their virtual and material sense of these states. One goal was to gain a heightened understanding of how a participant’s experience in the virtual community affected her material experience. Did the virtual body affect the lived body and vice versa? Did virtual time affect a sense of lived time and vice versa? Did virtual space, or the geography occupied while she entered into virtual space, affect her sense of lived space and vice versa? Did social relations within the virtual cultural arena affect relations in the arena without and vice versa? Did one affect the other at all? Was one dependent on the other? Were there any significant
instances of overlapping between non-directly-aligned categories, such as between virtual
time and lived space?

Additionally, this method aimed to reveal how the interviewee thought of the role
he played in his specific online community and how he thought his sense of personal and
communal identity was formed, shaped, and affected by his participation. Did his
perceived role affect his sense of identity, his understanding of his place in the
community, or his participation in a shared culture, in either his material or virtual
environment, or both? Did he feel his role, as he perceived it, was validated by others
within the MUD community?

Part of knowing is “hearing” and part of hearing involves trust. On a MUD, “hearing”
occurs through reading typed text. To elaborate on cultural, community, and
identity issues requires a level of comfort on the part of the persons being interviewed.
Thus, standard written surveys would not have engendered the responses that were
desired, for they would have been significantly more cold and impersonal. Written
questions reveal their constructions, and their inherent biases, whereas synchronous
ethnographic interviews, though also constructed of textual feedback, are less formal, and
elicit broader responses.

The assumption was that a virtual interview might inspire confidence because it
implicitly acknowledges the requirement to appear masked and interact through that
mask. On Aurealan Realms MUD, everyone plays a role, and might be doing so during
the interview, where there are no visual cues other than linguistic representation. As
observed in articles and books on types and frequency of gender-swapping on the ‘Net, it
is entirely possible that a woman might present herself as “male,” both with regard to her
avatar online and her material self (or a man might present himself as female), and there would be little that could be done to immediately ascertain the truth of the matter. (Stone 1995, Turkle 1995 & 2005, Rheingold 1993, Cherny 1994, Kendall 2002)

Offsetting risk of inaccuracy was the longevity of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Each volunteer had been a member of the MUD for several years. Some were long-time, veteran players or staff who had also participated in face-to-face off-line interaction with fellow Aurealan Realms MUD members. Others had spent less time as participants, but were known to, and referred by, other veteran participants. Their previous relationship with the MUD and the interviewer, it was hoped, would reduce distortion to a level consistent with traditional face-to-face qualitative studies.

The interviews are best described as story-telling prompted by the following questions. They were not always asked in the same order, or with exactly the same wording, for they needed to be inserted into the conversation in such a way that did not call unnecessary attention to them whenever possible. As the storytelling unfolded, all thirteen questions were answered in every interview, although not always in response to direct questions, because some participants provided answers in the context of other questions. Occasional follow-up questions, as reactions to information provided by the interviewees, depended on the situation.

The thirteen questions were:

Q1: How did you first get involved in MUDding?
Q2: What was your favorite experience on a MUD?
Q3: What was your least-favorite experience on a MUD?
Q4: How do you pick what to “be” on a MUD?
Q5: How is your choice of online “self” related to what you’re like in “real life?”

Q6: What do you think of the other people who play on the MUD?

Q7: What kind of relationships do you have with the other people on the MUD?

Q8: Was there a time when something happened online that made you log off in anger or frustration?

   F1: What happened when you logged off?

Q9: Was there a time when you logged off in a better mood than when you logged on?

   F1: What happened when you logged off?

Q10: In general, do the people you encountered online seem to fall into cliques or social groups?

Q11: Did you perceive any sort of social group/clique on the MUD?

   F1: What overall effect did any groups/cliques have on the MUD community?

Q12: Did you ever communicate with or meet anyone from the MUD offline?

   F1: Did your online association affect how you dealt with them offline?

   F2: Did your offline interaction alter how you dealt with them online?

Q13: Have any of your interactions on the MUD crossed over into your offline life at all, with regard to language or other cultural elements?

   F1: Have you ever had to explain to someone not affiliated with the MUD what a MUD-related word or phrase meant?
4.1 – Introduction to Analysis and Discussion

_Aurealan Realms_ MUD (AR), the laboratory for this study, has undergone noticeable change during this research. When this project began, AR had a relatively small but vibrant and active group of participants and administrators. Since that time, however, the participants and administrators drifted away to other games, or retired from online gaming completely. AR is still online and available to any old or new participants who desire to connect and play, but its playerbase has, with some occasional and infrequent exceptions, moved on.

During that period, virtual identity, virtual community, and virtual culture, as terms, have entered mainstream culture. Massively Multi-Player Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) such as _World of Warcraft, Star Wars Galaxies, City of Heroes_ and others, the graphics-driven offspring of text-based MUDs, have become noticeably popular. The acronym “MMORPG,” and its abbreviation “MMO,” have become common in media and social circles. Becoming an avatar, assuming a virtual identity and, through it, journeying into game-based communities, cultures, and domains, has become widely accepted around the world.

The purpose of this study is to further understanding of those who choose to participate in virtual communities, and the possibly synchronous and synonymous interconnectedness of their virtual and material worlds. Doing so requires looking at inception, the beginnings of virtual worlds – text-based MUDs – as the originators of virtual identity, community, and culture within gaming circles. They are the precursors to the MMOs that have become accepted by the mainstream. Ultimately, any hypothesis
should be applicable to MMORPGs and those who participate in them, but must first be demonstrated to be appropriate for the text-based virtual reality that preceded the current graphics-based models.

During the interviewing phase of this study, eleven individuals were asked about their experiences playing on AR. As stipulated in the agreement made with respondents, each was assigned a pseudonym, randomly produced from an online random name generator. This provided a new mask, of sorts, after the respondents unmasked for the interview itself, and allowed them to speak with a guarantee of anonymity outside of the interview. All interviews were conducted in 2006. The respondents’ pseudonyms, their ages, and their occupations at the time are listed below:

Arosess: Female, 29, immunologist.
Taneit: Male, 30, computer programmer and consultant.
Sapron: Female, 32, corporate human resources.
Rorayi: Male, 33, software engineer.
Garoco: Male, 30, electrician.
Dynsero: Female, 29, retail management.
Eseops: Male, 29, teacher.
Utcarem: Male, 33, ISP and computer retailer.
Isurut: Female: 35, teacher.
Ostan: Male, 24, retail employee.
Tahab: Male, 41, teacher.

The variations in age and professions thus represent a diverse population in AR.
4.2 – MUDding and Identity

The elements that make up virtual identity, unlike many of the elements that make up material identity, must be consciously chosen. Written speech patterns, textually-expressed gestures and facial expressions, virtual movement, described appearance, and choice of language are all the result of conscious decisions on the part of the individual, informed by a variety of material and virtual lived experiences. If the virtual identity is thinner than its counterpart, as could hardly be otherwise, deliberate selection of characteristics and interaction make its presentation more coherent than manifestations in off-line contexts and also more revealing. How and why an individual shapes her virtual representation allows the observant-participant insight into the player’s intentions and desires.

4.2.1 – Rules of the Realm

As with all game-based environments, rules limit what is possible. Three different strata of rules govern a text-based virtual environment at any given time, imposing and enforcing restrictions on the participants, and expressing and constraining choices.

The first stratum is imposed by the computerized nature of the medium itself. A virtual world, by its very definition, resides on a computer, and is most often accessed via the Internet. For a MUD, the software that creates the world must reside on either a UNIX/LINUX machine or, in rare cases, a Windows machine. Anyone in possession of the address of the MUD and the necessary software can connect through the Internet. MUD software comes in several variants, each with unique features, but almost all MUDs utilize the telnet protocol for interaction with participants.
Telnet is a legacy of the very early days of the Internet, then called the ARPA-Net, run by the Advanced Research Projects Agency. As researchers left institutions that were part of the ARPA-Net, they wanted to retain access to software. Telnet allowed them to connect their computers to other computers on the ARPA-Net and to run software on remote computers from their local location. (Leiner, B., Cerf, V., Clark, D., Kahn, R., Kleinrock, L., Lynch, D., Postel, J., Roberts, L., & Wolff, S., 2009)

With Telnet, software could reside on a computer anywhere and, if so designed, be accessible to anyone with the address and the necessary permissions to run it. The first MUD, appropriately enough called MUD1, was written by Roy Trubshaw and James Bartle, and placed online in 1978 at Essex University, in England. The MUD program allowed anyone with Internet access to log on, create a virtual avatar, and enter a fantasy adventure world based loosely on a stand-alone game called Colossal Cave Adventure that had been developed earlier in the 1970s. (Bartle, 2007)

Limitations of the Internet and the Telnet protocol restricted participants to ASCII characters, those letters, numbers and symbols found on a keyboard, to use in creating avatars and interpreting virtual worlds. This was hardly surprising because those are the tools available to writers, but rudimentary graphics could be constructed from keys, as in the familiar smiley face. Thus the first rule, limiting individuals to text and “text-graphics,” grows out of the medium’s nature. The advent of Telnet brought ANSI (American National Standards Institute) color, which gave participants some choices regarding hues of displays (text-graphics, iconography, and color are addressed in Chapter 5).
The second level of rules arises from the MUD software. This level is comparable to the board, playing pieces, houses and hotels, community chest and chance cards, money, and dice provided by a *Monopoly* set: It is the “physical” structure of the game itself. The term MUD originally stood for a single program, *MUD1*. Later, however, other programmers created a variety of MUD codes, each distinct in its own way. The promulgation of different types of MUDs is analogous to the proliferation of computer operating systems into types and sub-types. Each “flavor” of MUD, each variety of MUD program code, offers slightly different options to its participants, and each individual MUD within its type may limit or expand possibilities. *Aurealan Realms* is an *RoAMUD*, developed by James Rhone. The *RoAMUD* codebase is a derivative of the *CircleMUD* codebase, which itself was developed from the *DikuMUD* codebase. ([circlemud.org](http://circlemud.org), 2007) While the *RoAMUD* program was made publically available in 1998, and other *RoAMUD* MUDs were put online since then, AR is the original *RoAMUD*, the development site for the codebase. (Rhone, 1998)

AR was brought online in the Spring of 1994 as *Realms of Aurealis* (RoA), using the CircleMUD 2.2 codebase. RoA began as Rhone’s senior computer programming project at the SUNY Institute of Technology in upstate New York where he majored in computer science. After graduating, he chose to pass the MUD on. It was given into this author’s care, was renamed *Aurealan Realms*, and is currently online.

As RoA’s founding administrator, Rhone chose to expand the options for avatars. When RoA first opened online, participants were given choice of gender (male or female), race (humans, elves, dwarves, or half-elves), and profession (fighter, cleric, thief and wizard). As of the end of 2007, thirteen years later, participants of AR could choose
male or female characters of twenty different races and fourteen different professions. Two of the races, one plant-based and one crystalline-based, were gender neutral.

The third level of rules stems from AR’s own structure as a game. To continue the *Monopoly* comparison, this level of rules is like the rules booklet that comes with the game to tell players how to play it. On AR, these rules clarified acceptable and unacceptable behavior of participants in the game. For example, one such rule instructed AR players not to present their avatars to others in ways that went beyond the game limits imposed by the previous rules stratum – no role-playing something that had no support from the MUD program itself. The online rules file *info rp policy* states:

> You may not role-play anything that is not possible within the code itself. In other words, you may not [role-play] an undead creature, since there is no code to allow PCs to become undead. You may not [role-play] that you are secretly a dragon in disguise, since there is no code to allow players to pick dragon as a race, etc.

*(Smith & Rhone, 1999)*

This rule was created after a significant community disruption, caused by a group of role-players presenting themselves as vampires, which resulted in an imbalance among the role-players. Because there was no second-stratum category for vampires, those role-playing them created their own rules and were attempting to force them on other participants. To address this, the MUD staff created the rule that participants were not allowed to represent themselves as such within the game, a “players may not make their own rules” rule regarding the MUD as a whole.
4.2.2 – Choices and Decisions

Within the three strata of rules, participants were able to choose whatever avatars suited their intent at any given time. In fact, it was not uncommon for participants to create a diverse group of characters, each made for a specific purpose, that could be deployed as the players saw fit. “Good mood – bad mood” dichotomies often drove choices. Respondent Tahab related how he picked his avatars:

Usually my choice of who I'd play when I logged on [to the MUD] was determined by what mood I was in. If I felt like telling stories, I'd play one of the characters who was supposed to be wise and learned. If I was in a bad mood, I'd grab one of the villains and take my aggressions out on the MUD, and occasionally on other people in [Role-Playing], but only with their consent, of course. :) (Appendix J, p. 329)

The choice of online persona is, by necessity, a personal one of considerable significance. Turkle (2004) elaborates:

You enter into the world of the programmers who made it. You have to do more than identify with a character on the screen. You must act for it. Identification through action has a special kind of hold. Like playing a sport, it puts people into a highly focused, and highly charged state of mind. For most people, what is being pursued in the video game is not just a score, but an altered state. (p. 84)

Establishing an online persona that will mesh with the offline thought processes, skills, and attitudes of the player likely affects the journey through the game.

Connecting to Aurelan Realms generated one of five randomly-selected text-image welcome screens, followed by the question “What are you called?” The answer, a
specific name, functioned as the key to entering the MUD world. A previously-created identity required a password.

A new name triggered a screen of rules of naming (e.g. that all names must be original and not derivative) followed by a request for confirmation, and selection of a password (and its confirmation). Additional instructions asked for election of ANSI color (a standard 16-color palette available only to users of certain types of software), and listed options for creating a character, accepting a character randomly chosen, or disconnecting.

A second screen stipulated gender selection. This screen offered participants the options of picking a male or female character, but also advised that the plant-based *Cernunian* race, and the crystalline-based *Covallinin* race, were genderless. If participants chose either, the screen read “regardless of the choice you make here, your gender will be changed appropriately.” (Smith & Rhone, 1999). Next came the “Race Selection” screen, with twenty available in both genders. Paragraphs described the races so that entrants could make a more informed choice.

Selection of class or profession followed, with a warning: “NEW PLAYERS: It’s best to pick a warrior or priest if you’re new to mudding.” (*Ibid.*) Of the fourteen different professions existing in the world of Aurealis, only nine were available to starting participants. The remaining five were known as *remort classes*, secondary or tertiary professions reached by certain levels of proficiency beyond the capabilities of those just starting out.

The player was then required to elect an ethical stance, known as *alignment*. This term, borrowed from *Dungeons and Dragons* originally by the writers of *MUD1* and later
copied by other MUD designers, designated a person’s attitude toward the world and the others in it. Players could choose from several named alignments: Angelic, Heroic, Virtuous, Good, Neutral (Good), Neutral, Neutral (Evil), Evil, Villainous, Fiendish, and Demonic. From these labels, participants could distinguish between characters who were ethical and those who were not, and make judgments as to degree. Even so, once players entered the game, they could hide their alignment choice, and even render it undetectable.

Opportunities to alter a character’s alignment arose from actions. “Quests” were pre-written stories that allowed a character to undertake missions in pursuit of treasure, money, and fame; . Some required behavior that was considered evil. Other missions might be motivated by virtue. Successfully completing such a quest would realign the character, to varying degrees.

The penultimate screen for a new character mandated the decision to become an “Assassin” or not. Open to any class, an assassin could attack and be attacked by any other player who had also chosen to be one. Assassin status was a permanent choice for that character, and significantly altered the playing experience on the MUD because of the greater risk of sudden violence.

The final screen in the creation process asked participants to enter their description. This was the opportunity to fine-tune choices for fellow players. For example, if one had chosen to be Jheromme, a human warrior of Good alignment, and a non-assassin, only those basics would be known to other participants in the game. To the character’s description, however, participants could add information regarding height, weight, skin tone, hair color and length, eye color, affect, aura, and any other non-object-based information (but no clothing, as clothing existed as separate objects in the world
and could be worn and removed at will) in order to bring the character “to life” for anyone in the MUD world who “look”ed at it.

This process of character-creation functioned as the birth of a completely new virtual being, one who would shortly enter an unexplored and fantastic world. This new virtual being would be judged on his appearance, his choices, his abilities, and his actions. According to Rheingold (1993):

Your character's role and the roles of the others who play with you are part of the architecture of belief that upholds for everybody in the MUD the illusion of being a wizard in a castle or a navigator aboard a starship: the roles give people new stages on which to exercise new identities, and their new identities affirm the reality of the scenario. (p. 148)

While the identity of the character would be fleshed out over time by his behavior in-game, as with material identity, a first impression would be made on other players based solely on the choices made in character creation.

4.2.2.1 – Gender, Race, and Naming

When the act of choosing an online representation (avatar) first began to be examined by scholars, one of the most often-cited elements was gender-swapping. The available gender spectrum of an online community was seen as a haven for those seeking fulfillment of an alternate gender, and MUDs in particular gave those individuals an opportunity to do so. Amy Bruckman (1993), currently an Associate Professor in the College of Computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology, examined the gender choice issue, noting that “gender swapping is an extreme example of a fundamental fact: the network is in the process of changing not just how we work, but how we think of
ourselves and ultimately, who we are.” (¶ 33) Articles similar to Bruckman’s represented, for many years, the prevalent focus on the concept of virtual identity.

In the intervening years, however, gender-swapping has become less of an issue to a new generation that has grown up with virtual worlds and that has become used to possibilities. In many cases, gender is now seen as simply another choice, and not one tied to any particular desire for exploration or self-discovery, but rather as something planned and executed for specific effect. As Putnam, Myers-Walls, and Love (2006) note, “Many people confuse gender with sex.” (¶ 5) Feminist theory, however, provides insight into differentiating sex and gender:

“Sex” has had the meaning of a certain group of irreducible, biological differentiations between members of the species Homo sapiens who have XX and those who have XY chromosomes. [...] “Sex” in this sense – what I’ll demarcate as “chromosomal sex” – is seen as the relatively minimal raw material on which is then based the social construction of gender. Gender, then, is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors – of male and female persons – in a cultural system for which “male / female” functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or nonexistent. (Sedgwick, 1990, pp.27-28)

For AR, “gender” is the appropriate term - as used in character creation – because all virtual genders are selected and may or may not have any direct correlation of material sex or gender, a choice stemming solely from the desires of the player.
Most respondents reported maintaining their material gender when choosing avatar representation. Isurut, for example, a female respondent, stated that the decision was simple. “For me personally, [gender-wise] I pick a female because I don't want to play a male character.” (Appendix J, p. 269) Respondent Taneit was one of the few who spoke of gender-swapping, and described being dissatisfied with an alternate-gendered avatar:

I actually created a female character to see how I was treated, even role-played her for a while, tried to keep her in character all the time, but it actually got kind of boring, so I basically dropped the persona. [...] I just wanted to see why a female character would get more help, even if they wouldn’t be a help in the game. (Appendix K, p. 347)

Respondent Taneit was attempting to experience, through deliberate deception, the behaviors toward women playing female characters he had previously observed, to find out if they truly were advantaged on the basis of their online and material gender. His deception, however, was insufficient to evoke the response he had observed in others, and he ultimately abandoned the attempt.

Names, and the gender roles they suggest, are additional tools for the explorer into the virtual. Turkle (2004) agrees, remarking that “among a wide range of adults, getting involved with computers opens up long-closed questions. It can stimulate them to reconsider ideas about themselves and can provide a basis for thinking about large and puzzling issues.” (p. 155) Not all of the results of such thought-provoking experiences are necessarily “ethical,” however. Within a MUD, trends of behaviors assigned to genders became recognized and then acknowledged by some players as more a methodology than
a representative choice. Respondent Garoco identified the behavior that respondent Taneit tried to replicate, and assigned the phenomenon a label:

Cute and cuddly kittens. They think that they are the sexiest and cutest girls in the world, and act like cuddly sex vixens who whore themselves into every lap that opens up (gives them [virtual equipment and money], secrets, or even pays attention) for them. [sic] These are often really not at all that way [in real life], especially physically and in outward forwardness. (Appendix E, p. 258)

Garoco’s observations, echoing Taneit’s reasons for experimenting with an alternate-gendered avatar, suggest a shift in the use of gender in virtual worlds. The experimentation of the past has given way to a more premeditated decision-making process by which gender becomes another means to gain an advantage in-game in a traditionally male-oriented virtual space. Gender has become less declaratory of material self and, in this instance, indicates that virtual gender is in fact virtual sexuality as expressed by chosen MUD gender and is being used simply as an “in” into a virtual world that is perceived as predominantly populated by male participants.

Although more women are engaging in computer gaming than ever before, most critics think that women are rare in virtual worlds. For players, characters perceived as female are generally held in different regard than characters perceived as male. Male players are traditionally more likely to offer assistance to a perceived female character than a perceived male character in the hopes of attracting that female through online interaction. But given the nature of avatars, there is nothing to stop a male participant from creating a female persona, giving it a personality like that described by Garoco, and
taking advantage of the reactions of the largely male participants solely for personal in-game gain.

Garoco’s term, the “cute and cuddly kitten,” taken as a stereotype, was acknowledged by other respondents as well. This phenomenon, the choosing of gender for in-game benefit, also represents conscious thought – prior to interaction with other MUDders – about how the chosen avatar will be apprehended by other players. This denotes a certain level of deliberate manipulation on the part of the “kitten,” purposed consciously toward one or more goals within the game. Also possible is the concept that such engagement with the other members of the MUD community serves the added function of strengthening “her” ego by allowing “her” to exert perceived “traditional female power” over “men,” albeit in a non-traditional setting.

Some participants craft personas to fit a template they have created already. They may gender that character out of a sense of appropriateness. One player may choose a male because he may be more convincing in an aggressive mode. Another might think that a female character makes a more devious spy, and so on. Respondent Arosess commented “I *hope*[sic] I’ve evolved into picking a virtual self that would be interesting for people to interact with during [role-playing]. [I] try to bring something new to the mix.” (Appendix C, p. 211) Responding to a question regarding her choices of avatar creation, and what part an expectation of role-playing with that avatar had in her decisions, she explained:

It would play a part in how I pick her class and [abilities], sometimes even equipment, right from the beginning. Even if the whole personality and story
behind her isn’t set and established right away, it is always somewhere in my mind. (ibid.)

Arosess created an online identity specifically for the purpose of providing meaningful and enjoyable interaction with others who wished to engage in the free-form improvisation of role-playing. When examined for that purpose, identification elements such as name and gender become little more than two pieces in a puzzle whose whole represents a virtual construct designed for a specific purpose. As with Garoco’s “cute and cuddly kitten,” gender becomes a facet, a choice, but not one that is necessarily a definition or an indication of any material reality, behavior, or desire.

Gender is interpreted as the avatar’s sex on a MUD, but the range of gender choices in the MUD world recognizes the feminist theory definition of gender: In a MUD, virtual gender is more representative of the idea of chosen male/female roles and behavior than material biological sex. It is a choice that can be made, irrespective of biology, and as such affects participants differently than would material sex.

Choosing a gender may simply be a way to exploit the sexual mythology of the material world; that mythology in turn infects the virtual world and can be turned to a player’s advantage. Conversely, choice of gender may represent a thematic choice, a means of expressing a pre-conceived notion of how the character will “be” in the MUD.

Beyond gender is the choice of race. Each available race in the AR MUD world has been provided with an established history and culture. Within that history and culture comes names and pronunciations, physical characteristics, attitudes toward other races, societal types, and a general description. For example, the “help elf” entry in AR’s on-MUD documentation menu contains the following information:
Common Name: Elf (EHLF)
Formal Name: Ale'un (ah-LAY-oon)
Race: Ale'unan (ah-LAY-oon-an)
Racial Slurs: Fairman, Fairwoman
Friendly: Pixie, Nixie, Prmyr, Halfling, Covallinin
Indifferent: Orc, Ogre, Drakyn, Minotaur, Human, Ehaziel
Suspicious: Half-Elf, Dwarf, Trokhon, Half-Orc, Gnome
Antagonistic: Zhaun, Gharnblin
Height: 4'2" to 5'8" (1.3 to 1.7 meters)
Weight: 70 lbs. to 190 lbs. (31 to 86 kg)
Society: Tribal, Xenophobic

Description: Ale'un (Ale meaning "day", and Un meaning "People of") are forest-dwellers, feeling themselves guardians of nature. They are extremely fair-skinned, of middling height and weight, and generally willowy, with exotic eyes of varied hues. They are as advanced in thought and abilities as any other species, but have chosen to spurn the concept of cities, preferring instead to build their communities in and around the forests, to remain closer to nature.

(Smith & Rhone, 1999)

This information provides an “elf” player with details on how that newly-chosen race generally reacts to other species encountered in the AR world. Racial conflict has been pre-programmed into the MUD world, between the available MUD races. As race is a factor of daily material life, MUDs that allow a selection of race can make it a factor in daily virtual life as well. On AR, each race has a pre-scripted sense of self and sense of other with regard to other races. Players are not required to follow this script, however, but the information is presented as source material for those interested.

Some respondents chose a race for their avatar that most closely matched their material race, or granted the most in-game opportunities. Respondent Utcarem recalled:

Well, I must be simple minded, either that or racist. I was always human. When I did make a different raced character it was evil or bad or deranged or self hating. I am not sure if there are really any [underlying] issues with why I always picked a human but it was a well rounded individual and humans could be more classes than any other race. (Appendix L, p. 356)
Respondent Arosess chose a recognizable race as well, but because of a lack of fore-
knowledge of the fantasy elements of the MUD:

I usually stick with human or part human as a race. I don't read a ton of Tolkien 
and other sources of inspiration to make huge leaps like playing a totally different 
race. For that same reason, I think I've only had one male character in 10 years 
(and that was BRIEF). (Appendix C, p. 211)

For others, knowledge of fantasy elements affected avatar creation choices, but within the 
player’s perception of self. Respondent Dynsero explained:

I look to see what is available and see what would be most likely for me to 
become, something I could see myself doing if I were to really be at that place 
and time. I don't usually have the time or energy to create a persona that is a 
complete 180 from whom [sic] I am, I wouldn't be able to believe in it so how 
could I expect others to? (Appendix E, p. 253)

After choosing gender and race, each player can decide upon a specific role to 
play within the game world of AR. Male ogres are expected to be large, tough, dumb, and 
unrelenting. Female elves are expected to be soft, willowy, intelligent, and honorable. 
Beyond these common tropes, however, the establishment of a baseline racial behavior 
and attitude set allows a player to further distinguish herself as an individual within the 
game community. A female “zhaun” (a subterranean race noted for its cruelty) who 
spends her time helping others is a notable exception to the norm for her race. 
Respondent Sapron recalled her second-favorite avatar, an a-typical ogre who became a 
role-model for future AR players, “Vrondas didn't fit the general stereotypes for [the 
ogre] race. I liked playing against the norm. Sadly, others decided my version of ogre was
the true version of ogre and suddenly dumb but sweet ogres started popping up everywhere.” (Appendix I, p. 317) Respondent Tahab also deviated from the established norm when creating his signature character:

Dark elves are supposed to be evil, but I'd read R. A. Salvatore's books about the rogue [benevolent] drow elf Drizzt, and I liked the idea of being the white sheep of a family. My [dark elf] was a storyteller, and having the MUD to use to help tell those stories made it just that much more enjoyable because I could create the stage, the props, the extras, and then watch and participate as other people stepped into the main roles and a lot of times took the story in directions I never thought of." (Appendix J, p. 328)

Each player is given the opportunity to be a known as a hero or villain within the MUD world. The game is written to place player-run avatars in the forefront of the storyline, encouraging them to do that which the “normal” computer-run avatars of the world are incapable of doing. Gender and racial choices provide the ability for a player to acknowledge certain stereotypical assumptions about his avatar, and then choose whether to play along or to act in a way that counters those expectations.

4.2.3 – Lived Self

As part of the interviews conducted for this study, former and current AR participants were asked several questions about their personal rationales for online representation. Respondents were asked how they went about choosing how they would portray themselves within the MUD framework. Nine of the eleven respondents indicated that while the creation of a true alternate persona was always a possibility, they generally tended to create characters whose online representations most matched their own,
although not necessarily physically. Respondent Isurut pointed out that, in her experience, “[a player’s] characters, to an extent, [become] an extension of how they [see] themselves or how they [wish] themselves to be.” (Appendix F, p. 266). Respondent Arosess (2006) described this desire for representational avatar creation:

Most of my successful characters have a trait or two that is me. I hope I'm not as screwed up as some of them can be though :) There's always something in them I can identify with, whether it’s a trait or talent or belief (or goal).

(Appendix C, p. 212)

Respondent Sapron agreed, observing that her avatar “was a way of being able to express certain parts of [my] personality in a way that was safe and fun.” (Appendix I, p. 308) Respondent Dynsero described the level of difficulty involved in not linking an avatar to recognized personality aspects, saying that she didn’t believe she “would be able to play something that I couldn’t make some sort of connection to, I wouldn’t want to develop it, it would be too much work to think of how that [avatar] would act.” (Appendix E, p. 254)

The majority of respondents projected their self-image into the virtual world to create someone who felt familiar. Eva-Lotta Sallnäs (2002) terms this goal as presence:

There is also the notion of presence, or of feeling as if being more or less physically inside a computer-generated environment that feels like reality. To achieve this is one of the aims of virtual reality development, especially in developing immersive virtual environments. (p. 174)

In order to successfully project oneself into a virtual world, a participant must be able to connect to something familiar in his online avatar.
Respondent Rorayi (2006) described the process of choosing his avatar by linking the process to the popular film *The Matrix*, and suggesting that his virtual representation connected directly to his perception of material self, “As [Morpheus] says – Residual Self Image.” (Appendix H, p. 296) Each avatar is created, in part, to embody some familiar or desired facet of self, that then can be magnified, explored, examined, and perhaps refined, by its use as the basis for a complete personality, a *facet avatar*. Many of the respondents echoed similar feelings, that there needed to be some familiar element, even if only imaginatively familiar, to connect them to the online avatar they would inhabit. As noted previously, respondent Tahab also recounted how mood affected his choice of avatar creation. He also noted that gameplay had a demonstrable effect on his mood as well:

I've been using video games of one sort or another as a way to take out my aggressions since I was in junior high school. It's always worked for me, and it's kept me from losing my temper IRL more times than I can count.  
(Appendix J, p. 329)

Respondent Arosess (2006) echoed that sentiment:

When I [have] several characters I can play [on a MUD], my mood definitely would help me choose who to play at that time. [...] My own mood or perceptions at the time wouldn't make me play a character in a way that is completely against the nature I've established for them. But if I'm in a mood to laugh or be playful, my character might be playful as well. (Appendix C, p. 212)

This faceting of perceived material self into a virtual avatar exemplifies the concepts examined by Gergen (1991). Each virtual avatar becomes representative of one voice in the concept of the “chorus of the mind,” but by extending that representation into
a virtual world, that particular facet is given an opportunity to experience events and interactions that would not have been as readily available were the facet to remain solely part of the material perceived self. This is due, in part, to there being fewer consequences likely from allowing a single facet of a player’s personality to become the motivation and “personality” for an avatar in a virtual environment. Respondent Isurut agrees, saying she feels “there is a connection between the real person and how they play their character. For example, I am a quiet, observant person in real life and my characters tended to be as well.” (Appendix F, p. 267)

Behind the answers given by the various interview respondents was the belief or conviction that facet avatars provided the opportunity for exploration of individual elements that composed a person’s sense of self. Any one attitude, prejudice, desire, or self-doubt could provide the basis for a fully-fleshed-out avatar in the virtual world, and through this persona, further self-discovery could occur. When asked about the process of developing characters, respondent Tahab (2006) replied:

Well, I love passing along stories and bits of knowledge. I really enjoy helping people experience something for the first time that I've experienced and loved. My first two characters [on AR] were an old wise man and a big dumb ogre. It let me be the advisor and the jester at the same time, since I'd play them together. [. . .] Since then every character of [mine] has been some form of storyteller or teacher, even the villains (Appendix J, pp. 327-328)

This linking of material and virtual facets could also be seen as a form of self-analysis, a type of two-way communication between the virtual and the material, where lessons learned while inhabiting the virtual facet avatar can be then taken offline and re-woven
into the overall material personality from which it was originally created. Respondent Garoco spoke of the importance of not restricting experience gained on a MUD to just MUD interaction and behavior:

It helps [players] to explore aspects potential [in their] personae which they would otherwise have no chance (or gall) to explore in their daily lives. This is beneficial. But the distance which they gain from the faceless MUDding experience truly separates them from the real world, and makes it far too [easy] to restrict these explorations FROM the real world. But that person would have quite good results were he to chance those experimentations by exploring a different – but real-world – environment ... such as going out clubbing, or to art museums, or a new job, etc. There's really no [difference], except that MUDding can be compartmentalized quite easily from the rest of one's world. (Appendix E, p. 255)

Garoco also explained that “[Characters sometimes represent] aspects which are not of our personalities, but which we wished were of our personalities, which ends up making them an askew part of our personalities.” (ibid., p. 253) Respondent Arosess noted that, “we all have different sides. Angry sides, painful sides, silly sides. Creating characters allows us the chance to express parts of ourselves that we probably couldn't (and in some cases would never want to) express in real life.” (Appendix I, p. 310)

A facet of perceived self may also become part of, or may have been created by, observed behaviors of others within the MUD world. Donath (1999) states that:

The characteristics and reputation of this alter-ego are drawn not only from the real-world characteristics it references, but from its history within the virtual community. The player may learn quite a bit from the experience of constructing
an alternate, bodiless, textual persona, but that knowledge may be about social roles and institution, rather than specific insights about the psychology of others.

(Sec. 3.2.1, ¶ 4)

The process of integrating the lessons learned by a facet avatar is affected by both the participant’s own experiences and the input gained from interactions with other participants.

Like Tahab, respondent Garoco also indicated that he would use the MUD as an escape from the pressure of the offline world, and that it allowed him to channel his lighter side into a realm where it was both accepted and appreciated:

A MUD is truly an escape from the real world. MY real world has often been stressful, unbearable, difficult, trying, or otherwise boring from time to time. Being able to let my goofy side loose – and have it expected and enjoyed by the denizens of the MUD – is a release for me. Being able to force that weird persona into a believable and [role-playable] character is a fun challenge, and often can be greatly useful in [role-playing] situations which have become mired.

(Appendix E, p. 253)

By channeling facets of his personality that could find no outlets in the material world into a virtual avatar, participants like Garoco were able to find both release and reassurance via their interactions with others who might or might not have been undergoing similar cathartic experiences.

Another participant of AR spoke directly to the idea of a blending of on- and off-line personalities. Respondent Sapron talked about her signature character, and that character’s effect on her life:
I think Sapron helped me to come out of my shell in real life as much as she did online. I started to realize that this character wasn't just a character. She was a part of me. She was so beloved on [AR] that it made me feel good about myself. I thought, "Wow. People are seeing this crazy side of me and they're not recoiling. They actually like me!" ... As I let Sapron seep into my real life she started to evolve more on [AR]. It was a fascinating thing to watch. The other characters I played were fascinating, too, but Sapron was always my favorite.

(Appendix I, p. 309)

Additionally, a MUD is first and foremost a game, played with other people, for enjoyment. If other players inhibit the enjoyment of gameplay, those players are excluded from future communal play. Thus, the experience of having a facet of one’s material personality accepted by others in a virtual environment, as demonstrated through continued invitation to communal gameplay, sends a message to the material participant that the facet is acceptable and of value to others. The facet personality is presented with evidence that peers within the virtual world appreciate what the material participant is able to offer through that piece of himself while inhabiting that specific avatar.

4.2.4 – Extensions of Lived Self

Participants in a virtual environment have the potential to contribute to, mold, and otherwise aid in the formation of the perception of themselves by others. Within obvious constraints, each avatar is a consciously-created construct within the virtual world, and as such has become the embodiment of the phrase “don’t judge a book by its cover.” As participants gain experience in the virtual, they learn through the creation of their own
personal avatars, and their relationships with others who have also created personal virtual representations, the fallibility of first impressions in an avatar-driven space.

The interpretation of what is encountered likely derives both from real-world experience and from any previous experience with online encounters. As with offline communication, participants in an online community are likely to form impressions based on offline stereotypes. These assumptive impressions are made to fill in the gap formed by the lack of visual cues in an online text-based environment. Ann-Sofie Axelsson (2002) noted that the offline habits of forming impressions of individuals are not habits that online users discard:

Categorizations that play an important role offline in shaping the social interaction, like age, sex, and ethnicity, do not cease to exist when people enter a [virtual environment] and become avatars, as many had hoped, but become even more influential online due to the lack of social and status cues. Since we do not get a very nuanced picture of the people we meet, we tend to rely, more than offline, on stereotypical images of people as a first approximation of who we are interacting with. When going online, we do not leave our presuppositions about people behind, but rather bring them with us and allow them to rule the social interaction more strongly. (p. 198)

As suggested previously, issues of gender and race have also become less of a declaration, and more of a choice made for a planned effect. The “cute and cuddly kittens” that respondent Garoco spoke of indicates a conscious choice with regard to using gender (and by association, names that suggest an avatar’s sex as well) as a means to an end, be that end easier interaction with others to simplify the mechanics of the
environment, or the creation of an online persona that will fill a specific desired role in the improvisational drama that constitutes the essence of “online role-playing.” Garoco described his impressions of his fellow MUDders, but did so through recognition of the stereotypes he perceived. He described them as possessing “average to above-average intelligence. Very broadly disparate levels of maturity (or social maturity). Above-average to high levels of creativity. Lonely, and/or prone to depression and tunnel vision.” (Appendix E, p. 256) Garoco, known to this author as an intelligent and insightful individual, nevertheless fell back on perceived stereotypes to describe the MUD population.

4.3 – Virtual and Material Interpersonal Relationships

Computer games that take participants into fictionalized realms for significant amounts of time are not a new concept. Since the creation of the first single-user interactive-fiction game, called *Colossal Cave Adventure*, in 1972, participants seeking immersion in an alternate world were able to utilize computers for that purpose. Former investigative news reporter and video game programmer Rick Adams (2006) describes the game as “the historic first ‘interactive fiction’ game, in which the computer would simulate and describe a situation and the user would type in what to do next, in simple English.” (¶1) With the diffusion of the Internet, however, first into academia and then into the general public, the idea of exploring new virtual worlds with other living, breathing people was intriguing. The propagation of MUDs throughout the 1980s and 1990s allowed this activity to become global and, with advancement in graphics technologies, has spawned the follow-up genre of MMOs, which has further increased opportunities to participate in interactive virtual game-play.
Just as in material game-play, relationships with, and opinions about, other participants are inevitably created and explored. While the rules governing such interactions are slightly different materially than virtually, interactive behavior in MUDs does occur online. Some of those rules are modified by and for the nature of the medium, but through the relationships of the participants of a MUD, a sense of virtual community can arise. For example, since communication via text lacks visual cues, any faux visual cues like a character nodding or smiling are done deliberately by the player, as opposed to happening reflexively. These faux visual cues are, however, often interpreted in the same fashion as their reflexive material counterpart cues are. This allows for a more direct conscious influence over social dynamics for players. Additionally, social actions like advocacy, protesting, recruiting to social sub-groups, and emotional and virtual “turf wars” are common in MUD communities.

The society of AR was a hierarchy based on responsibilities. Players were allowed access to the MUD free of charge and, as long as the in-game rules were followed, were encouraged to enjoy the game as they saw fit. The administration comprised six levels of responsibility. At the lowest level were Counsel, individuals who were either representatives of other MUD communities, or persons who had retired from active participation but were still available for advice and general assistance. The next two levels, known as Avatars and Spirits, were the builders of the virtual world, the authors responsible for the places, objects, and creatures that players would encounter in their game-play. The next level were the Ulutiu, the department heads who oversaw specific areas of MUD development, such as world writing, programming, quests (pre-programmed mini-adventures), and role-playing. At the penultimate level were the
Merlon, who were the assistants to the Elohim, the head administrators of Aurealan Realms. Merlon and Ulutiu were also arbitrators called upon to resolve situations not clearly covered in the rules posted for the players and staff.

For players, AR offered as much or as little anonymity as was desired. A player would create his virtual avatar, then choose a name that would serve as his “mask.”

Aurealan Realms provided guidelines for masked avatar creation:

Greetings! Our policy on names is real simple, so this shouldn't take long. We basically have two policies: a basic one and a Role-Playing one.

Basic name policy:

* No deliberately offensive names.
* Don't use obviously religious names, it's disrespectful.
* Don't use names of copyrighted stuff that could get us sued.
* This is a fantasy mud, so don't use non-fantasy names.

Role-Playing name policy:

* You MUST MUST MUST have an original name!
* No common words/names. You're a hero or villain of renown!
* No names that are also titles. That's what titles are for.
* No names that are phrases. That's also what titles are for.
* No names that are "just a letter or two off" from someone else’s name.

(Smith & Rhone, 1999)

Because Aurealan Realms was centered on a mythos unique to it, the administrators decreed that each player be unique as well. The staff had the ability to change an avatar’s name if it were not acceptable (but would not delete his avatar) in order to ensure the integrity of the mythos.

Interaction between players began via their masked avatars. Over time, however, a player might achieve the level of friendship or intimacy necessary toward another player to feel comfortable revealing her offline name, and vice versa. This phenomenon has been written about extensively in narratives about virtual romance, virtual relationships, and other virtual social phenomenon. (Cherny 1994, Chesboro & Bonsall,
How and when a player chooses to reveal his material self, hidden behind his masked avatar, depends on trust, shared interests, and level of comfort with the other participant. The decision to extend trust and friendship, and then to chance the precarious consequences of reaching offline, is a huge step. It can be compared to asking someone out on a first date, making new friends after a geographic relocation, or telling a secret to an existing friend.

Virtual masking allows a player to control presentation of herself in an online community. A player “appears” to other players however she chooses. But masking also buffers – it insulates the player from a correspondent and also separates her virtual and material experiences. Such distancing behavior is common online, and may be the cause for incidents of seeming dismissal or disinterest when emotional matters are expressed and discussed. As Shea (1994) explains:

When you communicate electronically, all you see is a computer screen. You don't have the opportunity to use facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice to communicate your meaning; words -- lonely written words -- are all you've got. And that goes for your correspondent as well. When you're holding a conversation online -- whether it's an email exchange or a response to a discussion group posting -- it's easy to misinterpret your correspondent's meaning. And it's frighteningly easy to forget that your correspondent is a person with feelings more or less like your own. (p. 35)
The issue Shea addresses is one of the primary causes of communication uncertainty resulting from CMC. Because of this uncertainty, moving from a uniquely virtual relationship to one that is both virtual and material revolves around trust – in the other person and in the truthfulness of the information that has been received from her. Several respondents talked about the process of revelation of their material selves, with varying end results.

Respondent Arosess reported an instance where an online friendship that had progressed beyond avatar-to-avatar was terminated abruptly when her avatar correspondent became materially involved with another female MUD player. Because of the jealousy of the second female MUD player, the friend discontinued his online association with Arosess. (Appendix A, pp. 216-217) Respondent Garoco explained that making that connection beyond avatar-to-avatar created relationships that were “deeper than real-life relationships have been (due to the bare-bones depth of communication one gets by cutting out everything but the written word), and much more long-lived, where a personal connection has truly been made.” (Appendix E, p. 263) Respondent Isurut commented on the differences going beyond the avatar-to-avatar made in her perceptions of her fellow players:

I enjoyed their company. They were fun to be around and I felt that they were people I would have been real friends with. Plus it helped that later I actually met them and I still felt like they were people I would like as friends. Whereas other people that I may have associated with I knew I would not like to be around in
real life; some of [whom] I [later] met at [the annual face-to-face gathering of MUD players and staff] and I knew my assumption was right.

(Appendix F, p. 275)

Isurut formed opinions of her fellow MUDders based on solely virtual interactions, and the eventual face-to-face meeting, long after her impressions had been formed, simply affirmed those opinions as accurate.

In each case there was a turning point where a player would feel he had gotten to know the material personality behind another player’s avatar well enough to be comfortable revealing certain private information. In many cases, it began with revealing material names, and progressed from there. But in all cases, the issue revolved around the establishment of trust between the parties involved.

4.3.1 – Protocols of Virtual Interaction

Since MUDs are text-based virtual worlds, all communication in the MUD itself is text, made up of the characters available on a standard computer keyboard. While some keyboard-characters are given special significance, most are simply what they would be within the context of a word-processing program. The letters, numbers, and symbols used on a MUD are the same as those used for writing letters, postcards, or sending text-messages via instant messenger programs on a computer or a cellular telephone.

MUDs do, however, provide a variety of channels through which participants may communicate. Some of these channels support the willing suspension of disbelief necessary for an immersive, interactive fantasy-based role-playing game, while others contradict immersion by violating the rules inherent in the world structure.
The most common method of communication on a MUD is the *say* command. A user will type the world “say” followed by whatever he wants to communicate, and when the enter key is pressed, that line will be sent to the MUD, to be seen by anyone else in the same virtual “room” as the speaking avatar. The MUD will frame the message according to the position of the receiver to the speaker. For example, if a participant named Jheromme types “say Hello, how’s it going?” and presses enter, he will see “You say, ‘Hello, how’s it going?’,” while anyone else in the room will see “Jheromme says, ‘Hello, how’s it going?’” The MUD will send the message to the receivers in a manner that makes logical sense to them, and identifies the speaker. Only those in the same “room” as the speaker will “hear” what is said. This channel upholds the integrity of the virtual world by not breaking its continuity: Characters within the virtual world should be able to talk to one another, and “say” is considered a public channel in that what is communicated via this method can be overheard by anyone else in the same virtual space as the speaker.

The second most common channel on a MUD does not uphold continuity, because within the logic of the world, such communication should not be able to exist. The name for this command and channel varies from MUD to MUD, depending on the codebase used. The command may be called *Chat* or *Gossip* or *OOC* (Out-of-Character), but regardless of the command name, it functions in the same manner. If participant Jheromme were to replace his earlier “say” with “ooc,” he would see his message as does everyone else: “(OOC) Jheromme: Hello, how’s it going?” This message would be received by everyone else in the MUD tuned in to the OOC channel, regardless of where in the virtual world they were located. Thus, a person in the same room with Jheromme
would see that message, and a person on a separate virtual continent from Jheromme would also see that message the exact same way. This is a public channel in the broadest sense of the word, because anything sent over it can be seen and responded to by anyone else on the MUD who is tuned into the OOC channel, anywhere in the virtual world.

There are other public channels as well. The *yell* command allows anyone else in the same virtual area to hear what is yelled. The *music* channel is specifically for participants to share lyrics of songs with each other. Some MUDs have a *Query* or *Newbie* channel for participants to ask questions about the world or about the game-play. *Groupsay* allows participants who have banded together in a group to speak only among themselves. *Clansay* allows participants to communicate with other clan or guild members anywhere in the virtual world. *Faithsay* allows participants who are members of a MUD-based faith to communicate with each other. *Asay* is called the Assassin channel: It is dedicated to those participants who have agreed to engage in player-versus-player activities, which allow participants to attack one another. *Bellow* allows a participant to communicate a message across the entirety of the game world, but is only allowed once per MUD day per avatar.

Beyond the public channels, however, are private channels that allow participants to speak with others in a manner that may be “seen” and partially “overheard” by other avatars, “seen” but not “overheard” by other avatars, or completely unnoticed by other avatars, depending on the command chosen. The *murmur* command allows someone to say something to another participant within the same room, and anyone other than the two people involved in the communication will pick up random words that may or may not reveal the nature of the communication. For example, if Jheromme murmurs “I don’t
think I like this person very much” to Joyye, Jheromme will see “You murmur to Joyye, ‘I don’t think I like this person very much’.” Joyye will see “Jheromme murmurs to you, ‘I don’t think I like this person very much’.” Anyone else in the room, however, will see something similar to “Jheromme murmurs to Joyye, ‘I...I...this person...“ The distortion of the overheard murmur is randomly generated by the MUD each time.

The whisper command is similar to the murmur command in how it operates, but different in how it is perceived by others in the room. If Jheromme whispers the same sentence to Joyye, anyone else in the room will simply see “Jheromme whispers something to Joyye.” Finally, the tell command is completely private and unobservable. If Jheromme types “tell joyye I don’t think I like this person very much,” he will see “You tell Joyye, ‘I don’t think I like this person very much.” Joyye will see “Jheromme tells you, ‘I don’t think I like this person very much.” Anyone else in the room will see nothing, no indication that any communication has occurred. Thus, the level of privacy in communicating with another participant can be determined per message by the speaker.

Yell, say, whisper, and murmur are commands that emulate offline non-electronic communication possibilities. Gossip, query, groupsay, clansay, faithsay, asay, bellow, and tell are commands that replicate communication possible only via other electronic means (telephone, cellphone, text messaging, radio, television, satellite, etc.). But with this array of communication options, a MUD permits simulation of both non-electronic (talking, body language) and offline electronic (chat rooms, instant messaging) interaction.

In addition to the various channels for speaking, AR made two other types of communication available to participants to aid in the virtual reality achieved through
willing suspension of disbelief. Given the text-based nature of the MUD world, along with the lack of tone of voice, there are none of the visual facial cues common in human communication. This is an inherent limitation of text-based CMC – “Human communication is verbal, vocal, and facial.” (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967, p. 252) On a MUD, only the verbal can be seen. The MUD code, however, allows for the conscious insertion of virtual visual cues via the various socials and the emote command.

Socials are pre-written commands, modifiable only by the staff of the MUD, that mimic visual cues within the text-based framework. Socials are single word commands, such as nod or smile, that allow an avatar to simulate visual expressions and actions. For example, if Jheromme typed the word “smile” and pressed enter, anyone else in the room with Jheromme would see “Jheromme smiles,” while Jheromme himself would see “You smile.” If Jheromme typed “smile Joyye,” Joyye would see “Jheromme smiles at you,” Jheromme would see “You smile at Joyye,” and anyone else in the room would see “Jheromme smiles at Joyye.” Through socials, common visually-perceived physical inflections are given presence in the textual landscape. The behaviors represented by socials differ from their material counterparts in that each social on a MUD is deliberate, not involuntary. The command must be typed, which requires that a player think about nodding before sending. In the offline world, the expressions and body movement that socials emulate can be unconscious or conscious. Socials are seldom unconscious unless the participant has achieved such familiarity with the interface as to render them second nature.

The remaining command available to participants is much more open-ended, and requires additional programming by the MUD staff. The emote command allows a
participant to fashion his own customized social expression so that it seems spontaneous. If Jheromme wants to smile at Joyye and bat his eyes lovingly, there is no pre-programmed social that will allow him to do so. The emote command will let Jheromme structure his virtual response in any way he wants. If Jheromme types “emote smiles at Joyye and bats his eyes seductively,” he, Joyye, and anyone else in the room will see “Jheromme smiles at Joyye and bats his eyes seductively.” Emotes send one identical text message to the room, however, and this can cause communication uncertainty. For example, if Jheromme types “emote smiles at you,” everyone in the room with him will receive the message “Jheromme smiles at you,” regardless of who Jheromme may have intended the message for.

Additionally, many of the public channels (gossip, music, query, groupsay, clansay, faithsay, and assassin) allow emotes as well. If Jheromme wanted to make his earlier emote quite public, he could type “gossip :smiles at Joyye and bats his eyes seductively.” This would result in a message displayed publically on the gossip channel “(Gossip) Jheromme smiles at Joyye and bats his eyes seductively.” The use of the colon as the first character of a message on any of those channels tells the MUD to display the line as a simulated action, not as a message “said” by the sender.

4.3.2 – Interactive Iconography – Symbols and Words

In terms of the trichotomy of communication outlined by Mehrabian and Ferris (1967), CMC represents the lowest-ranking form of communication, consisting solely of words, lacking tonal or visual cues that normally convey meaning. MUDs attempt to compensate for such limitations by offering socials and the ability to emote attitudes and
behaviors. Because of the voluntary nature of these commands, however, they do not compensate fully for the loss of tone and sight.

Frequent users of computer-mediated communication tend to develop their own methods of inserting tone and action into statements. The most common method has become widely used and accepted by Internet users as a whole: The emoticon. Also known as “smileys,” these are defined in a 1999 *Network World* article as, “those concatenations of ASCII characters that are supposed to convey emotion in plain text messages, as in :-).” (Gibbs, ¶3) In short, they are text characters given icon status and assigned meaning in context.

Emoticons have become standard lingo for those engaged in communication with other people via computers. They have crept into almost every form of online conversation, game-related, chat-related, or even business-related. As Tamosaitis (1995) explained:

Digispeak is evident in e-mail exchanges of all kinds, too, from the dialogue between two digital pals who may or may not ever have met [face-to-face] to the slow infiltration of the occasional smiley or acronym into business e-mail to convey levity where levity is needed. (p.65)

Other methods can convey the non-verbal and the non-spoken aspects of language as well. A shorthand of sorts has evolved over the evolution of the Internet that permits the option of not using emoticons, emotes, or socials.

The most basic type of shorthand employs characters such as the asterisk or the greater-than and less-than symbols as emphasis around a word to separate it from the text itself. Jheromme might write, “I saw you online last night, but you were... *grin* busy.”
Read correctly, Jheromme is seen to grin following words said with a straight face. This allows for an emulation of offline speech that MUD socials, emotes, and even smileys are insufficient to convey. It is also not uncommon for the “*action*” to be written as “<action>” or “[action]” within typed sentences. There is no discernable difference in interpretation based on the bracketing character chosen, as each allows the expression within the message to be understood.

Acronyms in online chat and concatenation allow for faster communication while still providing essential information. This style of transmission only works, however, when the recipient also understands the abbreviations. For example, if Jheromme were to concatenate the “*grin*” in his sentence, it would look like “I saw you online last night, but you were... *g* busy.” The single letter is clear enough – provided the recipient understands the substitution. Only a few such abbreviations stand for the actual “language.”

In general, emoticons and other supplemental conversational protocols are common throughout CMC, and the more experienced participants have employed them frequently. Jorge Peña and Jeff Hancock (2006) point out that:

Approximately one half of the messages of highly experienced participants included a convention ... In general, the use of specialized conventions in the present study included abbreviations such as LOL (i.e., laugh out loud) and GF (good fight), emoticons (e.g., :-)) and scripted emotes (e.g., ‘**Great Duel my Friend**’). (p.105)
On a MUD, such protocols are institutionalized to a greater degree than in a pure-chat environment. As such, these protocols allow for more easily-understood responses, as they become common categories of meaning.

4.3.3 – Virtual Game Interaction

In general, interactions on AR fall into two types: Interaction between a human participant and a computer-controlled non-player character (NPC) and interaction between two or more human participants. Human-to-human communication may use any of the methods referenced previously. Interaction between the computer and a human participant use only a fraction of those commands and channels due to programming limitations of the MUD program – there are certain interaction commands that computer-controlled NPCs do not understand.

An NPC can be analogized with the animatronic pirates in the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction at Disneyland. For a MUD, they are entities in the virtual world, controlled by the MUD program itself, to provide the “extras” in the stories the MUD authors have created. The flexibility of NPCs varies from MUD-to-MUD. On AR, NPCs could be simple opponents for players to pit themselves against, or could actually react to certain words or phrases, responding with pre-programmed dialogue or actions. All “monsters” that the players fight in a MUD are NPCs, as well as all shopkeepers, teachers, healers, and non-player interactants. The level of interaction possible with an NPC is determined by the writer who chooses to utilize that particular NPC as well as the flexibility and limitations of NPC creation imposed on the writer by the MUD itself.

Some NPCs are robotic – they deliver pre-generated dialogue at pre-set times and do not respond to players. Others possess the ability to respond to pre-defined stimulus –
typed communication, socials, or emotes – and respond with information, actions, or other pre-set behaviors. The more player-like an NPC is, the more “real” that NPC will seem to the player within the virtual environment. Regardless of how well-written the NPC is, however, no MUD player would mistake an NPC for another live player.

AR has an advanced scripting language, called *mobprocs*, which allows NPC designers to create NPCs that will respond to player input. NPCs may then create other NPCs (summoning monsters to attack players), virtual objects (conjuring a weapon), or trigger events that will move a player’s avatar to another location within the virtual environment. NPCs may provide clues to mysteries, assign tasks which require players to speak to other NPCs in order to complete, or any number of other pre-scripted interactions.

On AR, interaction between PCs (player characters, i.e. a human participant), and between NPCs and PCs, utilizes the same set of commands and channels, although reactions by NPCs are limited by the channels they are able to react to. Any of the in-room communication methods (say, whisper, murmur, tell, a social, or an emote) can “trigger” an NPC. NPCs can be designed to respond only to certain words or phrases, or to incorrect answers to an interrogation. In responding, NPCs can speak or emote on many, but not all, of the channels available to players, and can perform in-room emotes and socials as well.

On AR, for example, there is an NPC creature known as the *Shadowsil*. It is a unique monster that exists only in one specific region of the AR “world,” a place known as *The Shadowkeep*. Through the use of a mobproc, the *Shadowsil* will periodically check to see if there are any player avatars in the same “zone” (the area of the “world” that it is
in), and if so, will then examine the avatar’s experience level. If the avatar the *Shadowsill* finds is higher than level 71, it will do nothing. If the avatar is level 71 or lower, but higher than level 59, it will appear suddenly at the avatar’s location, emote (A shadowsill hisses, ‘Too haaaaaaard...’), cower before the avatar, and disappear. If the avatar is level 59 or lower, the *Shadowsill* will appear suddenly at the avatar’s location, emote (A shadowsill hisses, ‘Victim!’ and attacks!), and attack the avatar. Once the fight is over, if victorious, the *Shadowsill* will return to its “lair” (the “room” it sits in while waiting) and continue watching for other player avatars to trespass on its domain. Without the mobproc, the NPC *Shadowsill* would sit in a “room” and wait to be attacked by an avatar.

In addition to allowing an NPC to react to an avatar, a mobproc can give an NPC the ability to initiate action as well.

Mikael Jakobsson (2006), in his article *Rest In Peace, Bill the Bot: Death and Life in Virtual Worlds*, described the role of an NPC bartender in his virtual world:

Apart from my two wizards, there was also a third member on my staff. His name was Bill and he was a bot, i.e. a character controlled by a computer script instead of by a human. Bill served as my bartender. In addition to serving beer, he could also answers questions posed to him in a more or less intelligent manner. The fact that Bill had a distinct resemblance to another well-known Bill gave an added satisfaction to being served by him – since I sometimes felt a bit like a servant to this other Bill. (pp. 64-65)

Jakobsson recalls the disruption that occurred when someone gained access to a restricted area of the game and “deleted” Bill, an act he labeled “virtual murder” within the game community. (*ibid*, p.65) NPCs can have a very real and direct presence in a MUD, and
their absence may be felt as much as the loss of any familiar element in a domain. On AR, without NPCs, the players would have no opponents to fight together, no wise men or women to seek out for information, and no common people to protect or pillage. It is an NPC’s role in the game that engenders feelings of “affection” toward NPCs, much in the same way one feels an attachment to a favorite chair or favorite coffee cup.

The primary difference between player-to-NPC/NPC-to-player and player-to-player interaction is the potential scope. NPCs will respond only if programmed to, and then only within their pre-programmed limits. NPCs are capable only of the interactivity written into them by their creator. A reliable “litmus test” of whether or not an entity is a player or an NPC is to use a variety of messages and forms of communication: Players will be able to respond to all; NPCs will be able to respond to only a few. The authenticity of that interactivity, and the effect the interaction has on the immersive nature of the MUDding experience, is largely dependent on the quality of the writing. Human-to-human interaction, however, while limited by the command and channel structure of the MUD, is otherwise unlimited: Communication is as wide and diverse as the linguistic and mechanical typing skills of the participants.

4.3.4 – Lived Other and Virtual Community

An examination of the possibilities and limitations of relationships in a MUD must begin with an acknowledgement of the tenets of computer-mediated communication, specifically computer-mediated synchronous communication. Again, CMC is “the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems (or non-networked computers) that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages.” (December [Author’s Name], 2007, ¶
2). This process both facilitates and inhibits communication in much the same way that text-messaging or speaking in a YahooChat does.

In the mid-1960s, Mehrabian and Ferris determined that human communication can be broken up into three categories, weighted by impact on the transmission and reception of messages. They determined that human communication was based on visual cues (55%), intonation cues (38%), and on the actual words chosen and utilized (7%). (1967, p. 252) Thus, CMC, given its lack of visual and tonal cues, is at the lowest level. Smith, Farnham, and Drucker agree, finding CMC, specifically “text chat,” to be inherently limited communication which “lacks non-verbal cues, such as gestures, physical distances, and direction of eye gaze that facilitate face-to-face conversations.” (2002, p. 205)

Designers of a MUD attempt to compensate for the loss of higher-level communication. While emoticons provide iconographic representations of emotion, the possibilities of MUD socials and emotes provide a means to enhance plain-text communication. Thus, while a participant cannot “see” another player smile, she can read that her conversational partner’s avatar has smiled. Despite the lack of visual cues, she can respond accordingly.

Similarly, although MUD code cannot compensate for the loss of intonation, MUD participants can overcome deficiency by inserting deliberate written cues that are suggestive. For example, Jheromme might write “Oh, I don’t think so!” Sarcasm is not evident in the text as-written. A written cue, however, indicates intent. For example: Jheromme says, “*sarcastic* Oh, I don’t think so” or “Oh, I don’t think so. :P” The “:*P”
text-icon indicates someone sticking their tongue out (i.e. sarcasm). Such cues diminish the potential for confusion.

Despite limitations and restrictions, connection can still be meaningful online. Tales of people who have found their soul-mates online have become common. Such relationships are no less prevalent on a MUD, which indicates that text communication is not a barrier to understanding. Through text-based communication, players find others who share interests, which “takes the place of proximity; people may not be able to be close in physical location to someone with whom they are interacting on-line, yet they can find others who share common interests and attitudes.” (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006, p. 156) Respondents reported that initiating, solidifying, or maintaining online relationships can lead to successfully transferred offline relationships.

In fact, ten out of the eleven respondents recalled successfully transferred relationships from the MUD into other domains, both online and material. Some, like respondent Ostan, enjoyed a relationship that moved from the MUD to another form of online electronic communication (via an instant messaging program), but remained online. Relationships of other respondents began in the virtual world and ended in the physical face-to-face world. Respondent Arosess was introduced to, became friends with, fell in love with, married, and has had children with, someone she originally met online. She related the story of meeting her husband online:

He had the nickname Brian Griffin at the time (definitely not a fantasy theme like [Aurealan Realms] :) ). A friend had just hooked me on the TV show Family Guy. So I sent him a message saying I liked his name :). There was a group of like [ten] people or so talking in the same room, and it was a good conversation, but he kept
making me laugh. So the next night I saw him online and talked to him again and again and again and again :) We started talking summer of 1995. [We] married [in the] summer of 1999. (Appendix C, p. 217)

She also revealed that they met and began speaking due to a shared interest in a television program popular at the time, which supports Anderson & Emmers-Sommer’s evidence.

Respondent Garoco noted that “people online are different from offline, but more fundamentally themselves.” (Appendix E, p. 267). This perception might stem from what Tidwell and Walther (2002) describe as “modification of uncertainty reduction behaviors.” They explain that:

CMC interactants appeared to employ a greater proportion of more direct, interactive uncertainty reduction strategies – intermediate questioning and disclosing with their partners – than did their [face-to-face] counterparts. The probes and replies they exchanged were more intimate and led to levels of attributional confidence similar to their offline counterparts. According to their partners, CMC interactants are more effective when engaging these more intimate exchanges, compared to [face-to-face] communicators who act similarly. It seems likely that the increased intimacy of these microlevel behaviors may lead to perceptions of extraordinary affectionate relation, or hyperpersonal states. (p. 339)

Respondent Garoco’s claim that players are different but “more fundamentally themselves” may suggest that a language lacking visual and tonal cues can be more direct and authentic. The lack of visual and tonal cues in the sending of the message may remove emotional or mental barriers that would inhibit direct communication in a face-to-face setting. In a virtual setting, a significant portion of identifying information can
only be transmitted consciously, providing a certain level of anonymity – smiling, nodding, blushing, and so on. According to Ben-Ze’ev (2004), “anonymity is associated with concealment, which is contrary to self-disclosure. However, greater anonymity typically facilitates greater self-disclosure, and in turn increases familiarity and intimacy.” (p. 34) Lack of visual and verbal cues, which provides greater anonymity for players, results in a deeper level of sharing of information, which in turn provides for a different process of achieving intimacy.

Respondent Rorayi also described the dichotomy of perception in the online persona versus the offline persona:

I think I build up a collection of assumptions over time when dealing with someone online. It’s interesting to see how many turn out to be false when you finally meet. After you do meet, it’s interesting to see how it changes your interaction with them online from that point on. We like to preach not judging a book by its cover, but we all do it. So you build a lot of assumptions into physical appearance. However, on MUDs, you don’t have that bias. So you’re forced to build up the assumption table entirely on your interaction with them. When you finally meet, those two collections of assumptions [conflict] with one another to varying degrees. There is a certain amount of time when you’re consciously trying to decide which ones were right and wrong. I trust my ‘real’ instincts more. They are generally more correct. It’s difficult to interpret all the nuances of text. Also, people tend to exaggerate towards the positive side of the spectrum on the MUD :). (Appendix H, pp. 309-310)

When asked to clarify what he meant by exaggerations, Rorayi explained:
I think people generally emphasize the positives in their life and [suppress] the negatives if given the opportunity. MUDs provide that opportunity. They also provide the ability to “start fresh.” Start a new persona, with an entirely new society, initially. So generally the MUD version of a person is stronger, smarter, more beautiful than their [sic] “real” [self]. (Appendix H, p. 310)

Merging an online relationship into the material world requires significant negotiation of virtual versus material perceptions. Statements made online that are not perceived as true must be explained when revealed in the material world, although some exaggeration may be expected and therefore generally forgiven. As mentioned previously, respondent Garoco explained this phenomenon by describing online relationships that leave the confines of the virtual world as “deeper than real-life relationships have been (due to the bare-bones depth of communication one gets by cutting out [everything] but the written word), and much more [long-lived], where a personal connection has truly been made.” (Appendix E, p. 263)

Other respondents spoke of relationships taken from online to offline as well, some resulting in romantic and permanent material pairings. Respondent Tahab explained:

I even fell in love - my first online love affair - on [a MUD], to a woman I later met and dated briefly. It would have most likely developed into a long-term relationship but that we were both poor, struggling, and lived many states apart, so we couldn't really afford to see each other often enough to make a long-term relationship work. (Appendix J, p. 329)
As in the studies by Tidwell & Walther, online relationships are sometimes perceived to move much faster, because of the increased intimacy of the communication that takes place online. Shared interests may hasten communication, which expands naturally from those commonalities.

Several respondents reported utilizing MUD communication as a means of continuing offline relationships when both participants were separated by some material geographical distance due to school or work. Respondent Rorayi discussed how he utilized the MUD to keep in touch with his girlfriend when they both transferred to different schools:

   It was difficult to stay in touch (no cell phones at that time :). We were roughly 2-3 hours apart. I taught her how to MUD and so we basically met up nearly every night and MUDded. Most of the time it was just chatting, but we also played now and then. It was an extremely cheap way to keep in touch :).

(Appendix H, pp. 300-301)

Respondents Dynsero and Garoco also indicated that, as a couple, they had used the MUD for contact when physically separated.

In addition to virtual relationships, virtual friendships are also a common result of online interaction via MUDs, and those friendships spawn sub-groups within the MUD community. Respondent Dynsero listed one of her favorite experiences on AR as “going around different areas with a group of people I just [met] and getting to play with other people. I'm not one to play all on my own." (Appendix E, p. 258) She further commented:
People I play with are mostly friendly, I like to give people a chance and I think they have picked up on that and have been able to develop a relationship with them with varying degrees from acquaintances to friends. (Appendix E, p. 263)

Again, respondent Garoco described his relationships with others on AR as “deeper than real-life relationships have been ... and much more long-[lived], where a personal connection has truly been made.” (Appendix E, p. 263)

Like all communities, however, MUD communities can have negative effects on players as well. Tahab recalled instances where he was emotionally injured by the actions of other players:

Mostly it was a small group who would spread rumors about me, try to drag me down in the eyes of other people on the MUD. I guess they did it because they were jealous, or maybe immature. Or I guess they could have just been cruel people, but I saw them be really nice to each other, so I guess it was more like the cool kids [cliques] that form in schools, that type of group mentality.

(Appendix J, pp. 333-334)

Whether virtual or material, relationships spawn communities of like-minded individuals. And unlike traditional communities, virtual communities are created in spite of a lack of physical proximity. This absence of physicality, however, does not necessarily render a community false or inferior. Anderson (1991) states that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the way they are imagined.” (p. 6) As Wilbur (1997) indicates:

Community seems to refer primarily to relations of commonality between persons and objects, and only rather imprecisely to the site of such community. What is
important is a holding-in-common of qualities, properties, identities, or ideas. The roots of community are sunk deep into rather abstract terrain.” (p. 8)

Miller (2002), another scholar in the area of communities, posits that communities may be defined as:

A group of people, sharing a common bond or tradition, who support and challenge each other to act powerfully, both individually and collectively, to affirm, defend and advance their values and self interests. Notice: place is not part of this definition. Though neighborhoods can foster community, there are geographic “neighborhoods” where there is no community. (p. 32)

Miller’s definition satisfactorily explains how community in a virtual environment develops. Those who participate in MUDding do so for a similar reason: To recreate in a virtual world. And while their individual goals regarding the specifics of activity and interaction during their gameplay may differ, their shared interests coalesce in that particular MUD.

Within the AR community, however, just as in offline socialization, groups precipitate into smaller sub-communities based around more specific shared interests. The effects of small groups on the overall parent community can be negligible or significant. Ten of the eleven respondents noted the formation of small groups within the overall MUD community, but differed on their assessment of their place within the wider context.

Respondent Arosess explained how the MUD community developed into the same groups that she had observed in an offline context, and compared them to cliques formed in High School:
You get the strong loud people who make a lot of noise, and the quiet ones who think they are brilliant and become “fast friends.” You get the people who usually don’t cross paths and speak that much, but when they are the only ones around find reason to be friend, until someone else logs in who is ‘better’ :). There are people who are just universally nice, or universally pricks. It really is a community like that, only the participants aren’t necessarily linked by age, occupation, major, etc...it becomes a wider base for the population of this community to have. (Appendix C, pp. 228-229)

The resulting small group behavior mirrored behavior observed in the material world in terms of personality and affinities.

Respondent Sapron pointed to idiosyncratic impulses behind the formation of small groups within the MUD community:

There are definite groups and group types. There were those of us who were here because we wanted to create characters and build storylines. The small group of true [Role-Playing] junkies. Then there were those who came on to use this as a social venue. They just wanted to sit and talk. Then there were those who liked the challenge of the game itself. They wanted to kill things and get the items no one else could get. (Appendix I, p. 318)

Those who only wanted to engage in a specific type of gameplay on the MUD banded together. She also observed that pickiness was evident in choices about socializing for some players, while others would happily “bounce between groups” (Appendix I, p. 320) with different playing styles and goals.
Again, virtual communities on the MUD mirrored the structure of material, geographic-based communities. As Healy noted, the Internet is “a perpetual reminder that our lives are intrinsically and inescapably social. In the face of increasing occupational mobility, we need ways to maintain connections and connectedness, and the Net provides almost limitless possibilities.” (p. 61) As suggested by William Gibson (2005) in his book *Pattern Recognition*, a virtual community may become permanent and necessary for those whose material lives are in constant motion.

4.3.5 – Transcending the MUD Channels

Interactive virtuality can sometimes transcend the MUD and extend into other spheres of electronic communication. Most often, this transcendence is dependent on the consent of participants. At times, however, interactive virtuality can be imposed upon participants without their consent.

Given the need for rules, MUD communication can never be completely private, even when so-called “private channels” are used. Staff members of a MUD are able to intercept messages to assist a player with a problem or to react to evidence of a violation of MUD rules. The staff may employ the appropriately named *snoop* command to examine an individual’s virtual experience without her knowledge. When snooping, the staff member will see every line of text sent to and from the target avatar’s screen. MUD rules now govern the use of the snoop feature because abuses have occurred, on AR and on countless other MUDs since their inception in the early 1970s. *The MudConnector*, the primary website devoted to the worldwide MUDding community, conducts regular discussions about the ethicality of the snoop command and its deployment.
Participants in MUDs are generally aware that even “private channels” are not truly private, and have embraced other means of communication whenever they seek confidentiality: E-mail, instant messaging programs such as ICQ, YahooMessenger, MSN, and AOL Instant Messenger, and privately-owned and controlled web forums. VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) programs such as TeamSpeak, Ventrilo, and Skype, are also common supplements.

Analysis of the respondent interviews revealed that alternate channels were common. Such channels were used primarily as a supplemental means of communication with other players. Only when players were dissatisfied with the MUD, the MUD staff as a whole, or a particular staff member, were alternate channels deliberately used for the purpose of circumventing potential eavesdropping.

The staff of Aurealan Realms also used alternate channels to update players on the evolution of the MUD, changes to the MUD code, special events, and other issues of import. The address www.aurealanrealms.org was the MUD’s home on the World-Wide Web. This site houses basic information of interest to current or potential participants, news updates, and a web-based bulletin board. This bulletin board became the primary off-MUD link between the participants and the administration of the MUD after its creation, and allowed past participants to re-connect.

MUD channels remained the primary means of communication between most participants. Most players were confident that the staff would follow the rules for the snoop command and would respect their privacy unless there was legitimate reason to do otherwise. Those who did not trust the staff were often those with ideological differences
on the running of the MUD or the conduct of individual staff members. Those participants were, however, in the minority of the overall MUD population.

4.3.6 – Community on AR

The community that formed on AR best fits the description of an interest community, although other community definitions also apply. The level of community on AR can be disseminated into a flow-chart typical of most communities, virtual or material. At the top there was the AR community as a whole. Beneath that were the staff and the players, although many sub-communities contained members from both groups. Among the players, there were the perceived “for and against” groups who either supported or opposed the MUD staff members. Then there were the dominant player groups: The “socializers” (those interested in using the MUD primarily as a communication venue), the role-players (the virtual actors who used AR as a stage to tell stories from), and the “power-mudders” (the participants who first and foremost played AR like a video game). Next came the normal sub-groups and cliques found in any community – some based on material or virtual relationships, others based around characters or themes of the AR narrative, and still others based around the concept of “winning” the game. Every player on AR, however, was a member of “the community” as well as a member of any number of other communities within the main AR community. Again, as respondent Arosess declared, “[AR] really is a community like [those found in a material setting], only the participants aren’t necessarily linked by age, occupation, major, etc.” (Appendix C, p. 229)
4.3.7 – Transportable Community

The majority of interviewee responses suggested that community was transportable from the material to the virtual and vice versa. Several respondents spoke of having friends, spouses, or family introduce them to the MUD and its virtual community. Respondent Sapron disclosed that:

I had a friend who had discovered [AR] back in the days when you had to teleport from one [FreeNet] to another to another in order to find a port that took you to a MUD list. I visited several different MUDS, including [his MUD] before I landed on [AR]. But this was the one that held my interest. (Appendix I, p. 314)

Respondent Isurut divulged that she “first become involved in mudding through my husband's involvement in mudding. I used to see him spend quite a bit of time doing so but was reluctant to try it myself.” (Appendix F, p. 272) While initially hesitant, after experiencing MUDding for herself, she began to appreciate the experience:

I understood why they enjoyed spending time on the MUD. [While] I still felt that it was a place used by some as a substitute for things they were missing in [their] own lives, I also understood why it took up so much of their time as I found myself just exploring or leveling for the fun but staying longer than I intended if someone I was friendly with came on and we spent time together [role-playing], or exploring, or whatever. (ibid., p. 266)

Respondent Utcarem had a familial introduction to MUDding on AR, disclosing that “my sister showed me [AR]. She played for a few years before she [introduced] me to the game. I was so [intrigued] that I made a character and immediately [spent] the first evening playing the game.” (Appendix L, pp. 362-363)
The transportability of community was also evinced as occurring from the virtual to the material. Nine of eleven respondents reported having met someone from AR in a material, face-to-face setting, and indicated that such meetings both clarified and deepened those relationships, whether initially positive or negative. Respondent Dynsero noted the importance of “making a connection with [other players], having a common goal to work for and sharing time with them. I like to meet/get to know new people and [AR] was an environment where I could do that.” When asked about her experiences with meeting virtual acquaintances face-to-face, she explained:

I would have to say [that the experience was] good. They are people that I found interesting online and seemed to fall [in-line] with what I would look for in someone I wanted to know and have a [real-life] relationship [with]. I still have some sort of communication with them. (Appendix E, p. 267)

Respondent Sapron revealed that she had met respondent Garoco before, remembering that it “was one of my first [virtual-to-material] meetings. He and my sister were...we'll just say ‘involved’ off and on for years and he came to visit us in Florida.” (Appendix I, p. 320) That meeting began a friendship that lasted several years. Another such meeting proved less successful, “There was one [AR player] I ended up dating and living with briefly. A definite mistake. I realized afterwards that he had fallen for my [avatar], not for me.” (Ibid.)

A face-to-face meeting of individuals first interacted with virtually is also used to verify impressions of the individual created by the on-line interaction. Again, respondent Rorayi states:
I think I build up a collection of assumptions over time when dealing with someone online. It's interesting to see how many turn out to be false when you finally meet. After you do meet, it's interesting to see how it changes your interaction with them online from that point on. We like to preach not judging a book by its cover, but we all do it. So you build a lot of assumption into physical appearance. However, on MUDs, you don't have that bias. So you're forced to build up [your assumptions] entirely on your interactions with them. When you finally meet, those two collections of assumptions conflict with each other to various degrees. There is a certain amount of time when you're consciously trying to decide which ones were right and wrong. I trust my "real" instincts more.

(Appendix H, pp. 309-310)

Face-to-face interactions serve as a means of uncertainty reduction regarding a person’s impressions of someone they’ve interacted with virtually. Because material interactions are the “norm” for most individuals, material cues and information are perceived as superior if they conflict with virtual information. Again, Rorayi elaborates on the disparity he perceived between virtual and material reality:

I think people generally emphasize the positives in their life and suppress the negatives if given the opportunity. MUDs provide that opportunity. They also provide the ability to "start fresh". Start a new persona, with an entirely new society, initially. (Appendix H, p. 310)

Respondent Tahab concurred, adding that material interactions sometimes, although not always, reinforced virtual impressions:
It always sort of clarified the relationship. If you already liked someone online, and you met them offline, most times you continued to like them and that sense of friendship or whatever got stronger. Likewise, if you already didn't like them, chances were that you'd continue to dislike them when you met them in person. Not always [however]. One of the other [staff members on AR] that was here before me used to really dislike me, and I returned the feeling. He thought I was an asshole, I thought he was an arrogant twit. But after meeting in person, we both got to see that what we were interpreting from our online interaction was due largely to the fact that we couldn't hear each other’s [tone of] voice or see each other's [facial expressions] or gestures. Once we added those into the interaction, we realized that the other wasn't like we had thought, and we got to be friends. (Appendix J, p. 345-346)

Tahab also recalled meeting the original owner of AR for the first time:

I was so intimidated by him online because he was "the boss." When I met him in person, he was actually sort of physically intimidating! He was a computer programmer so I pictured one type of person, but he looked like a pro basketball player. He had a deep voice, but an easy-going personality, liked to laugh, and was fun to hang out with, so the intimidation faded. (Appendix J, p. 346)

In such interactions, the lack of tonal and physical cues inherent in MUDding caused a misunderstanding of the intention behind statements made in conversation or an incorrect assumption of who the other was. Only face-to-face interaction was sufficient to provide the missing information. Following such a meeting, however, the virtual relationships were strengthened based on the knowledge gained. Community relations between
participants were strengthened in both the virtual and the material, based on information gained in both the virtual and the material, a true transportability of community.
5.1 – Virtual Geography and Time

A virtual world is one that is limited by three elements: Access, space, and skill. First, in order to traverse these virtual worlds, one must have the means to gain access to them, requiring that a player have a computer, a working connection to the Internet, and software configured to connect to a MUD. Second, the virtual world itself must have sufficient space on a physical computer, i.e. enough memory and hard drive space to store and load the MUD world and its associated files. Third, those in charge of the MUD must possess the necessary skill in networking and computer operating systems to find, download, and install the MUD source code, and then make the new MUD available online and accessible to participants. Furthermore, MUD administrators must also have the computer programming skill necessary to repair, adapt, augment, and improve the MUD world. When all of these elements co-exist (either in one person or spread across a team of individuals) the MUD world may have the potential to become “real” for those who inhabit it. Whether players will so interpret a MUD depends, in part, on the programming and writing skills of the MUD administrators. The acceptance of a MUD world as “real” helps a player to create an identity within the world, and to establish community relations with other players of that world. With a simulated “reality,” however, disparate facets still defy logic and require as much a willing suspension of disbelief as a book or a televisual offering. AR was successful in attracting players due to a staff of diverse, talented individuals who contributed to the skill level by donating their talents in programming and writing to continually improve and expand the MUD. In describing the allure of AR, respondent Utcarem remembered:
It drew me in and I spent [hours] on a daily and nightly basis playing the game. I couldn't think of [anything] else until I had it mastered. But that was impossible because the game was always changing, the people always changed.

(Appendix L, p. 363)

5.1.1 – Limitations of the Medium

Given the limitations of what can be sent and received via Telnet, the sole method of connecting to a MUD, the world must be rendered in text. The only opportunity to create some type of graphic comes from the use of the characters on a standard computer keyboard. As a consequence, most virtual concepts are “painted” with words rather than pictures. Modern ASCII Art aside – images made by keyboard characters – most depictions are written as descriptive sentences or paragraphs rather than rendered as graphics.

Telnet has advanced since its inception in the early 1970s. Today, Internet users take for granted that they can move the cursor around the screen. Moreover, the inclusion of ANSI (American National Standards Institute) color has given MUD operators and participants a basic 16-color palette to accent or inflect words and characters. The ease of cursor movement and stock of basic color can enhance text and deepen its dimensionality.

Computer-based communities are inherently dependent on the written word, what Ong (1995) describes as secondary orality. Unlike the concept of primary orality, which is oral communication “innocent of all writing,” secondary orality is “an orality totally dependent on writing and print.” (p. 15) Ong surmises that secondary orality creates an entirely new stratum of communication:
Our secondary orality fosters group unities reminiscent of those of the old oratorical world of primary orality. But it revolutionizes also the commitment of the word to space, the visual element which had earlier come about in writing and print. (p.15)

Ong also notes that the secondary orality of computer-mediated communication, “because of its orality, makes us yearn for interpersonal relationships.” (p. 16)

5.1.2 – Iconography and Color

On Aurealan Realms, 16 color possibilities derive from red, green, yellow, blue, magenta, cyan, white and gray. Each can also be bolded, which brightens each color noticeably, providing the full palette. (AR has only a 14-color palette, however, as un-bolded white is actually a light gray color identical to normal gray, and bolded dark gray looks the same as it does un-bolded.)

These shades have been integrated into the MUD and made accessible through the color codes in the program. For example, if Joyye wanted to say “I was really happy to hear about your success!” to someone, and wanted to emphasize the word “happy,” she could choose bold blue as her “happy” color, and type “say I was really %b%4happy%0 to hear about your success!” The “%b” tells the MUD to turn on the bolding, and the “%4” tells the MUD to turn on the blue color. The “%0” tells the MUD to turn off all color and bolding effects.

Given the primitive nature of a text-only environment, MUD administrators wishing to encourage willing suspension of disbelief have discovered that even basic shades can assist in creating a visual image in the player’s mind. A MUD item described
as “a sword covered in dried blood” is textually evocative, but is made more vivid when
the word “sword” is grey or cyan, and the words “dried blood” are dark red. Color
inflects the information provided, and shortens the textual descriptions, which otherwise
would have to read: “A silver sword covered in dark red dried blood.”

ANSI colors have also been integrated into the MUD’s boundaries and terrains. The map of the *Aurealan Realms* world in Appendix A, when viewed on the MUD itself, is color-coded. The “f” character, denoting forested areas, is given the color code “%2,” which signifies green. The numbers that represent named places on the map are written as “%0<%1#%0>” (light grey <> signs surrounding a red number). The words that represent the oceans are in blue, the mountain character (“^”) is in un-bolded yellow, the desert character (“d”) is in bolded yellow, and the tundra character (“t”) is in bolded white, all to assist the player in visualizing the geography of the MUD world. Respondent Tahab commented that the more evocative the textual images are, the greater the chance for immersion: “If the writing is good and you get drawn in, you'll have some sort of physical reaction. I've found myself feeling closed in when [my character was] wandering around dark tunnels where I knew that [he] might die.” (Appendix J, p. 349)

Adding color to ASCII images in a virtual world enhances otherwise shallow, flat textual images, and makes them easier for players to visualize. Maps rendered as ASCII images are key to enhancing player understanding of the MUD world. Tufte (1990) maintains that the quality of a map is tied closely to the standards for information design, and that the better the design, the higher quality the map will be, explaining that “display of closely-read data surely requires the skilled craft of good graphic and poster design; typography, object representation, layout, color, production techniques, and visual

principles that inform criticism and revision.” (p. 35) While production technique cannot be a factor in a text-based environment, the remaining elements can be skillfully crafted to produce evocative images that enhance a player’s lived experience of a virtual world. Foremost among these elements for a MUD are color, layout, and object representation. The ASCII image maps on AR depend on all three as a means of bringing a player more fully into the lived experience of the virtual world. By painting a picture of an area more effectively in the mind of a player, be it an avatar’s surroundings, a town or city, or the entire MUD world, maps increase concrete geographic understanding and enhance his grasp of navigation across virtual distance.

Single letters iconic representations of in-world features function as more than just map markers on AR. For example, on static, pre-written world maps, letters like “f” represent forests and symbols like “|” (a shifted backslash) and “—” represent the roads and paths a player’s avatar may travel. A player, however, also has access to a “fluid map” that changes with the character’s location in the MUD world, as shown below:

**Winter Square**
The northwest section of the Old Mesraht village square, named Winter Square after the road that forms the northern edge of the village, is home to two of the most prestigious establishments in the village. West sits Fel's Baked Goods, where Old Mesraht has gotten its baked goods for many a year. North, the massive, two-story Sage's Sanctuary Inn provides lodging for visitors to town as well as a lands-famous dining hall. Spring Square sits to the east, Autumn Square to the south, and in their center sits a large four-spouted fountain, plain and somewhat rusted steel bridges crossing from each square into the center of the fountain, where a platform is barely visible. Part of a large, marble fountain is visible in this section of the square.

A guard employed by the Sage's Guild walks the streets of the village.

**Obvious exits:**
North - The Sage's Sanctuary Inn
East - Town Square & Plains Trail
South - Town Square & Forest Run
West - Fel's Baked Goods
Southeast - A misty platform within the fountain
This is an example of the full text sent to a participant’s screen, detailing what is “seen” by an avatar outside the Sage’s Sanctuary Inn, in the city of Mesraht. A “[C]” represents an outdoor “City” area, while an “[I]” represents an indoor space. This graphic representation of an avatar’s location is optional and, if activated, is shown in addition to the descriptive paragraph detailing what other entities and objects are also present, and the available exits which are seen by all participants. As the participant moves through the virtual world, this local map will update, always showing her an accurate, up-to-date iconic representation of her immediate virtual surroundings and always following after the paragraph description, facilitating easier navigation.

The primary icon for this map is the “!” symbol, which is always centered on the map and represents the avatar of the participant as it travels through the virtual geography, a more mobile version of “You are here” maps in subways and department stores. All of the letters used in the fluid map become icons in this instance as well. While some text icons are used interchangeably between the static world maps and the fluid player maps, other will have new connotations assigned to them on the player maps.

Because each “room” in the MUD is designated by terrain type, letters inside brackets...
indicate the terrain (“[I]” for indoor, “[C]” for City). Only information and exits currently visible to the player will be presented on the map, a limitation that allows for experiences similar to respondent Sapron’s recollection of being lost while exploring the pixie homeland.

Colors and contexts allow single letters to function as understood icons, a single image that carries greater connotation and speeds communication of information. While similar to the concatenation of word-based emoticons into single letters discussed in chapter 4 (“grin” being condensed to “*g*” or “<g>”), iconic letters add meaning. As Tufte (1990) observes:

> We envision information in order to reason about, communicate, document, and preserve that knowledge – activities nearly always carried out on two-dimensional paper and computer screen. Escaping this flatland and enriching the density of data displays are the essential task of information design. (p.33)

Colored letter icons, carefully unveiled as play progresses, add dimensionality as well as modest emotional clues, and none of the respondents indicated experiencing AR dimensionally as impoverished. The fluid player map simulates what an individual in the virtual world can “see” around him as he moves through the world. As suggested by respondents’ recollections, it is yet another aid to immersion, a heightening of a player’s experience of a virtual self and his virtual surroundings (including other participants).

### 5.1.3 – Text as Images

As indicated in the previous section, individual letters, numbers, and symbols can function iconographically as larger concepts. But individuals across the Internet, using only text characters, have also created ASCII art. In ASCII art, the symbols, numbers,
and letters found on a standard keyboard mimic traditional graphic images. Libraries of ASCII art on the Internet deploy esoteric levels of experimentation and furnish as templates for those desiring to create their own text-images.

The creators of AR had in mind configurations of data that would simulate environments found in the material world. ASCII art is often crude and unimaginative, however, adding little to the mental “view” of a virtual world, and was used sparingly on AR for that reason. The limited ASCII art on AR enlivens the in-game maps and the welcoming screen a participant encounters upon connecting to the MUD via Telnet:

```
A U R E A L A N R E A L M S :
T H E   R E C K O N I N G

(===(_______)_______)_______

|       |   |   |
|-------|   |   |
|       |   |   |

\-\-|--|--|--
|   |
\-\-|--|--|--
|   |

Welcome to the Internet's Premier RoAMUD!
(Smith & Rhone, 1999)

A secondary function of ASCII art on AR is much simpler. Within the virtual world are any number of virtual objects: Clothing and armor, weapons, rings, bottles, rugs, and other objects as needed. Some objects are represented by “signs” that provide basic information to the player and her avatar. In the material world, signs might identify places of business or aid in navigation. On AR, text-image signs serve similar purposes,
but a player must deliberately “look” at a sign to view it (the player must type “look sign”
to tell the MUD to display the text-image information for him). To help simulate the
“reality” of such virtual objects, a “look-able” sign is often added to the textual
description to indicate the “presence” of the object. For example, when a participant
enters the “room” where a sign is hanging off the front of a building, she sees “A colorful
sign hangs off the front of the building to the north”. When her avatar looks directly at
the sign, by typing “look sign,” she sees:

```
+                  +
+  Torm's          +
+  Makkar         +
+  Emporium       +
+                  +
+-------------------+
```

(Ibid.)

In the material world, to see a sign is to read the sign. In the virtual world, a sign can be
read only after it is seen.

Adding a text-image allows an object’s creator to assist a player in further
envisioning his avatar’s environment – he can “see” the sign jutting from the front of the
building to the north in graphic form instead of merely being told of its existence. Often,
scrolls and notes take advantage of this technique. For example, an otherwise simple
message can take on significance when it can be read as a graphic in scroll form:

```
@================================@
\   \   \   \   \   \   \   
 \  Dear Rojur,  \  \  Please take this  \  \  note to my son, he  \  \  needs to know that I  \  \  loved him.  \  \  
 \  \  \  \  \  \  \  \  \  \  
 @================================@  (Ibid.)
```

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To a MUD player, the diagonal shape can encourage the illusion of three dimensions. Like the signs, crafted text-images assist a player in visualizing an object the way its creator wishes. But it would be difficult to overstate the significance of the participant’s deliberate “looking.” Not simply an obvious index of the interactivity that draws a player to the MUD, “looking” is not just keyboarding, but a kinetic response to cues in the artificial world. If humans react to cues in the material realm, so do players in AR. If looking at signs in the material realm triggers construction of the representations through which humans understand their environment, so do players in AR. Participants thus are not merely passive consumers of signs and features invented by the MUD designers: they are also co-creators of experience.

The translation of letters, numbers, and symbols into representational images is the discourse of the Internet, of MUDding in general, and of AR in particular. Partisans of every new medium must invent codes that make for efficient transmission of messages. Computer codes are hidden, of course, in the operating systems, leaving the non-programmer only the slightly augmented QWERTY keyboard as his tool for devising a language that can evoke new worlds. Such a language will, of necessity, be crude, at least at first, but it must take advantage of a computer’s speed, storage, and flexibility, especially the last, its responsiveness to a new software set that itself fosters experimentation. The most successful MUDs manage to achieve dimensionality; the most skillful MUD creators configure their worlds through precise and innovative manipulation of blocks of text, margins, fonts, and so on. More important, the most skillful players comfortably inhabit those worlds by learning the discourse.
5.1.4 – Distance and Travel

Cyberspace, we are often told, is without dimension and shape, and any movement involves only electronic data. In traversing virtual geographical distance, players find that the same three strata of rules come into play: those involving the medium, the MUD code, and the MUD world. A text-based virtual environment residing on a computer is bound by limitations of screen and keyboard. Because he can draw only on eyes and fingers, the player can experience travel over distances only as illusion: He does not move, and neither does anything in his computer. He clicks an iconic key or two, types in a few phrases, and “enters” the virtual world. The data travels; he does not. The material distance spanned by connecting to the MUD, however, may be as short as around the block or as long as around the world, depending on where he is sitting and where the servers of the MUD are housed.

In fulfilling the illusion of navigating a virtual world, the avatar of the participant expends “energy” to move from one city to another, from one continent to another, or from one world to another, but that energy is measurable as data. Most MUDs provide participants with quantifiable “energy,” a number that diminishes as the avatar exhausts it: fatigue from the exertion of traveling bolsters the illusion. The only expenditure of physical energy is that of fingers on keyboard, though one could reasonably argue that mental energy has been expended as well. Respondent Eseops’ recalled that, in his experience, game-play on a MUD is not artificially signified by reaching the end of the game, but rather indicated by the level of material fatigue experienced by the participant. (Appendix D, p. 254)
The rule-bound “code level,” i.e. the “flavor” of MUD program in play, determines distance within the virtual world itself. On most MUDs, movement is simulated through a series of commands controlling the direction a participant wishes to go. For example, should she want to move north, she need only type the word “north” and her avatar will move to the next available space north. When AR’s code-level rules analyze the geographic data to find that the player’s avatar cannot move north, she is sent the message “You cannot travel in that direction.” The player may experience as much frustration or confusion as she would in encountering a “detour” sign on a material street.

On a MUD, each virtual space that can be inhabited by an avatar is a “room”: a dungeon hallway, a mountain peak, the bottom of a river, or high over a city in mid-air. The entire geography of AR is a series of interconnected “rooms,” a term applied even to spaces between structures. Each entrance into, or exit from, a “room” reduces the number of “movement points” available to the avatar. When an avatar’s movement points are depleted, the MUD code will inform the participant “You are too exhausted to continue!” Turkle (2004) explains:

Players experience their every movement as instantly translated into game action. The game is relentless in its demand that all other time stop and in its demand that the player take full responsibility for every act, a point that players often sum up by the phrase “one false move and you’re dead.” (p. 83)

In a MUD, navigation has the same general consequences for the player’s avatar as material movement would have on the player – walking into a gravel pit will cause injury, and perhaps death, in both the material and virtual worlds. The difference is that an avatar may be resurrected but normally faces an in-game penalty.
On AR, thirteen different types of basic environments configured by the AR game designers are selectable: Inside, City, Field, Forest, Hills, Mountains, Water Swim (meaning that an avatar may swim through it), Water NoSwim (meaning that a craft of some kind, like a raft or canoe, is required), Underwater, Air, Desert, Marsh, and Tundra. Each type constrains an avatar’s ability to traverse it. More difficult terrains cost the avatar more movement points because they simulate more fatigue than merely walking on a road or crossing a grassy meadow.

Innate prohibitions may block an avatar’s entrance into specific areas. Without the ability to breathe underwater, for example, avatars are unable to enter “Underwater” rooms. Likewise, avatars without the ability to fly are prohibited from venturing into “Air” rooms. Desert rooms make the participant’s avatar thirstier more quickly, requiring that the avatar carry with her a container of water. Hunger and thirst are both quantifiable within the MUD world, and being hungry or thirsty will inhibit an avatar’s ability to heal and recover health points, movement points, and magical energy. The artifice simulates barriers and obstacles found in the material world and deepens immersion. Respondent Tahab described his satisfaction with the way his writing of MUD areas was experienced by other players: “My favorite compliments were when people would tell me ‘I was on the edge of my seat, biting my nails, waiting to see if this would all work out or not’ because of something I'd written or was role-playing.” (Appendix J, p. 349) Careful design and placement of obstacles aid in the creation of immersive experiences.

Of the strata of rules, those governing the construction of the world are the most relaxed. The only limitations on AR game designers are geographical constants dictated at code level; once a terrain has been established, it can be enhanced but not altered.
Skilled use of language, essential to the persuasiveness of a text-based environment, can make a virtual space seem wider or narrower, benign or dangerous, “real” or not. Sallnäs (2002) explains that a player’s immersion is dependent on the crafting of environment:

The information in the media environment must be meaningful to maintain the individual’s focus and sense of presence. Further, distracting events in the physical locale must be limited, or it must be possible for the individual to integrate them in the virtual environment in a meaningful way. The concept of involvement thus becomes important for the degree of perceived presence.

Involvement depends on the degree of significance or meaning that individuals attach to stimuli, activities, or events. (pp. 175-176)

Similarity to material lived existence is crucial for immersion. Accepting similarity impacts on the perception of distance and virtual geography, and vice-versa. The old adage in comedy-writing, “Buy the premise, buy the bit,” applies to the creation of a virtual world as well. One must accept that the geography is “real” in order to experience it. Once one does, the virtual geography is all that the case is, as if Wittgenstein had been made manifest. An avatar wishing to travel from one town to the next must do so within the terms and possibilities constructed by the code, which is itself mandated by the world design. He must walk, ride a horse, pay for passage in a carriage, buy a ticket for an ocean voyage, or in some cases, find alternate magical means of transportation.

The sense of space which each room engenders, however, is not contingent on the mathematical equations that govern the cost of movement. For example, a room can be described as a short ten-foot section of cramped, narrow tunnel, or it can be described as the enormous main worship chamber of a massive cathedral. On AR, the writer-designer
of an area controls a player’s perception of distance: The entirety of the sanctuary of the cathedral could be depicted in one “room” or it could be broken up into multiple “rooms,” each representing the stations of the cross, contingent on how the writer wants the spaces to be apprehended.

In a text-based environment, the quality of words, the elegance and flow of those words, are the thresholds of interaction. Sallnas (2002) describes the power of language to stimulate interaction:

The degree of immersion also affects perceived presence. Immersion is a psychological state characterized by perceiving oneself to be enveloped by, included in, and interacting with an environment that provides a continuous stream of stimuli and experiences. (p. 176)

If the quality of the stimulus is insufficient, then a player will not “feel” his surroundings, let alone the need to react to environmental pressures.

Respondent Rorayi explained how his perception of the virtual world actually took on physical depth:

[It] depends a lot on the writing quality. Short, [one] sentence descriptions of an area will do little [to] pull my mind into the area. You are in a cave. It’s dark. Ok, that worked in 1984. The [MUD] area has to be described well and logically consistent also. And a certain amount of “reality” has to be injected in for me to “connect” to it. (Appendix H, p. 311)

There must be enough information to translate the text into mental images, and those images have to make sense to a mind steeped in images from offline, in order to achieve absorption in a virtual world.
Respondent Sapron remembered two separate instances where the online geography colored her perceptions, triggering responses indistinguishable from offline feelings:

Depending on the area, the [role-playing], and what my character was going through I tended to feel it. Cheurn had Sapron trapped in a tight hidden chamber for a while. I was in there for days and I would have to get up and walk away from the computer for a while because I was feeling claustrophobic. There was another time when we were all trying to walk through a forest to find the pixie homeland [...] and I started to feel real anxiety in reaction to us being lost.

(Appendix I, p. 326)

The pixie homeland in question, Allarria, was located on the southern continent of the MUD world, across the ocean from the most common starting location for AR players, the central trading city of Mesraht. The virtual distance, and the fear of getting virtually “lost,” registered for Sapron as painfully as in the material world. (Both locations can be found on the map of the AR world in appendix A.)

Virtual geography contributed to claustrophobia in one case, and anxiety in another. The text-based environment of AR became immersive for Rorayi and Sapron. For Sapron in particular, apprehension and adrenaline levels peaked, a phenomenon often noted by MUD players. That their reactions are involuntary is testament to the visceral effect of finely-honed text.

As Sallnäs suggests, and respondents Rorayi and Sapron affirm, the perceived presence of the geography of a MUD derives from the same sort of re-imagined landscape that grips a traveler in the real world. The mind converts both linguistic and
visual cues into heightened experiences. A passenger on a European train who sees a sign for “Vienna” conjures up a host of associations; so does the avatar in AR when he glimpses a sign for the town of “Mesraht.” The ability of a participant to actually experience the immersive potential of a text-based world, however, ultimately lies in that participant’s willingness to engage in suspension of disbelief.

5.1.5 – Virtual Time and Material Time

Virtual worlds can be divided according to how they manipulate time: The first runs on actual empirical time, the second on a customized chronology in which seconds, minutes, and hours are fixed. Many recent virtual environments, including MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft, City of Heroes, and Second Life, use actual elapsed time: If the game requires an hour to play, then the elapsed time is actually that of the player’s watch.

A MUD, however, makes use of three unique units, one of which is invisible to the participants and embodied in the MUD code itself. All three are translations, but not transcriptions, of actual empirical time.

The first is known as a heartbeat. This is an internal pulse, engineered as a pre-defined unit (milliseconds, or sometimes seconds), that allows the MUD program to know when certain internal events should occur. Heartbeats regulate actions and reactions that take place independent of players across the MUD world, such as the duration of a snow storm or the rising of the sun.

For example: Jexle Bunger is a non-player character (NPC), a supporting character cast as the Captain of the Mesraht town guard. Once created by the author-designer of the town, Jexle is controlled by the MUD program (as opposed to being
controlled by a player). NPCs like Jexle are capable of responding to pre-written triggers, allowing for their limited pre-programmed interaction with the virtual world, with virtual objects, other NPCs, and live participants. If an NPC shopkeeper is scheduled to close his store at sundown every day, when “sundown” arrives, that NPC will execute the closing following pre-defined commands, pulsed by heartbeats. The paced sequence, with its appearance of deliberation and intent, counters the otherwise automatic nature of the pre-scripted program. Heartbeats actually “slow” the sequence to match the players’ slower responses, just as a bank ATM deliberately dawdles its transactions. When the ATM screen reads “Please wait,” the computer is simply accommodating itself to the consumer’s sense of time. The ATM has already processed the consumer’s request for cash in a millisecond. It is merely marking time before dispensing the bills so that the consumer will not be upset by the computer’s swift processing speed. So too with a MUD’s heartbeat: it helps to humanize the pace of activity.

The second unit of time for a MUD is a **tick** (some MUDs call a heartbeat a “pulse” and a “tick” a heartbeat). On *Aurealan Realms*, a tick defines one MUD hour, although it can be administrator-manipulated. Through a preferences menu within the MUD, the administrator can set a tick to mark the lapse of MUD seconds. On *Aurealan Realms*, a tick is ordinarily 300 seconds long, so that every hour in MUD time equates to roughly five minutes in normal empirical time. A spell (cast by a magician, say) affecting a player that lasts eight hours in the MUD world will last only 40 minutes in the material world. As players became steeped in AR, they might convert the length of a tick into empirical time, in order to plan game-play strategizing.
The third MUD unit is the world calendar. Each MUD day has both a “daytime” and a “nighttime.” During the “night,” avatars who lack the ability to see in the dark need virtual light-emitting objects in order to perceive their surroundings. Respondent Tahab acknowledged how the day-to-night cycle affected game-play:

The MUD also has its own day and night, and that can mess you up sometimes. You get done with a big fight, you go to sell your stuff, and the store is closed. You type time and the MUD tells you that it's 3 am. (Appendix J, p. 348)

In *Aurealan Realm*, every 35 days marks a month in a year of 16 months. Four months mark a change in season (spring to summer to autumn to winter). As the seasons change, rain, wind, or snow restrict virtual movement for an avatar. Extreme temperatures impact on food and/or water that an avatar needs to maintain “health.” The calendar is just as artificial as the rest of the environment, but its integrated rhythms help players believe in the illusion. Moreover, in a sense, one can “live” the artificial time despite its foreshortening and oxymoronic nature. Again, according to Van Manen (1990):

Lived time (*temporality*) is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time. Lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture [or] when we are anxious, as in the dentist’s chair. Lived time is also our temporal way of being in the world. (p. 104)

Time, as viewed through Van Manen’s lens, is something always felt. Despite the obvious “falsity” of MUD time, it has logic, progression, and discreteness; as such, it can envelop the player, who thus can “live” simultaneously in both kinds of time.
As the player in a virtual environment is caught up in two kinds of time, neither of them seeming objective, unfolding minutes and hours as he sits at a screen will appear less real than the days and months compressed by the game on that screen. “Real” time becomes elastic – as when the player looks at his watch and says “I’ve been sitting here three hours but I’ve already fought two day-long battles” at the same time that MUD-time becomes compressed – as when he tries to accomplish a virtual task, only to find that he has exhausted the time allotted. Respondent Tahab recounted such an experience:

Ticks make [MUD game-play] feel different from everything else. When you see a tick happen, you know that an hour has passed in the MUD, and that's completely separate from any other idea of time. You start counting ticks, since spells and attacks [sometimes work on ticks]. Your stone skin spell will wear off in two ticks, and you're in a big fight. Will it last until you finish or will it fade in mid-fight and make you lose? (Appendix J, p. 347-348)

All individuals “live” time; that is, they rarely experience it “objectively,” either in the actual world or its virtual counterpart. In conversation, AR players tried to describe their experience of lived time and lived virtual time, and the confusion that ensued.

Several respondents explained that their sense of lived MUD-time was similar to that lapsing as they read an engrossing book, or watched an interesting television program or theatrical film. Respondent Dynsero likened her targeted lived time to any immersive offline activity. Time spent on a MUD, she claimed, is:

Pretty close to the same especially if [it’s] an activity I am doing for fun; I want to get involved so I can have a [good] time so I make sure I don’t have to worry about other things before I can start.” (Appendix E, p. 270)
Flaherty and Meer (1994) agree, in theory, that the sense of lived time is directly related to the sense of “work” involved in an activity:

Lived time is perceived to pass slowly (protracted duration) when conscious information processing is high; lived time is perceived to be synchronized with clock time (synchronicity) when conscious information processing is moderate; and lived time is perceived to have passed quickly (temporal compression) when conscious information processing is low. (p. 705)

According to Turkle, “in the cyborg world we move beyond objects as tools or prosthetics. We are one with our artifacts.” (2007, p.325). Learned behavior and muscle memory can relegate purposive acts to habits. Like McLuhan, Turkle suggests that the computer becomes an external appendage – an extension of the material body and mind. When this occurs, conscious awareness of its instrumentality fades, as will become apparent to anyone who is reminded by eye fatigue that she has been sitting at a screen for hours. Lived virtual time, as opposed to normal offline time, or even normal computer clock time, allows one to inhabit the game on its own terms, at its own pace. As Van Manen explains, “The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape.” (1990, p. 104) A person’s “temporal virtual landscape,” on the other hand, may he shaped by any or all of those dimensions, virtually, materially, or both.

Some participants have described the feeling of lived virtual time on a MUD as completely singular, perhaps because temporality, artificial or otherwise, is so intricately tied to game-play. Respondent Rorayi (2006) observed:
It may be a bit unique in that I'm stepping into a different environment completely. Time, itself, flows differently in a MUD. I have lost track of time in many other things also, however. Most other things do not contain their own [concrete] definitions of time though. (Appendix H, p. 310)

For some, the creation and use of a unique virtual objective time within a MUD world, a sense of static time as measured by the MUD-dictated heartbeats, ticks, and calendar, may create an equally unique sense of virtual lived time as well. If a participants chooses to base her actions on a spell duration, measured in ticks, for example, her sense of lived time will be created in contrast to both the passing of minutes and ticks. MUD-dictated measurements of time can be added to normal methods of time measurements in the creation of lived virtual time.

Other participants theorized that agency altered the sense of time passing in game-playing. Respondent Eseops highlighted agency: “In reading and watching [TV], it is more of a passive attention, whereas in mudding, it tends to be more of an active activity.” (Appendix D, p. 254) Unlike many traditional activities that engender an awareness of participatory time, participation in a MUD is more interactive than vicariously living in a literary or television scenario; perhaps because that participation involves a more physical interface and digital manipulation, the passage of time turns on a more intimate sense of engagement.

All human beings engaged in a virtual activity face the necessity of balancing lived material time with lived virtual time, but that balance is created out of the method of virtual time measurement chosen and established by the creator of that virtual environment. Regardless of method, participants must find a way to negotiate both
“times” simultaneously, since both occur “at the same time.” As with other mentally-engaging activities, virtual participation can lead to a lapse in awareness of material time. Mizrak (2000) notes:

Cyberspace will also continue the collapsing of physical time and space that has begun in the 20th century. There are already numerous (somewhat humorous) stories of people logging into the Net, losing track of time, and "emerging" from cyberspace hours or even days later, realizing that they've forgotten to pick up their children or spouse. The clock is a convenient means of getting people all in the same place at the same time. (¶ 29)

Each player on AR simultaneously negotiates lived material time and lived virtual time, using heartbeats, ticks, and the MUD calendar. Respondent Garoco described acting and interacting in a MUD virtual world as “more intellectually stimulating” than a similar material activity like reading or viewing a film. (Appendix E, p. 270) He maintains that the interactivity requires a different set of mental abilities than those needed for a more passive activity. “You are not only [immersed] in what you are experiencing, but you are also acting imaginatively to create it. This is an engrossing blend of the mind’s abilities.” (Ibid.) Such immersion suggests a greater potential for loss of sense of empirical time during the activity, due to the higher level of interaction. Playing a MUD allows participants to contribute, to the community and the MUD world, extending the possibility for interaction, with the game world and other players, beyond what is possible in traditional video games, which tend to feature static worlds, unchangeable by the actions of the players.
For example, on AR, players can own and build “houses” which are added to the virtual landscape and can be seen and interacted with by other participants. Players who become writer-designers for the MUD create new, unique parts of the virtual world for other players to explore and enjoy. For some, writing new MUD areas can become more satisfying than game-play. Garoco explained that his favorite experience on AR as a writer involved:

“Putting my heart and soul into a [MUD area], [creating] lots of detail and secrets, and having the players bash their heads against the walls trying to find the hidden [equipment], recipes, [and] doors, and [having the players] really enjoy the experience of the complexity I had built.” (Appendix E, p. 259)

For an emotionally invested participant, the act of creation can extend his feeling of attachment to, and submersion in, the MUD. Such feelings would then encourage a lapse in awareness of material time, similar to other interactive creative activities. On a MUD, however, even when performing such creative acts, the existence of heartbeats, ticks, and the MUD calendar still affects the participant, perhaps even more so while he is engaged in virtual creation, and must be negotiated.

The experience of lived virtual time may also extend beyond the awareness of a single participant – interaction with other players in the game would seem to necessitate a negotiation of lived virtual time, as one participant’s lived virtual time meets another’s. When shared, an individual’s perception of lived time, virtual or material, would have the potential to alter the perception of another’s lived time. While not implicit in this study, the data available allows for the possibility that an individual’s lived virtual time would have a reciprocal effect on another individual’s sense of lived time.
5.1.6 – Constructed Space

Once again, on a MUD, the space experienced by an avatar is entirely constructed of text and ASCII images. The virtual world occupies space in a computer’s memory and on its hard drive, of course, but the design of the programmed and created interactive realm can be “felt” spatially. Sallnäs describes the felt aspect of virtual space as *environmental presence*, which, she says, “refers to the extent to which the environment itself appears to know that you are there and reacts to you.” (2002, p. 174)

Within the world of Aurealis, a participant travels through geography constructed by the imagination of its writer. A room’s name, description, any flags that denote special features, hindrances, situated objects, or non-player characters, are merely variations on program code, but all of these register as presences on the empathetic player.

One room can be a cramped closet, the next a grassy field that makes up a long valley between two immense mountain ranges. Despite different virtual sizes, each room, as code, takes up approximately the same space on the computer’s hard drive and in its memory. Each is, nonetheless, its own unique space, and the player fills it with his own imaginative cues. For example, one of the first rooms to appear at start of play in AR is the Dining Hall of the Sage’s Sanctuary. This is the largest and most prominent Inn in the village of Mesraht:

*The Sage’s Sanctuary Dining Hall*

Nestled away in the back of the inn, this dining hall provides simple Fare for visitors to Old Mesraht, or for those from the village who want a meal out of the house. Chairs and table are seen, scattered around the room, while twin doorways lead east, toward a sparse library, and south, toward the entrance to the Inn itself. In the northeast corner of the tavern room, a spiral staircase leads to the common room where weary travelers find rest.

Giullomme, the owner of the Inn, is here serving food and drink.

Obvious exits:
- East - A sparse library
- South - The Sage’s Sanctuary Inn
- Up - The common room of the Sage’s Sanctuary
Giullomme says in auran, "Welcome! Have a seat, I'll be right with you."
(Smith & Rhone, 1999)

Conceived as warm and cozy, the room is designed to make new participants feel safe and invited. Since this is the first room to be encountered after the tutorial (after entering the MUD proper), it is designed to have the feel of a place one might frequent, where one is known. Giullomme is an NPC programmed to greet anyone entering the room. This NPC, written as a “shopkeeper” (a vendor of virtual objects), will sell food and drink to any avatar who requests them. Not dissimilar to a familiar material hostel, the Inn eases the transition into what might otherwise be a strange and intimidating new environment. As Sallnäs explains:

A virtual world that produces a great sense of immersion will produce higher levels of presence. Factors that affect immersion include isolation from the physical environment, perception of self-inclusion in the virtual environment, natural modes of interaction, and control and percept of self-movement. (p. 176)
The more comfortable the setting, the more likely a participant will respond to it as something “real.”

A MUD room need not resemble a room in an offline context. Travelling across a wide expanse of grassy plain may require no more than one room, while longer journeys may necessitate a series of linked rooms to simulate the illusion of passing through mountains or jungles. Between Mesraht and the first city to the east, Sylvandell, are 68 rooms representing the “Great Grass Sea” to be traversed, “felt” by exertions of the avatar’s energy and sense of purpose. Distances so envisioned heighten the participant’s perception of the size of the virtual world, just as the necessary effort involved weights
one’s visceral consciousness of the “space.” To aid in the illusion of the MUD as a “world,” the two continents of Aurealis have been deliberately designed to actually “feel” enormous, as shown in Appendix A.

Again, the environment assigned to each room can be complicated by changes in weather conditions, some independent of the climate. The area’s writer can manipulate rain, thunderstorms, snow, blizzards, and spikes in the temperature. A room flagged as “indoors” suppresses weather messages (weather doesn’t happen indoors), but the participant can choose to “feel” messages in the outdoors.

Travelers from one room to another encounter the new room’s name, description, visible contents, and possible exits on-screen. The designer/author can also signpost unique messages to complicate a particular exit. For example, if an exit were a small muddy hole in the side of a cave, the designer/author could create the message “You wriggle through the hole and emerge on the other side with a wet ‘plopping’ sound,” a message that would appear on the participant’s screen when his avatar chose that exit.

Exits can also be made closeable, closed, and locked. A closed door will have to be opened in order to allow egress through that exit, and the door will remain open unless designed to close itself automatically. Likewise, a locked door will require a specific key or a magical spell to unlock it: a player will instruct her avatar to “unlock the door” or “open the door.”

One of the paradoxes of a text-based virtual environment is its capacity to be felt as private, despite one’s having elected to participate as a member of a large population. As Barbara Becker and Gloria Mark point out, “In a text-based environment, because no visual information about dialogue situations exists, people can create their own private
spaces without being seen by others.” (2002, p. 27) The AR MUD code actually fosters a sense of privacy through two default settings. The first, and simpler of the two, is a flag labeled *Private*. When a room is assigned this flag, the master program allows no more than two virtual entities within the space. Once the limit of two has been reached, a participant trying to enter that room will be told “That area is too crowded for you to enter” and his avatar will be prevented from moving in that direction.

The other setting assigns sizes to the different races of avatars, and limits the number of congregants in a specific room to those of given sizes. Such rooms can hold large numbers of avatars, and others only a few. Racial sizes are denoted by integers, as are a room’s “spatial” limits. Again, if the space if “full,” the participant attempting entrance will be told “That area is too crowded for you to enter.” Players who discover the size limitations of different virtual spaces can create “private” areas simply by filling them to capacity.

As previously stated, participants may also purchase private “homes” with MUD currency (no real money transfer takes place). These homes are created by one of the game designers and, once purchased, may be descriptively reconfigured by the participant, who may at will alter the dimensions and furnishings to suit her tastes. Access to houses is controlled through a guest list that the house owner can change at will. If privacy were desired, simply having an empty guest list would ensure that no one but the house owner would be able to enter that virtual space.

Other options for those seeking a private space on the MUD include finding out-of-the-way spots where other participants are unlikely to venture, or lockable doors with restricted keys, options similar to those available to participants in offline worlds. In fact,
the similarities are deliberate, so that players will find a quick balance between
community and isolation; creating a robust avatar depends, as all personalities do, on that
balance. Perhaps more than any other feature of AR, the privacy option enables a player
to customize “personal” space, to inhabit it as one might a home offline. Respondent
Tahab recalled a time when he was able to create a unique private space:

I remember building a small zone, a remote forest cabin like the one I remember
visiting as a child for vacations. I made it on [another MUD], and later on [AR],
as a place for the woman I fell in love with and I to go to just be together. It
wasn't as good as being together in person, but it was better than being together
out in the public areas of the MUD. It felt like a special place, something that was
only ours. (Appendix J, p. 331)

For some, the MUD itself allows for private communication otherwise
unavailable in material situations. Respondent Arosess observed that AR provided a
unique outlet in certain social circumstances where no other was available:

[Talking to people on the MUD] can act like a buffer. I can silently complain
about my family while in the same room as them, and get a few frustrations out.

[Whereas] even if I’m on the phone with a friend, hoo boy if [my husband]
overhears... (Appendix C, p. 221)

For Arosess, the MUD functions as a private pressure-release valve that cannot be
“overheard.” The ability to text a friend on a cell-phone now fulfills the same function.

Participants in a virtual space share the need for agency in their privacy choices as
acutely as their material world counterparts. The same questions surface: What space is
“mine?” Are those persons who they say they are? Can I trust them? Where is a safe
place to disclose private information where it will not be overheard by others? Answers to these types of questions are made more difficult online by the lack of visual and tonal cues, making the establishment of credibility, and the creation of trust, more tenuous. The “feeling” of being in a private space in a virtual world can alleviate some of that anxiety by providing an illusion of separation and confidentiality that mirrors the feeling of private spaces in the material world.

5.1.7 – Lived Space

According to respondents, a participant’s perception of the MUD world is affected by several factors: Offline physical environment, level of willing suspension of disbelief, the quality of the writing being read and interpreted, the emotional investment of the participant in his avatar’s activities, and the situation being experienced. As referenced previously, when respondent Sapron spoke of that instance particularly vivid in her memory, “Cheurn had Sapron trapped in a tight hidden chamber for a while. I was in there for days and I would have to get up and walk away from the computer for a while because I was feeling claustrophobic,” she nailed a common experience. (Appendix I, p. 326) To Sapron, inhabiting her avatar, the “tightness” of the environment and the feeling of being “trapped” for “days” (MUD days) resulted from various elements which combined to produce a highly visceral experience. Like ingredients in a recipe, each element is important on its own, but when mixed in the proper order and amount, a new fusion experience can come into being. Sallnäs explains that:

The information in the media environment must be meaningful to the individual’s focus and sense of presence. Further, distracting events in the physical locale must
be limited, or it must be possible for the individual to integrate them in the virtual
environment in a meaningful way. (pp. 175-176)

In this instance, as evinced by Sapron’s avatar’s ordeal, new combinations of information
heightened the experience of “being” in the virtual world, when a participant reacts as
though she were her avatar. Respondent Tahab commented that playing AR was:

Kinda like playing Resident Evil... that game made me jump so many times while
I was playing it because something unexpected would happen. I even yelled a
couple times. There were places like that on [AR] for me. They were written
really well, and there was some suspense, and when something happened that
took me by surprise, I'd actually be surprised and jump or yell.

(Appendix J, p. 349)

Losing one’s self – or finding it, as the case may be - appears to occur only to those
already predisposed to project themselves into textual matrices, such as works of fiction.
Although most respondents reported no sense of physically experiencing the virtual
world, some did speak of mental and emotional involvement, perhaps even rushes of
adrenaline. Threats, for instance, could produce visceral reactions.

Respondent Garoco recalled powerful and involuntary responses of that sort,
perhaps because, “I have almost always been able to immerse myself deeply into a
setting, using imagination. It’s a wonderful exercise.” (Appendix E, p. 269) Respondent
Rorayi, however, felt that his virtual immersion was no different than the way he felt
when “reading a good book.” (Appendix H, p. 311) Respondent Sapron experienced a
visceral reaction to the situation in which she found her avatar due to both environmental
and interactional factors, which resulted in her having to leave her computer for periods of time, presumably to calm down enough to return and continue.

For Garoco, Rorayi, and Sapron, experience of the MUD, through their respective avatars, took on a sense of immediacy, evoking responses that would be considered normal were the events transpiring being viewed on the screen in a movie theatre, or happening to their physical persons. Regardless of whether the stimulus is virtual or material, once an environment has been accepted by a participant as affecting outcomes within it, a player’s reactions and behavior become influenced and constrained by that environment.

Given the construction of the MUD world, being rendered solely in text and limited ASCII graphics, the immersive nature of such a virtual environment is limited. Only when the imagination of the participant is highly evolved, and the information being transmitted to the participant is especially engaging, does the mind appear to transcend the text and begin to interpret the information as it would if it were visually and aurally delivered in the physical world. This phenomenon, the experiencing of lived virtual space, would likely be more intense if the setting were rendered visually for the participants rather than in text. Respondent Garoco mentioned, for example, that while the text-based world evoked significant emotional but little physical reaction, playing a first-person shooter game, with sophisticated graphics, made him physically ill.

(Appendix E, p. 269)

5.2 – The Blurring of the Boundaries

Computers are no longer simple tools for hybrid lifestyles that incorporate digital processing on a daily, massive scale. Ramirez and Burgoon (2004) note that “as ever-
increasing numbers of individuals turn to on-line venues to satisfy their social needs, it is important to reassess ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions about communication behavior and the tools employed in its occurrence.” (p. 439) As McLuhan predicted, computers have become human extensions themselves. Newitz makes this characterization explicit:

> My laptop computer is irreplaceable, and not just for all the usual reasons. It’s practically a brain prosthesis. I find myself unable to complete a thought without cracking it open and accessing a file of old notes, or hopping online and Googling a fact or two. (2007, p.88)

As prosthesis, the computer allows users to reach beyond their physical selves for new information, new images, new people, new ideas, or new experiences. Noting Newitz’s affinity with her computer, Turkle observes:

> Newitz feels so close to her laptop that she cannot tell where it leaves off and she begins. Her self-understanding depends on analyzing the flows and rhythms that pass between herself and the machine. In bed, Newitz remembers not to let the blankets cover the computer’s vents so it does not overheat. She is at one with her virtual persona: “I was just a command line full of glowing green letters.” (p. 325)

Participants engaged in communication on a MUD find themselves in a unique position to experience something beyond the norm with regard to the possibilities of CMC. As McRae clarifies:

> MUDs are unique among other voice-based or text-based environments in that users can move about with a described space, handle and create objects and interact with other players with bodies that they construct. The feeling of being embodied in actual space is often sufficiently “real” that the senses are engaged in
a complex interchange of experience between a physical and a prosthetic body.Players similarly engage with each other in meaningful, complex and frequently intense ways, in the absence of the conventions of nuance, gesture, and tone that facilitate human interaction.” (1997, p. 76)

As with any form of prosthesis, the brain finds ways to integrate its input.
Respondent Tahab suggests that such an event can and does occur when interacting with a text-based virtual environment:

I think one of my favorite experiences with MUDding is when [...] the computer kind of disappears. You're so into what you're doing that you no longer recognize that there's a computer, that you're typing, or that you're responding with your fingers instead of your face or your body. That's when you're fully into the game, really keyed into the action going on within the MUD itself, and almost completely oblivious about anything going on in RL. That doesn't happen as often as I'd like it to, but when it does it's amazing. When you're talking to someone, and they say something funny, and you don't even think about smiling or laughing, but your fingers type smile or laugh. The computer becomes like an extension of you, the extra arms that allow you to reach into the MUD world and be there instead of having this thing between you and it. (Appendix J, p. 350)

Owing to the adaptability of the human species, such prostheses may become transparent.
This musing on symbiosis resembles the absorption that Newitz and Turkle note: the computer as prosthesis, but a prosthesis that has become so familiar, so comfortable, that at times it is no longer consciously recognized, but more intuitively used as a translation device. For some, this transparent interface can process material emotions and thoughts
and subconsciously convert them to text even as they occur in the material world.

Arosess explained that,

Some [physical gestures] are independent, or in place of the action [in real life] (if I were to type nod, I would probably nod at you in agreement if you said it to me [face-to-face]). If I type laugh or emote it, I probably am doing such [in real life] (Appendix C, pp. 226-227)

This behavior suggests that the transparency of the interface encourages a duality of experience. Some reactions may remain material, some may be uniquely virtual, but others may occur simultaneously in both worlds, and in that instance, one or both of the reactions may be subconscious. Bolter and Grusin (2000) indicate that such transparency is an anticipated, even expected, part of modern computer usage:

The transparent interface is one more manifestation of the need to deny the mediated character of digital technology altogether. To believe that with digital technology we have passed beyond mediation is also to assert the uniqueness of our present technological moment. For many virtual reality enthusiasts, the computer so far surpasses other technologies in its power to make the world present that the history of earlier media has little relevance. Even those, like Rheingold, who do acknowledge technological precursors (particularly film and television) still emphasize the novelty of virtual reality. Their view is that virtual reality (or digital technology in general) completes and overcomes the history of media. (p. 24)

Transparency promotes willing suspension of disbelief because, just as we are unaware of our eyes while watching a film (unless they become irritated), falling through the MUD
interface to truly “be” in the virtual world allows players to come as close to experiencing their avatar’s activities as the technology of a MUD will allow. While not true “virtual reality,” willing suspension of disbelief, coupled with an interactive, evocative environment filled with other people, allows a MUD to offer something close. This phenomenon of transparency does not, however, appear to be constant on a MUD, but occasional, needing the right conditions to occur. During his interview, respondent Tahab related his desire for that intimate connection to occur more often than it does, pointing out:

As I get older I find it harder and harder to shut out the real world and let myself drift into a world on the screen, but it still happens every so often. Usually it happens when something really intense is going on [that] requires a lot of focus to keep up and do what needs to be done. (Appendix J, p. 350)

Additionally, as the intimacy of the interface grows, so grows a different sense of the passage of time while so engaged. Turkle (2006) explains the phenomenon as a kind of material sentience: “Objects speak in a way that destroys any simple stories we might tell about or relationships to nature, history, and the inanimate; they destroy any simple sense we might have about progress and our passage through time.” (p. 313) A majority of the conversational partners spoke of a distinct sense of “other time” experience through their interaction with a text-based virtual world. Specifically, respondents Garoco, Eseops, Arosess, Rorayi, Taneit, and Tahab all described consciously experiencing the unique time within the MUD (the heartbeats, ticks, and calendar) separately and distinctly from normal material time. Acknowledging time as a MUD counts it can encourage focus on the virtual world, which could in turn deepen the
immersion in the world, encourage transparency, and aid in successfully ignoring material distractions.

While the sort of intimacy of interface under discussion does not appear to be constant, it does strongly suggest that a certain level of familiarity with both the interface and the conventions of text-based CMC can and will occur for participants with sufficient practice. As users become acclimated to “spoken” messages, socials, emotes, emoticons, or other means of expressing non-verbal communication via the text-based medium, it becomes easier to respond in a more natural way, and the interface takes on a less artificial presence, thus allowing communication to flow more easily between participants. As mentioned previously, Turkle (2997) explains, “in the cyborg world we move beyond objects as tools or prosthetics. We are one with our artifacts. And in the cyborg world, the natural and the artificial no longer find themselves in opposition.” (p. 325) When the interface truly does become transparent, the barriers between the virtual world and material world may become transparent as well.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Analysis of respondent interviews suggests an interconnectivity between virtual and material experience. The resulting examination of virtual identity, community, and culture has provided a basis from which to draw conclusions as well as an overview of the synchronous and synonymous nature of the MUDding experience for participants.

Interviewing *Aurealan Realms* players and staff has produced significant data on lived body (self), lived other (human relation), lived time, and lived space – the overall lived experience of the MUD player. The interviews have also suggested that such concepts are directly translatable into the virtual. No single theory provides a sufficient understanding of these concepts in both the material and virtual domains. Multiple theories together, however, suggest a workable means of analysis.

Combining Gergen’s (1991) saturated self, Hamman’s (1997) notion of community, and van Manen’s (1990) and Sokolowski’s (2000) existentials demonstrates that what we might call a *Cyber-Synchronicity* of lived experience, an inherent joining of material and virtual, is not only a plausible, but a practical approach to exploring virtuality. Three models will be used to operationalize these elements. The first model (Figure 3) indicates the connection between material lived self, material lived other, and their virtual counterparts.
Figure 3. A synchronous and synonymous identity model demonstrating the interrelation of, and interactivity between, self and other in both the material and virtual worlds.

The second model (Figure 4) represents the interrelatedness between material body/self and material community, and their virtual equivalents.

Figure 4. A synchronous and synonymous community model showing the interrelation of, and interactivity between, individuals and communities in both material and virtual worlds.
The final model is the *Cyber-Synchronicity* model (Figure 2, introduced in chapter 3 and reproduced here), which extends all four of van Manen’s existentials (Figure 1, introduced in chapter 3 and reproduced here) into the virtual and graphically depicts an instrument that can be used to chart the range of these relationships between the virtual and the material.

*Figure 2.* A set of eight cyber-existentials, based on the four phenomenological existentials posited by van Manen & Sokolowski, used to illustrate the interrelation of, and interactivity between, the four primary facets of lived experience in the material and their corollary facets in the virtual.
Figure 1. Phenomenological Existentials as explained by Gus Van Manen and their interrelationship with one another as well as their connecting axes.

Through these models, the level of interconnectedness of the two disparate domains can be understood, as well as indicating to what degree the material and the virtual exist synchronously and synonymously for MUD participants.

Each research question will be addressed in order, with the fourth applying the Cyber-Synchronicity model to demonstrate the length and breadth of respondents’ lived experiences as MUD participants. The resulting patterns and relationships observed will indicate whether or not the Cyber-Synchronicity model accurately describes the level of interconnectedness between material and virtual lived experience, and how well this model functions will suggest the suitability of Cyber-Synchronicity as a theoretical construct for further academic research in this and related areas.

6.1 – Analysis of Responses to Research Questions

6.1.1 – Research Question One: The Nature of Virtual Identity

Research question one asked how identity is created in a virtual community when enforced assumption of an alternate identity is required and what, if any, relation does
that assumed identity have to the participant’s sense of his material identity. Several elements have been identified that contribute to the overall understanding of identity assumption in a text-based virtual reality where such “masking” is enforced.

When a participant creates an avatar that serves as her virtual representation, she is presented with a number of initial choices that are limited by the three strata of rules (computer-based, program-based, and game-based). Choosing an avatar, therefore, is constrained, but the participant is still able to select from an array of options with regard to race, profession, moral stance, and inclusion in a unique player-versus-player community (e.g. assassins). Through these choices, the participant begins to define her avatar; other choices follow.

Two of the primary choices in particular, those of gender and name, can directly influence how other players will initially react to the new avatar. As indicated by respondent comments, veteran participants sense when such choices are disingenuous, such as attempts to curry unearned in-game favor. For example, respondent Garoco suggested the “cute and cuddly kitten” avatar stereotype. (Appendix E, p. 265) Veterans who recognize the behavior inherent in this stereotype think of such strategies as consciously-constructed deceit and disapprove. Long-time members of the MUD community consider withholding information about one’s material self an acceptable practice, but not deliberate misrepresentation for the purpose of greater in-game status and ability.

Avatar creation beyond the choices dictated by the MUD itself, however, is shaped by pre-existing and acknowledged preferences, values, and information possessed by the participant, which are then imposed upon the virtual representation. To judge from
disclosed respondent knowledge, a player’s virtual self is almost always, in some way, a reflection of part of the player’s perceived sense of “self,” although that reflection may be skewed somewhat by the limitations of the medium. All virtual identities share some equivalencies with the player’s perceived “self.” Respondents Tahab, Arosess, Utcarem, Dynsero, and Sapron all spoke of creating representative avatars based on material lived experience and knowledge. As mentioned previously, Tahab, who describes himself as a storyteller, explained that each avatar he created trafficked in information, thus fulfilling his hopes for himself:

Every character of mine has been some form of storyteller or teacher, even the villains. One of my bad guys taught the truth of greed and power, another taught the gospel of cold logic. They were all sort of honorable, [however], like lawful evil in [Dungeons and Dragons] terms. I consider myself to be an honorable person, and while sometimes I’ve played characters who weren't, they were harder to play, so I generally stuck to characters that reflected me in some way.

(Appendix J, pp. 334-335)

Specifically, virtual identity usually reflects a facet the creator perceives as dominant in herself, and the choices she makes tend to foreground the traits she thinks admirable in herself. Assuming a rational approach to game playing, an assumption that may be as fragile as the “rational marketplace,” MUD participants choose each trait in their avatars consciously, as Tahab suggests above. Respondent Isurut concurred:

I am a [quiet], observant person in real life and my characters tended to be as well. I think that for some people though, it could be the opposite. A person who is [quiet] in real-life take[s] more risks in a world where the others don’t know
them and [becomes] more vocal and outgoing if that was perhaps an internal desire of theirs; to be more outgoing. I would venture that the more loud and cocky players are either loud and cocky in real life or are making up for not having the confidence to be more forthright in real life. (Appendix F, p. 274)

This infusion of characteristics into a representation provides an avatar with attitudes, prejudices, likes and dislikes, practices, and templates for interaction with others. Virtual interactions are not, however, limited by previous offline behavior. Creation is, at times, also heavily influenced by participant mood, as indicated by several respondents, including Arosess and Tahab, who linked offline feelings directly to new avatar creation or choice of which existing avatar to play at that time.

Online identity choices are significant for other players, just as they are in offline situations. Because each avatar is initially invested with only a few offline characteristics, its evolution will result in accretions acquired in play.

After a player begins to explore the virtual world his avatar inhabits and begins interacting with other participants, his avatar begins to reflect more and more of the participant himself, rather than just those initial, perhaps whimsical, facets. As the participant becomes acclimated to a virtual environment, and begins to apprehend its sensorium, his avatar begins to thicken into his virtual representation.

Virtual interactions may thus reveal some of an avatar’s “personality” but may also add new layers as well. A player’s revelation of personal information to another may be influenced by that player’s style of game-play. A player who sees the MUD as a “traditional video game” will often speak and act as “herself,” withholding any personal information she is not comfortable giving out. For this type of player, her avatar is more a
translation of “herself,” in whole or in part, into the virtual world than a true “alternate identity.” Respondent Ostan explained his preference for playing with others who saw the game as he did:

I really liked some players on the MUD. Mostly the people that treated it as a game though. There were several of us who continued to gain levels and possessions and we had good conversations while doing it. I tended to stay away from the so called [role-players]. (Appendix G, p. 289)

A player who engages in role-playing (using the MUD world as a stage for acted-out improvisational storytelling with other like-minded players) may also speak and act as “herself,” but has also established a separate identity for her avatar, a projection of “self” into the fantasy world of the MUD. During interactions with other players, she must make clear who is speaking: the player or the avatar. This type of player has added an additional virtual distance between “herself” and other players, but revelation of “self” can still occur, provided the extra effort is made to distinguish player from avatar. Again, respondent Garoco describes the satisfaction of the fusion of “self” into role-playing:

A MUD is truly an escape from the real world. MY real world has often been stressful, unbearable, difficult, trying, or otherwise boring from time-to-time. Being able to let my goofy side loose – and have it expected and enjoyed by the denizens of the MUD – is a release for me. Being able to force that weird persona into a believable and [role-playable] character is a fun challenge. (Appendix E, p. 260)
Regardless of chosen play-style, the decision-making process regarding how much personal information a player reveals is similar – dependent on his comfort level with the virtual environment and any other virtual interactants – regardless of play-style.

As indicated by Garoco and other respondents, interaction with other avatars (and their material participants) may allow a MUD player to use his avatar as a form of stress relief, as a means of communication with fellow players, as a form of social experimentation, or a variety of other functions. Because avatar personality is born from player personality, a symbiotic relationship between the two is formed. Through that symbiosis, and through interactions with others, shared learning occurs. The player may gain new information regarding play-style and online strategy, or learn new information about the participants themselves that alters his perception of them and subtly (or not so subtly) changes future interaction. Tahab, for example, described how greater one-on-one communication with a player he perceived as hostile changed not only his opinion of the player, and that player’s opinion of him, but their future interactions as well.

Because the player-avatar relationship is symbiotic, and new information applicable to both player and avatar can be gained through MUD play and interaction, a reciprocal relationship forms between player-avatar interactants on a MUD, as shown in Figure 3.

Online masking is common, but on a MUD is required of all players. The origin and impact of the mask, however, is different than in the material world. On Halloween, for example, a child might don a Spiderman mask to attempt to conceal his identity, and allow him to pretend to be the super-hero. He is using the mask as a means of expressing
his attraction to Spiderman, and his desire to “be” Spiderman, but otherwise it is an impersonal representation, and only partially obscures his “identity.”

As previously explained, on a MUD, the “avatar-as-mask” also conceals only part of a participant’s identity, but differently than a Halloween mask: Some non-concealed facets of “self” are used as the mask. This renders the avatar-as-mask both representative and obfuscatory. The decision regarding which personality traits are made public, and which are concealed, is unique to every player, and to every avatar she creates. The effectiveness of an avatar-as-mask as a means of concealment is then measured on a per-relationship basis, and dependent on the amount of personal disclosure to the “other” in the relationship. Because of this, the avatar-as-mask is a highly personal choice, and its effect and powers of concealment are different for every person the player interacts with. Additionally, players may create multiple avatars, and choose different facets of “self” to use as each avatar-as-mask. Thus, on a MUD, an avatar-as-mask is an intimate creation, directly related to, and born from, the individual, and representative of that individual. The Spiderman mask, by contrast, is mass-produced and lacks little to no personal representation, other than the choice made in selecting it, and is far from truly concealing.

Respondents who addressed the subject indicated their personal connection to their avatar-as-mask choice, expressing a desire to find sympathetic depiction in their avatar, something that both “looked” and “felt” comfortable to them while still providing a suitable representation. In some cases, a participant’s avatar-as-mask allowed him to experiment with revealing a part of his material identity before attempting it in a material setting. Respondent Sapron described how she deliberately chose to give her avatar an outgoing personality, and not have the avatar exhibit the shyness she felt in material
social situations. The reactions she observed in other virtual interactants allowed her to “come out of her shell” in her non-virtual interactions as well, indicating that she “started to realize that this character wasn't just a character. She was a part of me.” (Appendix I, p. 316) For others, their virtual persona represented a desire to express a consciously perceived identity facet they felt was not given sufficient exposure or acknowledgement materially. As respondent Rorayi previously explained:

I think people generally emphasize the positives in their life and suppress the negatives if given the opportunity. MUDs provide that opportunity. They also provide the ability to “start fresh” [and] start a new persona, with an entirely new society, initially. (Appendix H, p. 310)

The avatar-as-mask implicitly represents the symbiosis of player and avatar, based on the reality of its creation from consciously-chosen facets of the player’s personality. Some respondents even went so far as to describe how difficult it was, in some cases labeling it as “impossible,” to create an avatar that had no connection to their material sense of “self,” further indicating that without the symbiotic connection of player and avatar, the mask became uncomfortable to the point of being “un-wearable.” Because of the intimate connection between a player and his avatar-as-mask, interaction with other participants takes on a more personal timbre for him than would otherwise be suggested by the medium. Since this symbiosis is experienced by most participants, to judge from responses, shared learning can occur between avatar and participant, and between disparate players.

Ultimately, since the avatar-as-mask is based on chosen facets of a participant’s offline sense of “self,” and given the symbiotic nature of the avatar-as-mask to
participant, and avatar-to-avatar, relationships, any “unmasking” a player engages in seldom represents a sudden and unexpected revelation. Instead, the process amends that which is already perceived about a participant by other interactants.

6.1.2 –Research Question Two: The Nature of Virtual Community

Research question two asked how community is created where enforced assumption of an alternate identity is the norm for participants in a virtual world and if participation in that virtual community has an observable effect on the material life of the participant. The data collected suggests that, although there are several additional levels of difficulty in negotiating MUD communication, both between individuals and within groups, virtual community develops in much the same manner as material community.

Despite the limitations of communication on MUDs, participants are able to forge strong relationships that ultimately create virtual communities. Respondent Utcarem detailed how his participation in AR, and the community that formed from his relationships on AR, affected his sense of available personal support:

Over the years I have built strong personal relationships with a number of people I would otherwise have never been given the opportunity to meet. I consider some of the people I met through [Aurealan Realms] my strongest friends and I can lean on them for support if I need it. (Appendix L, p. 365)

A virtual community also develops the same observable types of sub-communities that have been noted by scholars as developing in the material world. Respondent Tahab described several different types he perceived on AR:

There were those who were there to make friends. Those people weren't really there to play the MUD, but to use the MUD to make personal connections. I
remember one [AR staff member] getting kicked off the MUD for using it to stalk female players, so sometimes using it to be social was abused, but that only happened a couple times in the [history of the MUD]. Some people were there for attention, sort of trolling for it. They tended to be what I call the MUD kittens, the ones who go "I'm so cute, tee-hee, you want to give me stuff" and people do it. [...] There were those who were here to play the game. They didn't interact much, they were intent on experiencing the adventure of the MUD and pitting themselves against it. And there were the assassins, the people who were here to pit themselves [directly] against other [players]. (Appendix J, p. 342)

Virtual communities develop in spite of a MUD’s computer-based limitations. Computer-mediated communication, as experienced through a MUD, functions using only Mehrabian and Ferris’ lowest stratum of communication: Raw language. Lacking visual and tonal cues, participants can, and often do, interpret the textual information received any number of ways, which can often lead to misunderstandings and ill-feelings. (Shea, 1994) Respondent Tahab’s recollection of how intense, one-on-one communication was necessary to reduce the communication uncertainty that had caused tension and ill-feelings between him and another player is but one example of the inherent possibility for communication uncertainty in CMC.

In an attempt to bridge the communications gap caused by the missing tonal and visual cues, an absence inherent in a text-only medium, AR provides in-game tools that simulate the lost levels of communication. Some, like the “socials” commands, and the ability to “emote” body language, movement, and other “physical” information about a participant’s virtual avatar, are executed solely through a programmed interface as part of
the MUD program. These socials and emotes were even used by respondents during the on-MUD interviews to convey missing emotional and attitudinal information. In the following snippet of raw interview transcript, for example, respondent Sapron used a social (sigh), followed by an emote, to provide the “vocal non-verbal” and body-language information that would have been perceived were the interviewer and interviewee face-to-face offline:

Sapron says in auran, "When that RP started to fall apart because people were letting real life interfere. Cheurn started taking things personally and she drug Olyeo into it because they had a thing going on the side in real life. Things got really ugly and I started dreading coming on. I eventually ended up leaving for a bit. I had left once before because something similar had happened when I was an immortal and one of the [staff members] started creating all this drama and people started choosing sides."

Sapron says in auran, "In my experience, letting real life enter the game always, always takes the fun away in the end."

Sapron sighs.

Sapron sighs and her wings droop sadly. (Appendix I, p. 323)

Other methods, such as “smileys” (and other emoticons), colored text, and text icons unique to a MUD, permit participants to diminish the communication uncertainty inherent in CMC. These “actions,” however, are consciously and deliberately performed. Unlike subconscious body language and facial expressions, each social or emote on a MUD represents a conscious choice on the part of the participant to convey information so it may be seen and interpreted by conversational partners. Because of this, for MUD
players, subconscious actions like smiling, frowning, the shaking or nodding of the head, and other body movements, may or may not be translated into the virtual realm, depending on the will of the participant. And because they are conscious decisions, they may or may not accurately reflect the actions of the material participant (such as an avatar smiling, while the material participant is not). When recalling an online relationship that ended badly, respondent Arosess expressed her appreciation of how communicating online allowed for more control over the information sent to an interactant than an equivalent offline conversation would permit:

If [the disagreement] had happened offline, I think it might've been even uglier than online. In a [face-to-face] conversation, I'd be very bad at censoring myself and taking the necessary time to form comments and responses in my head. At least with an online "argument" you have that time it takes you to think and type it out and maybe backspace to rephrase things. (Appendix C, p. 224)

Virtual communication on a MUD allows for conscious control over all information – absent unperceived subtextual cues – conveyed to others. The subconscious can seldom betray real feelings or intent in an environment where there can be only consciously chosen communication, though obviously it can happen, through poor choice of words.

Through the additional text-based communication techniques available on a MUD, participants are able to create virtual communities of types similar to those found in the material world. Respondent Taneit, when asked his perceptions of the community on AR, and the existence of sub-communities within the general population, described several:
[There were] plenty of cliques on [AR], but you just have to take them in stride, even though it's a fantasy game, some people still bring that pack mentality online and try to surround themselves with people who think like them or in some cases people who would help them gain that next level or get that better piece of [equipment]. I mostly saw [that] the groups [who] stuck together [were those who] knew almost every inch of the mud, so that they could get the best pieces of [equipment] and wouldn't want to share with other people. I’m not sure if they had assholish [sic] personalities, but I definitely felt an air of elitism from them, like, "look at me, you wish you were like me.” (Appendix K, p. 357)

Within the MUD community as a whole, and the various sub-groups, respondents observed behavior similar to that seen between individuals in the material world. Dependent personalities still gravitated toward unhealthy relationships, insecurities often led to outrageous behavior (the “cute and cuddly kitten” personality) or public conflicts of the type described by respondent Arosess, but other participants formed strong, healthy attachments through respective virtual representations as well.

The MUD also provides a virtual geography within which a participant’s avatar “lives.” This allows MUD participants to form a unique virtual geographic community: They all share knowledge of, and interact with and within, a deliberately-designed virtual realm. Each MUD can be considered a “neighborhood,” and its players as members of that geographic community, both in the MUD’s virtual sense, and in the material sense of the participant’s choice to play on that specific MUD as opposed to another. Respondents Eseops, Tahab, Rorayi, Garoco, and others recounted experiences with other MUDs before deciding on AR as their virtual home. Again, respondent Sapron explained the
choice, saying, “[I had] visited several different [MUDs] before I landed on [AR], but this was the one that held my interest.” (Appendix I, p. 314) Something about AR in particular felt comfortable to these players, and encouraged them to participate further, just as clusters form in both benign and hostile environments off-line.

As discussed previously, the avatar-as-mask allows a MUD participant to present himself in a manner of his choosing, but the avatar-as-mask is constructed from chosen facets of his sense of material “self.” Because the avatar-as-mask is partially representative, it functions as a starting point for interactants to form an opinion of the participant via his avatar. If the initial interaction is satisfactory, additional disclosure of his perceived material identity may occur as his relationships grow and a feeling of inclusion in various MUD communities is recognized.

As respondent Taneit and others acknowledged, within the general Aurealan Realms community several sub-communities formed. Many were “interest communities,” such as those interested in role-playing, those interested in the MUD as a more traditional “video game,” and those interested in player-versus-player “assassin” game-play. The RoAMUD program, which Aurealan Realms uses, also allows for the creation of “clans” and “faiths,” groups that can be formalized by the MUD code, which represent symbolic communities – each such group embodied an attitude or a belief (sometimes role-playing oriented) within the game world – for its participants. Even before AR allowed for code-supported clan creation, themed sub-communities formed. Respondent Rorayi recounted that, “[at first] the MUD didn't officially support the idea of clans or guilds, but the players made them themselves, informal clans.” (Appendix H, p. 299)
Once MUD support was written for clans and faiths, several were created to further segment the overall AR community. Respondent Ostan suggested that “the clans were [similar to] social groups. They were very close to [each other] and always stayed away from the other groups.” (Appendix G, p. 290) Respondent Tahab described clans as groups “which players and sometimes [staff members] created around an idea or philosophy. Religions came in later and never really took off but they had the same idea.” (Appendix J, p. 343) Respondent Garoco described the similarity between MUD and offline sub-communities, saying he would “liken them in most aspects, but that those on a MUD are somewhat more closely-knit, due to the written-word aspect of more clear thought communication. [Inclusion] bypasses looks, financial status, age, etc.” (Appendix E, p. 266) Communities in a MUD may actually coalesce more easily because visible personality markers, fashions, and status symbols are suppressed. Respondent Dynsero agreed:

[Virtual groups such as clans are] pretty close to the same [as other off-line groups]; there are some that think they are better than everyone else, a few that everyone wants to be part of to find out why others are a part of it, and the few that no one wants to be part of because those people have made it clear they don't want to have anything to do with other people. (Appendix E, p. 266)

At the same time, such suppression of visible cues is likely a significant factor in the desire for players who have begun relationships online to then meet face-to-face.

As attested to by various respondents in this study, significant emotional relationships formed initially in the virtual world have led to significant, and sometimes long-term, material relationships. Regardless of type and longevity, these pairings
occurred through the symbiotic relationship of avatar-as-mask to participant, and between participants. Respondent Sapron told of two separate situations she experienced where the emotions invested in the avatar-as-mask blurred with the emotions of the participant:

> When your character is falling in love with another character, it's hard not to feel it yourself. Hell, the same is true in Hollywood. How many actors hook up after playing lovers in a movie? When you are putting yourself into a character, it's hard to break away completely sometimes. When your character has been slighted by another character or attacked viciously by someone, it's hard to sit and talk out of character to the person who just attacked you. Sometimes it takes a few minutes for you to pull yourself back and get out of character.

(Appendix I, p. 319)

Respondents Sapron, Arosess, and Tahab recounted beginning relationships on the MUD that later transferred offline and continued, to varying degrees of success. The most successful online-to-offline relationship was recounted by Arosess, who first met the man who would eventually become her material husband through online interaction:

> There was a group of like 10 people or so talking in the same [chatroom], and it was a good conversation, but he kept making me laugh. So the next night, I saw him online and talked to him again, and again, and again, and again. :) We started talking [in the] summer of 1995, [and were] married [in the] summer of 1999.

(Appendix C, p. 217)

As of this writing, Arosess and her husband are still married and are raising a family.

Other respondents related incidents where material relationships utilized the virtual setting as a means of continuing communication, and supporting the material
relationship, through virtual interaction, usually over great distances. Again, respondent Rorayi detailed how the MUD allowed him to maintain contact with a romantic partner in college:

> My girlfriend and I met at Morrisville, but [then] we each transferred away to different colleges. It was difficult to stay in touch (no cell phones at the time :). We were roughly 2-3 hours apart. I taught her how to MUD and so we basically met up nearly every night and MUDded. Most of the time it was just chatting, but we also played now and then. It was an extremely cheap way to keep in touch :).

(Appendix H, pp. 300-301)

Rorayi went on to marry his college girlfriend, and together they are currently raising a son. For others, like Respondent Tahab, as previously stated, while the MUD facilitated communication across great distances, it was insufficient to allow a relationship to continue:

> I even fell in love - my first online love affair - on [another MUD], to a woman I later met and dated briefly. It would have most likely developed into a long-term relationship but that we were both poor, struggling, and lived many states apart, so we couldn't really afford to see each other often enough to make a long-term relationship work. (Appendix J, p. 329)

Regardless of the origin of a relationship, the symbiotic nature of the interactions between MUD participants blur the boundaries between virtual and material relationships and community (Figure 2). For respondents, AR became an additional avenue through which to seek, forge, experience, reinforce, and maintain deep, lasting, personal
relationships, both with individuals they knew prior to joining the MUD and with individuals they would never have met had they not chosen to enter *Aurealan Realms*.

### 6.1.3 – Research Question Three: The Nature of Virtual Culture

Research question three asked if the creation of, and engagement with, a virtual culture had an effect on a participant’s understanding and acceptance of their virtual identity and their chosen virtual community, and if the created virtual culture had an observable impact upon the material life of the participant. According to Tylor (2008), the concept of culture is interpreted as “that complex whole which included knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (p. 1)

Participants on a MUD share several of the elements listed by Tylor, specifically knowledge, belief, rules and customs of both the MUD and the off-line realm. Interaction with a unique geography and sense of time, individually or with other participants, also helped to forge a new sub-culture. The respondents interviewed provided several examples of how the AR community created, and participated in, its own culture.

Several respondents acknowledged that certain players demonstrated significantly higher expertise in the successful playing of AR as a game. This naturally led to such players being perceived as “experienced,” with the community granting them higher social status as “elders” of a sort, a recognition of their superior knowledge. Respondent Sapron, for example, recalled how her initial impression of the MUD was shaped by the two experienced players who greeted her (Appendix I, pp. 315-316), while respondent Tahab related being nervous about meeting the owner of AR face-to-face because of his perception of him as “the boss” of the MUD. (Appendix J, p. 346)
Garoco, Tahab, Rorayi, and other respondents indicated a belief that an avatar-as-mask was capable of an acceptable level of personal sharing, and that withholding information was likewise acceptable, but that deliberate falsehood on the part of the player was unacceptable. This is an expression of a custom inherent in the AR community.

How AR players, and the MUD itself, are affected by a unique time-measurement system falls under the “other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” portion of Tylor’s explanation of culture. On *Aurealan Realms*, time exists in its own terms (heartbeats, ticks, and an original MUD calendar). While those measurements are based upon, and fluctuate with, material empirical time, they are unique to MUDding. Respondent Rorayi, in fact, specifically pointed out that most activities are not geared to their own time measurement systems. (Appendix H, p. 310) Additionally, respondent Tahab recalled an awareness of the unique MUD time in terms of how the game itself employs it, and how it impacts on game-play. (Appendix J, pp. 347-348)

Some respondents compared virtual lived time on a MUD to a similar sense of internal time experienced through participation in other endeavors that require a willing suspension of disbelief. As referenced previously, respondent Dynsero likened it to similar activities engaged in for pleasure:

[ Losing track of time on AR] is pretty close to the same [as in an off-line activity] if it’s an activity I am doing for fun; I want to get involved so I can have a [good] time [and] so I don’t have to worry about other things before I start. If it is a more task-related activity [then] that can be a little more stressful because I have other things that need to get done and finished. (Appendix E, p. 270)
For some, however, lived virtual time on a MUD passes in its own unique experiential sphere and does not parallel material lived time. Again, Garoco offered his conviction that MUDding was “more intellectually stimulating” as the reason why his awareness of virtual lived time was different than his awareness of material lived time. (Appendix E, p. 270) Respondent Eseops described how MUDding was apprehended differently than other off-line enjoyable activities:

In reading and watching TV, it is more of a passive [activity], whereas in MUDding, it tends to be more [actively interactive]. And it is usually fatigue that has you stop, versus the movie ending or [coming to the end of a] book. (Appendix D, p. 254)  

As a game, a MUD has no definitive “end.” Participants may continue to play as long as they like or, in some cases, as Eseops suggests, as long as their physical stamina allows.  

Participants of Aurealan Realms also share a virtual geography that influences, among other things, communication choices, locations within the world chosen for meetings and game-play, and the sense of community created by the pursuit of shared goals. Respondent Arosess claims that such shared goals are commonly found in MUDs:

I think most MUDders share some basics of what they are looking for in coming here. I mean, if they just wanted to play a game, there are thousands of games out there. Start with Freecell or Minesweeper. If they just wanted to talk to people, [there are] thousands of chat rooms. MUDs are [a way] to integrate several of those needs together into a unique experience. [To an extent,] I think most people come to a MUD looking for some degree of human interaction in a
creative forum. I think the more experienced MUDders can take [better advantage of that] (whether in game-play, [role-playing], or other aspects).

(Appendix C, p. 227)

Respondent Garoco described the effect the goals of disparate groups of players can have on the MUD as a whole:

[Groups of] players can severely steer and commandeer [role-playing.] [Other groups of players] as power-MUDders can devastate [areas of the MUD] and really define what everybody else wants in regards to [equipment] and [avatar abilities]. [The staff] steer the entire focus of the game from the ground up.

(Appendix E, p. 266)

While such virtual behavior was initially unique to MUDs, the pursuit of similar common goals is an inherent part of a wide variety of current interactive on-line games. Virtual distances traveled by MUD avatars also provide opportunity for shared experiences – the virtual travel itself as well as communication during the “trip” – and shared knowledge. Participants learn which journeys are easy and which are more difficult, and that knowledge becomes embedded into the culture of the AR player community. Respondent Sapron, for example, spoke of how she, and the other players with her, got lost in a forest while attempting to find a specific MUD location, the pixie city of Allarria, and the anxiety that they felt at being lost. (Appendix I, p. 326) After so many players had blundered through the forest maze, however, they could let others in on the secrets of navigating it. Destinations in the virtual geography, and the travel necessary to reach them, thus become common knowledge for the community.
AR staff and players inherited language specific to MUDs in general, but also developed slang unique to *Aurealan Realms*. As players became fluent in this “AR tongue,” they found themselves “speaking” it off-line. Phrases “spoken” in-game (given the bi-directional nature of virtual and material interaction) could blend back into the material vernacular of the participant. Respondent Rorayi, for example, when asked if he had ever used MUD-specific language during his material interactions, responded “Come on! Yes, and usually we all pronounced them differently, particularly character names.” (Appendix H, p. 308) Respondent Garoco was credited by several other respondents as having originated a single well-known exclamation (“woot!”) and indicated that the word had become part of their off-line expressions as well, even though Garoco denied authorship. (Appendix E, p. 268)

As with jargon of any unique community, however, crossover slang could result in communication uncertainty, requiring additional explanation. The effect was similar to hearing any enthusiast speak of her hobby to someone who had no knowledge it. Respondent Tahab discussed negotiating MUD-material communication:

I have to remember if I’m talking to someone about the MUD, or something that happened on it, that there’s a lot of stuff they won’t understand if they haven’t played a MUD before. [For example], talking about zones, or ticks, or NPCs, or re-pops, or mobs, or stat-ing something. Things that are pretty specific to MUDs in general. (Appendix J, p. 347)

Hybrid vernaculars can increase communication uncertainty, so that veteran MUDders have to remember “where” they are, and whether their conversational partners share sufficient referents to understand what is being said.
Again, to apply Tylor’s definition of culture, *Aurealan Realms* participants appear to have created a unique sub-culture of shared experiences, customs, time, geography, and language. While some of these cultural elements are unique to MUDs in general – shared by many text-based virtual realities – other aspects are unique to *Aurealan Realms* alone.

**6.1.4 –Research Question Four: The Nature of Cyber-Synchronicity**

Research question four asks how the answers to the first three research questions, and the subsequent data collected, support the concept that the virtual and material experiences of participants are observably interconnected and, as such, require the inclusion of information from both experiential arenas. This synchronous and synonymous relationship is represented by the Cyber-Synchronicity theoretical model (Figure 2). The relationship between *Lived Material Self* and *Lived Virtual Self*, *Lived Material Other* and *Lived Virtual Other*, *Lived Material Space* and *Lived Virtual Space*, *Lived Material Time* and *Lived Virtual Time*, and the interrelation between the dichotomies and among these four pairings, have been suggested by the research and respondent interviews. The model provides a graphic representation of this interaction, as all eight existentials converge and connect in the center, an indication of the reciprocity linking each area to the other seven.

As indicated by reports from other scholars and bolstered by respondent interviews, an avatar (*lived virtual self*) in a virtual setting is created from, often as an extension of, the material identity (*lived material self*) of the participant. The avatar-as-mask represents one or more facets of a player’s material identity. The experiences of the avatar-as-mask with the MUD’s virtual geography and computer-controlled elements
other participants, the virtual community, and the virtual culture (lived virtual other), are shared by the material participant as well (lived material space, lived material other). All information received by the avatar is also received by the participant, and is added to the participant’s overall lived experience and perceived sense of material self, including the facet(s) she has chosen to utilize for her avatar on the MUD. The experiential learning is inherently two-way, having an effect on both the virtual and material sense of “self” of the participant. The identities consciously acknowledged as lived material self and lived virtual self can both be considered “singers” in Gergen’s “chorus of the mind.”

Large scale interaction with other participants in the Aurealan Realms community, as well as with participants in the micro-communities that develop within the general AR community (lived virtual other), allows participants to further hone their sense of perceived “self,” both virtual and material. Several respondents observed personal growth through their avatars, or witnessed growth in other players. This was generally credited as positive, but most of the observers felt that identity “lessons” learned on the MUD that were not blended back into a player’s material identity were wasted. Such was indicated, for example, in Garoco and Dynsero’s statements regarding the suitability of the MUD as a personality testing-ground. (Appendix E, pp. 260-261)

Participation in both material and virtual communities helps shape a participant’s perceived sense of “self,” perceptions shaped by the acceptance or rejection received from other members of the macro- or micro-community. The sub-communities within AR bear striking similarities to material communities, both in type and in process of formation. Several of these sub-communities have crossed the virtual-material threshold,
with varying degrees of success, mirroring attempts to belong to multiple material communities simultaneously (lived material other). Again, respondent Arosess, for example, noted that she would compare the small groups that formed on AR to a high school:

You get the strong, loud people who make a lot of noise and the quieter ones who think they’re brilliant and become “fast friends.” You get people who usually don’t cross paths and speak that much, but when they are the only ones around find reason to be friendly, until someone else logs in who is “better.” There are people who are just universally nice, or universally pricks. It really is a community like that, only the participant’s [sic] aren’t necessarily linked by age, occupation, major, etc... it becomes a wider base for the population of this community to have. (Appendix C, pp. 228-229)

According to respondents’ statements, a participant’s overall lived experience of lived material other and lived virtual other (the matrix of associations that link individuals) tend to be quite similar and often overlap.

The sensations occasioned by virtual geography (lived virtual space) can provoke responses in participant’s material environments (lived material space), but only under certain circumstances. The depth of immersion, combined with the quality – the evocative nature – of the writing utilized in the descriptions of “physical” spaces within the virtual geography, can result in material reactions to virtual environments. Such reactions were reported by less than half of the interviewees, however, and were not a common occurrence. Respondents Eseops, Garoco, Rorayi, Sapron, and Tahab related experiencing material reactions to virtual geography. This minority was able to allow the
MUD to assume the foreground in their experience, due in part to heightened immersion and more significant attention paid to textual descriptions. Additionally, given the symbiotic nature of the avatar-as-mask for participants, a player’s past and present experiences with material spaces can influence her reactions to virtual spaces as well.

Participant responses to virtual spaces, through their avatar-as-masks, are nevertheless added to the total lived experience of the individual. Using Gergen’s “chorus of the mind” metaphor, one “singer” learns something new and then shares it with the rest of the choir. Similarly, experience with lived material space provides insight and knowledge essential for participants to be able to envision evocative text-rendered virtual geography in a way that can be “felt” as a lived virtual space (*lived material space, lived self, lived virtual space, and lived virtual self*). This suggests that lived material space and lived virtual space map onto one another, although the sensation is not experienced by every player. Players who materially experience sensations created by virtual spaces likely do so based on apprehension (imagined or real) of offline spaces: Material experience provides the basis for understanding and embodying virtual experience, which then creates almost physical sensation.

Time in the material world and time in the virtual world are unavoidably intertwined, given that material world time and virtual time are ultimately founded upon the same time measurement system, although we have tried to discriminate between them using internal and external terms (*lived material time*). As addressed specifically by respondents Eseops, Rorayi and Tahab, virtual time can also be unique in terms of *lived internal time* and *consciousness of lived internal time*. “Losing track of time” while MUDding was felt by some respondents as similar to other immersive experiences that
require a willing suspension of disbelief to fully engage. Other respondents, however, felt that virtual time on *Aurealan Realms* existed in its own “felt” experiential space, unique to the MUDding phenomenon (*lived virtual time*). The MUD’s internal method of quantifying time (heartbeats, ticks, and a unique MUD calendar) contributes to this “feeling.”

Each MUD participant experiences the virtual geography, inhabitants and objects through an identical text-based interface (*lived space, lived other*), and often share those experiences with others, both in real-time as they are occurring, and as anecdote after the event has taken place (*lived time, lived other*), using the slang of the MUD. The growth of a player’s perceived sense of virtual “self” is linked to his experience of the lived space of the MUD, the lived others that make up the MUD community, and the lived time of the MUD world (*lived self, lived other, lived space, lived time*). Growing out of his experience of material space, material others, and material time, the overall lived experience affects the development of his facet-based avatar-as-mask identity. Information gained virtually is added to the general lived experience of the participant, who then incorporates his experiences back into his avatar-as-mask. As a result, both the material and virtual “self” experience growth.

Each of the four existential columns (*self, other, space, and time*) marks the formation of the unique culture of *Aurealan Realms*. The lived self of the AR avatar and participant, the lived other of those she encounters within the virtual world, the virtual geographical spaces she will encounter and react to, and her unique sense of AR time and its synchronization with both virtual and material world time, all have unique linguistic and iconographic cultural elements associated with them. The combination of
experiences, virtual blended with material, create a singular MUD sub-culture containing unique customs, time, geography, and language. The AR culture, like other cultures a player may be a part of, provides a member additional communication choices, allowing her a wider, if sometimes oblique, choice of slang, as well as additional experiences to base her day-to-day decisions upon.

6.1.5 – Dissertation Conclusions

With their inception in the early 1970s, MUDs became quite popular across the world. Currently, however, their popularity has waned significantly as more advanced online game opportunities, particularly MMORPGs, have been developed. But precisely because they represent an earlier, simpler stage in the evolution of virtuality, MUDs can offer a clearer insight into the development of identity, community, and culture in an online environment.

The Cyber-Synchronicity model (Figure 2) graphically represents the interconnected, synonymous, and synchronous nature of participation in Aurealan Realms. There is observable interaction within the top horizontal layer (van Manen’s four material phenomenological existentials) and the bottom horizontal layer (the four original posited virtual phenomenological existentials). There are detectable shared elements of experience between both the top and bottom of each column (lived self, lived other, lived space, and lived time) as well. Finally, there are clear connections between and among each of the eight individual existentials.

Cyber-Synchronicity, as a theoretical model, thus appears to be a valid construct for understanding the overall lived experience of participants in a virtual community. Studying the interaction between the eight named existentials, and their influence upon
one another, deepens understanding of the meaning and impact of synchronous and synonymous participation in a virtual community.

Through the model, a more substantial understanding of the attraction such games hold for participants, the satisfaction gleaned from participation, and the compensation gained by participation, can be pursued. This study has indicated that, in addition to its existence as an on-line game, AR functioned as a gateway of sorts for participants. Being a member of *Aurealan Realms* MUD allowed players access to people, social opportunities, knowledge, and attitudes they might not have otherwise had exposure to materially. It also provided them a familiar environment, filled with supportive friends, that could be accessed from anywhere the Internet reached, allowing them to carry a small sense of “home” with them, largely regardless of material location.

Given those findings, it seems likely that similar virtual phenomena cannot be adequately examined without also taking into account the ways in which virtual interaction affects the material aspects of participants’ lives, and vice-versa.

If those implications hold true, material and virtual worlds should no longer be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as two worlds connected by a threshold that can be, and often is, crossed by those who participate in both. Experiences in the virtual world have a measurable effect upon the material, and vice-versa. Such threshold-crossing should be incorporated into any study of virtual phenomena in order to achieve accurate and reliable reporting on the experiences of those who participate in MUDs, MMORPGs, or any other virtual community.
6.2 – Suggestions for Future Research

The one pair of phenomenological existentials in this study that provided the least satisfactory evidence of symbiotic influence was the interaction between lived material spaces and lived virtual spaces. Because of the text-based nature of the MUD world, only those respondents who were willing to engage in deeper-than-normal deliberate immersion reported any physical or emotional reactions to the virtual world, and then only when the writing was of sufficiently evocative quality to form images in their minds clear enough to cross the material-virtual threshold. The textual limitation of MUDs seemed thus to limit as well the existential sense of lived virtual space.

Since this study was undertaken, however, the number of active MUDs on the Internet has declined noticeably, victims, perhaps, of just that limitation. To compensate, graphic MMORPGs, using sharp, fluid, dynamic three-dimensional imagery, have proliferated, with new games being developed and opened to the public every year. MMORPGs incorporate the same elements of lived self, lived other, and lived time as MUDs, but their graphic simulations seemingly deepen the experience of lived space for participants. The graphical nature of the virtual world on a MMORPG may allow researchers to more easily demonstrate whether the concepts of lived material space and lived virtual space are, as suggested by this study, reciprocal in their “felt” effect on participants. A secondary study, focusing on graphics MMORPGs, and employing the Cyber-Synchronicity model, might furnish additional support for the interrelation.

Utilizing the Cyber-Synchronicity instrument to analyze an MMORPG, moreover, would also allow for further demonstration of the model itself by applying it to the genre that succeeded MUDs in the arena of multi-player online gaming. By venturing into the
world of graphic virtual spaces, MMOs represent the next step in the evolution of interactive virtual worlds, and as such should be suitable for analysis. If the model reveals similar interconnections between the eight phenomenological existentials for MMORPG participants as well, that would further demonstrate the usefulness of the instrument.

It might be possible thus to quantify levels and degrees of interaction among the eight existentials. Doing so might register the overall impact of each facet of the material-virtual relationship upon participants, and serve as a guide both for scholars trying to understand the phenomenon and for designers of virtual worlds intent on augmenting specific types of virtual experiences.

Once again, this study found that only a small percentage of respondents experienced material reactions to textual descriptions of virtual spaces. This was perhaps the most surprising finding, since player are accustomed to “enter,” “navigate,” and react to bounded spaces that have been carefully simulated. Because spatial effects were contingent on levels of willing immersion and perceived evocative dimensions in the written description of the virtual space, research might determine whether degrees of simulation affect only a small subset of the overall MUD population. The resulting study could provide additional insight into how the quality of writing affects CMC interactants, though that question might be rendered moot by advanced graphics as opposed to text.

Finally, an additional area that could be examined as a result of this research would be the level of success or failure of socials, emotes, and emoticons, or similar commands in MMORPGs. Does the ability to textually-substitute facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice have a discernible impact upon Computer-Mediated
Communication or have these elements now been rendered absolute by graphic equivalents?

Virtuality has traditionally been understood as resident within its own sphere, and a single dimensioned one at that. This study suggests barriers are permeable. Materiality augments virtuality, and expanded virtuality enhances life off-line. Participants in *Aurealan Realms* MUD have indicated that the confluence has resulted in personal growth: They have experienced cyber-synchronicity.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: MAP OF AURELAN REALMS

Key:  f forest          s swamp
      ^ mountains      - | roads
      m rivers        )) bridge
      d plains/grasslands  m marsh
      t tundra

1-Twin Towns  2-Tressardvalia
3-Kanrik Delves  4-Old Sparta
5-The Watcher's Wood  6-Yarrowshire
7-The Gnome Tunnels  8-The Cytchul Pastures
9-Al'Kargoth  10-Mesraht
11-Sylvandell  12-The Underdark
13-The Silver Oak Forest  14-The Skyship Icarus
15-Dark Derkwood  16-The Dusk Swamps
17-Light Derkwood  18-Dunchester
19-Wirenoft  20-The Northern Pier
21-Alanholt  22-Ossat Island
23-Port Nighthaven  24-The Trokhon Caves
25-The Equarian Forests
27-Hope County
29-Aria
31-Ballysagartmore Keep
33-Uk'rusht
35-Triumveraal
37-Staak Caverns

26-The Prmyrian Hometree
28-Allaria
30-Iron Hills Trading Post
32-New Kerofk
34-Trading Grounds
36-Great Eastern Desert
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1: How did you first get involved in MUDding?

Q2: What was your favorite experience on a MUD?

Q3: What was your least-favorite experience on a MUD?

Q4: How do you pick what to “be” on a MUD?

Q5: How is your choice of online “self” related to what you’re like in “real life?”

Q6: What do you think of the other people who play on the MUD?

Q7: What kind of relationships do you have with the other people on the MUD?

Q8: Was there a time when something happened online that made you log off in anger or frustration?

   F1: What happened when you logged off?

Q9: Was there a time when you logged off in a better mood than when you logged on?

   F1: What happened when you logged off?

Q10: In general, do the people you encountered online seem to fall into cliques or social groups?

Q11: Did you perceive any sort of social group/clique on the MUD?

   F1: What overall effect did any groups/cliques have on the MUD community?

Q12: Did you ever communicate with or meet anyone from the MUD offline?

   F1: Did your online association affect how you dealt with them offline?

   F2: Did your offline interaction alter how you dealt with them online?
Q13: Have any of your interactions on the MUD crossed over into your offline life at all, with regard to language or other cultural elements?

F1: Have you ever had to explain to someone not affiliated with the MUD what a MUD-related word or phrase meant?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - AROSESS

The area surrounding you suddenly brightens. Arosess arrives amidst a darkened cloud.

Arosess says in auran, "woo"
You smile.

Arosess says in auran, "hiya"
You say in auran, "Hola. :)"
You say in auran, "First, the official stuff."

Arosess nods.
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Arosess says in auran, "yes"
You say in auran, "Thank you. :)"
You say in auran, "Ok. This is basically just going to be a conversation. I'm going to ask you to tell me stories."
You say in auran, "And there's no such thing as too long an answer. :)"

Arosess chuckles.
Arosess says in auran, "OK, but if you want more info after I stop, let me know :)
You say in auran, "Will do."
You say in auran, "So tell me about how you first got involved in MUDding."

Arosess says in auran, "I started on MOOs first after hearing about some online friends through a newsgroup gathering there. Once I got used to that format, I discovered that the same basic concept applied to the RPG game style I was always playing on my Nintendo :)"

Arosess says in auran, "so I started playing MUDs then"
You ask in auran, "What is a MOO, say, compared to this MUD?"
You ask in auran, "What's the difference?"

Arosess says in auran, "hrm. no point or purpose. rooms you can program and describe and wander through talking to people"

Arosess says in auran, "no game or story purpose to it, just fun"
You ask in auran, "So it was basically just a virtual stage then? You had sets, props, etc., and you inhabited it?"
You say in auran, "I ask because I've never played a MOO. :)"

Arosess giggles.

Arosess says in auran, "that's one way to put it, yeah. there were rooms and objects to interact with, but they were whatever the person who wrote it wanted. usually no set theme. I myself had a hockey rink :)"
You grin.
You ask in auran, "When was this, that first MU* system? How long ago?"

Arosess says in auran, "early 1994"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "during high school, much to my parents chagrin :)"
You say in auran, "So you've been doing this for over a decade, just like me. :)"

Arosess says in auran, "oh yeah, I'm sucked in for good now"
You ask in auran, "In that time, what is your one single instant that stands out as your favorite experience on a MU*?"

Arosess says in auran, "ooh, good one. need a min to think"
You say in auran, "Take as much time as you need."

Arosess says in auran, "a few come to mind, but I gotta say the first conversation I had with hubby Daniel :)")"
You say in auran, "Tell me about that."

Arosess says in auran, "he had the nickname Brian Griffin at the time (definitely not a fantasy theme like this place : ) )"

Arosess says in auran, "a friend had just hooked me on the TV show"

Arosess says in auran, "Family Guy. So I sent him a message saying I liked his name :)"

Arosess says in auran, "there was a group of like 10 people or so talking in the same room, and it was a good conversation, but he kept making me laugh. so the next night I saw him online and talked to him again. and again and again and again :)")"
You ask in auran, "And you ended up married IRL. How long after that first meeting did you get married?"

Arosess says in auran, "we started talking summer of 1995. Married summer of 1999"
You nod.

You ask in auran, "Ok, now take the inverse of that question. What is the one instance you can recollect that is your worst online experience on a MU*?"
You say in auran, "Your least favorite, at any rate."

Arosess says in auran, "parting ways with someone you think is a good friend, on their decision not yours"
You ask in auran, "Can you elaborate on that a bit? What was the relationship like, what brought on the parting of the ways?"

Arosess says in auran, "I think its the same that can happen in a real life or face to face setting. in any friendship there are expectations and definitely feelings attached"

Arosess says in auran, "in those ten years there were two instances that come to mind where someone I felt very close to suddenly changed the terms of the friendship, and things were done from that point on"

Arosess asks in auran, "doesn't really matter that it was online, it would've hurt in any instance. know what I mean?"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did you ever find out why?"

Arosess says in auran, "once it was a deep misunderstanding that brought some harsh feelings to the surface. the second time it was decisions my friend made IRL to alter online relationships (and cheapen them, in my opinion)"

Arosess says in auran, "even though you can't see a face, there's still a person attached to that text, with very real feelings and emotions"
You ask in auran, "Do you know why the friend in the second instance wanted to change their online relationships? What their motivation was?"

Arosess says in auran, "a real life relationship that emerged and felt threatened by online friendships"

Arosess says in auran, "(see, here's where the dirt goes into the paper :) )"
You say in auran, "That's ok with me, everything will be pseudonym'd appropriately."

Arosess says in auran, "oh, I know that. not concerned."
You say in auran, "Let's move to a different area for a bit. I want to ask you about your choices of characters."

Arosess says in auran, "shoot"
You ask in auran, "How do you pick who and/or what to be on a MU*?"
You ask in auran, "How do you choose your virtual self?"

Arosess says in auran, "I usually stick with human or part human as a race. I don't read a ton of Tolkien and other sources of inspiration to make huge leaps like playing a totally different race. For that same reason, I think I've only had one male character in 10 years (and that was BRIEF)"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "I *hope* I've evolved into picking a virtual self that would be interesting for people to interact with during RP. Try to bring something new to the mix"
You ask in auran, "So you make a persona with the concept of role-playing in mind?"

Arosess says in auran, "in a context like this mud, definitely. It would play a part in how I pick her class and stats, sometimes even equipment, right from the beginning. Even if the whole personality and story behind her isn't set and established right away, its always somewhere in my wmind"
You ask in auran, "So... when you make a character, is that character already part of you, at least mentally, or do you give birth to it as you create it?"

Arosess says in auran, "most of my successful characters have a trait or two that is me. I hope I'm not as screwed up as some of them can be though :)

You smile.

Arosess says in auran, "there's always something in them I can identify with, whether its a trait or talent or belief (or goal)"

Arosess says in auran, "but at the same time..there's a great deal thats NOT me"

You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "some of my favorite parts to play are when my characters are doing things I could never ever do myself :)

You ask in auran, "So part of a character is familiar, part of it is like trying on new clothes?"

Arosess says in auran, "yeah. I've tried explaining it to my husband (he's a former actor) that its like playing a role of a favorite character"

You ask in auran, "When you're deciding on a character to make, do any RL factors play into that? Say... mood, whether you're tired or not, hungry, etc.?

Arosess says in auran, "when making a character, not necessarily. I might try and make a character to fit into a MUD or group if I think there is a need for that type of character (with my own twist on it, of course)"

Arosess says in auran, "when I have a place with several characters i can play, my mood definitely would help me choose who to play at that time"

You ask in auran, "Would you go so far as to say it would also influence your actions as whatever character you chose?"

Arosess says in auran, "to some degree. My own mood or perceptions at the time wouldn't make me play a character in a way that is completely against the nature I've established for them"

You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "but if I'm in a mood to laugh or be playful, my character might be playful as well"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever taken a bad mood out on somebody on the MUD, deliberately or accidentally?"

Arosess says in auran, "in 10 years, absolutely"

Arosess says in auran, "trying to remember a specific instance"

Arosess says in auran, "do you mean in character or out of"
You say in auran, "Either."
You say in auran, "In either case, it's you the person expressing emotion through your character, so..."
You smile.

Arosess says in auran, "well, there were times when I'd be in a really ticked off mood irl, so I might pull out my evil character and find some poor innocent soul to torture (with their ooc permission or rp consent of course :) )"

Arosess says in auran, "I'm sure that there were times out of character as well where my being in a foul mood led me to snipe at someone verbally or make some other choice in interaction I wouldn't do otherwise. hopefully I apologized for those later"
You ask in auran, "Is that something you'd also do offline? Vent at someone with their permission?"
You say in auran, "I can do that with <my wife> if I need to, and know she'll understand. I'm lucky that way. :)")"

Arosess says in auran, "yes, at times. I do that at work with a really great boss, sometimes just go into her office and say "OK, I need to vent," and she knows to let me talk and get it out and when its done we can talk rationally and all be better"

Arosess says in auran, "at home too on occasion"

Arosess says in auran, "<Your wife>'s neat :)"
You ask in auran, "Which do you find more useful to you, emotionally... venting online or offline?"
You ask in auran, "or is there a difference?"
Arosess says in auran, "hrm. depends on the circumstance"
You ask in auran, "So... both are roughly equal, given different situations?"
Arosess says in auran, "I think I end up complaining and venting to friends online (in MUDs, livejournal, chat rooms) more often than irl. The breadth of friends goes wider than I have available at a moment's notice irl."
You nod.
You say in auran, "I understand that idea intimately. :)

Arosess says in auran, "if I'm just looking to vent about how my husband ticked me off, or a coworker that is insane, its good to jump online and dump it"
You ask in auran, "Does it help? As much as telling someone FTF or on the phone would?"

Arosess says in auran, "the downside is sometimes those online friends aren't familiar enough with the situation to fully understand"
You say in auran, "That's a risk in FTF relationships too, come to think of it."

Arosess says in auran, "well, it can act like a buffer. I can silently complain about my family while in the same room as them, adn get a few frustrations out"
You grin.
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "where as even if I'm on the phone with a friend, hoo boy if Daniel overhears...:)
You ask in auran, "So online allows you more freedom to express yourself?"

Arosess says in auran, "definitely. both in ooc friendships and ic interactions."
You ask in auran, "Speaking of friendships... what do you think of MUDders, in general. In 12 years, you've no doubt met a lot of them... what are they like as a type of people?"

Arosess says in auran, "insane? :)
You go 'Heh.'

Arosess says in auran, "no, really, some of them are really good people"

Arosess says in auran, "(afk a min)"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Works for me too. I figured out how to make kool-aid that I can drink as much of as I want, but it does go through me."

Arosess rolls on the floor laughing hystericallly.
Arosess says in auran, "OK, one of the things that really surprised me about people online was how varied they were"
You say in auran, "Two packets of Kool-aid and three droppers-ful of Stevia. It's lovely."

Arosess says in auran, "when I first started I guess I kind of assumed most people were students right around my age"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "then one of the first friendships I formed was a woman I went on to refer to as my MOOMom :)

Arosess says in auran, "in that first online site, I was friends with others who were fellow students, but then also older professionals looking for a creative outlet. an air force guy. Ultimate Trekkies. Teachers. the whole works :)"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "I think the MUD population now is getting younger (or Im' just needing a new walker and cane), but that's how it struck me initially"
You say in auran, "So, in general, what kinds of relationships do you have with the people you meet and interact with online? You've already mentioned a couple friendships and a marriage... ;)

Arosess says in auran, "a lot of acquaintences, a number of good friends, a husband :)"

Arosess says in auran, "unfortunately due to the nature of real life, some of the friendships are more transient...as opportunity changes and priorities shift, there just isn't he time or opportunity on my or their part to keep as active with keeping in touch"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Sounds like a nice variety. How does that compare to your offline life?"

Arosess says in auran, "not a ton of friends that are in the area. Most of them are from work or ones I went to school with and are out of the area."

Arosess says in auran, "its easier to hop online and start up a conversation than go somewhere irl and do the same :)"
You ask in auran, "Why?"

Arosess says in auran, "less effort (I can do it in my pajamas while sacked on the couch). less risk (I don't need to worry about not making a good first impression or looking
stupid, because if I do, I don't need to worry about the person online passing me on the street and knowing it was me)
You say in auran, "So it's the physical anonymity issue. According to the literature I've read, that's common."

Arosess says in auran, "that's a big part of it. especially if you do bring RP and other interactions into it. I'm too scared to get on stage and act, but I can do it through a character in an MUD"
You say in auran, "Sounds like you'd do well on radio. :"
Mouseglove knows all about THAT.

Arosess says in auran, "is that an invite? The All ABBA hour :)"
You wince.

Arosess speaks as if she actually is an ABBA fan, rather than just liking a couple of songs ;)
You say in auran, "Uhhh... I'd rather not... ;)"
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "So you've said that your mood influences your behavior online at times."
You ask in auran, "Has something online ever changed your mood? Have you ever, for example, logged off in a worse mood than you were in when you logged on?"

Arosess says in auran, "absolutely"
You ask in auran, "Can you give me an example?"

Arosess says in auran, "that instance I described earlier of someone breaking off a friendship because of RL pressure? (which I can understand, it was just very sudden and unexpected)...I think i cried for about 2 hours after I logged out"
You sigh.
You comfort her.

Arosess says in auran, "heh, thanks <grin>"
You ask in auran, "What happened after that?"

Arosess says in auran, "(is this awkward for you, because you know what's going on with it?)"
You shake your head.
Arosess says in auran, "OK, good"
You say in auran, "I'm sufficiently removed from it all, thanks to so much time having passed."

Arosess says in auran, "OK, so after that, a few attempts at simple conversation were problematic on both sides, so we're not friends anymore"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So tears were the aftereffects. If this had happened offline, would you have reacted the same way?"

Arosess says in auran, "that happened with the other friendship I mentioned too. a couple of years later I sent a quick email saying I hoped things were going well, and I got a response that made it clear the other person was still angry about the misunderstanding"
You say in auran, "Wow."

Arosess says in auran, "I guess that can happen FTF too. people hold grudges and bad feelings, no matter what the medium"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "if it had happened offline, I think it might've been even uglier than online"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "in a FTF conversation, I'd be very bad at censoring myself and taking the necessary time to form comments and responses in my head"

Arosess says in auran, "at least with an online "argument", you have that time it takes you to think and type it out and maybe backspace to rephrase things"
You ask in auran, "Let's try something more upbeat. Take the inverse of that question. Have you ever logged off in a better mood than you were in before you logged on?"

Arosess giggles.
Arosess says in auran, "absolutely to that too. In fact, I'll probably be trying to hunt the log down after this :)"
You say in auran, "I'll be happy to forward you a copy of the pre-psuedonym'd version."

Arosess giggles.

Arosess says in auran, "Sapron and I once were on the clan channel "In character" (heh heh...if our characters were both incredibly high and drunk at the same time)"
You quirk an eyebrow.

Arosess says in auran, "that time I ended up in tears because I was laughing so hard and trying to not wake up the kid sleeping in the next room"

Arosess says in auran, "oh, just conversations we were sucking other people who logged in into, innuendo flung back and forth, jokes flying left and right. it was hysterical"
You say in auran, "So tears is normal for you when you log off, one way or another? >;)")"

Arosess rolls on the floor laughing hysterically.

Arosess says in auran, "what can I say, this place makes my eyes leak"
You go 'Heh.'

Arosess says in auran, "its your fault, Mousie Poo"
You wince.
You say in auran, "There's that name again..."
You grin.

Arosess exclaims in auran, "its in the log now! ha!"
You chuckle.
You ask in auran, "So when you find yourself in a better mood while online, and you log off... does the mood stay with you once you leave the keyboard?"

Arosess snickers as she tries to think of how to put this.

Arosess says in auran, "umm. yes ;)")"
You quirk an eyebrow.

Arosess says in auran, "OK, and I'm blushing as I type this, but I'm going to anyway"
You say in auran, "Oh there's got to be more to THAT answer..."
Arosess says in auran, "it used to be a running joke with hubby"

Arosess says in auran, "on occasion when the mood would turn very good (and a bit racy, if you know what I mean)...well, he's not a night person and he'd always fall asleep earlier than I would, but I'd make him wake up ;)")"
You say in auran, "Ah. ;)")"
You ask in auran, "Why do you think the online interaction affected you in that way?"
Arosess says in auran, "but other than that, yes, even a really good RP session, or even a
good fun conversation with a friend that made me laugh a lot, would pick up my mood
and make me smile for awhile"
You say in auran, "Was it only when it was "racy?""

Arosess says in auran, "nah, that was just what made me snicker to myself when you
asked that"
You say in auran, "(Did you see the first part of that question?"

Arosess asks in auran, "I did, but I'm having difficulty forming an answer. can you
rephrase it?"
You ask in auran, "Knowing yourself and your personality, what was it about the online
stuff you did that caused you to respond the way you did?"
You say in auran, "Respond physically offline, I mean."
You say in auran, "That's still not a very good question, I'm grappling with how to ask it
well too."
You ask in auran, "What was it about what happened online that translated to the offline
feelings you expressed?"

Arosess says in auran, "because I have a very active imagination and it likes to run in a
lot of directions. I think thats why I get so expressive about what happens online
(expressive irl) in a lot of situations. Daniel has caught me crying (yes, again) after some
tragic rp with characters I was very interested in."
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "he's also commented on me cracking up and laughing, or even
just smiling as I'm talking to someone or rping, because its just a good talk. what happens
online seems to just translate itself into irl"
You ask in auran, "So you become emotionally (and to some degree physically) involved
with interactions with other people online?"

Arosess says in auran, "definitely"
You say in auran, "Here's a side question that just popped into my head...
You ask in auran, "We have socials on the MUD. When you type smile, or nod, do you
do so as you do the action IRL, or in response to feeling it (but you just do it online), or
do you just do it to do it?"
You ask in auran, "Or something else?"

Arosess says in auran, "some are independent, or in place of the action irl (if I were to
type nod, I would probably nod at you in agreement if you said it to me FTF)"
Arosess says in auran, "if I type laugh or emote it, I probably am doing such irl :)
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "It's the same with me. Sometimes it just goes to my fingers instead of my face/eyes/head, sometimes it's both."

Arosess nodsnodsnods.
You ask in auran, "Based on your interactions with other people on MU*'s, good and bad, do the people you've encountered seem to fall into groups?"
You ask in auran, "Like... can you identify "types" of MUDders, based on your experience?"

Arosess says in auran, "ooh, that's a tough one. let me think"
You say in auran, "And I don't mean types of MUD players..."
You say in auran, "But more types of people that MUD."

Arosess says in auran, "I think most mudders share some basics of what they are looking for in coming here"

Arosess says in auran, "I mean, if they just wanted a game to play, there are thousands of games out there. Start with Freecell or Minesweeper"

Arosess says in auran, "if they just wanted to talk to people, there's thousands of chat rooms"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "muds are kind of a way to integrate several of those needs together into a unique experience"
You ask in auran, "Do you think everyone comes to a MUD looking for the same type of experience?"
Arosess says in auran, "to some degree. I think most people come to a MUD looking for some degree of human interaction in a creative forum. I think the more experienced MUDders can take advantage of that more (whether in game play, RP, or other aspects)"

Arosess says in auran, "they know how creative it can be and how to maximize their experience. If I logged in wanting a good RP experience that night, I'd probaly know who to track down and what to do to instigate it"

Arosess says in auran, "(sorry, that probably didn't answer it at all..)"
You say in auran, "Sort of. Let me follow-up a bit."
You smile.  
You say in auran, "Remember, it may be my question-asking abilities too."

Arosess giggles.  
You ask in auran, "In your experience, do the people you've encountered online fall into groups, personality-wise?"  
You ask in auran, "For example... did you perceive any social groups or cliques that formed?"

Arosess says in auran, "a lot of them are intelligent. I think a lot of them are quieter irl than they appear online, but that might just be my reading into it. I'm not exactly a shy person (just ask any coworkers who think I'm insane :) ), but I'm not likely to charge into a room of strangers and make a spectacle either :)

Arosess says in auran, "social groups that formed online? well sure...I think that its very translatable to FTF interactions."  
You ask in auran, "What types of groups did you encounter in your online travels?"

Arosess says in auran, "(good question, I'm just trying ot word it correctly)"
You say in auran, "Ooo.. I asked a good question. Yay me! :)"

Arosess giggles.  
Mouseglove nibbles on turkey jerky.

Arosess says in auran, "if I had to classify the groups and interactions, I'd compare a lot of it to a high school (bear with me):"
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "you get the strong loud people who make a lot of noise, and the quieter ones who think they are brilliant and become "fast friends""

Arosess says in auran, "you get people who usually don't cross paths and speak that much, but when they are the only ones around find reason to be friendly, until someone else logs in who is "better" :)

Arosess says in auran, "there are people who are just universally nice, or universally pricks."
Arosess says in auran, "it really is a community like that, only the participants aren't necessarily linked by age, occupation, major, etc...it becomes a wider base for the population of this community to have"
You ask in auran, "Most communities have some common tie that binds them together... would you say there is one for a MUD?"

Arosess says in auran, "it would be what brings people to that particular mud, with that particular address and port. THE GAME. Oh, we're here to play THE GAME."
You ask in auran, "So does the game retain its importance once the community forms within it? Other than providing the "place" for the community to gather?"

Arosess says in auran, "at least at first, that's what make people initially log in. after that point, they might come back for the friendships or familiarity, but even some of the aspects of that started because those other people logged in to start trying the game as well"

Arosess says in auran, "I think that depends on what we are looking to do at that time. If it were just to chat with some friends from the game, then it simply provides the place. If its to relax and play, then the game is crucial. That goes for levelling, fighting, gaining items, or RPing."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So which group(s) you mentioned would you say you fit into?"

Arosess says in auran, "back to high school? I'm the one who is friends with the jocks but not GOOD friends, cause I'm still a band geek :)
You say in auran, "In terms of applying those groups to a MUD community."

Arosess says in auran, "just teasing"
You grin.
You say in auran, "I was a choir nerd, so I know about that too."
You chuckle.

Arosess says in auran, "I'd probably sway from being one of those strong loud ones to one who is drawn to them, based on the situation"
You say in auran, "Have you ever met anyone from the MUD irl? Apart from your husband, I mean."

Arosess asks in auran, "from this MUD or any MUD/MOO?"
You say in auran, "Any."
Arosess says in auran, "met a number of them. The first place I went to, one of the guys (went by the name of Peabody) threw PeabodyCon '95 :) About 8 of us took a road trip and hung out for days. Think Fest ;)
You nod.

Arosess says in auran, "I think I lied to my parents that weekend and told them I was studying for exams, when really one of the group picked me up and drove me back after ;)"
You say in auran, "My first meeting of that type was when the SysOp of the C64 C-Net bulletin board I was on came out to my house, and we went to a movie. We saw... um.... (running to IMDB) Black Moon Rising, with Tommy Lee Jones and Linda Hamilton."

Arosess rolls on the floor laughing hysterically.

Arosess says in auran, "should've picked a good movie, sheesh"
You say in auran, "We're still friends to this day. Good friends. He's started screenwriting, and I'm one of only two people he sends his first drafts to."
You smile.
You say in auran, "Hey, we were both Linda Hamilton fans. <shrugs & grins>"

Arosess chuckles.
You ask in auran, "So... after you met them irl, did that change the way you interacted with them online at all?"

Arosess says in auran, "for a long time it made us even closer, I think. We were friends, so we took a weekend and had a great time, and when we were all back to our separate lives we had great memories of that. So we continued to talk and joke and play online."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did anything ever happen online that then changed the dynamic of the offline relationship?"

Arosess says in auran, "hrm. that one I'm drawing a blank on,s orry"
You say in auran, "Then that's a no. :)"
You say in auran, "As part of a MU* community, you know that they tend to come up with their own slang, their own subset of English."

Arosess chuckles.

Arosess says in auran, "oh yes"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever taken any of that into your offline speech? Has it crept off the screen and into your vocabulary?"

Arosess says in auran, "you mean like handwriting sideways smileys into notes? :)")"

Arosess says in auran, "I think the first time I did that I sat back and went 'whoa...''"
You say in auran, "Well, sure, but I was more thinking of speaking... vocalizing something you'd only used in text before."

Arosess says in auran, "yeah, done that too"
You ask in auran, "Like what?"

Arosess says in auran, "at work today we still speak of someone being Q-o-o-c'd (came from a mail list form the original place called *Quoted out of context. Like Garoco's list :) ). We made it into a verb on that MOO, and I still use it today"
You nod.
You say in auran, "For me, it's also Garoco: woot. I find myself saying it from time to time."
You sigh.
You shake your head.

Arosess says in auran, "woot is a good one. wootiness abounds."
You nodnod.
You say in auran, "We've been at this for just under 2 hours. Wow."
You grin.

Arosess chuckles.
You say in auran, "Here's a question..."
You ask in auran, "You know how you can lose track of time when reading, or watching TV, or whatever... do you ever lose track of time when MUDding?"

Arosess says in auran, "ohhhh absolutely"
You ask in auran, "Would you equate it to losing track of time, say, in reading a book? Is it the same or different?"

Arosess says in auran, "reading a book or watching a good movie, yes. I can end up enjoying myself and just not being aware of how much time has passed"
You ask in auran, "Does time mudding seem to go by faster or slower than time spent reading or watching TV? Or is it roughly the same?"
Arosess says in auran, "if I'm actively involved in something (like conversation or RP), it goes faster. If its wandering around and levelling, it kind of would compare to watching an infomercial...passes the time but not that quickly. But that's just me :)
You nod.nod.
You say in auran, "So it feels different depending on what exactly you're doing."
You nod.

Arosess nods.
You say in auran, "Trying to think how to word this one..."
You ask in auran, "Have you ever physically experienced a feeling of an area you've entered on a MU*? Like... a really well-written description that made you feel dissy (heights), or claustrophobic (tunnels/caves), or wide-open spaces (halls, fields)?"
You say in auran, "Sorry, dizzy, not dissy."

Arosess says in auran, "hrm. no, can't say I've gone that far (but I haven't done that for great written books, either). If its really good writing for descriptions, it intrigues me and makes me read it more closely rather than skimming it, but not to that degree"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Ok, I think that's about all I can think of to ask tonight. :) My head's empty."
You grin.

Arosess giggles.

Arosess asks in auran, "how'd I do?"
You say in auran, "Not having anything to compare it against, mind you, I think it went well."

Arosess laughs out loud.

Arosess says in auran, "just deidentify me as Freak #1 and its all set ;)
You say in auran, "I'll whip up some totally unrelated pseudonym. I found a fabulous random name generator."
You say in auran, "Angels & Demons name generator."

Arosess laughs out loud.
You say in auran, "I'll just grab one from there."

Arosess says in auran, "make it a good one for me <bats her eyelashes>"
You say in auran, "Elapsed time: 2 hours, 2 minutes."
Part 1:
You say in auran, "Ok."
You say in auran, "First off, to satisfy OU... the formal stuff."
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Eseops says in auran, "sure"
You smile.
You say in auran, "Ok then. Basically, I'm going to ask you to tell me stories. I'll have some specific questions as we go along, but for the most part this will just be you and I chatting."

Eseops nods.
You ask in auran, "So tell me... how did you first got involved in MUDding?

Eseops says in auran, "A girl I knew had been on Farawaymud (address omitted), and I checked it out. The mud theme there was (is) cartoons, pop culture, tv, movies, etc, all sort of twisted"

Eseops says in auran, "I played there a bit because it was very off-the-wall"
Eseops says in auran, " Then when I got to Adrian College, I met Roger, and he showed me Realms of Aurealis "

You ask in auran, " Why was that something that influenced your decision to stay on Faraway? "

You ask in auran, " The "off-the-wall"-ness? "

Eseops says in auran, " It was one of the first games I was able to play with many other people, especially from different countries "

Eseops says in auran, " Was just something about killing Big Bird and Sam Malone "

You chuckle.

You ask in auran, " So how many different MUDs have you played on, roughly? "

Eseops says in auran, " Hmm, I guess that depends on what you mean by 'play' "

You say in auran, " Right. Let's say "been involved in/with" then. "

You say in auran, " been a part of? Yeah, that's even better. "

Eseops says in auran, " Okay, as a player and actually playing the game, two or three "

Eseops says in auran, " However, I've been involved with probably about 6 or 7 "

You ask in auran, " So the others you were staff on? "

Eseops says in auran, " Yes, when I got to level 300 on Farawaymud, and after some quests (used basically to help weed out those who didn't have any real desire to be a staff member), you could be promoted to an apprentice "

You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " Farawaymud is an LPmud, and when I became an apprentice, I was able to see how the mud worked "

Eseops says in auran, " I'm not sure if I favor LP codebase because it was the first one I worked with or, as I suspect, because there is so much freedom as you can code it to do just about anything rather than just what other people have put in place "

You say in auran, " That's interesting... my first MUD was an LP as well."

You ask in auran, " So when you think back over your various MUDding experiences, what stand out in your mind as your favorite? "

Eseops says in auran, " Well, I enjoyed a lot building/coding on Farawaymud. There they have split up the in-game areas into domains, such as the Warner Bros domain, Sesame domain, Fantasia, Hanna Barbara domain, Gotham domain, etc "

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Eseops says in auran, "I worked in Fantasia, which was mostly Disney stuff, fantasy, etc"

Eseops says in auran, "I remember my first area was the Death Castle, which I created as sort of a hodge podge of castle type areas (which was a bit of a stretch as this mud was pretty anti-DND)"

Eseops says in auran, "But it had some musical theater items, Young Frankenstein, Rocky Horror Picture Show, etc"

Eseops says in auran, "When I could watch people going through and playing my first area, it was a lot of fun"

Eseops says in auran, "I also enjoyed working on another LPmud that I was an admin on"

Eseops says in auran, "Other than Faraway and Realms of Aurealis/AR/The Reckoning, all the other muds I worked on are no longer around"

Eseops says in auran, "Once I began to be able to create, my "playing" drive lessened"

Eseops says in auran, "I became more focused on what I could create, make new, etc"

You ask in auran, "You mentioned enjoying being able to play with people all over the world. Did your interactions with other people online decrease when you became more focused on creation than playing?"

Eseops says in auran, "Not really"

Eseops says in auran, "I still talked to a lot of people. On Faraway, the people that I played with the most also became apprentices about the same time I did"

You say in auran, "Ah, so... like high school friends all going to the same college? :)"

Eseops says in auran, "Matter of fact, Samer, Nioh, and I all sort of app'd around the same time and all worked in the Fantasia domain"

Eseops says in auran, "Yeah"

Eseops says in auran, "Plus, Faraway was a very social mud"
Eseops says in auran, " It did have quests and some other things, but in essence it was a hackandslash kill your favorite cartoon mud "

Eseops says in auran, " Now a days, though, although it is still around, there is seldom more than 3 people on at a time, and all are usually idle for many hours if they are on "

Eseops says in auran, " Which is sort of what lead me to search other muds "

Eseops says in auran, " It got to the point where I didn't want to create much there anymore because there weren't people to play the new areas "
You say in auran, " Sort of like this place. "
You chuckle.
You say in auran, " It's hard to motivate yourself to work not knowing if anyone will see/appreciate what you're doing. "

Eseops says in auran, " kinda, yeah "
You ask in auran, " When you think about the other people you've met on all these MUDs, is there a particular experience that stands out as a favorite memory? "

Eseops says in auran, " Hmm "

Eseops says in auran, " I went to a gathering in State College, Pennsylvania at PSU once where about 14 people from Faraway met. That was the first time I had gone to see people in person "

Eseops says in auran, " I've also always looked forward to the Fests at East Harbor "

Eseops says in auran, " Those would probably be the ones that stand out "
You ask in auran, " Any that happened online that come to mind? Any stories of "times of high adventure" as Pi would have said? "

Eseops says in auran, " Hmm, I guess I'm not a typical mudder in a sense that I never quite got into the character and what was happening "

Eseops says in auran, " I always saw it as "I'm playing with Phillip and we are killing this mob for equipment", etc "

Eseops says in auran, " and not "I'm a monshai/fighter seeking to kill the deadly dragon "

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Eseops says in auran, "Which considering my theatrical background, would be surprising "

Eseops says in auran, "I'm not a big RP person although I've tried many times "

Eseops says in auran, "I wouldn't say I'm a true power mudder, because I've never figured out the best combinations of fighting, etc, (I usually just stuck with the meat and potato skills)"

You say in auran, "Well, I'm not talking about a "RP" experience, per se, just a favorite memory of yours about being online with someone else/other people, doing whatever. :)"

Eseops sinks into deep thought.

Eseops says in auran, "I guess it wouldn't be a specific time, but I do remember times in early college where I would wake up in the winter time, and it would be maybe a saturday or so, and log on (with a 2400 baud modem) and log into Faraway to code"

Eseops says in auran, "I do have a bit of a found memory of that, learning how to code and the room was brisk and I'd usually make some hot chocolate, etc"

You nod.

You ask in auran, "Now switch gears a bit... what was your least-favorite experience on a MUD?"

Eseops says in auran, "hmm"

Eseops says in auran, "I guess I should set it up a bit"

You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "when I decided to look other places past Faraway (for some practical reasons and some personal reasons, such as conflicts with some people), I decided to look to code LP on another mud"

Eseops says in auran, "used the mudconnector webpage and some other webpages to find places that needed them"

Eseops says in auran, "The catch was that I at that point now was more of a creator than a player"

Eseops says in auran, "and to code on an established mud, you would most likely have to play the game for a while, which wasn't interesting to me"

You nod.
Eseops says in auran, " so the places that would put you in would be newer places "

Eseops says in auran, " of course, around this time, there were always new muds starting up "
You chuckle.
You say in auran, " Still are. "
You say in auran, " Belive it or not. "
You say in auran, " But go on. :) "

Eseops says in auran, " the first one that I spent time on and had official duties, IE higher up on the food chain, was Ripples of Space "

Eseops says in auran, " That one disappeared one day and I never saw it again "

Eseops says in auran, " But then around 2001, a new mud called Forgotten Fables began, and I got involved early in it "

Eseops says in auran, " The top position was admin, and under it were the lords, and I was made a lord there "

Eseops says in auran, " I worked on a lot of area stuff, but mostly I tried to focus on creating systems to implement into the game "
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " for example, I worked extensively on guilds, structuring skills, keeping them unique from each other, etc "

Eseops says in auran, " I also created a self-operating clan system, where you could create your own clan, and create your own clan area, link it automatically to the rest of the game, even customize a clan power "

Eseops says in auran, " and I created a system with ships, that you could purchase, and pilot and search out areas, etc, with coordinates, etc "

Eseops says in auran, " Well, I was on there, and another woman was on there too, and became an admin ahead of me (she and I were both lords), but was put in an admin position because it gave access to files she woudl need, but it was made clear that she was admin in title only, etc "

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Eseops says in auran, "But not long after she got to admin, she began to overstretch the original boundaries, and tried to manage everything else"

Eseops says in auran, "long story short, I left for a bit"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "I came back a few months later, and I got promoted to more of an admin position, and after doing tons of work, the original guy could no longer support the mud financially, etc, so another person wanted to run the mud on his server (whom had done some not nice things to the mud before, stealing code, etc)"

Eseops says in auran, "Long story short, they went behind my back and one day I logged on and was no longer an immortal"

Eseops says in auran, "So I lost complete access to everything I had worked on"

Eseops says in auran, "Now, at that point, I did a lot of work on my computer and ftp'd it up"

Eseops says in auran, "so I had a lot of copies of my work"
You say in auran, "Wise."
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "I was pretty furious and long story short, the mud "Forgotten Fables" merged with "Rulitanna", and became "Fables of Rulitanna"

Eseops says in auran, "Forgotten Fables had a decent player base, Rulitanna didn't"

Eseops says in auran, "There, it turns out, were some issues of whether the initial code base of Forgotten Fables was "legal" as it came from <another MUD> (which never quite got running, they decided to not open it to players until it was "ready")"
Eseops says in auran, "Anyway, I digress"
You say in auran, "That's ok. :)"
You say in auran, "Tangents are insightful too."
You grin.

Eseops says in auran, "Then they split it to two muds, one Forgotten Fables, and on Rulitanna, and now the Forgotten Fables is no longer up"
Eseops says in auran, "I have stopped by there, oh, maybe every 6-9 months or so, log in with a "new" character, or so, do a chat history, finger some people to see if they have been on etc, to check up, etc"

Eseops says in auran, "I was sort of made to look like a scape goat, and the reason things weren't working etc, however, now that I've been gone from there for several years, they can't use that excuse anymore"

Eseops shrugs.
You ask in auran, "So it was a power-struggle ultimately? A political "event" if you will?"

Eseops says in auran, "Yeah"
You say in auran, "It's stunning to hear this... it parallel's so much that went on here in the early days, with Tpesacl and Zetas."
You say in auran, "Zetos, sorry."

Eseops says in auran, "Part of the problem was my fault, in retrospect, as I did idle quite a bit then (I had done a lot of work, and was in a bit of a break)"
You nod.
You say in auran, "I had a similar experience with Realms of Imagination (my 2nd MUD, where I met Rorayi & Garoco)"

Eseops says in auran, "I had played RoI for a bit too, and got a top level character there"
You say in auran, "One day I was an imm, then I was a god, then one day... blam, imm again for no reason other than I "supported" the wrong higher-up."
You ask in auran, "So you've said that you're not really an RP-er. Given that, how do you pick what to "be" on a MUD?"

Eseops says in auran, "Well, if I'm new to the place, I would usually pick "human" because they were pretty much always average at everything"

Eseops says in auran, "and then usually a figher, because they were the easiest"

Eseops says in auran, "if I had been on a place a while, I'd use different combinations that worked well for others"

Eseops says in auran, "Like I said, I wasn't the best at figuring out the quirks of skills/spells/etc"
You nod.

Eseops says in aur'an, " I _hated_ character descriptions "

Eseops says in aur'an, " most of them eneded up being quite similar to others 8) "
You ask in aur'an, " Did you ever choose (or not choose) a race/class because it... well, for lack of a better word, "felt" wrong? "

Eseops says in aur'an, " for example, if you look at me, my description is "q" "
You nod.
You say in aur'an, " Descriptions are always the last thing I figure out, almost like an afterthought. I get yelled at on CoX for not descing my characters (by Nathan, mostly). "

Eseops says in aur'an, " Heh, nope, the only 'wrongness' was a race/class that didn't work long term, ie could only be a couple of races that didn't work well together "
You nod.
You say in aur'an, " You've been on many different MUDs, and dealt with oodles (the technical term, btw) of people... ;) "
You say in aur'an, " Based on your experience, what do you think of the other people who play on MUDs? In general. "

Eseops ponders something, "hmm.."

Eseops says in aur'an, " There are always exceptions (like Rorayi), but as of 10 years ago, they were college kids that were trying out new things "

Eseops says in aur'an, " then about 7 years ago, they tended to be people who liked games but didn't necessarily have the best social skills (how could they when most of the time they spent 14+ hours on a computer playing a game "
Eseops says in aur'an, " They tended to not be comfortable with who they were in real life, so they enjoyed a sense of empowerment in their characters and being able to pretend to be someone else "

Eseops says in aur'an, " This was especially true not only in the 'playing' character, but as a person as well "

Eseops says in aur'an, " The picked on might do the picking,because they knew it would be impossible for anything of consequence to occur to them back "

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Eseops says in auran, "And often the higher up they rose, the worse they got, with power, etc"
You say in auran, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"
You ask in auran, "Tell me about the exceptions. What made them different? Was there anything you noticed that they had in common?"

Eseops says in auran, "just a second, daughter work up"

Eseops says in auran, "woke"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "okay, back"

Eseops says in auran, "exceptions would be people like Rorayi, who are pretty social, in shape, etc"

Eseops says in auran, "I guess I liken it to what I'll call the AOL Elite"
You ask in auran, "I'm not familiar with that term, can you explain it a bit?"

Eseops says in auran, "I remember logging on to some bulletin boards out of Toledo when I was 13 or 14"

Eseops says in auran, "and then in high school, I got AOL for a while"

Eseops says in auran, "And in the chat rooms, everyone was muscular, popular, the homecoming king/queen, a model, star athelet"

Eseops says in auran, "And I always said or thought "If you were really that great, why are you spending your saturday night talking on here?"
Eseops says in auran, "I guess to mud, you would have to have one of a few reasons"

Eseops says in auran, "1) You like computers and found it through that, 2) You like fantasy books, or 3) you like role playing"

Eseops says in auran, "or I guess 4) you like to play games"

Eseops says in auran, "the more you fit, the stronger your attachment to the muds would have been"
Eseops says in auran, "the fewer reasons, the more un-stereotypical you probably would be"

You nod.

You ask in auran, "have you ever gotten to know someone online who represented themselves one way, but eventually allowed you to "see" the real person behind the representation?"

Eseops says in auran, "Hmm"

Eseops says in auran, "Well, in the sense that they appeared one way and I believe they were that way, no"

Eseops says in auran, "There were times that people pretended to be one way, but I knew better"

You ask in auran, "Even if you didn't believe the way they presented themselves, did they eventually let you know the "real" them online?"

You say in auran, "I know if/when you meet them face-to-face, that dispels the online presentation. :)"

Eseops says in auran, "Hmm"

You say in auran, "I'm interested in A) if they eventually "let you in" and B) why."

You smile.

Eseops says in auran, "The people I tended to interact with the most or even saw in real life were pretty much honest and straightforward"

Eseops says in auran, "I guess if there was one, maybe Garoco"

Eseops says in auran, "Who normally appears off the wall, whacky, perverted"

Eseops says in auran, "But really is a more down to earth guy, more reserved, etc"

You ask in auran, "Can you remember when you first felt like you were interacting with the "real" Garoco?"

Eseops says in auran, "And to answer 'why', I don't know if it was a conscious decision as much as once you have met him in real life a few times, you see that he does have orny moments, whacky moments, but 90 percent of the time is a more laid back person"

You ask in auran, "So it was meeting face-to-face that changed your relationship online?"

Eseops says in auran, "I guess, although I still interact with him like I did before"
You ask in auran, "But it changed your perception of him when interacting?"

Eseops says in auran, "I suppose"
You say in auran, "Is there a better way of expressing what changed? Your words are better than mine here. :)"

Eseops says in auran, "I guess I knew that what he was saying was over the top rather than his true feelings, etc"

Eseops says in auran, "So the joking back and forth could get more out of control without fear of it getting personal, etc"
You ask in auran, "So why do you react differently to him doing things like that, say, versus the people in the AOL chatrooms for example?"

Eseops says in auran, "Well, I haven't been in an AOL chatroom for at least 12 years"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "I mean that type of person, I think you called them the "AOL Elite" type?"

Eseops says in auran, "Well, I joke with him, sometimes crudely, and I know he won't take offense and he'll joke back"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "Although when I get "out of control", I keep it on the wiznet channel so that other players don't see, and it doesn't go into a history"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you dealt with people who did take offense when things you said were taken out of context?"
You ask in auran, "Or misinterpreted?"

Eseops says in auran, "I don't remember it happening specifically to me, but I've seen it happen to others, so I always kept that in mind"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Was there ever a time when something happened online, involving other people, that made you log off angry or frustrated?"

Eseops says in auran, "The time I was demoted and the merge happened"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "What did you do after you logged off? How did you deal with the anger/frustration?"
Eseops says in auran, " Well, once I logged off, I was pretty pissed, but I went and did some work that needed done "

Eseops says in auran, " Eventually I settled down "
You ask in auran, " About how long did it take? "

Eseops says in auran, " In in a sense, it was then that I realized that I had a lot more real life responsibilities that I didn't have the time to work on them like I had in the past "

Eseops says in auran, " To calm down from the "anger", about a couple hours "
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " to get over what happened, a couple weeks "
You say in auran, " That's what brought me to RoA, my anger at being demoted on Rol. I heard Rorayi was starting his own MUD, and a player I knew named Frida invited me there, then vouched for me and got me added as a builder. "
You ask in auran, " Have there been occasions when your online interactions have helped you log off in a better mood than you were in when you logged on? "

Eseops says in auran, " Hmm "

Eseops says in auran, " Again, not anything specific, but sometimes when I've completed a project or gotten code to work, I've felt better, or logging in and seeing someone I hadn't seen in a long time, that was always goo "

Eseops says in auran, " good "
Eseops says in auran, " I guess the bottom line is the past 5 years or so, I use the mud to keep in contact and talk to people I've known "

Eseops says in auran, " more keep in contact with the old rather than search out the new "
You ask in auran, " Would the better mood carry over after you logged off? "

Eseops says in auran, " sometimes, although I'd usually get involved/wrapped up in something else too "
You nod.
You ask in auran, " How would you compare the mood impacts (positive & negative) to RL mood-changing events, in terms of how long they stuck with you? "
Eseops says in auran, " I would say that the mood impacts would be moderate to mildly severe short term "

Eseops says in auran, " such as "

Eseops says in auran, " the case I had talked about before, or playing before you had to go to class, and then dying, losing your equipment, and not being able to get it back before the repop because you had to leave for class "

Eseops says in auran, " it's piss you off, but you'd quickly get over it, where as the real life issues lasted much longer "

Eseops says in auran, " I guess because ultimately, it was a game "

You nod.

You ask in auran, " So do you think it would be about the same as, say... doing some form of offline entertainment, not doing as well as you'd like to, running out of time, and having to leave before you wanted to? "

You say in auran, " Of course, I can't come up with a great example of what that would be exactly... ;) "

You say in auran, " Playing mad amounts of solitaire with a real deck of cards and not wanting to stop until you actually won once without cheating? ;) "

You shrug.

Eseops says in auran, " diaper duty, brb "

You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " I wouldn't say it would be the same, as the game is just that, a game, with 0 and 1 "

Eseops says in auran, " whereas the real life issues have more impact, especially long term "

Eseops says in auran, " For example "

Eseops says in auran, " Okay, I lose access to the files I spent hours creating, however, losing those doesn't affect my health insurance, job, etc "

You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " I lose my job, that is much more severe "

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Eseops says in auran, " However, for some people who can't separate the real from the fantasy, I could see how they might take it much worse "
You say in auran, " Ok, here's a fun question for you. :) "

Eseops says in auran, " and in many people in muds and other interactive games (especially ones that are played with others), "
You say in auran, " Go on, sorry. "
You smile.

Eseops says in auran, " There is a significant percentage of those who have great trouble separating the two "
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " I think a big part of that is the age of the mudder "
You say in auran, " Had some experience with that myself. "
You say in auran, " Remind me to tell you the whole Zetosl/Osetal story sometime. "
You sigh.
You shake your head.

Eseops says in auran, " most muders 10 years ago where either jh/hs/or college age "

Eseops says in auran, " so figure 13-22 "
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " these years have a lot of physical, emotional, and other changes going on "

Eseops says in auran, " And the way an adult thinks at 24 or 25 is not what they would think, even at 22 or 23 "
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, " Mostly perspective, but also a big thing is that the brain isn't fully developed, etc "
You say in auran, " I've heard it said that you aren't who you're going to be until your mid-twenties. That's when your formative process, personality-wise, is mostly done. "

Eseops says in auran, " I'd mostly agree, although I think your personality is born with you, but how you handle it and others needs the extra time "
Eseops says in auran, "I need to go get some lunch for the family and have the car looked at and get a check, so I need to go now. I'd be more than willing to talk more later if you'd like"

Eseops says in auran, "again, the whole real life thing 8)"
You say in auran, "So do you perceive there to be any general groups/cliques that tend to form in MUD communities? You've participated in several..."
You say in auran, "Heh, had that queued."
You say in auran, "Ok. Let's set up a time to finish this, thanks. :)"
You say in auran, "Time elapsed: 1 hour, 51 minutes. Ending log."

Eseops says in auran, "I might be able to later this afternoon"

Part 2:
You say in auran, "Ok, logging again."
You smile.
You say in auran, "Ok. We were talking about the types of people you've encountered in your time MUDding."
You say in auran, "Based on that experience, do you perceive there to be any general groups/cliques that tend to form in MUD communities? You've participated in several..."

Eseops says in auran, "There are several definite cliques"

Eseops says in auran, "Let's see"

Eseops says in auran, "One clique would be people who were aquainted in real life prior to muds"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "They tended to be people that met, usually in a school setting"

Eseops says in auran, "whether high school or college"

Eseops says in auran, "I'd say the majority of this clique had gamed before and migrated to muds because it made getting together easier, as well as lending itself to the possibility of a larger core to game"

Eseops says in auran, "There is usually a perceived clique of immortals verses mortals"
You nod.
Eseops says in auran, "Usually there is at least a hint of truth to it, as to be in a trusted spot where you can contribute, but there is also the possibility to causing great harm"

Eseops says in auran, "Sometimes you'll see powermudders as a clique, but more often than not, powermudders tended to be solitary people, if for no other reason than they found ways to make quick experience with minimal risk, and others killing usually made the time verses exp not as appealing"

Eseops says in auran, "Then you'd have some cliques of people, similar to the school one, that had met on a previous mud, and migrated together to a new one"

Eseops says in auran, "more often than not, you could also notice cliques by clans"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Clans, guilds, faiths... any constructed grouping."
You ask in auran, "Would you classify the player-versus-player folks as a clique of sorts?"
Eseops says in auran, "I wouldn't, because although there are some that would talk on here and be friendly, most PvP can lead to hurt feelings easiliy"
Eseops says in auran, "not to mention the increased competetion factor"
You nod.
Eseops says in auran, "I think they are people who are very similar, but not a clique, as I would think a clique would all agree, work together, etc"
You say in auran, "You mentioned the staff vs. player distinction."
You ask in auran, "In your experience, what usually happens to the group dynamnic when someone crosses from one to the other?"
Eseops says in auran, "Well, depends on the system in place"
Eseops says in auran, "For example, on Faraway, if you got to 300 and did x amount of quests, you'd be promoted, as long as you didn't mess up, etc"
Eseops says in auran, "where as on AR, you had to apply, be an opening, and it was a much more restricted process"
You nod.
Eseops says in auran, "on faraway, not much happened different there"
Eseops says in auran, "other than sometimes the people had access to more restricted chat lines"

Eseops says in auran, "the creators saw cre, app, and chat, whereas the apprentices saw only app and chat"

Eseops says in auran, "sometimes there would be discussions about individuals, etc, there"

Eseops says in auran, "On a more restricted system"
Eseops says in auran, "when someone became an immortal, especially if there were several that wanted to and were unable to become an imm, it could fracture a bit the new imm from players"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "Personally, I think the least restrictive imm settings are the best, as everyone will hit a point where they tire of the playing of the game, and even if just one area gets in that they made, it gives them a bit more ownership of the game"

Eseops says in auran, "And tends to keep them around longer"
You nod.

You ask in auran, "What affect, if any, do you perceive the various cliques/groups having on the MUD community as a whole (within a single MUD)"

Eseops says in auran, "ultimately, a mud has to have a social interaction quality (or why else would you play one and not some other game you can play on your computer by yourself)"

Eseops says in auran, "the more established and fuller muds tend to have many different cliques operating at the same time"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "one of those are the RPers and the Non-RPers"

Eseops says in auran, "when someone logs into a mud, they want to see that others are there, as a way to gauge themselves, and show them that there are qualities that make people want to come back and stay there"

Eseops says in auran, "no one is going to move into a town that doesn't have a house that works for them"
Eseops says in auran, "same as a mud"

Eseops says in auran, "no one will stay at a mud unless there is a spot that fits their needs and desires"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "You mentioned already that you had met people from the MUD face-to-face. Did you find that the groupings/cliques translated off-MUD?"

Eseops says in auran, "I think the easiest way to join or strengthen a clique is to attend face to face"
You ask in auran, "Why?"

Eseops says in auran, "After I would meet people at Fest, it was definitely easier to talk to them on the mud, as you now had more than a one dimensional relationship to them"

Eseops says in auran, "You knew them outside of the confines of the mud"

Eseops says in auran, "you got a chance to see them and understand how they worked better"

Eseops says in auran, "so much gets lost with the lack of inflection in typing"
You ask in auran, "So do you think it's possible to get to know someone as well online without meeting face-to-face as you would if you met them both online and IRL?"

Eseops says in auran, "not to mention that the developed inside jokes, etc, tend to help your standing in the clique"

Eseops says in auran, "I think it is like long distance dating"

Eseops says in auran, "You might get to know a lot of facts about a person and in the few days every week or two that you see them, you get along great, but it isn't until you have spent time with them that you start to get to know the real them"

Eseops says in auran, "And some of that you can't know until you have seen them in person, how they react to things, how they move, the way they hold themselves, etc"

Eseops says in auran, "Although I should mention that I don't think I'm so much of a typical mudder"
You say in auran, "All the non-verbal and tonal cues you can't get via text."
You go 'Heh.'
You ask in auran, "Why do you say that?"

Eseops says in auran, "Well, I'd say that 90 percent of mudders are people looking for similar people"

Eseops says in auran, "They search out on muds people like them, whether it is people that like to role play, those who like to code, those who like to pk, that sort of thing"
Eseops says in auran, "Many of them don't fit well into other social situations"

Eseops says in auran, "I tend to melt into any other form I'm around"

Eseops says in auran, "I could go just about anywhere and fit in eventually"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "I wouldn't say that about many mudders"
You ask in auran, "So your interpretation is that most MUDders are looking for MUDs that are already like they are?"

Eseops says in auran, "I would"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "No one would log onto a mud by themselves to make themselves fit into that situation"
You nod.
You say in auran, "It's the social experience."

Eseops says in auran, "The two main places I went were because of real life people that took me there"
You say in auran, "It's the great catch-22 of MUDs: You have to have people to attract people, but you have to attract people to have people."
You ask in auran, "So what are your favorite and least-favorite "meeting MUD folk FTF" experiences?"

Eseops says in auran, "Hmm"
You say in auran, "And I'll psuedonm all the names, if you mention any."
You say in auran, "pseudonym, rather."

Eseops says in auran, "I'd have to say that I've never had a "bad" experience with meeting mud people for the first time"
Eseops says in auran, "I've genuinely enjoyed it each time"

Eseops says in auran, "Now, that is not to say that I've enjoyed everyone equally"

Eseops says in auran, "Get the pseudonyms ready 8)"
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "I do that afterwards, but go ahead on. :)

Eseops says in auran, "Bobby's girlfriend....quite needy and all"

Eseops says in auran, "There were a lot of issues she had, and it translated into the experience of meeting her"
You nod.
You say in auran, "I was thinking of that particular 'Fest myself."

Eseops says in auran, "Garoco and I sort of felt sorry for the situation, so we spent time with them, but I could tell that she would not be someone I would choose to spend time with"

Eseops says in auran, "And the only really other person that I was not thrilled with was Alan, but he was not one that quite fit into the group dynamic, nor did I think he understand what the group was really like, plus, he was there mostly for the rollercoasters"
> 
Eseops says in auran, "which is fine, if I travelled that far and was with a large group that I only knew maybe 2 people from, I might have been more like that too"
You nod.

Eseops says in auran, "But generally, I've enjoyed each person I met"

Eseops says in auran, " Kiop, after all the problems he had caused, etc, I still enjoyed hanging out with for a few days"

Eseops says in auran, "and I think in a way, hanging around in real life helps ease situations at times too, as sometimes people don't get as paranoid and take offensive where non was intended"
You nod.
Eseops says in auran, "if for no other reason than now they have a relationship established, and more ownership in keeping calm, etc"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever found that MUD slang has crossed over into your normal life? Found yourself saying things you'd only ever typed before?"

Eseops says in auran, "Maybe "ack" and "woot", although I have seldom ever used those"

Eseops says in auran, "but my language and style of speaking adjusts to the situation I'm in and the group I'm in"

Eseops says in auran, "part of the melt thing"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever had to explain what something meant to someone who didn't know about MUDs?"

Eseops says in auran, "I've tried to explain some things to my wife, but that lasts about 10 seconds before she doesn't care 8)"
You chuckle.
You nod.
You say in auran, "So going in a slightly different direction..."
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time MUDding?"

Eseops says in auran, "oh, yeah, usually when I've been in college. And more times than not it was when I was working on code and trying to get it to work"
You ask in auran, "So how does losing time on a MUD compare to losing time, say... reading or watching TV?"

Eseops says in auran, "oh, in reading and watching tv, it is more of a passive attention, whereas in mudding, it tends to be more of an active activity"

Eseops says in auran, "and it is usually fatigue that has you stop, verses the movie ending of the book finishing"
You say in auran, "Does the time seem to go faster, slower, or about the same speed when MUDding as opposed to reading, watching TV, etc."

Eseops says in auran, "If I was just talking or killing stuff, probably about the same. The coding is what tended to go faster"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever found yourself getting physically tense due to something that was happening online to your character?"
Eseops says in auran, "the only times that might happen is in a battle where I'm close to
dying and the commands have qued and I can't enter the flee command, etc"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever been aware of the tightness or vast openness of an area
a character was in while moving around the virtual world?"
You say in auran, "I've been known to play video games and physically duck when trying
to get my character under something, heh."
Eseops says in auran, "video games, yes, muds, no"
You nod.
You say in auran, "I do remember very clearly the Resident Evil experience. :)
You say in auran, "Back in the days when I could get unnerved more easily."
Eseops goes 'Heh.'
You chuckle.
> You say in auran, "I was telling Marty about the first time you see the Licker in Res
Evil 2 while we were watching the 2nd Res Evil movie."
> You ask in auran, "Ok, I think I've asked everything I can think to ask at this point. If I
end up with any follow-up questions, can I get with you at some later time and ask
them?"
Eseops says in auran, "sure"
You say in auran, "Thanks, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this."
You smile.
Eseops says in auran, "no problem"
You say in auran, "Log ending. Elapsed time 50 minutes."
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – GAROCO AND DYNSERO

Garoco rolls his eyes.
You say in auran, "Logging."

Garoco nods.

Garoco smiles warmly.
You say in auran, "Ok. First thing is the legal stuff for Ohio University."
You will no longer hear OOC.
You will no longer hear congratulations.
You will no longer hear messages on the query channel.
Info channel: off.
Your syslog is now off.
Use Logall for complete debugging logs.
You will no longer hear the immortal channel.
Your color is now disabled.

Garoco nods.
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."

Garoco asks in auran, "May my pseudonym be Cloaks?"
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use
anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do 
you wish to continue with the interview?"

Dynsero says in auran, "yes"

Garoco says in auran, "Asssswell do I."
You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the 
interview, just so you know. :)"

Garoco nods.
You say in auran, "And no, you already have a pseudonym, Garoco, since your name has 
already come up in other interviews."
You smile.

Garoco asks in auran, "What is it?"
You say in auran, "I don't remember. It's saved in a file someplace."
You say in auran, "one sec."

Garoco grins mischievously.
Unknown command.
You say in auran, "Garoco"

Garoco says in auran, "Ouch."
You say in auran, "I tried to replace real names with real names, and MUD names with 
other fantasy-sounding names."

Garoco nods understandingly.

Garoco says in auran, "Garoco it is."

Garoco looks at Dynsero.
You smile.
You ask in auran, "Ok. For starters, would you tell me how you first got involved in 
MUDding?"

Dynsero says in auran, "Garoco got me into it, it seemed one of the few ways to be able 
to spend time with him in the begginging."

Garoco cringes in terror!
Dynsero grins.
Garoco says in auran, "After I left the closed world of eWorld (Apple's AOL varianet in the 2800-baud dialup days), I got on to a menu-driven text-based system (I don't recall the name - but it was in Lynx days) which had "online gaming." One of these I joined." You nod.

Garoco says in auran, "I don't recall the name of the MUD - I tried a few - but it ended up that a player there led me to dognet and RoA."
You ask in auran, "Were you on RoI before RoA?"

Dynsero says in auran, "No, but i think I tried that one at a later time"

Garoco says in auran, "No; I popped on there after imming here; more because Raul and others urged me to check it out. I wasn't interested, due to its setting."
You say to Garoco in auran, "Ah, ok. I remembered you as being from RoI, so that explains it."

Garoco says in auran, "Not the case."
You nod.

Garoco says in auran, "Although ..."

Garoco says in auran, "I may have had a token there when you were there but before here."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So how long have you each played MUDs then, approximately?"

Dynsero says in auran, "10 years"

Garoco says in auran, "12 or so years."
You nod.
You say in auran, "So, in that time, what is one of your favorite experiences on a MUD? A memory that stands out positively for you."

Dynsero says in auran, "Going around different areas with a group of people I just meet and getting to play with other people. I'm not one to play all on my own."

Garoco says in auran, "As a player, getting really deep into the development of a character, and having that character truly affect others, inciting to really enjoyable RP."
Garoco says in auran, "An an imm, putting my heart and soul into a zone, lots of detaiul and secrets, and having the players bash their heads against the walls trying to find the hidden eq, recipes, doors, and really enjoy the experienc3e of the complexity I had built."
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You ask Dynsero in auran, "What was it about getting to play with a group of people you'd just met that made it a positive experience for you?"

Dynsero says in auran, "Making a connection with them, having a common goal to work for and sharing time with theml like to meet/ get to know new people and it was an environment were I could do that."
You nod.
You ask Garoco in auran, "Comparing the two examples you gave, one as a player and one as an immortal staff member, can you point to one of them as more enjoyable than the other?"

Garoco says in auran, "No. One involved emotional connection with healthy serparation by like-minded yet disparate individuals, creating and reacting contemporaneously. The other was pure intellectual gratification derived from stimulating the minds of others - though this stimulation involved puzzle-solving, logical progress, narrative leading, as well as the simple art of prose."
You ask in auran, "Again, thinking back across your time participating on MUDs, what was your least-favorite experience?"

Dynsero says in auran, "Being PK'd"
You ask Dynsero in auran, "Why? What about that made it your least-favorite experience?"

Dynsero says in auran, "I don't play on a regular basis and to have spent all that time working and developing a character to only have it taken from you; that was on the one other MUD I tried and I never went back."
You nod.

Garoco says in auran, "Not completing the creative works as a builder which I had started."
You ask Garoco in auran, "How did that make you feel?"
Garoco says in auran, "Guilty and let down towards myself. Self failiure."
You say in auran, "Ok, changing topic slightly, let me ask you this:"
You ask in auran, "How do you pick what to "be" on a MUD?"
Dynsero asks in auran, "I look to see what is available and see what would be most likely for me to become, something I could see myself doing if I were to really be at that place and time. I don't usually have the time or energy to create a persona that is a complete 180 from whom I am, I wouldn't be able to believe in it so how could I expect others to?"

Garoco says in auran, "As a player, I enjoy being able to sink into a character, putting it on fully. It needs to be somewhat compatible with myself (so that I will even enjoy it), but no identical. It needs to be able to draw others into focussed RP."

Garoco says in auran, "As an imm, I like grape juice."
You quirk an eyebrow.

Dynsero says in auran, "He likes freedom from what's expected and can do that as an imm"
You say to Garoco in auran, "Is that an accurate assessment of what you meant? ;)"

Garoco says in auran, "It could be."
You ask Garoco in auran, "Is there a more accurate way of explaining it?"

Garoco says in auran, "A MUD is truly an escape from the real world. MY real world has often been stressful, unbearable, difficult, trying, or otherwise boring from time to time. Being able to let my goofy side loose - and have it expected and enjoyed by the denizens of the MUD - is a release for me. Being able to force that weird persona into a believable and RPable character is a fun challenge, and often can be greatly useful in RP situations which have become mired."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So would I be correct in reading from your answers that you based MUD characters off aspects of your personalities?"

Dynsero says in auran, "yes"

Garoco says in auran, "Sure."
You ask in auran, "Have you ever tried making a character that was unlike how you perceive the offline "you" to be? If so, how was that experience?"

Garoco says in auran, "Sometimes aspects which are not of our personalities, but which we wished were of our personalities, which ends up making them an askew part of our personalities. I think ..."
You say in auran, "Go on, we can get back to the question after."
You smile.
You say in auran, "I can always ask them again, don't let me cut either of you off."

Garoco asks in auran, "Oft times, people try to be, online, who they truly wish to be. Which I think it kind of silly. Why not take the risk-free chance of a faceless MUD to truly be yourself?"

Garoco sighs.

Garoco exclaims in auran, "And ... I split an infinitive. SHAME!"
You chuckle.

Dynsero says in auran, "I've made a couple of characters that were morefoward/ carefree than I tend to be; more capable to take care of themselves, they worked well for me; it was more of letting a side of me out that I normally wouldn't due to being a shy person."

Garoco says in auran, "Again, ther aspect of letting sides of us out which we don't do normally. But they're truly part of us."

Dynsero says in auran, "I don't think would be able to play something that I couldn't make some sort of connection to, I wouldn't want to develop it, it would be too much work to think of how that persona would act and do"

Dynsero says in auran, "I don't have time for all of that."
You nod.

Garoco says in auran, "Which would indicate, for you, less of a need for escape."

Dynsero says in auran, "That's why I read, to escape"
You ask Garoco in auran, "Why do you say that?"

Garoco says in auran, "Many people who MUD do so for true life escape. IT is easier to log in to a faceless world and be someone you're not than it is to face your worldly poroblems. Furthermore, it is even more difficult to instead put the energy into CHANGING who you are into what you WISH you were; this is something which all are capable of."

Garoco says in auran, "And, again, a split infinitive. Bonus points to those who can find it."
You ask Garoco in auran, "If this is the case, does MUDding help with a person's development, or hinder it? Or have no effect at all?"

Garoco says in auran, "Both. It's not cut and dry."

Dynsero says in auran, "I think that depends on that person's environment."

Garoco says in auran, "It helps them to explore aspects potential in their personae which they would otherwise have no chance (or gall) to explore in their daily lives. This is beneficial. But the distance which they gain from the faceless MUDding experience truly separates them from the real world, and makes it far too easy to restrict these explorations FROM the real world."

> Garoco says in auran, "But that person would have quite good results were he to chance those experimentations by exploring a different - but real-world - environment ... such as going out clubbing, or to art museums, or a new job, etc. There's really no difference, except that MUDding can be compartmentalized quite easily from the rest of one's world."

Dynsero says in auran, "People need many outlets, to become completely immersed in one thing is bad for anybody."

Garoco says in auran, "I agree."

Garoco holds out cards. "Pick any card!"

Garoco (echo): You pick a card.

Garoco asks in auran, "Two of Hearts?"

Garoco (echo): You say, "Yes!"

Garoco exclaims in auran, "TAH-DAH!"

Dynsero pouts.

You ask in auran, "This brings me to a related question: In general, what do you think of the other people you've encountered who play on MUDs?"
Dynsero says in auran, "Its a mixed bag, there are those whose sole purpose is to level and be the best; then there are others whom take the time to develop their characters and seem to have more substance to them."

Garoco exclaims in auran, "Average to above-average intelligence. Very broadly disparate levels of maturity (or social maturity). Above-average to high levels of creativity. Lonely, and/or prone to depression and tunnel vision. But nifty, nonetheless!"

Dynsero says in auran, "Then there are the few who are completely miserable and want everyone else to be so they do nothing but whine and complain about anything."
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You ask in auran, "Taking into account what you've said about the different types of people you've encountered, can you tell me what your general relationships have been with the other people you've encountered MUDding?"

Garoco says in auran, "Deeper than real-life relationships have been (due to the bare-bones depth of communication one gets by cutting out everything but the written word), and much more long-lived, where a personal connection has truly been made. My cat also wants to say: gerueeeeeee43444444444444444"

Dynsero says in auran, "mostly friendly, I like to give people a chance and I think they have picked up on that and have been able to develop a relationship with them with varying degrees from acquaintances to friends that get to meet up with on a semi-regular basis."
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You ask in auran, "Has there ever been a time when something has happened on the MUD that made you log off in anger or frustration?"

Garoco says in auran, "Yes, but it has been an aspect of personal communication, rather than anything involving the MUD itself; it could as well have been a chat room."

Dynsero says in auran, "No"
You ask Garoco in auran, "What did you do after you logged off in those instances?"

Garoco says in auran, "I probably escaped in some other fashion."
Garoco says in auran, "Video game, T.V., book, etc."
You ask in auran, "Were you still angry/frustrated after you'd logged off?"
Garoco says in auran, "Sure; it would have been an issue involving real-world frustrations, not in-game irritations."
You ask in auran, "How so? Can you explain that a bit more?"

Garoco says in auran, "Any in-game disagreements are often resolved well, I have found."
Garoco says in auran, "Due to the aspect of the bare-bones written word, the MUD can be seen as an extended written letter to people, wherein one is able to think before speaking. This tends to lend itself well to more rational communication than otherwise."

Garoco says in auran, "I mean, I can type that you suck ass^H^H^H^H^H^H^H^Hare a mean person, but I can always delet those words and replace them, which is not possible when speaking."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Was there a time when you logged off the MUD in a better mood than you were in when you logged on?"

Garoco says in auran, "When I wasn't online to wallow in self-pity? Pretty much always, yes."
You say to Dynsero in auran, "The same question to you as well. :)"

Dynsero says in auran, "Yes, when I got a chance to spend time with someone I hadn'r seen in a while; or a time when something I had been working toward was accomplished."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did that better mood continue after you'd logged off?"

Dynsero says in auran, "Sure"

Garoco says in auran, "Being that you asked if we were in a better mood after logging out, that would seem to indicate that, having logged out, our mood would at that point be still better."

Garoco says in auran, "I mean, Yup."
You say in auran, "I'm just clarifying, so I'm not assuming anything."
You smile softly.

Garoco says in auran, "Dynsero says that I ought not be a snot."
You chuckle.
You ask in auran, "So, based on your experiences, do the people you've encountered on
MUDs seem to fall into distinct types? Personality or otherwise?

Garoco says in auran, "I have encountered a broad spectrum of personality types on the MUD. However, I have noticed a couple of very distinct types, who could easily be carbon-copies of each other. MUDs seem to attract a wide variety of folks; but they also attract particular types commonly enough to be able to be categorized."

Dynsero says in auran, "Yes, you have power gamers/hack and slash, thinkers/believers who take time to develop their characters and the whiners who think things should just be given to them; not that I like to make judgements about people."

Garoco grabs Dynsero by the shirt collar, looks deeply into her eyes and screams, 'Do everything for me!!'

Garoco says in auran, "There are other types, as well."
You ask in auran, "Such as?"

Garoco says in auran, "Cute and cuddly kittens."

Garoco pukes.

Dynsero shakes her head.
You ask in auran, "Explain that one?"

Garoco says in auran, "They think that they are the sexiest and cutest girls in the world, and act like cuddly sex vixens who whore themselves into every lap that opens up (gives them eq, secrets, or even pays attention) for them. These are often really not at all that way IRL, especially physically and in outward forwardness."

Garoco says in auran, "But, again, there's that escape, and ability to explore someone you wish you were."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did you ever perceive any sort of social group/clique(s) on the MUD?"
Garoco says in auran, "There have also been males who prey upon any nice girl they can find, sometimes to the point of illegality. This, in point, is the male equivalent of the cuddly kitten, if you think about it."

Garoco asks in auran, "Uh, yeah?"
Dynsero asks in auran, "Isn't that what clans were?"

Garoco says in auran, "Also amongst the imms."

Garoco says in auran, "Kind of a cool kids' club."
You ask in auran, "How would you compare the MUD cliques/groups to RL cliques/groups?"

Garoco says in auran, "I'd liken them in most aspects, but that those on a MUD are somewhat more closely-knit, due to the written-word aspect of more clear thought communication. It bypasses looks, financial status, age, etc."

Dynsero says in auran, "Pretty close to the same; there are some that think they are better than everyone else, a few that everyone wants to be part of to find out why others are a part of it, and the few that noone wants to be part of because those people have made it clear they don't want to have anything to do with other people."
You ask in auran, "What overall effect did these groups have on the MUD community?"

Garoco says in auran, "Huge effects. They as players can severely steer and comandeer RP. They as power-MUDders can devastate zones and really define what everybody else wants in regards to eq and stats. As imms they steer the entire focus of the game from the ground up."

Dynsero says in auran, "I'm not sure it mauch of an effect, being similar to RL except that some people may have tried to be in the social group they weren't able tp be part of in RL."
You ask in auran, "Did you ever communicate with or meet anyone from a MUD offline?"

Garoco says in auran, "Yep."

Dynsero says in auran, "Yes"

Garoco asks in auran, "You mean, not including my wife?"

Dynsero says in auran, "We met before the MUD"
You say in auran, "People you met first on the MUD."
You smile.

Garoco says in auran, "Then yep."
You say in auran, "Tell me about that/those experience(s)."

Garoco says in auran, "There have been many. They were either a true meeting of the minds, or a slight distancing experience. People online are different from offline, but more fundamentally themselves. Or something."

Dynsero says in auran, "I would have to say good; hey are people that I found interesting online and seemed to fall inline with what I would look for in someone I wanted to know and have a RL relationship. I still have some sort of communication with them."

You ask in auran, "Did your online association affect how you dealt with them offline?"

Garoco says in auran, "Not sure how to answer that. I would not have dealt with them at all offline had I not known them online beforehand, in many instances. When I met them IRL we were able to start out with a solid baseline level of understanding - kind of like a jump-start on a relationship." 

Dynsero says in auran, "Not really, I believe that you need to have an open mind when you meet people; it helped a little in the fact there was common ground and something to talk about so there was no real need to break the ice or anything like that."

You ask in auran, "Did your offline interaction change how you dealt with them online?"

Garoco says in auran, "Depends on the person, but it has. Sometimes I found that the weird, cool, quirky guy was IRL just a weirdo and not very interesting. That brings about an arms'-lengthening. In time, without repeated IRL interaction, this can return to the original state, however."

Dynsero says in auran, "Not really, there may have been more chatting afterward as opposed to strict roleplaying but there was that previous relationship to lean back on."

You ask in auran, "Have any elements of MUDding (language, culture, etc.) crossed over into your off-MUD life?"

Dynsero says in auran, "No, but I think that may have more to do with the fact that I don't spend a lot of time MUDding."

Garoco says in auran, "Recommended books/movies/websites/hobbies, sure. Advice on RL matters. As well as continued relationships which have left the MUD behind in some form or another."

You ask in auran, "Has there been any crossover (MUD to RL) of language or communication behavior?"
Garoco says in auran, "Can you define language or communication behaviour better?"
You say in auran, "Words, phrases, methods of reference..."

Dynsero says in auran, "No"

Garoco says in auran, "Some habits of speech have transferred themselves to my other modes of online communication (chat, MMORPGs, etc.), and so have been shaped by my MUDding. But they have not really entered into my everyday verbal world."
You say in auran, "Other people have mentioned a word that's crossed over, and they've attributed it to you: woot."

Kylron bellows in auran, "AWESOME :P"

Garoco says in auran, "Well, I stole it."

Garoco says in auran, "Yes, the cat's out of the bag."
You smile softly.
You ask in auran, "Where did it come from originally?"

Garoco says in auran, "A jerkeologist who had got banned at least once got back in and tried to ingratiate himself. HE typoed the word woot. I made fun of him. He was forgotten, and I, I have persevered into eternity through my fame."

Garoco says in auran, "Admittedly, I brought it to its true usage and meaning. But it was not MY typo."
You ask in auran, "Do you every use it offline?"

Garoco says in auran, "Never. But people I've known have discovered it and done so. It's kind of like singing solo. It's embarrassing."

Dynsero says in auran, "He uses all sorts of goofball words offline."

Garoco exclaims in auran, "LIAR!"

Garoco says in auran, "Okay, she's right."

Dynsero chuckles.
You smile.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever had to explain to someone it meant?"
Garoco says in auran, "Nope. People just 'get it.' That's the miracle of wooting, my young friend."
You chuckle.

Dynsero asks in auran, "How do you explain to someone Garoco?"

Garoco (echo): It's Garoco Fastbreeze, the great sword-swallower!

Garoco makes a strange magical gesture.
Garoco has created a gilded longsword!

Garoco eats a gilded longsword.

Garoco bows deeply.
You say in auran, "Ok. Shifting gears one last time..."

Dynsero starts to float.
You ask in auran, "In terms of experiencing a MUD, have you ever found yourself "physically" reacting to a virtual space, in terms of its vastness or smallness?"

Garoco asks in auran, "Can you clarify?"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever been playing a MUD, and based on what you've seen (i.e. read), you've "felt" the space described to you? Mentally experienced the opens/closed-in nature of a location?"

Dynsero says in auran, "no"

Garoco asks in auran, "So, mentally affected; not physically?"

Dynsero says in auran, "I can picture it and visualize it in my mind but no physical reactions to it, nothing like claustrophobia or anything like that"
You say in auran, "Either/or. I mean mentally experienced in a way that would be similar to how you'd react were you physically in a similar space."

Garoco says in auran, "I would have to agree. However, I have almost always been able to immerse myself deeply into a setting, using imagination. It's a wonderful exercise, but that's about as far as it goes. Then again, first-person shooters make me barf. That's physical."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time playing on a MUD?"

Dynsero says in auran, "Sure"

Garoco says in auran, "I once wrote over 300 rooms in 24 non-stop hours. So, yeah." You smile.
You ask in auran, "How would you compare losing track of time on a MUD to losing track of time in an off-line activity?"

Garoco says in auran, "For me, it's more intellectually stimulating. This is due to not only having to work within the real-world-reflection of a mUD's mechanics, but also to the sheer creativity of creating and/or role-playing. Therefore, you are not only engrossed in what you are experiencing, but you are also acting to imaginatively create it. This is an engrossing blend of the mind's abilities, for me. Plus poop+pants&facepluswhatnot."

Garoco says in auran, "Playing D&D in poen and paper comes close, however."

Dynsero says in auran, "Pretty close to the same especially if its an activity I am doing for fun; I want to get involved so I can have a goof time so I make sure I don't have to worry about other things before I start. If it is a more task related activity then that can be a little more stressful because I have other things that need to get done and finished."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Ok. Is there anything else you'd like to add about anything we've talked about tonight?"

Dynsero says in auran, "Don't think so."
You ask Garoco in auran, "And you sir?"

Dynsero proudly exclaims 'Woot!'
You ask in auran, "Do either of you have any questions you'd like to ask me before we wrap this up?"

Garoco says in auran, "MUDding - and this MUD in particular - has added an enormous wealth of experiences and deep friendships to my life which I would otherwise never have known. It has also been a deeply satisfying outlet for creative as well as intellectual juices at one time or another. It has also assuaged my penchant for the written word and its twisting. I have friends for life, and memories the same. I also have a cat named Xylophone, but that's wholly unrelated."
You chuckle.
Dynsero says in auran, "Not at this time."

Garoco exclaims in auran, "I do!"

Garoco asks in auran, "Have you seen my baseball?"
You say in auran, "Sorry, I have not."

Dynsero shakes her head.

Garoco nods.

You smile softly at Dynsero.

Dynsero kisses Garoco.
You say in auran, "Then I thank you both, and I believe we have reached the end."

Garoco blushes.

Garoco sketches a flourishing bow in mid-air.

Dynsero smiles.
You say in auran, "Ending the log. Elapsed time: 2 hours, 3 minutes."

Garoco says in auran, "A pleasure, old friend."
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - ISURUT

You say in auran, "Ok, it's logging. Now the official part, bear with me please."

Isurut nods.
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."

You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Isurut says in auran, "Yes."
You say in auran, "Excellent."
You smile.
You say in auran, "Ok. Basically, this is just a chance for you to tell me anecdotes and stories about your experiences with MUDs. I'll ask some starter questions, but mostly I just want to hear about your experiences."
You say in auran, "We'll start with an easy one. :)"

Isurut smiles.
You ask in auran, "How did you first get involved in MUDding?"

Isurut says in auran, "I first become involved in mudding through my husband's involvement in mudding. I used to see him spend quite a bit of time doing so but was reluctant to try it myself."
Isurut says in auran, "My first thoughts were that people I knew who mudded spent too much time doing so and that they tended to ignore parts of their real lives in order to spend so much time with their online acquaintances."

Isurut says in auran, "Eventually, my husband talked me into trying it for myself."

Isurut says in auran, "It was okay. I found it to be frustrating because I was not familiar with the language of mudding or the worlds involved."

Isurut says in auran, "Unbeknownst to me at the time, my husband had told his acquaintances that I was coming and that is why I feel quite a few of the people were friendly and helped me get the hang of things on the MUD."

You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "I had tried a couple other MUD's after that but without the already established network of people, their worlds were too frustrating for me to navigate."

You ask in auran, "Did your perception of the other poeple who MUDded change after you moved from observer to player?"

Isurut says in auran, "In a way it did. I understood why they enjoyed spending time on the MUD. However, I still felt that it was a place used by some as a substitute for things they were missing in there own lives. I also understood why it took up so much of their time as I found myself just exploring or leveling for the fun but staying longer than I intended if someone I was friendly with came on and we spent time together rping, or exploring, or whatever."

Isurut says in auran, "I feel that the more seriously people took their characters or the more they wrapped themselves into their characters, the more they needed to be in the MUD world."

You were idle for 5 minutes.

You ask in auran, "Why do you suppose that was? What sorts of things did they need the substitution for?"

Isurut says in auran, "Their characters, to an extent, became an extension of how they saw themselves or how they wished themselves to be."

Isurut says in auran, "I would say the substitutions were for emotional needs. A way to develop friendships or loves or self-esteem or self-worth, attention, etc.; Whatever they may not feel they are getting in the real world."
Isurut says in auran, "I do not believe it is a conscious fulfillment however. I think some people are unconsciously looking for the fulfillment they need."
You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "I also think that there is a connection between the real person and how they play their character."
You ask in auran, "How so?"

Isurut says in auran, "For example, I am a quite, observant person in real life and my characters tended to be as well."

Isurut says in auran, "I think that for some people though it could be the opposite. A person who is quite in real life might take more risks in a world where the others don't know them and be more vocal and outgoing if that was perhaps an internal desire of theirs; to be more outgoing."

Isurut says in auran, "I would venture that the more loud and cocky players are probably either loud and cocky in real life or are making up for not having the confidence to be more forthright in real life."

Isurut says in auran, "Plus without the facial and intonation cues you would get from a face-to-face meeting, both parties involved will interpret the same typed sentence in differing manners depending upon their needs."
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So would you classify this as substituting for real life behavior, or augmenting real life behavior, or both?"
You say in auran, "I'm trying to get a frame of reference for how you're intending "substituting" when you talk about the behavior you've observed while MUDding."

Isurut says in auran, "For some people it will be neither for they are content with their lives; for some people they may be augmenting for what they would like to change about themselves; for some people it may be substituting for what they are not receiving from others."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Ok, I understand how you're using the term now, thanks. :) I just wanted to be sure."

Isurut smiles.
Isurut says in auran, "No problem. :)
You ask in auran, "So how long have you been MUDding now?"

Isurut says in auran, "I really am not sure. Probably about 5 years."
You ask in auran, "Thinking back across your experiences, is there one that stands out as your favorite on a MUD?"

Isurut says in auran, "I can't think of a favorite experience, I probably enjoyed the teleporting and exploring the most."
You ask in auran, "Any positive experiences interacting with other players that stand out in your mind?"

Isurut says in auran, "I used to enjoy spending time with clan members like Atlah and Zanepac. Just sitting around discussing clan things or going exploring or fighting as a group."

Isurut says in auran, "I enjoyed being the Emissary and casting protective spells while the warriors fought or creating food for the hungary."
You ask in auran, "What was it about interacting with those two people that made it a positive experience?"

Isurut says in auran, "I enjoyed their company. They were fun to be around and I felt that they were people I would have been real friends with. Plus it helped that later I actually met them and I still felt like they were people I would like as friends. Whereas other people that I may have associated with I knew I would not like to be around in real life; some of which I met at Fest and I knew my assumption was right."
You ask in auran, "I'm guessing from that response that you've had some negative experiences with other players as well?"

Isurut says in auran, "Yes."
You ask in auran, "Can you tell me about one that sticks out in your memory, and why it was negative for you?"

Isurut says in auran, "For example, I was capable of admitting characters to the clan that belonged to people I might personally not like very well. Through poor communication one of Onanel's characters was admitted to [our clan]. I did not want her to join based on the fact that she had characters in almost every clan out there and I thought it would be too hard to keep her characters interactions/knowledge from showing through in her other characters. Unfortunately other clan members thought I had agreed and she joined DS as well."
Isurut says in auran, "I did not mention to the other clan leaders that I had not wanted her character admitted once I found out it was done since I was not there when she was admitted."

You were idle for 6 minutes.

You ask in auran, "Was there more to your objection than just her potential gameplay ability?"

Isurut says in auran, "However, another clan person and I spoke in real life and she took it upon herself to bring it up to the other leaders in the clan; as a result Onanel's character was dismissed from the clan, but the other clan member made it sound as though it was what I wanted. Which although I did not want her to join, I would not have kicked her out once it was done."

You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "I guess most of the negativeness associated with the game comes from people having mixed real life and character life ideals; the trouble sometimes of keeping the two separate."

You ask in auran, "Do you find that tends to be linked to a single character they play, or to multiple characters?"

Isurut says in auran, "Perhaps to multiple characters. Since your characters technically ought to be different, each character could embody a different trait that the person was developing."

Isurut says in auran, "Hmm, upon rereading and reflecting, I would say one character they play will tend to dominate."

Isurut says in auran, "And that the dominate character wields more power and influence as to how they play."

You ask in auran, "So when you make a character, how do you choose what to "be" on a MUD?"

Isurut asks in auran, "By what to be do you mean like a priest, warrior, etc.?"

You ask in auran, "That, and race, gender... what goes into you deciding what representation of "you" you're going to make?"

Isurut says in auran, "For me personally, genderwise I pick a female because I don't want to play a male character, classwise I usually try to pick one that has a gentler nature like healing or defensive magics; creaturewise I like to pick something that is lighter spirited by nature."
Isurut says in auran, "say I like characters that are helpful."

Isurut says in auran, "But knowledgeable."
You ask in auran, "You said you feel people have a "dominant" character they play. Is that type of character yours?"

Isurut says in auran, "I would say yes."

Isurut says in auran, "I really don't like having to write a character description, because I don't really care what the characters I come into contact look like. I care about how they act."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So how do you form your first impressions of someone on a MUD?"

Isurut says in auran, "Plus I find it amusing how a lot of the people try to play up their characters physical features in their descriptions."

Isurut says in auran, "I form my opinions by how their characters interact with my character or the other characters I see them interacting with and by what they say on OCC."
You ask in auran, "So a combination of in-character and out-of-character behavior?"

Isurut says in auran, "Yes."
You ask in auran, "How does your character-creation choice relate to how you think you are in real life? How would you compare the online you to the offline you?"

Isurut says in auran, "I would say that both the online and offline me are quiet. We prefer to listen and observe than to be directly involved in a lot of the conversation and action. If with an individual or group of 2-3 of people we feel close to, than we will be talkative and even amusing, but if in a larger situation, even if those 2-3 people we are comfortable around are present, we will retreat to the background."

Isurut says in auran, "We like being helpful and sent on missions if we feel appreciated and included but not if someone is being demanding."
You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "The exploring thing for the character is not like the real person though."
You smile.
You ask in auran, "In general, what kinds of relationships have you had with people on the MUD?"

Isurut says in auran, "In real life I am not adventurous. But on the game it is fun to wander around and see new things because if I get lost I can recall to somewhere I know my way around."
You say in auran, "Btw, feel free to keep on a subject, we can always go back to anything I ask if you have more to say."
You smile.
You say in auran, "I want you to feel free to keep talking."

Isurut says in auran, "But either way I am a landmark traveler and all the directions confuse me."
You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "I enjoy obtaining objects and IDing them to see what they do."

Isurut says in auran, "I would say relationships with people on the MUD for me are similar to how I view relationships in real life."

Isurut says in auran, "Most people are acquaintances. I like them or find them tolerable and can enjoy their company."

Isurut says in auran, "I have always only needed a couple of close friends. Growing up in the same place and a small town you knew everyone at school."

Isurut says in auran, "I had my twin sister for a friend and 2 other girls we hung out with. When I say friend, I mean someone I personally feel I can be close too."
You nod.
Isurut says in auran, "Being friends and being friendly are different to me."

Isurut says in auran, "Most people fit into the friendly with category with a couple of friends. Even people I don't like how they act or they annoy me are not usually people I don't like or hate. They go in the middle category as well."

Isurut says in auran, "There are few people I have ever really disliked or hated. Unfortunately, once in that category it can be very hard to get out of."

Isurut says in auran, "Unfortunately my social skills at friend making are probably not what they should be for someone my age."
You ask in auran, "Do you find any difference(s) between making friends in real life and making friends online?"

Isurut says in auran, "I had a few friends and then just naturally my twins friends would be mine as well; (which she was not very happy about)"

Isurut says in auran, "I had a couple of friends in college when I went to [my school] plus my twin's friends there."

Isurut says in auran, "Then I got married and went to [my other school]. I had a few class friends but friends I hung out with."

Isurut says in auran, "I had a friend or two in some of the towns we lived in after being married, but we moved a lot in the first 7-8 years."

Isurut says in auran, "We have lived here 5-6 years or so and I would not say that I have had a real life friend here, but I have a work friend."

Isurut says in auran, "Not really, I find making friends in either place the same."

You ask in auran, "Can you think of a time when you logged off the MUD in a better mood than when you logged on because of your interactions with other people?"

Isurut says in auran, "I don't know that I could give a specific example, but I know that there were times when I logged off happier because of my interactions with people on the MUD."

You ask in auran, "In those cases, what happened when you logged off. Did the "happier" carry over back into real life?"

Isurut says in auran, "It did but how long it lasted depended on interactions in real life. Plus sadness from the game carried over to real life because you are investing something of yourself in your characters I think."

You ask in auran, "So there were also times when you logged off in a worse mood because of your interactions online?"

Isurut says in auran, "Yes."

You ask in auran, "Can you think of any specific instances that stand out in your memory that you'd be willing to tell me about?"
Isurut says in auran, "Only that I am not a fighter and when you feel like two people who you considered friends take up with someone you do not trust that you no longer feel free to share with them and thus a distance is created and a loss of a valued thing."

Isurut says in auran, "I am not naive enough to believe that the powers of friendship are stronger than the powers of female persuasions."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Btw, feel free to use names if you want to, I pseudonym every name as soon as the interview is over."
You say in auran, "So no one will read the names."
You say in auran, "It sounds like you've had some interactions with a wide variety of personalities on the MUDs you've been on."
You ask in auran, "In your mind, have the personalities you've encountered fallen into groups of any kind, and if so, what are they?"

Isurut says in auran, "I don't even remember the name of the other MUD or two I tried. I probably never spent more than an attempt or two trying to get around them. This has been the only MUD I consider myself to have played on."

Isurut says in auran, "No, I haven't really thought of the personalities being in groups of any kind."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever perceived there to be any cliques or social groupings within a MUD community?"

Isurut says in auran, "I would say that to some extent the clans people choose to join lend themselves to cliques."

Isurut says in auran, "Although some people belong to more than one clan, I would say that there is one clan and its members that they spend more time with."

Isurut says in auran, "Although which clan that is may or may not be constant."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "How does that affect the overall MUD community, do you think?"
You ask in auran, "Does it?"

Isurut says in auran, "To some extent it does. It creates rivalries. For example, my first character was Eraret. She was wanting to join two clans, but since that is not an option, I created Papriel."
Isurut says in auran, "You have multiple groups out there helping the "newbies". The newbies may not be aware of the clans or associate certain people who help them with a particular clan."

Isurut says in auran, "But when they join an clan, they may learn that someone else who helped them belonged to a different clan and there leader is annoyed that time and effort where put into helping a character only to have them join someone else's clan; especially if they don't like the other clan."
You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "Or perhaps OCC they get acquainted with a group of people and decide to join their clan for OCC reasons, ICC reasons or both"
You say in auran, "You mentioned earlier that you'd met some of the people from the MUD in a face-to-face setting."
You ask in auran, "In general, what was your reaction to that?"

Isurut says in auran, "Atlah came down to visit my sister-in-law. He spent some time at our house visiting and teaching us to play MAGIC. Since he was already someone I had spent time with online, being in the same clan and all, I found it to be a good thing. He was someone I enjoyed being with."

Isurut says in auran, "Next I met, Zanepac and Lbaros and Rehslar. We went to a gaming convention at Zanepac and Rehslar's in Michigan."

Isurut says in auran, "It was good to see the people behind the characters. It was fun but not as relaxing because there were also a bunch of people there I had not met online or offline before but they were friendly."
You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "I also met some people at FEST. I was rather uncomfortable there because outside of my husband, there was no one there that I generally interacted with online or offline."

Isurut says in auran, "But he was very comfortable there since he is more sociable and better acquainted with the people there and doesn't have to know people well to be sociable with them."

Isurut says in auran, "And once after that we went to another gaming thing at Zanepac's and Rehslar's where more [clan] people were who had been added to the clan or after the event starting playing and joined [our clan] for a while."
You ask in auran, "Did any of those meetings alter, positively or negatively, your online interactions with those people?"

Isurut says in auran, "I would say meeting the people in real life made for a more positive online experience because there was an already established connection when they began; I knew who they were and they knew who I was as thus it made it more comfortable to work with them."

Isurut says in auran, "I should clarify that to mean the people who joined [the clan]. Outside of you and [your wife], the other people at FEST I still wasn't comfortable with."

Isurut says in auran, "Plus I met that other guy who visited with my sister-in-law, but I can't remember his name. Meeting him did not change my online interactions with him."
You ask in auran, "Nhapiz? Kiop?"
Mouseglove tries to remember.
You ask in auran, "Dozetok?"
Isurut says in auran, "It was neither of them. It was a [different clan] member... Dozetok I think."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did any of the interactions you had with them online change how you reacted to them in a face-to-face setting?"

Isurut says in auran, "If so only in the case of you and Dozetok. Not knowing you guys as well, some of your characters can be intimidating to get around. Atlah and Zanepac and Lbaros etc. were easier to be around, but perhaps that's because of more time spent with them"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Are there any elements of interaction with others on a MUD that are, to your mind, unique to being on a MUD?"

Isurut says in auran, "No, not really."
You ask in auran, "Can you think of any phrases or sayings that seem to be unique to MUDding?"

Isurut says in auran, "I don't know if they are unique to MUDding but I had never heard these terms for mudding: ICC, OCC, logging, ROA, triggers/aliases."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever found yourself using what could be termed "MUD terms" in real life?"
Isurut says in auran, "I'm not sure about terms, but I have the impression that when I did MUD on a regular basis, the ICC/OCC language used made its way into real life conversations, especially if talking to another person who MUDded."
You nod.
You say in auran, "For me, the first "incursion" was when I found myself saying Garoco's word 'woot'."
You chuckle.

Isurut says in auran, "Phrases and such that might be common to the clan or people you interacted with."

Isurut laughs out loud.
You nod.

Isurut says in auran, "Excellent example."

Isurut says in auran, "Or talking about sitting in the pudding."
You say in auran, "I said it, then immediately went "Oh crap.. did I really just say that out loud?!?!"
You nod.

Isurut smiles.
You say in auran, "Well, that was a RL phrase that made its way onto the MUD and then back off again."
You smile.

Isurut says in auran, "Or the "Lbaros's momma" jokes; poor lady."
You ask in auran, "Have you ever had to explain to someone what you meant when one of these slipped into your conversation?"
You smile.

Isurut says in auran, "I don't think so; I'm fairly sure they would have been in conversation with someone who also mudded."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time while MUDding?"

Isurut says in auran, "Yes. It used to be a pet peeve of mine when Utcarem would do it when MUDding, so I tried to be careful not to do it myself, but was not always successful."
You say in auran, "How would you compare losing track of time on the MUD to an activity in real life? Is it similar to something as far as how it "feels?""

Isurut says in auran, "For me, the only thing it would be similar to is reading a good book that I can't put down."

Isurut says in auran, "You just get lost in the plot and feel compelled to go on to see what will happen."
You ask in auran, "Does that fact that you're interacting with people instead of just reading static words affect the way it feels at all?"

Isurut says in auran, "Not if you become involved in the story and pick up on the feelings the author intended the characters to feel."
You ask in auran, "Ok! That's all the questions I can think of at the moment. Is there anything you'd like to add or ask me?"

Isurut says in auran, "Would there be any chance that when your paper is all done I could read it? I think it is an interesting study that you are conducting."
You nod.
You say in auran, "I'm sure that can be arranged. I might even be able to get you a "real" copy instead of an electronic one. I'm clueless on how much that'll cost, but I expect I'll find out."
Isurut chuckles.
You say in auran, "I believe I have to pay to have at least one copy bound for the OU library."
You say in auran, "I could be wrong, but I seem to recall hearing about that."

Isurut asks in auran, "That would make sense. Will this be your first published work?"
You say in auran, "I had a conference review published in a UK film journal a couple years ago. Other than that, however, yes."

Isurut says in auran, "Well good luck to you."
You say in auran, "Thanks. :) Ending the log."
You say in auran, "Time elapsed: 2 hours, 21 minutes."
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - OSTAN

You say in auran, "Logging."
You say in auran, "Start time: 12:03 p.m. EST"
You say in auran, "Ok, first the official stuff."
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok"
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I understand and I will continue the interview"
You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interview, just so you know. :)

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok"
You smile.
You say in auran, "Ok, from here on in it's much less formal. I'm going to basically just ask you general questions and then listen as you tell me stories."

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok"
You say in auran, "If at any time I ask another question before you're done answering, just ignore my question. I can re-ask it at any time. :)"
Ostan says in iysthien, "I want you to know that my connection seems to be a little slow. I do not know if I will get disconnected or not"
You say in auran, "If you do, just re-connect and we'll continue."
You smile.

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok"
You say in auran, "Or if need be, we can do this in two parts if you can't reconnect."
You say in auran, "Ok, let's start with an easy one."
You ask in auran, "How did you first get involved in MUDding?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "let me think about this one for a minute..."
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "I am not entirely certain. I think that I may have been looking up
online games and I ran into a website called something like mudconnect.com that listed a
bunch of MUDs"
You ask in auran, "What was your first MUD?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "no. I tried a few and I was not very impressed with the ones I
played with. I really liked the environment here so this is the one that I stuck with"
You nod.

Ostan exclaims in iysthien, "oh!"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I misread that, sorry"
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "No worries."
You ask in auran, "So what part of MUDding appealed to you to get you started in it as a
hobby?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I cannot remember what my first MUD was. There were a few
that I just did not like. They were mostly futuristic MUDs"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I really liked the gaming aspect of it. I liked the challenge of
trying to gain levels and money. It was like a regular game, except it was text based"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So when you logged onto a MUD, how did you pick what to "be" in
the game?"
Ostan says in iysthien, "I always liked the magically types of characters, I do not know why. Pixies were always an option on a MUD, so I always knew that they would be involved in magic, so I always chose something like that"

Ostan asks in iysthien, "sorry to interrupt this interview. I woke up like an hour ago and I haven't eaten yet. Would you mind if I made a sandwich really quick and came right back?"
You say in auran, "Not at all."
You say in auran, "I have plenty of time. :)"

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok, I'll be back in like 2 minutes"
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok, I'm back"
You nod.
You say in auran, "I ran and grabbed a snack too, since I'll be headed to lunch when we're done."
You smile.

Ostan says in iysthien, "cool"
You ask in auran, "So what was it about the magic-using characters that appealed to you?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "it was just something different. Most games were about sports and martial arts. Magic was something unique and something I haven't really seen in games before"
You say in auran, "Is your choice of online "self" related to what you're like in "real life"?""

Ostan says in iysthien, "the opposite really. My online self is like another personality. I am loud and obnoxious online, but in real life I am quiet and shy"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I just remembered my first MUD :p"
You say in auran, "Oh, ok, tell me about it. :)"

Ostan says in iysthien, "in the mid 90's, back when AOL was cool, it had some games on it. One of them was a futuristic space MUD"
Ostan says in iysthien, "I cannot remember the name of it though, but I do remember being addicted to it"
You ask in auran, "What was it about the MUD that was so addictive?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "it was just very challenging to get ahead and build up your character. I really liked that. In that particular game, it seemed like the levels were limitless"
You say in auran, "You mentioned before that your online character was the opposite of your "real" personality."
You ask in auran, "Why was your online character so different?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "yeah, I really do not have a good explanation for it. It just seemed like there was no real reason to stop me from doing or saying whatever I wanted. In reality I am very shy"
You ask in auran, "So was it maybe a release? Or an experiment? What was it about being able to be that way online that appealed to you?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "probably some sort of release of energy. I always did whatever I wanted without thinking. Normally, in real life I would envy people who were like that"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "And how did other people react to the online you?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "lol. I think most people were annoyed with me"
You chuckle.
You ask in auran, "Why?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "well I always seemed to get in trouble. If I wasn't trying to gain levels, then I was probably talking trash on the channels or picking on players"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "In general, what is your impression of people who play on MUDs?"

Ostan asks in iysthien, "what I think they are like offline or are you asking about my relationship with people in the MUD?"
You say in auran, "Both."
You smile.
You say in auran, "There's no such thing as too much information. :)")"

Ostan laughs out loud.
Ostan says in iysthien, "offline I felt like people were using the MUD as some sort of escape from reality. They were very involved in their character and some people would not even react to reality, for example not listening to the OOC channel and always staying in character"
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "I really liked some players on the MUD. Mostly the people that treated it as a game though. There were several of us who continued to gain levels and possessions and we had good conversations while doing it. I tended to stay away from the so called RPers"
You ask in auran, "In general, did the people you encountered seem to fall into groups or types in your mind?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "Yes, I guess they did. They were here for either Role Playing or for what we called hack'n'slash"
You ask in auran, "Were there any other groups/types, or maybe sub-groups/sub-types within those groups that you noticed?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "hold on a second, I'm thinking about this..."
You nodnod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "there were some sub-groups, but it is difficult to describe"
You say in auran, "Take your time and give it a shot. :)")"

Ostan says in iysthien, "there were a few people like Atlah, Vanon and me who sortof stopped playing eventually and just hung out. Then there were people who had secret, or sometimes known characters that they went into the other group to use as RP."

Ostan says in iysthien, "so some people were secret RPers and then there were people who didn't really do anything anymore"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I always suspected that most RP characters were actually hack'n'slash people in disguise :p"
You go 'Heh.'

Ostan says in iysthien, "I do not really know much about the people that were heavily involved in role playing. They just seemed unusual to me so I didn't interact with them"
You chuckle.
You ask in auran, "Do, in general, what kinds of relationships do/did you have with the other people on the MUD?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "it was just a game friendship. Someone to talk with through the boring times while trying to gain levels. I only talked with a few people offline before." You ask in auran, "Did you perceive any sort of social groups/cliques on the MUD?"
You say in auran, "er perceive"
Mouseglove glares at his fingers.

Ostan ponders something, "hmm.."

Ostan says in iysthien, "I guess you can say that the clans were sortof like social groups. They were very close to eachother and always stayed away from the other groups. I do not really know for certain if there was much more than that though. Most people always seemed to get along well"

Ostan asks in iysthien, "is there a way to toggle the hunger and thirst message?"
Ostan's hunger now off.
Ostan's thirst now off.
You say in auran, "I turned them off for you."
You smile.

Ostan says in iysthien, "thanks"
You ask in auran, "What overall effect do you think the groups/cliques had on the MUD as a community?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I'm trying to think about that...."
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "I really don't have an answer to that. Even when I joined a clan, I never really took part in it. Some of them were there for like-minded people. Several of us had a clan for close friends that liked to gain levels, and I think there were some clans for people who only did role playing. I guess these groups allowed people to interact with others that had the same interests"
You nod.

You ask in auran, "In your time playing on MUDs in general, did you ever communicate with (or meet) anyone you knew first from the MUD in an offline setting?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I never met anyone. I talked with maybe 3 or 4 on an instant messenger, and I have only spoken with one on a phone"
You ask in auran, "Did that phone call change how you dealt with them online?"
You say in auran, "Or those phone calls."
You say in auran, "If there were more than one."

Ostan says in iysthien, "we called eachother several times. I suppose it changed us a little
online. I spoke with her more often on the MUD and we talked a lot on AIM."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did talking online change the nature of the offline interaction?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I think at the time I was losing interest in the MUD. So I cannot say for certain how it changed things. I was rarely on at the time."
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "not really. we had the same conversations online that we did over the phone."
You ask in auran, "Was there ever a time when something happened online, related to another player, and you logged off angry or frustrated?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "yes, lots of times :p"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I have a question about the interview"
You ask in auran, "Sure, what's your question?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "do you just want a direct answer for your question? I feel like you want me to continue with it and tell you everything about the subject"
You say in auran, "As I said before, there's no such thing as too much information. If there's a story behind the answer, and you're willing to tell it, I'd be very interested in hearing it/them."
You smile.

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok"
You say in auran, "And as I said back in the beginning, if you use names, they'll all be changed before anyone but me reads anything."

Ostan nods.
You ask in auran, "Can you think of one time that sticks out in your head?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "there were two times that I became very angry over the MUD"
Ostan says in iysthien, "one time I had stopped gaining levels for a while and for some reason I decided to try again to gain some. Someone had used a spell on my character to summon me and he killed me."

Ostan says in iysthien, "I was just frustrated about it because I was at such a high level that dying would mean that it would take days for me to regain the experience I needed to get back to where I was"
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "the other time was when I caught two people having 'cybersex' and I copied and pasted it on a channel. I got in trouble for that. I didn't mind being yelled at for it, because it was a dumb thing to do. It was just that at the time there was a debate as whether or not to kick me off because those were two characters that were either very old players or admins"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I think I had disappeared for a few days after that"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "After the first incident, what happened after you logged off? Were you still angry?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "yeah, I was still angry. he tried talking to me on AIM but I was just ignoring it. It took a day or two to get over it"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Keeping in that train of thought... is there one incident in your mind that stands out as your worse experience on a MUD?"

Ostan asks in iysthien, "there was an incident related to the MUD, but there was never any really horrible incident that I had directly related to it. Did you want to know about that incident?"
You say in auran, "Yes, please."

Ostan says in iysthien, "there was a player here that had helped me gain levels and he taught me all the tricks to it. He became a good friend and we even talked outside of the MUD on AIM. It turned out that he was some sort of psycho stalker and he was banned from here. I felt really awkward speaking to him on AIM after that, and eventually I just ignored his messages"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Ok, let's go to the other side of the coin. :)"
Ostan says in iysthien, "I can't remember exactly what had happened because it was such a long time ago. I do remember that it was something bad enough where I didn't want to speak to him anymore and I had to ignore him"

Ostan says in iysthien, "ok"
You ask in auran, "Was there ever a time when something happened online, related to another player, and you logged off happy or pleased?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "let me think..."

Ostan asks in iysthien, "anything in general or something bad that happened to the player?"
You say in auran, "Anything player-related that had you logging off in a better mood than you had been in before you logged on."

Ostan says in iysthien, "I really cannot think of anything. Sorry."
You say in auran, "That's ok."
You ask in auran, "Can you tell me instead... is there one incident in your mind that stands out as your best experience on a MUD?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I'm trying to think about this..."

Ostan says in iysthien, "oh yeah, there was"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I was part of that assassin group, and when I first started, there was a player that always picked on me. There was one time that I caught him off guard and I killed him. That was the first time I ever killed another player and it happened to be the person that continuously killed and harassed me"
You smile.

Ostan says in iysthien, "it was Kiop btw :p"
You grin.
You say in auran, "I can definitely understand how that's a happy memory then."
You chuckle.

Ostan laughs out loud.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever found yourself verbally using terms or slang from the MUD when talking to someone, and then had to explain what you were talking about?"
Ostan says in iysthien, "I do not think I have verbally used MUD slang, but I have written things to people that I would have to explain later"
You nod.

Ostan says in iysthien, "I'm probably not the only person that would do this, but a lot of times when I would be typing an instant message I would always put 'say' in front of whatever I type"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time MUDding?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "definitely. I have played for hours straight before. There were several times when I would notice that nobody was on the MUD except for me, and I would look outside to see the sun rising"
You go 'Heh.'
You ask in auran, "Would you say it's similar to losing track of time in another endeavor, or is it a unique sort of loss of time sense?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I guess it would be like any other thing that would attract my attention. There have been other games or things that I was so interested in that I would not notice that hours had passed by"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Have you ever been playing a MUD and found yourself physically reacting to the virtual geography? For example..."
You ask in auran, "Feeling a little bit "closed in" if the area were tight quarters, or experiencing a mental expanse based on having a large area described to you?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "I don't think that I ever have. I have read all of the room descriptions before, but usually I would just read it once and then never look at it again."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Thinking back over what we've talked about, is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?"

Ostan says in iysthien, "nope"
You say in auran, "Ok then, thanks very much for taking the time to talk to me. :)"

Ostan says in iysthien, "it was fun"

Ostan asks in iysthien, "what class is it for?"
You say in auran, "Ending the log. Elapsed time: 1 hour, 59 minutes."
You say in auran, "It's for my Ph.D. dissertation. :)"
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - RORAYI

You say in auran, "Logging."
You say in auran, "Ok, first the official stuff."
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Rorayi says in rhaedda, "Yes."
You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interview, just so you know. :)"
You say in auran, "Excellent."

Rorayi says in auran, "Ok."
You say in auran, "Function-key assigns are fabulous for that, btw."
Mouseglove still loves the client.

Rorayi asks in auran, "That prologue?"
You nod.

Rorayi asks in auran, "Is that a jab?"
You say in auran, "Shift F1-F8"

Rorayi says in auran, ".. :)

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You grin.
You say in auran, "Just subtle encouragement."
You smile.

Rorayi says in auran, "You need to get the next version to test, but that's another story"
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "When we're through, tell me how and I'll get right on that. :)
You say in auran, "All right, let's begin."
You ask in auran, "We'll start with an easy question first: How did you first get involved in MUDding?"

Rorayi says in auran, "As a freshman in college in 1993 I had a roommate who introduced me to it."

Rorayi says in auran, "format question..."
You nod.

Rorayi asks in auran, "I can ramble in one long response or provide a slew of shorter ones... which would you prefer?"

Rorayi asks in auran, "Also, how should I indicate I'm done answering?"
You say in auran, "This method of data gathering is called conversational interviewing, it's all about listening to stories, so ramble on as much as you like."
You say in auran, "As for how to indicate the end, you can just tell me somehow or I'll just watch for longer pauses."
You grin.
You say in auran, "This is an informal interview, more just like a conversation than anything else."

Rorayi says in auran, "Ok, well I had toyed around with BBS systems for a few years on my commodore 64, but I had never experienced interaction with so many people on a computer and so I thought it was quite cool."

Rorayi says in auran, "I'm also a medieval fantasy fan... and the MUD my roommate happened to be playing was based on that genre."
You ask in auran, "What was the MUD called?"

Rorayi says in auran, "That MUD was called Divine Trek, I believe."
You nod.
Rorayi says in auran, "It was based out of somewhere over there"

Rorayi points way over east.
You say in auran, "So out of the US then."

Rorayi says in auran, "I think Europe somewhere, probably Norway or there abouts."

Rorayi says in auran, "My roomate was a MUD addict and he quickly got me hooked as well."
You ask in auran, "What was it that hooked you?"

Rorayi says in auran, "The concept of interacting with many people from all over the world in real time."

Rorayi says in auran, "The "web" didn't exist yet... there were the basics still... ftp, gopher, usenet, etc."

Rorayi says in auran, "The most popular thing on campus was email at the time... people would spend hours emailing each other, a kind of slow chat."
You nod.
You say in auran, "I remember..."
You say in auran, "It was a sort of "geek badge" to e-mail someone sitting 15 feet away from you in the computer lab."

Rorayi says in auran, "MUDs took that and made the response time instaneous... and placed you in a game"

Rorayi says in auran, "yeha"

Rorayi says in auran, "I think people immediately latched onto the anonymity factor also..."

Rorayi says in auran, "There was something exciting about chatting with someone you honestly did not know."

Rorayi says in auran, "Anyway, since my roomate was hooked, it was hard to get time to borrow his computer."
Rorayi says in auran, "There were a few labs on campus and each dorm building had a few VT100 terminals on the first floor"
You nod.
Rorayi says in auran, "I spent a lot of time in those labs MUDding. As did many others."

Rorayi says in auran, "In fact, the college banned MUDding my 2nd year there. It was an epidemic of sorts I guess."
You say in auran, "Wow."
You ask in auran, "What school was that?"

Rorayi says in auran, "The ban was mostly for show though, anyone with any knowledge knew it was unenforceable at the time."

Rorayi says in auran, "No such things as firewalls back then :)"

Rorayi says in auran, "State University of New York at Morrisville... or SUNY Morrisville"
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "ironically, a few years after I left, they were voted Yahoo's "Most-Wired" a couple years in a row"
> You go 'Heh.'
You ask in auran, "How long did it take you to get your own computer?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I was very much into CRPGs in general ... and MUDs were basically RPGs that you got to play with real people"

Rorayi says in auran, "so the following summer I worked many, many hours to save up money"

Rorayi says in auran, "Mostly for books, but I saved enough to put a down payment on a Packard Bell, 486-SX (woo hoo) that I bought from Sears."
You smile.

Rorayi says in auran, "So when I returned to Morrisville that fall, I had my own computer (and was making monthly payments on it). It was worth it though."

Rorayi says in auran, "4 MB of RAM"
Rorayi says in auran, "200MB HD, etc. PLENTY enough for MUDding :)"
You say in auran, "Wow. It sometimes seems unreal that computers ran on so little and still ran. :)"
Rorayi says in auran, "I guess I also used it for homework and projects and stuff also"

Rorayi says in auran, "Yeah it's mind boggling."

Rorayi says in auran, "It was expandable to 8MB ram"

Rorayi says in auran, "but at the time, that additional 4MB SIMM was well over $350"
You say in auran, "I remember. I started on a 386sx-33 that my father built and gave to me to use. It was basically in a metal shoebox."

Rorayi says in auran, "I cannot begin to count the number of hours I MUDded on that thing. I kept the computer throughout the rest of my college career and for roughly a year after I graduated"
You ask in auran, "So 1993... you've been MUDding for 13 years then. In that time, is there one experience that you can point to in your head as your favorite experience on a MUD?"

Rorayi says in auran, "So that second year there, I got into a group of people that actually befriended the owner of Divine Trek"

Rorayi says in auran, "ok favorite experience"
You say in auran, "Keep going, come back to the question when you're done."
You smile.

Rorayi says in auran, "Well they introduced me to _how_ a MUD worked. Being a software geek, I was hooked even more after that."

Rorayi says in auran, "Most of my favorite times "playing" MUDs happened in those first few years"
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Divine Trek allowed player killing, but only with a valid excuse"

Rorayi says in auran, "The MUD didn't officially support the idea of clans or guilds, but the players made them themselves, informal clans."
Rorayi says in auran, "If one of the clan members got offended, it was a great time hunting the offender down and slaying them"

Rorayi says in auran, "And then trying to convince the admins that it was a valid reason"
Rorayi says in auran, "My all-time favorite MUD moment, though, was code related :)

Rorayi says in auran, "I had just started my "own" MUD in early 95 I think and was desperately trying to learn the code behind it"
You nod.

Rorayi asks in auran, "A friend from another MUD that I had played for a while ... what was it?"
You ask in auran, "RoI?"

Rorayi exclaims in auran, "yea!"

Rorayi says in auran, "Mind-fart."
You say in auran, "Realms of Imagination."

Rorayi says in auran, "Lent me their online creation (OLC) framework to look at. I studied it for a week or two and then decided to try to stuff it into the MUD I was working on"

Rorayi says in auran, "After several very long days and nights I got it in enough so that the MUD would actually run with it without crashing :)

Rorayi says in auran, "I edited a room, saved. and rebooted. When my changes remained over the reboot, that's my single favorite moment :)."
You ask in auran, "You mentioned that one of the things that attracted to MUDding was the social aspect of it all. Is there a "favorite social moment" that stands out in your memory?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I don't think any one in particular stands out, honestly. I have thousands of mini-memories of that kind of stuff, but nothing substantial that I can think of at the moment."
You ask in auran, "How about, if not a "favorite," a representative "good" memory?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Ok, one sec."
Rorayi says in auran, "My girlfriend and I met at Morrisville, but when we each transferred away to different colleges"

Rorayi says in auran, "it was difficult to stay in touch (no cell phones at the time :). We were roughly 2-3 hours apart."
Rorayi says in auran, "I taught her how to MUD and so we basically met up nearly every night and MUDded. Most of the time it was just chatting, but we also played now and then."

Rorayi says in auran, "It was an extremely cheap way to keep in touch :)."
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You smile.
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "I think it helped us stay together, actually."
You ask in auran, "Are you still in touch with her?"

Rorayi says in auran, "We're on our 6th year of marriage :)."
You say in auran, "Oh! Ok... wasn't sure if this was Sarah we were talking about or not. :)"

Rorayi says in auran, "heh yeah"

Rorayi says in auran, "I threw some drama in there."
You ask in auran, "Ok. Now look at the other side of these memories... is there one that stands out as your least favorite experience on a MUD?"

Rorayi asks in auran, "Other than impossible to track down crash bugs?"

Rorayi says in auran, "heh"
You say in auran, "Whatever stands out most in your memory."

Rorayi says in auran, "Yeah there are a few kinds of not-so-good moments that I can remember. There are the code kind. Those that you rack your brain for days and sometimes weeks trying to fix. You know the players of "your" game are not happy... some are even leaving..."

Rorayi says in auran, "some may even be bad-mouthing the game on public forums. All the while you're trying your best to solve the problem(s). Those are not very good moments... until you find the solution that is."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Then there are the moments when your team members/mates let you down."
You say in auran, "How so? I mean... in what context "let you down"?"
Rorayi says in auran, "So I have this vision... this goal, to make the game the best one out there."

Rorayi says in auran, "It's too much work for on person, so you have to have help. So you basically "hire" people to help you. It's hard to find people who have enough time and interest to help you out."

Rorayi says in auran, "You form this team of people and believe you're all working towards a common set of goals."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "In my case, it disappointed me to various degrees when a member of my team did something that resulted in me having to make the decision to remove them from the team."

Rorayi says in auran, "Examples... I caught one blatantly cheating. He had to be removed."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Another guy who was likely fairly disturbed in "real life" started to leak some of those personal problems into the MUD side of things... harassment, "virtual" stalking, stuff like that."

Rorayi says in auran, "A lady, who I thought was a very likeable person, took the MUD world FAR too seriously - so much so that it was affecting her emotionally in "real life" on a daily basis. It ended up being best for her to take an extended leave from MUDding."

Rorayi says in auran, "And then the general problems related to apathy..."

Rorayi says in auran, "It seems that most people share your vision and dedication up front, but usually, in my experience, they are in it for a short-term power-trip and the romance quickly fades... and they basically leave by virtue of inactivity."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "those are the unpleasant times :)"
You say in auran, "Switching gear slightly..."
You ask in auran, "When you were playing MUDs, how did you decide what to "be" on the MUD?"
Rorayi says in auran, "As Morpeus says - Residual Self Image."

Rorayi says in auran, "... :)

Rorayi says in auran, "A combination of things for me. One - I think melee characters had advantages on most MUDs and they were relatively easier to play."

Rorayi says in auran, "Especially when starting a new MUD, I would stick to a melee class."

Rorayi says in auran, "I also generally play my own personality, initially."
You ask in auran, "Initially?"

Rorayi says in auran, "For the first character on a MUD let's say."

Rorayi says in auran, "Once I'm more comfortable with the MUD, I deviate with additional characters."
You ask in auran, "How so?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I'm not a "role player" in the traditional sense. Either from lack of ability or interest (or both)... it never became a substantial part of my playing style."

Rorayi says in auran, "So when I "play" a character, for me it's really all about how to mechanically play the character in the context of the game."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "I inject very little personality into the character, really."

Rorayi says in auran, "So, when I'm comfortable with the mechanics of the MUD, I tend to want to "try out" different "characters"."

Rorayi says in auran, "though, for me, it's not really a different "character" per say, it's really a different "build""
You ask in auran, "Can you explain what you mean by the distinction between those two terms?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Ok."

Rorayi says in auran, "(trying to think how to word my response) :)"
Rorayi says in auran, "A character build, in the MUD sense, is a MUD construct, based solely on statistics, attributes, and capabilities as defined by the MUD framework itself."

Rorayi says in auran, "A character is a build that a person has also applied some degree of personification or emotional contribution to. This contribution could include a detailed backstory, physical appearance, mental characteristics, personality traits, etc."
You were idle for 7 minutes.
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Perhaps more simply put, a build is defined by the MUD, a character is defined by the player."
You nod and say in auran, "Let's talk about players for a minute."

Rorayi says in auran, "Ok"
You ask in auran, "In general, what do you think of the other people who you've encountered playing MUDs?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Generally I think they're all relatively likeable. Most are techno-geeks. A good percentage are MUDding because of something missing in their real lives."

Rorayi says in auran, "My opinion of course."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Having trouble figuring out how to ask this... give me a sec..."
You ask in auran, "Have you noticed any general categories of "missing in their life" elements over the years? Any recurring "themes" if you will in what people seem to be trying to find online?"
Rorayi says in auran, "Some are just immature... MUDs are games afterall, and they are bound to attract that type of person."

Rorayi says in auran, "Issues associated with people and their relationships with other "real" people tend to be a common theme."

Rorayi says in auran, "A decent portion of these relationships tend to be romantic in nature to some degree or another."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Are you talking between MUDders, or between those who MUD and others in their offline lives?"
Rorayi says in auran, "Both, I think."

Rorayi says in auran, "Perhaps people are trying to find people to emotionally bind with, without the hassles of physical appearance or social stature impeding them."

Rorayi says in auran, "Sometimes, people just like to be social and play games with other people :)

You nod.

You ask in auran, "What kind of relationships do you have with the other people you've MUDded (or still MUD) with?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Well obviously I'm married to my wife and we used to MUD with each other a bit."

Rorayi says in auran, "I'm still good friends with a few people I've met on MUDs."

You ask in auran, "Are you still actively involved in MUDding?"

Rorayi says in auran, "No, not really."

You ask in auran, "How long has it been since you were?"

Rorayi says in auran, "It's been a few years, not sure if there was a well-defined cut off point when I became "inactive"."

Rorayi says in auran, "I still, occasionally, work on MUD-related stuff in my spare time."

You nod and ask in auran, "And the people you're still good friends with, are they people you met first through MUDding?"

Rorayi says in auran, "However, it's certainly dropped down my priority pole over the years."

Rorayi says in auran, "In some cases, yes. In others, we live close to each other and we went to the same schools."

You nod.

You say in auran, "Do the people you encountered online seem to fall into social groupings? You mentioned a couple earlier..."

You ask in auran, "But even within a particular MUD, do they seem to fall into categories?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I think mostly they fall into the 2nd group - those who just like to game with others."
Rorayi says in auran, "I try to distance myself from the other type :)
You chuckle.

Rorayi says in auran, "I'm not into drama. I have enough "real" things to worry about in my life."
You say in auran, "So you've seen drama on MUDs? I'm assuming you don't mean role-playing..."

Rorayi says in auran, "Yes, non-role-playing drama. Not MUD related at all sometimes."
Rorayi says in auran, "I've seen various types..."
Rorayi says in auran, "Simple immaturity to things that are borderline illegal."
Rorayi says in auran, "Mental and sexual harassment, etc."
You ask in auran, "Was there a time when something happened online with another person that made you log off in anger or frustration?"
Rorayi says in auran, "I'll admit I've probably screamed an obscenity or two at the screen over the years. I can't recall logging off in anger or frustration, however."
Rorayi says in auran, "In the end it's a game to me, really."
You ask in auran, "I'm not suggesting that something made you log off, but... was there every a time when something happened, or had happened, that put you in a bad mood such that you were still in a bad mood when you logged off?"
Rorayi says in auran, "Even though I know there are real folks behind the other screens, I've never let it bother me much."
Rorayi says in auran, "Certainly with respect to the code end of things :)"
Rorayi says in auran, "In terms of interaction with others... I can't really think of a time that something happed "in" the MUD that annoyed me enough to put me in a bad mood"
Rorayi says in auran, "I've been put into many bad moods by not being able to fix a bug, though."
You ask in auran, "How about the other end of the spectrum? Was there a time when something social-interaction-related put you in a better mood and that carried over when you logged off?"
Rorayi says in auran, "In the context of the game?"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Or in the context of the interactions with other players."

Rorayi says in auran, "Here's my question... if I'm using the MUD simply as a communication mechanism... and just discussing "real" things... then"

Rorayi says in auran, "then I'd have to answer yes, the same way I'd answer about a chat-room, or a telephone"
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "But, in the context of the MUD itself, beyond simple communication, I'm not so sure."

Rorayi says in auran, "Thinking about it, I'm sure that the MUD has had positive and negative impacts on my mood, conscious or not."

Rorayi says in auran, "But in general I think my emotional state on the MUD is fairly disconnected from my real world"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Why would you say that is, given that you recognize the reality of "people" behind the screen names?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I yell at the screen, I laugh at the screen. If I walk away, 15 minutes later, I'm not still yelling or laughing."
Rorayi says in auran, "That same anonymity that allows people to live as they otherwise could not, allows me not to care, really, about the most of the people behind the screens."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "It's very easy for me to look 14 inches to my left and see a pile of bills, for example. :)"
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "Have you ever yelled, or laughed, or anything else for that matter, and had to explain to someone nearby why? :)"

Rorayi says in auran, "Definitely"

Rorayi says in auran, "Usually it's laughter."
You nod.
Rorayi says in auran, "Usualy I can contain it... but sometimes, someth8ing happens that just cracks me up."

Rorayi says in auran, "Kind of like when I'm reading a book, actually."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "I've probably yelled at the GNU compiler the most."
You say in auran, "Same here, although I expect I laugh more easily than most. ;)
Rorayi says in auran, "I think we're still friends, though."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Me too."
You say in auran, "Usually yelling "WHY!??!!""
You go 'Heh.'

Rorayi goes 'Heh.'

Rorayi says in auran, "yeah"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever found yourself verbally using terms or slang from the MUD when talking to someone, and then had to explain what you were talking about?"

Rorayi says in auran, ""Come on!"
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Yes, and usually we all pronounce them differently."
Rorayi says in auran, "Particularly character names."
You nod.
You say in auran, "The one that springs to mind for me is "woot" which has crept into my daily language choices."

Rorayi says in auran, "Yeah that one is odd, for I though Manny made it up."

Rorayi says in auran, "But it's everywhere now."
You say in auran, "I did too for many years, but he says he got it from somewhere else originally."
You say in auran, "He did introduce me to the word however."

Rorayi says in auran, "me too"
You say in auran, "So I know you've met people from the MUD in real life, I was there for most of them..."
Rorayi says in auran, "I don't use it though in my daily conversation."
You ask in auran, "Given that, thinking back on those instances, did your online association affect how you dealt with them offline, either when you met them or afterwards?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Sure. I think I build up a collection of assumptions over time when dealing with someone online."

Rorayi says in auran, "It's interesting to see how many turn out to be false when you finally meet."

Rorayi says in auran, "After you do meet, it's interesting to see how it changes your interaction with them online from that point on."
You ask in auran, "How did/does it do that?"

Rorayi says in auran, "We like to preach not judging a book by its cover, but we all do it."

Rorayi says in auran, "So you build a lot of assumption into physical appearance."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "However, on MUDs, you don't have that bias."

Rorayi says in auran, "So you're forced to build up the assumption table entirely on your interaction with them" 

Rorayi says in auran, "When you finally meet, those two collections of assumptions conflict with each other to various degrees"
You say in auran, "Which do you find you tend to "side with?"

Rorayi says in auran, "There is a certain amount of time when you're consciously trying to decide which ones were right and wrong"

Rorayi says in auran, "I trust my "real" instincts more"

Rorayi says in auran, "They are generally more correct. It's difficult to interpret all the nuances of text."
You nod.
Rorayi says in auran, "Also, people tend to exaggerate towards the positive side of the spectrum on the MUD :"
You ask in auran, "Can you explain what you mean by that?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I think people generally emphasize the positives in their life and suppress the negatives if given the opportunity. MUDs provide that opportunity. They also provide the ability to "start fresh". Start a new persona, with an entirely new society, initially."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "So generally the MUD version of a person is stronger, smarter, and more beautiful than their "real" self."
Rorayi says in auran, "er self."

Rorayi says in auran, "Hollywood, to some degree."
You nod.
You say in auran, "All right, one last slight subject shift. :)"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time MUDding?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Absolutely."

Rorayi says in auran, "Particularly at night."
You ask in auran, "Would you say it's similar to losing track of time in another endeavor, or is it a unique sort of loss of time sense?"

Rorayi says in auran, "It may be a bit unique in that I'm stepping into a different environment completely. Time, itself, flows differently in a MUD."

Rorayi says in auran, "I have lost track of time in many other things also, however."
You nod.
You say in auran, "So have I. :)"

Rorayi says in auran, "Most other things do not contain their own definition of time though."
You nod.
You say in auran, "On a MUD, would the normal measurement of time usually be "tick?""
Rorayi says in auran, "I think that's the generally accepted measurement of time, regardless of what the mythos refers to it as. Most MUDders know it as a tick."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Depending on your build, ticks can be extremely important to keep track of."
You ask in auran, "And how is a tick defined as far as measuring it in real-time?"

Rorayi says in auran, "A tick is usually roughly equivalent to a MUD hour... an hour in MUD time. They are usually a minute or two in "real" time."
You ask in auran, "So it's a variable length depending on the MUD?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Yes."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Have you ever been playing a MUD and found yourself physically reacting to the virtual geography? For example..."
You ask in auran, "Feeling a little bit "closed in" if the area were tight quarters, or experiencing a mental expanse based on having a large area described to you?"

Rorayi says in auran, "I think so, in the same way I feel when reading a good book."
You nod.

Rorayi says in auran, "Depends a lot on the writing quality of the area."
You ask in auran, "How so?"

Rorayi says in auran, "Short, once sentence descriptions of an area will do little do pull my mind into the area"

Rorayi says in auran, "You are in a cave. It's dark."

Rorayi says in auran, "Ok, that worked in 1984."
You chuckle.

Rorayi says in auran, "The MUd area has to be described well and logically consistent also."

Rorayi says in auran, "and a certain amount of "reality" has to be injected in for me to "connect" with it."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Thinking back over what we've talked about, is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?"

Rorayi says in auran, "No, but thanks for considering my input to be valueable enough for what you're doing :)
You smile.
You say in auran, "It's my pleasure."
You say in auran, "Ok, ending the log. Elapsed time: 2 hours, 17 minutes."
You say in auran, "Ok the log is recording."
You smile.
You say in auran, "First up, the official stuff."
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."

Sapron flits her wings.
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Sapron nods.
You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interview, just so you know. :)

Sapron grins.
Sapron says in auran, "I don't care. I have nothing to hide ;)
You say in auran, "So you can mention anyone you like as we talk."

Sapron wiggles her bottom.
You nod.
You say in auran, "Ok. This is basically going to be a really informal conversation, where I'm going to ask starter questions and then sit back and let you tell me stories. :)"
Sapron says in auran, "k"
You say in auran, "And if I shoot the next question to you before you're done answering, please ignore the question until you are."
You smile.

Sapron says in auran, "No premature e-questionation"
You say in auran, "We'll start with an easy one."
You cackle gleefully.
You say in auran, "Right."

Sapron grins.
You grin.
You ask in auran, "How did you first become involved in MUDding?"

Sapron says in auran, "I had a friend who had discovered it back in the days when you had to teleport from one freent to another to another in order to find a port that took you to a MUD list."

Sapron says in auran, "I visited several different MUDS, including his (Carrion Fields) before I landed on this one."

Sapron says in auran, "But this was the one that held my interest."

Sapron smiles.
You ask in auran, "Freent?"

Sapron nods.
You ask in auran, "What's a freent?"
Mouseglove isn't familiar with that term.

Sapron says in auran, "My computer access at school (this was in 93) was through Tallahassee Freenet. This was a free service set up with the idea that the internet should be free to all."

Sapron says in auran, "They would give free programs and even modems in the early days, to people who wanted to get online."
You say in auran, "Ahhh... ok."
You smile.
You ask in auran, "So what was it about MUDding that got your attention and attracted your interest?"

Sapron says in auran, "Part of the draw to mudding was that it was hard to get to the mud and you had to know all the steps for the teleporting process in order to get here. Made you feel like you were part of a club :)

Sapron says in auran, "I'm not sure really. The internet was a relatively new beast. The idea of being online and talking to people from all over the world was pretty exciting. The idea of playing a character that wasn't you, was also exciting."

Sapron says in auran, "It was a way of being able to express certain parts of your personality in a way that was safe and fun. It was also a great creative process. I'm a writer and creating characters online was really fun for me."

You nod.

Sapron smiles.

You ask in auran, "Let's talk about a couple things you just mentioned... how do you pick what to "be" on a MUD?"

Sapron says in auran, "Well, I have never played D&D nor had I ever read LoTR or WoT or any of the usual stuff I think most MUDders read, so I think it was a little different for me than most."

Sapron says in auran, "I came in with no preconceptions about the different races and classes, which I think gave me a sort of freedom to play whatever I wanted. I chose a pixie just because I liked the idea, but I have to admit that the character was greatly influenced by the first people I encountered on the MUD...namely Ilditin and Garoco."

Sapron grins.

You grin.

You nod.

You ask in auran, "How did interacting with them influence your choices?"

Sapron says in auran, "I was extremely shy and I found that through Sapron (my first, longest, and favorite character) I could express my silly side and my loving side at the same time..."

Sapron says in auran, "Well both Ilditin and Garoco were on the crazy side. I believe Ilditin fell at my feet in a puddle of goo and Garoco came screaming out of the sky and hit the ground at my feet. You can't ask for better entrances than that."
You chuckle.
You nod.

Sapron says in auran, "It was fun being around them and their craziness was contagious. At the time the MUD was really small and everyone was so excited to be here that you couldn't help but have fun."

Sapron flits her wings.
You ask in auran, "You mentioned that you were shy, but being online let you express other parts of your personality that you usually didn't feel comfortable expressing. Is that accurate?"

Sapron nods.
You ask in auran, "Are there any other ways your choice of online "self" is related to what you're like offline?"

Sapron says in auran, "It was happening both on the MUD and on a regular bulletin board I posted to. I posted there as "Casper" because I felt invisible, but I wanted people to know I was harmless. I later changed my name on that board to Sapron to match my character here."

Sapron says in auran, "I think Sapron helped me to come out of my shell in real life as much as she did online. I started to realize that this character wasn't just a character. She was a part of me. She was so beloved on here that it made me feel good about myself. I thought, "Wow. People are seeing this crazy side of me and they're not recoiling. They actually like me!"

Sapron shrugs.
Sapron says in auran, "As I let Sapron seep into my real life she started to evolve more on here. It was a fascinating thing to watch. The other characters I played were fascinating, too, but Sapron was always my favorite."

Sapron looks at you.
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So if Sapron was your crazy/loving side, were other characters representative of other parts of you?"

Mouseglove (send): Log started at 10:57 a.m.
You send 'Log started at 10:57 a.m.' to Mouseglove.
Sapron says in auran, "Absolutely. We all have different sides. Angry sides, painful sides, silly sides. Creating characters allows us the chance to express parts of ourselves that we probably couldn't (and in some cases would never want to) express in real life."

You ask in auran, "You mentioned before that you were surprised when people liked Sapron. In general, what is your impression of other people who MUD?"

Sapron says in auran, "I created one character who had a childhood full of pain and the result was a girl who was tough, sarcastic, and almost impossible to reach emotionally. This character was more an image of who I was at that time. It was something I was ashamed of and proud of at the same time, much as she was. She was complicated and her relationships on here were complicated, too."

Sapron says in auran, "I don't think you can group people who MUD into one category. The only thing I think that may fit most MUDders would be to say that they generally are not as confident in real life as they can be on here. Some play because they are really into fantasy. Some play because they are attention whores (we've certainly had our share of those here)."

You smirk.

Sapron says in auran, "and some play because they are lonely or need a creative outlet. I don't think it's fair to put everyone in one category though."

Sapron says in auran, "I have to admit though.."

Sapron says in auran, "when I first got into MUDding I assumed most MUDders were losers who couldn't get along in real life and so created a life online to make up for the life they didn't have on the outside world."

Sapron says in auran, "It was only after I started meeting people in real life that I realized how varied the personalities and people were."

You ask in auran, "So you started thinking of them as a group, and then changed that thinking based on your experience with them as individuals?"

Sapron nods.

You ask in auran, "Ok, so let me ask this then... in general, do the people you've encountered online seem to fall into groups/types at all?"

Sapron says in auran, "Kind of the same way people lump most "Trekkies" or "D&D" people as a group with certain characteristics. Very few people see them as individuals."
You ask in auran, "You mentioned a few above... are there more? Or any sub-groupings within those broad categories you mentioned?"

Sapron says in auran, "There are definite groups and group types. There were those of us who were here because we wanted to create characters and build storylines. The small group of true RP junkies."

Sapron says in auran, "Then there were those who came on to use this as a social venue. They just wanted to sit and talk. Then there were those who liked the challenge of the game itself. They wanted to kill things and get the items no one else could get."

Sapron says in auran, "Then of course, there were the drama queens (of both genders) who just wanted to stir up trouble and get attention at any cost."

Sapron says in auran, "When the drama queens started to outnumber the RP people, that's when I decided to leave."

You nod.

Sapron says in auran, "This was not just happening on the MUD, btw. The Bulletin board I was on was called "The Cafe""

You ask in auran, "Given the various types of groups/personalities... what kinds of relationships did you have with the other people on the MUD?"

Sapron says in auran, "it was part of freenet and we all had adopted characters as we "came in" to the Cafe. As the internet got more popular we found that we were being overrun by "trolls" and people who wanted to start flame wars. It stopped being fun."

Sapron says in auran, "I had lots of different types of relationships. There were many who I wanted nothing more to do with besides RP, but I found that some people made that difficult. Cheurn and Nhapi are two who come to mind. They wanted to somehow merge real life with the RP world and I didn't want that. This was a game. It was my escape. I didn't want to pre-plan storylines. I didn't want the fact that I disliked someone in real life to seep into the game."

Sapron says in auran, "for me this was always a game. I don't think that was true for everyone."

Sapron says in auran, "I also wasn't into cyber, which was disappointing for many, I think. I didn't think it was a necessary part of the game."

You ask in auran, "Cyber... as in cybersex?"
Sapron says in auran, "Yes."
Mouseglove is rusty on some of the terminology.

Sapron grins.
You nod.

Sapron says in auran, "I can see why some people had a hard time separating real life from the game"

Sapron says in auran, "It was hard for me sometimes, too."
You ask in auran, "Why?"

Sapron says in auran, "When your character is falling in love with another character, it's hard not to feel it yourself. Hell, the same is true in Hollywood. How many actors hook up after playing lovers in a movie? When you are putting yourself into a character, it's hard to break away completely sometimes."

Sapron says in auran, "When your character has been slighted by another character or attacked visciously by someone, it's hard to sit and talk out of character to the person who just attacked you. Sometimes it takes a few minutes for you to pull yourself back and get out of character."
You nod.

Sapron says in auran, "I think some people were just unable to make the distinction. They weren't able to pull back. If you attacked their character, you attacked them. If you loved their characters you loved them."

Sapron smiles.
You ask in auran, "So... within the social structure on the MUD, did you perceive any sort of cliques or groups?"

Sapron says in auran, "Definitely."
You ask in auran, "What were they?"

Sapron says in auran, "There were people who only wanted to play with each other. There were a few of us who just wanted to RP, but there were others who wanted to control where the storylines were going and they didn't appreciate it when things didn't go the way they wanted...so they stuck together."
Sapron says in auran, "So there was, as I mentioned before, Nhapi and Cheurn, who were very picky about who they played with. There was Olyeo and Arosess who seemed to bounce between groups. There were the non-RP people who just liked to play the game. There were the people like Ustu who hit on the most powerful players so they could get a bit of power themselves."

Sapron says in auran, "In some ways it was not unlike real life. Personalities are the same wherever you go and human nature is human nature, even when the human is playing a dragon or an elf."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Did you ever communicate with or meet anyone you met first on the MUD in an offline setting?"
Sapron nods.
Sapron says in auran, "Of course. You can't play on a game for as long as I have without wanting to meet the people behind the characters."
Sapron smiles.
Sapron cocks her head to one side.
You say in auran, "would you tell me about some of those meetings, if you are willing."
Sapron says in auran, "Sure. Meeting Garoco (aka Garoco) was one of my first meetings. He and my sister were...we'll just say "involved" off and on for years and he came to visit us in Florida. Someone else came at the same time but I don't remember what his character name was. He was quite creepy...both online and in real life."
Sapron says in auran, "Most people on here I never met. I just talked to them via email and instant messenger. There was one (Peras) I ended up dating and living with briefly. A definite mistake. I realized afterwards that he had fallen for my character, not for me."
You nod.
Sapron says in auran, "Since the game was always a game for me, it was never terribly surprising to meet the people behind the characters. I liked it. It was cool to put a face to all the messages I had received over the years. I played on here for over a decade, but I mostly tried to keep my "real life" separate from my MUD life."
Sapron says in auran, "Most of the people I knew and liked well on the MUD simply lived too far away for it to be feasible for me to meet them."
Sapron shrugs.
You nod.

Sapron says in auran, "It did seem to me that meeting people in real life sometimes messed up the game."
You ask in auran, "How so?"

Sapron says in auran, "It tended to make things even more blurred as far as reality vs the game. I didn't like that. I wanted the MUD world to remain the MUD world without having to think about who was attractive in real life or who might have a crush on whom. I got irritated when real life interfered with the game."

Sapron says in auran, "For example..."

Sapron says in auran, "Sapron was seeing Atlah (rest him) and his character had changed to a pixie just to be with her."

Sapron says in auran, "but when he started seeing another player in real life, she demanded that the online relationship stop. So this ridiculous storyline was created to make that happen."

Sapron says in auran, "That sort of thing irritated me immensely."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So... did your online interactions affect how you dealt with someone when you met them face-to-face?"

Sapron says in auran, "Not really. Generally I had talked to them out of character (ooc) before I met them in real life. So I already had a pretty good idea of what they were like before I met them."

Sapron says in auran, "Though I have to admit, I'm afraid I may have bitch-slapped a few people who played here if I had met them in real life :)"

Sapron says in auran, "I wanted to shake them and shout "Snap out of it!! It's a freakin game!"

Sapron grins.

Sapron flits her wings.
You ask in auran, "And did your offline interaction affect how you dealt with them online afterwards?"

Sapron says in auran, "Not really. Garoco was still crazy. Psycho creepy guy wasn't really into RP so I didn't have to deal with him. I did convince Peras, who had previously just been a "hack-n-slash" player, to actually RP once we started getting involved in real life, but we didn't allow our real life relationship to interfere with the RP...or we tried not to. There weren't many people to RP with, which made things difficult (and boring) sometimes."

You nod.

You ask in auran, "So, thinking back on your interactions with the people on the MUD, what stands out as your favorite memory/experience?"

Sapron says in auran, "But even if there was someone whose personality I couldn't stand, if they could RP well, I would RP with them. Their character was separate from their real life personality as far as I was concerned."

Sapron asks in auran, "What stands out for real life interactions or for game interactions?"
You say in auran, "How about both? ;)")"

Sapron says in auran, "Oddly enough, my favorite times were those times when we sort of blurred the lines. We weren't exactly in character but we weren't really being ourselves either. I think I still have some logs of Arosess and Sapron making out and making Angver all kinds of uncomfortable. It was just us being goofy but it was fun and it was a good way to release steam when we couldn't find any good RP going on."

Sapron says in auran, "RP-wise, I really liked it when Olyeo was here. He turned out to be a real jerk in real life, but he was really good at RP. Nhapiz and Cheurn weren't bad either. If they had been able to let go of a control a bit, they would have been fabulous. The time period when we were all here and all playing together, was really the best time I had here."

Sapron says in auran, "Rou really helped shape Sapron's personality."

Sapron says in auran, "and Nhapiz shaped the personality of one of my other characters (whose name escapes me at the moment)"

Sapron says in auran, "When we had real storylines going and everyone was deeply into RP, that was what I loved. It was what kept me coming back in those years (I think that was around 99-00)"
Sapron smiles.
> You ask in auran, "Ok, other side of the coin: What stands out as your least favorite memory/experience?"

Sapron says in auran, "When that RP started to fall apart because people were letting real life interfere. Cheurn started taking things personally and she drug Olyeo into it because they had a thing going on the side in real life. Things got really ugly and I started dreading coming on. I eventually ended up leaving for a bit. I had left once before because something similar had happened when I was an immortal and one of the imms started creating all this drama and people started choosing sides."

Sapron says in auran, "In my experience, letting real life enter the game always, always takes the fun away in the end."

Sapron sighs.

Sapron sighs and her wings droop sadly.

Sapron grins.

You ask in auran, "So was there ever a time when you logged off frustrated or angry over something that happened online?"

Sapron says in auran, "Many times. Mostly during those days. That's why I stopped logging on. When it stopped being fun, I stopped coming. This was a game. It was supposed to be an escape from the ugliness of real life. When MUD life became uglier than real life, it was time to go."

Sapron cocks her head to one side.

You ask in auran, "In those cases, what happened after you logged off?"

Sapron raises an eyebrow.

Sapron asks in auran, "What do you mean?"

You ask in auran, "Were you still in a bad mood after you left the keyboard? If so, what did you do?"

Sapron says in auran, "Ahh. Yeah, I was still in a bad mood. I didn't really DO anything that I can remember. I think there was a bit of time when emails started flying along with
accusations and I just made a decision to leave the MUD. I just let it go and moved on to other things."
You ask in auran, "Coin-flipping again... was there a time when you logged off happier or in a better mood?"

Sapron says in auran, "Sure. Most of the time in those days, that was the case. When RP went well and everyone was playing together, it made me happy. Sapron is a joyful character to play. Playing her always made me feel better in those days. As she evolved she became less joyful and it was harder to enjoy playing. I've had tons of other characters but none ever gave me as much joy as she did. I'd say my second favorite character I created was Vrondas, the ogre."

Sapron says in auran, "Like Sapron, Meeplo didn't fit the general stereotypes for his race. I liked playing against the norm. Sadly, others decided my version of ogre was the true version of ogre and suddenly dumb but sweet ogres started popping up everywhere." You ask in auran, "And were you still in a better mood after you left the keyboard?"

Sapron says in auran, "Sure. Adrenaline and endorphins take a while to wear off. The things that happen on screen may not be real, but you are putting yourself into that character. When we had big fight scenes and stuff, my adrenaline was sky-high. You're in character so you feel at least a bit of what your character is feeling and it takes a while for that to dissipate once you log off."
You nodnod.
You say in auran, "I remember back when I first created on RoA, I had two characters: Ryned, my human priest, and Kimbur the rhyming ogre. :)"

Sapron grins.
You say in auran, "Kimbur was a pain to write for (having to come up with the rhymes all the time) but everyone seemed to like him."
You chuckle.

Sapron says in auran, "I think that became a problem for a while..."
You quirk an eyebrow.

Sapron says in auran, "everyone wanted to create "likeable" characters"

Sapron says in auran, "I was guilty of it, too"
Unknown command.
You nod.
Sapron says in auran, "We started running low on bad guys"
You say in auran, "Then came Mossay and Polcer."
You chuckle.

Sapron grins.

Sapron says in auran, "and Sapron was so beloved by them both ;)

Sapron flits her wings.
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "Ok, slight change of subject here. :)

Sapron grins.
You ask in auran, "Have any of your interactions on the MUD ever crossed over into your offline, with regard to the language of the MUD?"
You say in auran, "For example..."
You ask in auran, "Have you ever found yourself saying things normally typed on-MUD out loud?"

Sapron asks in auran, "Like what?"
You say in auran, "Like anything really... MUD slang, abbreviations, etc."

Sapron says in auran, "Not that I can think of..."
You say in auran, "For me, I think of how that infernal word "woot" has crept into my daily speech. I never heard that word before meeting Garoco."
You smile softly.
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time MUDding?"

Sapron says in auran, "definitely"

Sapron says in auran, "there were many many nights during the good RP days that I would be up until 4am or later just because I was so into the story"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Would you say it's similar to losing track of time in another endeavor, or is it a unique sort of loss of time sense?"

Sapron says in auran, "It's similar, to me at least, to losing track of time when you're reading. You're so deeply involved in this other world and these other characters that the real world just seems to melt away. You forget you have school or work to go to. You only exist in that other realm for that period of time."
You ask in auran, "Are you aware of the "time" on the MUD itself at all? Does the fact
that the MUD has its own time intrude on your interactions?"

Sapron says in auran, "No. Frankly the MUD time should have been more closely related
to real time I think. It always went so ridiculously fast that the sun might rise and set
twice during the course of a conversation between two characters. We tended to ignore
it."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Have you ever been playing a MUD and found yourself physically
reacting to the virtual geography? For example..."
You ask in auran, "Feeling a little bit "closed in" if the area were tight quarters, or
experiencing a mental expanse based on having a large area described to you?"
You say in auran, "I guess I should say physically or mentally reacting."

Sapron nods.

Sapron says in auran, "I'd say I mentally reacted quite often."
You ask in auran, "Can you give me an example?"

Sapron says in auran, "Depending on the area, the RP, and what my character was going
through I tended to feel it."

Sapron says in auran, "Cheurn had Sapron trapped in a tight hidden chamber for a while.
I was in there for days and I would have to get up and walk away from the computer for a
while because I was feeling claustrophobic."
Sapron says in auran, "There was another time when we were all trying to walk through a
forest to find the pixie homeland (damn Garoco for making it such a maze) and I started
to feel real anxiety in reaction to us being lost..."

Sapron asks in auran, "Is that what you mean?"
You nod.
You say in auran, "That's exactly what I mean."
You smile.
You ask in auran, "Ok. Thinking back over what we've talked about, is there anything
else you'd like to add before we finish?"
You ask in auran, "Or any additional info to one of the questions you'd like to give?"

Sapron says in auran, "Just that the MUD gave me a sense of community at a time when I
felt like I didn't belong anywhere. It also allowed me to create a character that I love even
today (about 13 years later) and I'm glad I was a part of it."
Sapron says in auran, "I think, like IRC and freenet, it may have lived its life and there is no real coming back because everyone prefers graphic games and such, but it was great while it lasted."

Sapron says in auran, "And for the record, I think you and Lissilinde were two of the best RPers I ever met."

Sapron smiles.
You say in auran, "What year did you start MUDding in? I know you started here back when the MUD first came online..."
You blush a lovely shade of red.
You say in auran, "Awwww... thanks. :)"

Sapron says in auran, "I think I started in 93 or so. Back when creepy Dinthin was giving everyone roses :)"

Sapron says in auran, "and Ilditin was disgusting and didn't have a big Christian page on the web ;)"
You nod.
You say in auran, "I'd like to thank you for doing this, your input is (as I'd guessed it would) very valuable. :)"

Sapron smiles.
Sapron says in auran, "Glad to help."
You say in auran, "Ending the log now. Elapsed time: 91 minutes."
You say in auran, "Ok, I'm logging."
Tahab nods.

You say in auran, "Now the disclaimer, hang on... ;)"

You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."

You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."

You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."

You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."

You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."

You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."

You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"
Tahab says in lokkath, "absolutely"

You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interview, just so you know. ;)"
Tahab says in lokkath, "ok"
You ask in auran, "My first question for you is... how did you first get involved in MUDding?"

Tahab sinks into deep thought.

Tahab says in lokkath, "I guess is started before there really were muds for me."

Tahab says in lokkath, "In high school, in the early 80s, I was introduced to BBSs. The first BBS I was on was called M-Net and I discovered single-person games on there."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Someone I'd met on there told me about a thing called a MUD, and told me how to use the U of M internet dialup system to gain access to it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It was called VikingMUD, and still is actually - its still online."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I was hooked. Not only could I play a game I liked, but there were other people to talk to who were also playing it at the same time."

Tahab says in lokkath, "While I was playing on that MUD I learned exactly how powerful the whole internet thing was."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I heard about the fall of Communism in the USSR before any American TV stations broke the story, because someone on the MUD who was in Norway heard about it and told us all."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I even fell in love - my first online love affair - on VikingMUD, to a woman I later met and dated briefly."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It would have most likely developed into a long-term relationship but that we were both poor, struggling, and lived many states apart, so we couldn't really afford to see each other often enough to make a long-term relationship work"

You were idle for 5 minutes. You nod.
You ask in auran, "Are there still BSSs these days?"

Tahab nods.

Tahab says in lokkath, "In fact, M-Net is still online although it's called ArborNet now."

You ask in auran, "What kind of MUD was VikingMUD?"
Tahab asks in lokkath, "You mean what code was it running?"
You nod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "LPMud."

Tahab goes 'Heh.'

Tahab says in lokkath, "While I was on Viking was when I discovered the different flavors of code for MUDs."

Tahab says in lokkath, "While on Viking, I found a CircleMUD called Realms of Imagination that caught my attention, and I began playing there instead."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Eventually I reached level 50 and was made an Immortal. I created my own zone based on a book by one of my favorite authors and got to know a lot of people who worked and played there."

Tahab says in lokkath, "One of the people I got to know went by the online name Nadia, and she helped me find another MUD to go to when the political infighting on RoI got too bad."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The MUD changed hands several times, and when the dust settled, I'd been demoted because I wasn't part of the new inner circle."
You were idle for 6 minutes. You ask in auran, "Is that sort of shake-up common in your experience?"

Tahab nods.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Unfortunately."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Nadia introduced me to Realms of Aurealis, this MUD, that had been created by two computer programming students and a couple other RoI imms whose names I recognized."

Tahab says in lokkath, "So I started playing there, or here I guess, and eventually got accepted as a builder. I've been part of the staff ever since."
You grin.
You say in auran, "I remember. :)"
Tahab chuckles.

Tahab says in lokkath, "I think that's all I have to say about that."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "What was your favorite MUDding experience?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Wow"

Tahab says in lokkath, "There are way too many to pick a single favorite I think."
You ask in auran, "Is there one that stands out as _a_ favorite experience?"

Tahab ponders something, "hmm.."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I've been MUDding for about 15 years at this point, so there's a lot to kinda sift through."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I remember building a small zone, a remote forest cabin like the one I remember visiting as a child for vacations."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I made it on VikingMUD, and later on here, as a place for the woman I fell in love with and I to go to just be together."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It wasn't as good as being together in person, but it was better than being together out in the public areas of the MUD. It felt like a special place, something that was only ours."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I have great memories of creating zones here and storylines for RP, puzzles for the players to figure out, and taking part in them by switching into an NPC and providing plot points and whatnot."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Sometimes I'd do that just to throw them off too, it was a lot of fun watching them run around trying to figure stuff out, and knowing that they were having fun and I was helping them do it."

Tahab smiles.

Tahab says in lokkath, "I also remember fondly the times when I'd get to know someone online well enough that they'd step out from behind the character and let me get to know the real person that was playing it."
Tahab says in lokkath, "I have a lot of friends still that I met online. I keep in touch with them as much as I'm able, and there are more that I've lost touch with that I wish I could still keep in touch with. I wonder how they are, hope they'll show up again at some point so I can talk to them."

Tahab sighs.
You nod.
You say in auran, "Same here."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "How should I let you know that I'm done with my answer?"
You say in auran, "However you'd like. :) I'm adaptable."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Ok, I'll just say that I'm done then, and I'm done."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "You have a lot of good memories... do you only have good memories?"

Tahab shakes his head.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Oh no, I have a lot of bad memories too, I don't like to think about them much but they're there."
You ask in auran, "Is there one that stands out for you?"

Tahab nods sadly.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Unfortunately, this one is easy."

Tahab says in lokkath, "One of my dear friends, who I knew offline first, and who joined the MUD and became a full-on leader in the MUD community, died suddenly of a massive heart attack at another friend's wedding."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It ended up being my responsibility to let everyone else know, since his girlfriend, who he met on here, called me."

Tahab says in lokkath, "At first, I was so numb that I was able to handle the telling and retelling over and over of what happened."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But as I began to really understand and feel what had happened, it became harder and harder."
Tahab says in lokkath, "These people were also friends, and I was doing my duty, but also causing them pain, and that made it hurt more."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Another RL friend of my friend's who had joined the MUD is a minister in RL, and he conducted the memorial service. I was asked to speak, to deliver a eulogy on behalf of the online family."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I read words of shock, grief, sadness, and condolence from people on the MUD, people from all over the world. I was their representative back to the family and friends of my friend who died."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "Is it ok to say his name?"
You were idle for 6 minutes.
You say in auran, "I see no reason not to, if you would like to."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It would be easier I think. His name was Mike, he was known as Leedo on here."

Tahab says in lokkath, "And at the memorial service, I was kind of an ambassador, representing this group of people from all over the world in common grief at losing Mike."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I was honored to be able to serve as kind of a bridge I guess."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I guess that's my least favorite memory on or off a MUD really."

Tahab sighs.
You nod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "I do remember other times when people's actions and words would send me off into fits of depression, sometimes causing me to burst into angry tears, because they were so thoughtless and cruel, but that was only a small group of people, not the majority."
You ask in auran, "Was it something specific that they said that caused this reaction?"

Tahab shakes his head.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Mostly it was a small group who would spread rumors about me, try to drag me down in the eyes of other people on the MUD. I guess they did it because they were jealous, or maybe immature. Or I guess they could have just been cruel people,
but I saw them be really nice to each other, so I guess it was more like the cool kids clicks that form in schools, that type of group mentality."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I'm done."
You say in auran, "Ok, let's shift gears a little. You mentioned earlier that you really enjoyed when people let you get to know the person behind the character..."

Tahab nods.
You say in auran, "How do you decide what that character will be when you create one on a MUD? How do you choose what to "be"?"

Tahab asks in lokkath, "Do you mean me specifically, or how I think people do it in general?"
You say in auran, "Both if you feel comfortable talking about it."

Tahab sinks into deep thought.

Tahab says in lokkath, "For me, I guess I've always leaned towards thieves, rogues, bards, and magic-using classes."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I like the idea of being able to sneak around and listen, and being able to tell stories"

Tahab says in lokkath, "I think as far as races, I've always leaned toward races that I could connect to emotionally on some level, which meant humans in the beginning."

Tahab grins.

Tahab says in lokkath, "But I read fantasy novels, and the more I read the more I kinda understood other races, so I'd branch out and try others out to see if I could think like them convincingly enough to pull them off."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I've never felt the desire to play a female character tho. I know that's supposed to be the big thing, but I just never got into it."
You ask in auran, "What do you mean when you say "pull them off" exactly?"

Tahab asks in lokkath, "Umm..be able to play them realistically?"

Tahab sinks into deep thought.
Tahab says in lokkath, "If I could wrap my brain around what it would be like to be a dwarf, to come from that culture, then I could play one in such a way that people who interacted with that character would accept that he was a dwarf. I guess pulling it off means not doing stuff that makes people not believe the role-playing of the character." You nod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "When I became immortal on RoI, my character was an elf. On here, my character was a dark elf."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Dark elves are supposed to be evil, but I'd read R. A. Salvatore's books about the rogue good drow elf Drizzt, and I liked the idea of being the white sheep of a family."

Tahab says in lokkath, "My imm was a storyteller, and having the MUD to use to help tell those stories made it just that much more enjoyable because I could create the stage, the props, the extras, and then watch and participate as other people stepped into the main roles and a lot of times took the story in directions I never thought of."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It was fun trying to keep up with them sometimes :)
You were idle for 8 minutes.
You nod.
You ask in auran, "You said that reading fantasy widened your options on what to be, is that accurate?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Pretty much, yeah."
You ask in auran, "As your choices got more exotic, how much of the offline "you" got put into the online "you" you were making?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Well, I love passing along stories and bits of knowledge. I really enjoy helping people experience something for the first time that I've experienced and loved."
Tahab says in lokkath, "My first two characters here were an old wise man and a big dumb ogre."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It let me be the advisor and the jester at the same time, since I'd play them together."

Tahab goes 'Heh.'
Tahab says in lokkath, "The ogre would talk only in rhyme, which was really challenging to keep up a conversation. But it made me think, it made me be really creative, and it was a fun challenge."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Since then every character of mien has been some form of storyteller or teacher, even the villains. One of my bad guys taught the truth of greed and power, another taught the gospel of cold logic."

Tahab says in lokkath, "They were all sort of honorable tho, like lawful evil in D&D terms."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I consider myself to be an honorable person, and while sometimes I've played characters who weren't, they were harder to play, so I generally stuck to characters that reflected me in some way."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But usually my choice of who I'd play when I logged on was determined by what mood I was in. If I felt like telling stories, I'd play one of the characters who was supposed to be wise and learned."

Tahab says in lokkath, "If I was in a bad mood, I'd grab one of the villains and take my aggressions out on the MUD, and occasionally on other people in RP, but only with their consent, of course. :)"

Tahab says in lokkath, "I've been using video games of one sort or another as a way to take out my aggressions since I was in junior high school. It's always worked for me, and it's kept me from losing my temper IRL more times than I can count."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Done."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "You've mentioned enjoying interacting with other players and making stories for them. What are your impressions of the other people who play the MUD?"
Tahab asks in lokkath, "You mean each one of them specifically?"
You shake your head.
You say in auran, "As a general group, in your experience with MUDders."

Tahab adopts a stern look and goes, 'Ahem...'

Tahab says in lokkath, "sorry was trying to say ah."
You say in auran, "I think that's ahh"
You go, 'Ahh.'
You nod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Gotcha thanks."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Well, for the most part, I guess it really depends on the person."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Some of the people are here to have a good time, to enjoy the game, to express their creative side, and to make friends and take part in the community."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Either the mud-character community or the community of real people who play muds actually, I canremember both."

You nod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Then there are the people who use the MUD as some form of mental masturbation. They use it to get the kind of power they don't have or don't feel they have in real life, so they come on here and act like assholes."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Those types are probably using the MUD to vent their frustrations and anger here, and they abuse people here because they can't actually do anything to the people who are really making them upset or unhappy irl."

Tahab shrugs.

Tahab says in lokkath, "That's how it appears to me. But the cool thing about that was... the community here was pretty strong and pretty faithful."

You say in auran, "Can you explain that a little more? I'm not sure what you mean exactly."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Sure. It was like being in a big family sort of."

Tahab says in lokkath, "People would squabble back and forth sometimes, but if someone new came in and was being rude or disrespectful or causing problems, everyone banded together to stand up to that person, players and imms both."

Tahab says in lokkath, "No one walked into our home and started trashing the place or messing with the people in it unchallenged."

Tahab says in lokkath, "And when the community came together for a common cause, it was an amazing sight to see. Everyone forgot that they were mad at so-and-so for what
they did the night before, because we were defending our place to be mad in, if that makes any sense."

You nod.
You say in auran, "It makes perfect sense, to me at least."

Tahab says in lokkath, "That's all I have to say about that I think."
You ask in auran, "Ok. So you've talked a little bit about specific examples of relationships on the MUD. In general, what types of relationships did you form with the general MUD community?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Really just about every kind you'd have anywhere."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I fell in love with one person and she with me."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I had another relationship that got intimate on and offline, but didn't go anywhere else really."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There was one that ended because I didn't want to take it offline and she did."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There were and are a lot of friendships, a lot more sort of nodding friends, some relationships that started hostile and relaxed over the years, and some people that I'd still let get hit by a car rather then yell out and warn them."

Tahab grins evilly.
You go 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "I have a few of those myself."

Tahab nods.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Probably some of the same people I'd guess."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Yeah, pretty much the same type of relationships I've had in any other group or community I've been in during my life."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Done."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "You mentioned one earlier, so could you talk a bit more about a time that something happened online that made you log off upset or angry?"
Tahab nods.

Tahab says in lokkath, "There was one person in particular who had been around since the beginning of the MUD who would over and over make me so upset that I thought seriously about quitting the MUD af ew times."

Tahab says in lokkath, "This person was the type who thrived on emotional attention and make it their purpose in life to rally as many players as possible against me."

Tahab says in lokkath, "She was constantly spreading rumors about me, telling lies about my motives, my comments, my actions, my intentions."

Tahab says in lokkath, "And all to try to create a group that would tell her she was the strong hero for standing up to the corrupt imm and championing players rights."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Her influence would come and go depending on how many guys she could rally to her cause."

Tahab says in lokkath, "She was a female IRL, I met her twice, and she would use it to get male players to follow her every whim."

Tahab says in lokkath, "She played the "I'm cute and I might cyber with you if you do what I want" card I'm sure."

Tahab says in lokkath, "So when her influence was on one of its larger rises, it would get ugly for me. I'd start feeling really depressed, angry, defensive, hurt... you name it, none of it was good."

Tahab says in lokkath, "More than once, I logged off and would actually flee from the computer because of the things that had been said, either told to me directly or overheard."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I hold this person at least partially responsible for the fact that this place has all but died out now, and as great as it used to be, that's unforgiveable and I don't intend to ever forgive her for it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "A lot of times I'd end up in tears it hurt so bad. This was my home, and she was making me feel unwelcome in it, and that hurt a lot."
Tahab says in lokkath, "Sometimes I'd talk to one of my friends who was both an online and offline friend, sometimes I'd talk to my girlfriend about it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But it took hours, sometimes even days, to get over the hurt. Eventually I'd always go back, but each time it was with a little more emotional distance between me and the rest of the MUD."

Tahab says in lokkath, "So I guess I blame her for that too."
You were idle for 8 minutes.
You ask in auran, "On the other side, was there ever a time when you logged off in a better mood than you'd been in when you logged on?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Oh sure! Lots of times actually."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Sometimes I'd have a really good productive building session, getting a lot of writing done so I'd log off feeling like I really accomplished something good."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Other times I'd log off happier because I just spent time with the woman I was in love with, or hung out with friends, or had a good role-playing session, or just had fun playing the game with some other people."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Most of the time I was role-playing would fall in this category. There were some really talented RPers that I got to hang out with and we had a blast when we'd really get going."
You ask in auran, "What happened when you logged off after one of these times?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Well, at the risk of sounding really casual about it, I'd do whatever."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I'd watch TV, I'd read, go to work, go to class, talk to someone, play a different game, whatever."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But I'd do it in a good mood."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Unless something happened to make me lose it, sometimes that good mood would stick with me for a day or so, because I'd keep remembering what happened."
You say in auran, "Ok, shifting gears slightly again."
You ask in auran, "In general, in your mind, do the people you encountered online seem to fall into any sort of groupings?"

Tahab asks in lokkath, "You mean like social groups? Clicks?"
You say in auran, "Cliques :)"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Yeah, them."

Tahab grins.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Several actually."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There were a lot of "this or that" types of groups. Role-player or non-role-player. Assassin or non-assassin."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Players and power-mudders."
You ask in auran, "Can you explain what a power-mudder is?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "A munchkin. :)"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Someone who is out to be the biggest, baddest whatever, so be able to say they're the best at something, the highest level, the most remorts, the most money, the most cool eq, whatever."

Tahab says in lokkath, "They just want to be the best at something and lord it over everyone else. They're all about the numbers of the game, the most hit points, the lowest armor class, the highest damage modifier, etc."
Tahab says in lokkath, "They don't care about enjoying the playing of the game, that's just a way for them to be the best whatever."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I think power-mudders are like people who don't eat to enjoy the taste of the food, they eat to gain muscle mass, and it doesn't matter what they eat as long as they end up bigger than anyone else around them so they can strut about it."
You say in auran, "That's a good analogy."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Thanks :)"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Personality wise tho, there were several different types you'd meet."
Tahab says in lokkath, "There were those who were there to make friends. Those people weren't really there to play the MUD, but to use the MUD to make personal connections."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I remember one imm getting kicked off the MUD for using it to stalk female players, so sometimes using it to be social was abused, but that only happened a couple times in the whole time the MUD has been here."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Some people were there for attention, sort of trolling for it. They tended to be what I call the MUD kittens, the ones who go "I'm so cute, tee-hee, you want to give me stuff" and people do it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The person I talked about earlier that made me log off upset was one of these."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There were those who were here to play the game. They didn't interact much, they were intent on experiencing the adventure of the MUD and pitting themselves against it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "And there were the assassins, the people who were here to pit themselves against other people."
You say in auran, "The people involved in player-versus-player stuff."

Tahab nods.

Tahab asks in lokkath, "When the arena was put in, a lot of people gave up playing assassins. Why risk your stuff if you could fight someone in the arena, prove who was better, and not lose your eq in the process?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "That's all I can think of."
You say in auran, "If you think of more later, feel free to mention it."
You ask in auran, "Did you perceive any sort of social groups/cliques on the MUD?"

Tahab laughs out loud.

Tahab asks in lokkath, "You mean besides the clans and religions?"

Tahab grins.
You say in auran, "Any."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There were a ton."
Tahab says in lokkath, "You had clans, which players and sometimes imms created around an idea or philosophy."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Religions came in later and never really took off but they had the same idea."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But there were other groups, social groups, that would run around."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Miss Cute Kitten had a group that eventually wound up being part of a clan, but at first it was people from a bunch of different clans and some who weren't in any clans."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But the biggest group division was the perceived us vs them mentality, us being the players and them being the imms."

Tahab says in lokkath, "People saw the imms as opposing the best interests of the MUD because the imms created the rules, the zones, the structure of the MUD, and I think because they made the challenges the players faced."

Tahab says in lokkath, "They saw the imms as opposing their ability to do whatever they wanted to do."
Tahab says in lokkath, "And they were right, since the imms made sure people followed the rules and such, but it always seemed strange to me."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The imms created this place and everything in it specifically to interest players, and then the players tended to see the imms as trying to ruin their fun or whatever."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I never understood that view but it was definitely there."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I'm done."
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You ask in auran, "You've talked about this a little already, but can you talk more about communicating or meeting folks from the MUD offline?"

Tahab nods.

Tahab says in lokkath, "I guess that started back in the BBS days too."
Tahab says in lokkath, "I'd gotten involved in a BBS that had some really good discussion going on, and gotten to know the guy who ran it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I suggested we have a picnic and actually meet face-to-face. He liked the idea, and so we had our first Fest."

Tahab says in lokkath, "We had a picnic in a park that was fairly central to everyone since they all lived in approximately the same area."

Tahab says in lokkath, "We ended up having a few of those, and I made friends with many of the people I met that day. I ended up dating a couple of them, although neither relationship turned out well."

Tahab smirks.

Tahab says in lokkath, "But I'm still friends with some of them to this day, and that was almost 20 years ago now."

Tahab says in lokkath, "When I got to RoA, I suggested the same thing to the guy who ran it and he liked the idea."

Tahab says in lokkath, "He lives in New York, me in Michigan, so we picked Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio as our meeting point."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Four of us from Michigan met three from New York, and we had a blast."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "We ended up doing fests for how many years?"

You say in auran, "Almost 10 I think."

Tahab nods.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Camping, going to CP again, playing Mini-Gold, riding go-karts, all sorts of stuff."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "I remember the one year we ended up in the cave, what was it called do you remember?"

You ask in auran, "Ummm... the earth crack?"
Tahab exclaims in lokkath, "That was it!"

Tahab says in lokkath, "That was a lot of fun."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "Will there be any more fests?"
You shrug.
You say in auran, "Doesn't look like it at the moment, but only time will tell."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There were also three women that I met from MUDs in a romantic way."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The first was from Viking, and she was creepy. My first attempt at crossing that online offline boundary, and it didn't work out well at all."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The second time was the woman I fell in love with. Looking back, if I hadn't married the woman I'm married to now, I'd probably have married the woman I met from Viking who followed me to RoA."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The third woman I met on RoA turned out to be way too young for me. She was 18, I was in my early 30s, and the maturity and life experience difference was really huge."

Tahab says in lokkath, "She was much more infatuated with me than I with her, and I can't say that it ended well, but we've since gotten to be friends again."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I think that's it."
You ask in auran, "Did meeting someone offline change the relationship you had with them online at all?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Sometimes."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It always sort of clarified the relationship. If you already liked someone online, and you met them offline, most times you continued to like them and that sense of friendship or whatever got stronger."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Likewise, if you already didn't like them, chances were that you'd continue to dislike them when you met them in person."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Not always tho."
Tahab says in lokkath, "One of the other imms here that was here before me used to really dislike me, and I returned the feeling."

Tahab says in lokkath, "He thought I was an asshole, I thought he was an arrogant twit."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But after meeting in person, we both got to see that what we were interpreting from our online interaction was due largely to the fact that we couldn't hear each other's voice or see each other's face or gestures."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Once we added those into the interaction, we realized that the other wasn't like we had thought, and we got to be friends."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I remember meeting the guy who ran RoA for the first time. I was so intimidated by him online because he was "the boss"."

Tahab says in lokkath, "When I met him in person, he was actually sort of physically intimidating! He was a computer programmer so I pictured one type of person, but he looked like a pro basketball player."

Tahab says in lokkath, "He had a deep voice, but an easy-going personality, liked to laugh, and was fun to hang out with, so the intimidation faded"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Done."
You were idle for 6 minutes.
You ask in auran, "Considering that your MUD relationships have sometimes crossed into RL relationships, have you ever found that language from the MUD community specifically has crossed over as well?"

Tahab proudly exclaims 'Woot!'
You grin.
You say in auran, "Yes, like that."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I started out hating that word. That was when he and I didn't get along. Now I say it all the time."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I also say heh sometimes, thanks to someone else using it on here a lot."
Tahab says in lokkath, "And I have to remember if I'm talking to someone about the MUD or something that happened on it that there's a lot of stuff they won't understand if they haven't played a MUD before."
You ask in auran, "Like what?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Like talking about zones, or ticks, or npcs, or repops, or mobs, or stat-ing something."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Things that are pretty specific to MUDs in general."
You nod.
You say in auran, "Ok, just a couple more questions. :)"

Tahab says in lokkath, "No problem."
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time while MUDding?"

Tahab laughs out loud.
Tahab says in lokkath, "Constantly. I'd get wrapped up in role-playing, or building, or whatever, and lose all track of time."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I'd look up and hours would have passed that I was completely unaware of."
You ask in auran, "Would you say that it's similar to losing track of time doing something else, or would you say that it's unique somehow?"

Tahab sinks into deep thought.

Tahab says in lokkath, "It depends."

Tahab says in lokkath, "For role-playing or talking to people, it's about the same as losing yourself in a really good and interesting face-to-face conversation."

Tahab says in lokkath, "For building, I'd say it's similar to getting lost doing anything that requires you to really focus on it in order to do it well."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But when you're just playing in general, it's kind of unique."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Ticks make it feel different from everything else. When you see a tick happen, you know that an hour has passed in the MUD, and that's completely separate from any other idea of time."
Tahab says in lokkath, "You start counting ticks, since spells and attacks work on ticks sometimes."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "Your stone skin spell will wear off in two ticks, and you're in a big fight. Will it last until you finish or will it fade in mid-fight and make you lose?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Oh, and the idea that your character gets hungry and thirsty has something to do with the unique idea of time on the MUD too."

Tahab says in lokkath, "A character needs to eat and drink much more often than the person playing it does. Sometimes seeing the "You are hungry" message on the screen reminds the player that they need to eat too."

Tahab grins.
You were idle for 6 minutes.
You smile.
You nod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "The MUD also has its own day and night, and that can mess you up sometimes. You get done with a big fight, you go to sell your stuff, and the store is closed. You type time and the MUD tells you that it's 3 am."

Tahab says in lokkath, "So there's definitely a unique part to dealing with time on a MUD."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Done."
You ask in auran, "Last question: Have you ever found yourself reacting to the physical environment on the MUD?"

Tahab asks in lokkath, "What do you mean?"

You ask in auran, "Well, if the MUD tells you the space you're in is a certain size, do you ever feel yourself reacting to it?"

Tahab says in lokkath, "Oh, i see what you're asking."

Tahab sinks into deep thought.

Tahab says in lokkath, "Sometimes."
Tahab says in lokkath, "It depends on how into what I'm doing I am I guess."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It's like reading a good book. If the writing is good and you get drawn in, you'll have some sort of physical reaction."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I've found myself feeling closed in when wandering around dark tunnels where I knew that I might die."

Tahab says in lokkath, "My character I mean."
You nodnod.

Tahab says in lokkath, "It's like that. If I get engrossed in what I'm doing, I'll start reacting to it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "It's like I forget that i'm looking at a computer screen, I'm actually thinking and reacting like my character and what happens to him is what I feel. Not everything, but some things like atmosphere. The big things."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Kinda like playing Resident Evil... that game made me jump so many times while I was playing it because something unexpected would happen. I even yelled a couple times."

Tahab says in lokkath, "There were places like that on the MUD for me. They were written really well, and there was some suspense, and when something happened that took me by surprise, I'd actually be surprised and jump or yell."

Tahab says in lokkath, "That sort of experience helped me when I was writing too. I'd try deliberately to write areas that would create that sort of experience for other people."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I spent a lot of time making sure things were spelled right and that the sentences made sense and flowed well."

Tahab says in lokkath, "My favorite compliments were when people would tell me "I was on the edge of my seat, biting my nails, waiting to see if this would all work out or not" because of something I'd written or was role-playing."

Tahab asks in lokkath, "Is that what you were talking about?"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Right on the money. :)"
You ask in auran, "Ok, that's all I have... is there anything else you'd like to add before I stop logging?"

Tahab sinks into deep thought.

Tahab says in lokkath, "I think one of my favorite experiences with MUDding is when, like I was talking about a minute ago, the computer kind of disappears."

Tahab says in lokkath, "You're so into what you're doing that you no longer recognize that there's a computer, that you're typing, or that you're responding with your fingers instead of you face or your body."

Tahab says in lokkath, "That's when you're fully into the game, really keyed into the action going on within the MUD itself, and almost completely oblivious about anything going on in RL."

Tahab says in lokkath, "That doesn't happen as often as I'd like it to, but when it does it's amazing."

Tahab says in lokkath, "When you're talking to someone, and they say something funny, and you don't even think about smiling or laughing, but your fingers type smile or laugh."

Tahab says in lokkath, "The computer becomes like an extension of you, the extra arms that allow you to reach into the MUD world and be there instead of having this thing between you and it."

Tahab says in lokkath, "That's just an amazing experience. As I get older I find it harder and harder to shut out the real world and let myself drift into a world on the screen, but it still happens every so often."

Tahab says in lokkath, "Usually it happens when something really intense is going on and it requires a lot of focus to keep up and do what needs to be done."

Tahab says in lokkath, "But it's always, always fun."

Tahab says in lokkath, "I think that's all I wanted to say."

You were idle for 5 minutes.
You say in auran, "Ok. Thanks very much, this will be very helpful! Ending the log now."
Tahab asks in lokkath, "Let me know how it turns out, ok?"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Log ends."
APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - TANEIT

You say in auran, "Ok, logging."
You say in auran, "First, the official stuff. :)")
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "yes"
You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interview, just so you know. :)")
You say in auran, "So you can say whatever you want about whoever you want. :)")

Taneit says in daeweyn, "k"
You say in auran, "Basically I'm interested in your experienced with MUDs. I'm going to ask what amount to "starter" questions, and then sit back and have you tell me stories."
You say in auran, "So say as much as you are comfortable with about what I'm going to ask, there's no such thing as "too much" information."

Taneit nods.
You say in auran, "And if I ask a question before you're done answering the previous one, just ignore the question, finish what you're saying, and then I can repeat the question (if necessary)."
Taneit says in daeweyn, "k"
You ask in auran, "The first question's an easy one: How did you first get involved in MUDding?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "Sapron introduced me to this mud, which was the first one i had played, she told me about an online game that i would like"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "so i said sure and logged on"
You ask in auran, "What were your first impressions when you joined the MUD? What did you think of it?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "at first i was a bit overwhelmed, all the new things i had to learn and having to get my bearings straight"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "but it was all very exciting"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "that was the first time i had really participated in a group type setting online"
You ask in auran, "And once you got past the initial stages, what did you think of the group online experience?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "it was cool, all types of different people with their opposing opinions and personalities, made it an interesting place to want to be in"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "you'll occasionally run into the jerk or whatnot, but the overall experience was enjoyable, it made me not want to leave because i might miss something" You nod. You smile.
You ask in auran, "What year did you start MUDding, and are you still playing?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "hmm....i think i started in the spring of 95 and played up until umm....last year"
You nod. You ask in auran, "So when you create a character on the MUD, how do you pick what to "be" online?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "at first, it was cool to think about trying to be seen as an elf or whatever, but i never could really get into the roleplaying aspect of mudding, so then i just started creating characters based on what would get me the best skills for a certain class"
You ask in auran, "So was your choice of what to be online ever related to what you are like offline?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i don't think so, mudding, for me, was to be someone different than what i was in real life"
You ask in auran, "Did you ever make a specific character because you were in a certain mood at the time?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "yup, i actually created a female character to see how i was treated, even role played her for a while, tried to keep her in character all the time, but it actually got kind of boring, so i basically dropped the persona and just did the whole slash-and-kill thing instead of roleplaying"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i don't think it was jealousy per se, just wanted to see why a female character would get more help, even if they wouldn't be a help in the game"
You ask in auran, "And did you get an answer to that question?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "heh, not really, i just chalked it up to horny teenage/college guys ;P"
You go 'Heh.'
You nod.
You say in auran, "You mentioned earlier that one of the things that you liked about MUDding was the ability to interact with a wide variety of people."

Taneit nods.
You ask in auran, "Based on your experiences, what do you think of the other people who MUD?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i think they were a bunch of good people, maybe not the most popular people in the group, but people who would want to help out if you were in trouble"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "like me, i wasn't the most popular kid, i didn't really go out to clubs and stuff, but i had my small group of friends that would do fun stuff"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Do the people you encountered seem to fall into groups in your mind? Types of personalities, etc.?"
Taneit says in daeweyn, "sorry, had to take a call"
You were idle for 5 minutes.
You say in auran, "No problem."
Taneit says in daeweyn, "i don't think i really categorized people when i met them"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Looking back, can you see any groups/types of players that stand out in your mind?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "they're personalities really didn't make me think they were a certain type of person, because for the most part, i would think that was their online personality, not their real life personality"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i think the ones that stood out most were the ones that just wanted to have fun"
You nod.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "they'd get big groups of people together to do whatever, raid a ficticious castle or just get drunk online or whatnot"
You go 'Heh.'
You nod.
You ask in auran, "What kinds of relationships did you have with the other people on the MUDs you played on?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "just friends really, the only people i've met from the muds were the people i knew already from my local area, i never really developed a deep deep connection with anyone online, but i did make some good friends while playing online"
You ask in auran, "Did these friendships carry over outside of the MUD environment?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "for the most part though, they were acquaintances (sp?) that were just there as part of the game, i really didn't take those friends out of the game"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "so i guess that answered that question, heh"
You chuckle.
You say in auran, "Yes it did. :)
You ask in auran, "And did I understand you correctly, that you've never met anyone from the MUD offline that you didn't already know offline?"

Taneit nods.
Mouseglove scratches that sequence of questions off the list. ;)

Taneit says in daeweyn, "dee and i talkd about going to the RoA fests, but never happened"
You nod.
You say in auran, "Well, wait... I can still ask this one."

Taneit says in daeweyn, "k"
You ask in auran, "Did your interactions on the MUD change how you dealt with the people you know offline when you were with them offline?"
You ask in auran, "Did anything happen online that carried over?"
You ask in auran, "Did anything happen offline that carried back onto the MUD?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "umm, for the most part, no, i don't think i've ever had to do something online that would affect my offline friendships, they'd know if something was going to happen that would make us online enemies or whatever"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "and my friends offline were a bunch of laid-back people, so we never really got into fights that would affect us online"
You ask in auran, "You said "for the most part"... was there an exception at some point?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "although,"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "doh"
You quirk an eyebrow.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "well, i was addicted to mudding for a while, back when i first started, while it didn't really affect how my characters interacted with my friends' characters, the addiction did affect my real life"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Was there ever a time when something happened with another character(s) online that resulted in you logging off feeling angry or frustrated?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "o yeah, there were a couple of times, but it wasn't because of a strained friendship or anything like that, it was more misunderstanding of whatever the situation was"
You ask in auran, "What did you do when you got up from the keyboard in those instances?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "hmm.....good question, i don't think i did anything rash, like throw stuff or drink, maybe more like just went home and watched tv to get my mind off of the situation"
You nod.
Taneit says in daeweyn, "I'm pretty laid-back, although I do hold grudges longer than I should, but I don't think I carried them back online, I never lashed out at another character just because I was pissed."

Taneit says in daeweyn, "Although if there was a legitimate reason for my character to hunt down that character, well, that's a different story ;)

You go 'Heh.'
You nod.

You ask in auran, "On the other side, was there ever a time when something happened with another character(s) that resulted in you logging off feeling happy or pleased?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "Sure, plenty of times, helping people get their stuff back, or complete some hard quest, or just having a good time OOC for that night to make the first part of the day wash away."

You ask in auran, "What did you do when you got up from the keyboard in those instances?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "I'd log on because it was still a nice place to go to get away from the troubles of real life, so I'd generally log off happy."

Taneit says in daeweyn, "Heh, not much really, probably go to sleep because it was a long session.

You ask in auran, "But did you still feel better/happier after you logged off and got up?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "I never kept a journal or anything about my life, I suppose if I did, there'd be mentions of the mud everywhere."
You nod.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "Yeah, I'd still feel pretty good, sometimes it'd carry over to the next morning."

You ask in auran, "Based on your experiences, have you ever noticed any social groups/cliques on a MUD?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "O yeah, plenty of cliques on the muds, but you just have to take them in stride, even though it's a fantasy game, some people still bring that pack mentality online and try to surround themselves with people who think like them or in some cases people who would help them gain that next level or get that better piece of eq."

You ask in auran, "What would be some examples of the cliques you've seen? What types of personalities inhabit them?"
Taneit says in daeweyn, "i mostly saw the groups that stuck together that knew almost every inch of the mud, so that they could get the best pieces of eq and wouldn't want to share with other people, i'm not sure if they had assholish personalities, but i definitely felt an air of elitism from them, like, "look at me, you wish you were like me"

Taneit shrugs.
You nod.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "sometimes i felt jealous, but it wasn't because of them, it was because they knew more of the game then i did, and that's fairly easy to overcome with time"
You smile softly.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "part of the addiction problem i had, heh"
You say in auran, "I've felt that too from time to time actually."
You ask in auran, "Has any of the language or slang from MUD ever crossed over into your offline communication?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "hmm...."

Taneit says in daeweyn, "well, i did say "woot" a lot because of the mud"
You smile.
You ask in auran, "Did you ever have to explain to someone not familiar with the MUD what something you said meant?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "but i can't remember using something from the mud to convey my thoughts to other people if they didn't play the game"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "occasionally, i'd just say, it's somethign i picked up playing a mud, thenjust say what it meant"
You nod.
Taneit says in daeweyn, "i never had to get in-depth with my explanations"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "because the poeple i hung out with were mostly computer people, so they'd take it as no big deal"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time MUDding?"

Taneit laughs out loud.
Taneit says in daeweyn, "more times than i'd like to admit"
You grin.
You ask in auran, "Would you say it's similar to losing track of time in another endeavor, or is it a unique sort of loss of time sense?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i used to have to play at the libraries at school because their connection was faster and it seemed like just minutes before the announcement would come saying they were closing in ten minutes"

Taneit sinks deeply into her own thoughts.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i think it's unique, because there was really no way to judge how long you'd been there without looking at an outside source, like a watch or the sky or whatever"
You nod.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "as opposed to say, playing poker with your friends, there are times when blinds go up and stuff, so you kind of knew when time passed"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "I've been trying to remember what name you used to use when you were here... and one name just popped to mind: Roljur? Was that one of yours?"

Taneit nods.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "Taneit, Roljur, Vuldymon, Liem, Xaphoos"
You say in auran, "That character's still here. :)

Taneit goes ooOOooOooOoo.
You smile.
You say in auran, "Good, my brain can let go of that one now. :)

Taneit goes 'Heh.'
You say in auran, "Next questions: Have you ever been playing a MUD and found yourself physically or mentally reacting to the virtual geography? For example..."
You ask in auran, "Feeling a little bit "closed in" if the area were tight quarters, or experiencing a mental expanse based on having a large area described to you?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "not really, i'd only get frustrated when i lost my way around an area or a maze, but never felt like i was suffocating or anything"
You ask in auran, "It doesn't have to be an overwhelming feeling... when you lost your way, did you actually feel lost?"
You say in auran, "Major or minor doesn't really make any difference. :)

Taneit says in daeweyn, "not really, i knew that it was just a game, just like reading a book, i knew that i wouldn't be affected in real life, so i never thought about it as if i was experiencing the moment"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Thinking back over what we've talked about, is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish? Any additional answers to any of the questions?"

Taneit shrugs.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "not really, i mean, i could talk about the addiction aspect, but i'm not sure if that's relevant to your thesis"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "errr dissertation"
You say in auran, "Anything you want to talk about is fine by me, whether it ends up being useful or not. :)
You say in auran, "I was going to ask what you found so addicting about it, actually, but that question got lost in the shuffle."

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i dunno really, just trying to get the next level, the better piece of eq, i guess just trying to be at the top of the who list"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i guess i'm competitive like that"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "What was it about being "on top of the who list" that made it important?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i guess it just feels good to see your name at the top, knowing that you've put in the time and effort and seeing that effort being rewarded by seeing your name up there"
You ask in auran, "Did you find that people reacted to you differently when you were there?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "maybe having other people see your name up there and saying, wow, he kicks ass"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So the addiction aspect was more about proving yourself against the game/other players?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i'd get more requests to help out with stuff, maybe to help get better eq or to get their corpse back, but nothing too crazy"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i guess that was it"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "trying to be the best"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "So which would you say was the more pleasurable/enticing part of the game: the social interaction or the competitiveness of the game itself?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "after i knew how to play the game, it was about trying to beat the game, which can't really be beaten, but if you can stand at the top, then it's just as good"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "i think it was both, at times, when i'd log on and wouldn't see the "fun" people, i'd try to beat the game"
You nod.
You say in auran, "That makes sense."
You smile.

Taneit says in daeweyn, "when i logged on to hang out with people, the game really didn't matter too much"
You ask in auran, "Is there anything else you'd like to bring up before we finish?"

Taneit says in daeweyn, "nope, i guess that's it"
You say in auran, "Ok. :) Ending the log now, time elapsed: 1 hour, 36 minutes."
APPENDIX L: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - UTCAREM

You say in auran, "Log begun."
You say in auran, "Time, 8:08."
You say in auran, "Ok, first off... the official stuff."
You say in auran, "This research is being conducted in conjunction with Ohio University. All information gained through this interview, and any subsequent follow-up interviews, is solely for the purposes of academic research."
You say in auran, "You will be assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the interview procedure and that pseudonym will be substituted for your name immediately. No one but myself will know your actual online identity."
You say in auran, "You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this interviewing process."
You say in auran, "The interview process will be a semi-formal conversation, and if you become uncomfortable with the current topic of discussion at any time, you may request that the topic be discontinued and your request will be honored immediately."
You say in auran, "The initial interview should take no longer than two hours. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview process, I can be reached by e-mail at js644901@ohiou.edu and will be happy to answer them."
You say in auran, "Likewise, if you would like a copy of your interview transcript after we have completed the interview, I would be happy to provide you one electronically."
You ask in auran, "By consenting to this interview, you are giving me full rights to use anything said in the interview for academic research purposes, including publication. Do you wish to continue with the interview?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Yes I do wish to continue with the interview process."
You say in auran, "_All_ names will be given pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interview, just so you know. :)"

Utcarem says in auran, "I understand"
You say in auran, "Ok."
You smile.
You ask in auran, "First question's an easy one: How did you first get involved in MUDding?"

Utcarem says in auran, "My sister showed me the game a few years ago."
You ask in auran, "What did you think when she showed it to you?"

Utcarem says in auran, "She played for a few years before she introduced me to the game"
Utcarem says in auran, "I was so intrigued that I made a character and immediately spend the first evening playing the game."
You ask in auran, "Do you remember what she told you about it?"

Utcarem says in auran, "She told me it was fun and exciting way to meet new people and that it was medival based."

Utcarem says in auran, "Before that I never really played any online games, actually it was my first online game of any kind, even hearts or the simple games"
You nod.
You ask in auran, "And based on your initial exposure to the game, what did you think of it?"

Utcarem says in auran, "It drew me in and I spent horus on a daily and nightly basis playing the game. I couldn't think of anything else until I had it mastered. But that was impossible because the game was always changing, the people always changed."
You say in auran, "When you're making a character for a MUD, how do you pick what to "be"?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Well, I must be simple minded, either that or racist. I was always human. When I did make a different raced character it was evil or bad or deranged or self hating."

Utcarem says in auran, "I am not sure if there are really any underlying issues with why I always picked a human but it was a well rounded individual and humans could be more classes than any other race."

Utcarem says in auran, "As far as what profession I held, I figured always start out a fighter, if you can fight you can learn anything else and not die while trying to learn a new profession."
You nod.
You say in auran, "So is your choice of what and/or who to be on the MUD related to who you are in "real life?"

Utcarem says in auran, "I do not believe so. I normally based what/who to be on what was the most powerful and what could learn the most skills. Power hungry, that is what fed my decisions."
You say in auran, "Do you see that same thirst for power anywhere in your "real life?"
Utcarem says in auran, "No, I think I have a firm grip on reality. I understand the difference between real and make believe."

Utcarem says in auran, "It is just a game."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "In general, what do you think of other people who MUD?"

Utcarem says in auran, "However, the people playing the game with you are real and many real life situations evolve from playing the game."
You say in auran, "Btw, if you have more to say on a subject, please do. I can re-ask the next question when you're done. :)"

Utcarem says in auran, "I think some are just trying to escape reality. Some people may be trying to find that certain someone while enjoying the game. Others I believe are just out to have a good time."

Utcarem says in auran, "I have no facts or figures on anything of this nature, just my personal opinion."
You nod.

Utcarem says in auran, "With anything anywhere, there are predators and evil minded people that abuse things. But those people are few and far between."
You ask in auran, "Do the people you've encountered on MUDs seem to fall into any general categories or groups in your mind?"
You ask in auran, "You mentioned a few above... have you perceived any more? Any sub-groups within those you've already mentioned?"

Utcarem says in auran, "I find them in three general groups."

Utcarem says in auran, "youngsters, 12-15 they seem to be testing their maturity and stretching their minds."

Utcarem says in auran, "high school/college aged people. they seem to be networking for friendship and having fun gaming."
Utcarem says in auran, "older crowd, say 28-30+ is actually enjoying the writing and the dynamics of the game."

Utcarem says in auran, "in my opinion"
You nod.
Utcarem says in auran, "I do not see out of doors adventurous people playing"
You ask in auran, "What kinds of relationships do you have with other people on
MUDs?"

Utcarem says in auran, "...Over the years I have built strong personal relationships with a
number of people I would otherwise never had been given the opportunity to meet."

Utcarem says in auran, "I consider some of the people I met through online gaming
(MUD's not graphical gaming) my strongest friends and I can lean on them for support if
I need it"
You ask in auran, "You say "some of the people." What kinds of relationships do you
have with the other people the ones who don't fall into that category?"

Utcarem says in auran, "the same I have with mutual friends. If I saw them on the street I
would say Hello and have a good weekend and leave it at that."

Utcarem says in auran, "There have only been a few people I disliked."

Utcarem says in auran, "I did just as I would in real life, I avoided them."
You ask in auran, "Have you perceived any social groupings that form on a MUD?"

Utcarem says in auran, "yes, I have seen people group together. The power mudders stick
together and kill things, the people that enjoy ...

Utcarem says in auran, "the people that enjoy role playing stick together and real life
friends stick together"

Utcarem says in auran, "it seems that real life friendships roll over into online gaming."
You say in auran, "Let's talk about that for a minute, since you brought it up."
You ask in auran, "Did you ever communicate with or meet someone that you originally
met on the MUD in an offline setting?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Yes, I have met several people that game on this MUD, no other
online game. I have met a couple dozen people that I met on this MUD."

Utcarem says in auran, "I have been camping with a group of players and staff members."

Utcarem says in auran, "I have also met and gamed with another group of players"
You ask in auran, "Did your relationship with them online affect the way you dealt with
them in a face-to-face setting?"
Utcarem says in auran, "I don't believe so. As I said before, it is just a game."
You ask in auran, "So your relationship with them online was completely separate from your relationship with them offline?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Sometimes people play a bad guy or crazy and that doesn't make them that way in real life"

Utcarem says in auran, "no, your last statement isn't true either"

Utcarem says in auran, "..."
You ask in auran, "Can you explain it a bit more then, so I understand what you're saying?"

Utcarem says in auran, "My wife also played and I went off the deep end and went crazy mad when someone tried to take it offline. Once the other person knew I was willing to go to Texas just to kick his ass he backed off. I still treated him poorly even his other characters"

Utcarem says in auran, "There are certain issues that I have no problem holding a grudge."
You ask in auran, "Ok, so you made a distinction between the character(s) and the person behind the character(s)?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Yes, I always did, again, to me, characters are just that, characters, like watching a movie or a cartoon. They are make believe."

Utcarem says in auran, "some people took their character and wrapped it into their personal real life."
You say in auran, "How could you tell when someone was the "real" them as opposed to when they were their "character"?"
Utcarem says in auran, "the begin to believe that they are the character. I am not one of those people. Those people are the ones you read about and see on the news for hacking up their buddy."

Utcarem says in auran, "Most people spoke OOC (out of character) and when they were in character you knew the person well enough ooc to know they were in "character" mode."
You ask in auran, "How easily did you find people were willing to be "themselves" to you, to step out of character and interact as the player instead?"
Utcarem says in auran, "After a while, you get to really know someone and you know when they are 'in character' and when they were in real life"

Utcarem says in auran, "I found that I was genuine and honest while playing. People seem more than happy to talk about their personal lives online."

Utcarem says in auran, "I think people are so willing to talk about their personal lives online because there is no face to face interaction."

Utcarem says in auran, "Sort of like talking to a priest in confessional."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Once you'd met them face-to-face, did it change how you interacted with them online?"

Utcarem says in auran, "yes and no"

Utcarem says in auran, "(ooc) I will elaborate"
You say in auran, "Please do. :)"

Utcarem says in auran, "I need a drink, give me a few seconds. like 60 or so"
You say in auran, "No problem."

Utcarem says in auran, "I was more relaxed with them after I met them personally."

Utcarem says in auran, "I joked a bit more with them and kept in closer contact with them. I naturally formed stronger relationships with people I met in person."

Utcarem says in auran, "For the most part, people I met face to face formed stronger relationships and the people I haven't met are more like mutual friends."
You were idle for 6 minutes.
You ask in auran, "For the most part... what happened in the instances that aren't part of 'for the most part'?"

Utcarem says in auran, "They are more like mutual friends. The sort of people I would simply say hello in passing, maybe chat for a bit but nothing too personal or stringent."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Was there ever a time when something happened online that made you log off the MUD in anger or frustration?"
Utcarem says in auran, "log off... Not that I can think of... Well yes."

Utcarem says in auran, "Trying over and over to defeat a part of the game and just not being capable at the time."

Utcarem says in auran, "So, you log off to refresh your mind and try again later." You nod.

Utcarem says in auran, "Not any one incident that I can think of."

Utcarem says in auran, "Never over a person or character, I do not let people affect me like that normally" You nod.
You ask in auran, "Normally... was there an exception ever?"

Utcarem says in auran, "I would rather force them offline, why should I log off and sugger, heh"

Utcarem says in auran, "sure, the only exception was with a character that treid to have my wife contact him offline and I went nuts, buit I didn't log off."
You nod.
You ask in auran, "Was there ever a time when you logged off in a better mood than when you logged on?"

Utcarem says in auran, "sure often. It was an escape, Log on, kill some baddied and take frustration out on something fake."

Utcarem says in auran, "I also got to talk to friends and 'let it all out', so to speak." You ask in auran, "So what happened when you logged off? Either in the case of the worse moods or better moods... would the change in mood carry over into your off-MUD life?"
> 
Utcarem says in auran, "somewhat, it depended what set my mode off." You ask in auran, "How so?"

Utcarem says in auran, "If it were real life stuff going on (IE OOC stuff) then that crap mase more likely to carry over. I had no problem leaving the in charcter stuff on the game" You nod.
You ask in auran, "How long have you been MUDding?"
You say in auran, "I forgot to ask that back at the beginning. :)"

Utcarem says in auran, "since 1999 I think, December of 1999"
You say in auran, "So close to seven years."
You nod.

Utcarem says in auran, "almost 7 years then, WHOO HOOO"
You ask in auran, "So, thinking about your interactions with other people on the MUD, what is the best memory that comes to mind?"

Utcarem asks in auran, "best happiest or best strongest (be it good or bad)?"
You say in auran, "Best happiest."
You say in auran, "We'll get to best worst in a minute."
You smile softly.

Utcarem says in auran, "ok. I think I need to think about that one for a moment"
You say in auran, "Please do."

Utcarem says in auran, "ok, I think I need to say there is no one good memory. I have a great memory of everyone being on and spending good quality time with each other."

Utcarem says in auran, "Not just one moment but many make up my favorite memory"
You nod.

Utcarem says in auran, "the experience as a whole."
You ask in auran, "What experience with regard to your interactions with other people on the MUD stands out as the worst experience in your mind?"
Utcarem says in auran, "I have two things in mind. One is the decline in MUD population. The whole idea that people just flat out do not MUD like they used to sadens my heart. It weighs heavily on me."

Utcarem says in auran, "the other..."

Utcarem says in auran, "The loss of an online friend wasn't devastating but I rarely look at the MUD screen and not have him flash through my mind."
You say in auran, "Tell me about that, if you wouldn't mind."

Utcarem says in auran, "Heck, I was at a giant food store last weekend and thought of him because of something from the MUD. He used to toss around a vat of pudding and I found a 1 gallon can of pudding"
Utcarem says in auran, "I even picked it up and in the middle of the store yelled, "May the pudding be with you!" My wife liked to fall over from how loud I was."

Utcarem says in auran, "Of course my twelve year old son had no idea what I was talking about, but he was right there with me laughing."
You smile.

Utcarem says in auran, "I must say that meeting him face to face made the loss more difficult than if I had never met him"
You nod.

Utcarem says in auran, "He stayed at my house on several occasions, he taught me how to play Magic the gathering, we played monopoly. He was just a good guy."

Utcarem says in auran, "Not the smartest or the best looking or the happiest but the nicest most well meaning guy I knew."

Utcarem says in auran, "Loosing him was more difficult because of actually meeting him."
You ask in auran, "Did your perception of the MUD and/or the people on it change after he died?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Not at all. Nothing really changed. It wasn't anything the MUD did that caused him to pass away."
You say in auran, "Ok, slight change of subject."
Utcarem says in auran, "ok"
You ask in auran, "Have you ever lost track of time MUDding?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Hell yes"
You grin.

Utcarem says in auran, "at the beginning, like the first few months, I couldn't get away from the computer."

Utcarem says in auran, "I would start to MUD at 6-8pm and all of a sudden it was 4-5 am and I had to work in 4 hours."
You ask in auran, "Would you say it's similar to losing track of time in another endeavor, or is it a unique sort of loss of time sense?"
Utcarem says in auran, "well loosing track of time is loosing track of time but I find when I am gaming, be it online or when playing a game deck I easily loose track of time."
You ask in auran, "So losing track of time MUDding is the same as... say... losing track of time fishing? Or driving? Or reading a book?"

Utcarem says in auran, "Yes, or watching tv or when working. To me it is anyway." You nod.
You say in auran, "Have you ever been playing a MUD and found yourself physically reacting to the virtual geography? For example..."
You ask in auran, "Feeling a little bit "closed in" if the area were tight quarters, or experiencing a mental expanse based on having a large area described to you?"

Utcarem says in auran, "No, not at all." You ask in auran, "Is there anything else you'd like to add, or anything else you'd like to say in answer to any of the previous questions, before we close the interview?"

Utcarem says in auran, "I want to stress how strongly you can bond relationships with those you meet online."
You ask in auran, "What do you mean exactly?"

Utcarem says in auran, "well, Let me think how to word it."

Utcarem says in auran, "I have formed friendships that are as strong or stronger than friendships I formed in real life growing up with people in the same small town of 2700 people."
Utcarem says in auran, "If you can form a friendship as strong online as you can in real life then there must be some credibility given to online relationships."
You ask in auran, "Have you found that people don't give the online relationships the same level of credibility as the offline relationships?"

Utcarem says in auran, "I hear and read about how online relationships are built on mistrust and lies. There are always the exceptions to the rule and I firmly believe that for the most part, people are more honest online than they are in real life."

Utcarem says in auran, "going back to that you cannot see me, I will probably never see you so why not be honest."

Utcarem says in auran, "the exceptions to the rule are people that lie online and feel the need to make themselves different than their real life person."
You ask in auran, "So you find the people who are honest about who they are to be more
common than those who lie about themselves?"

Utcarem says in auran, "they can be someone they aren't in real life and that is why
people think everyone online is liying and you cannot form honest relationships"

Utcarem says in auran, "I do think people are more honest online that liars."
You nod.

Utcarem says in auran, "I think that is it"
You say in auran, "Ok, ending the log then. Elapsed time: 1 hour, 50 minutes."

E-Mail Additional Question/Answer:

Q: Have any of your interactions on the MUD crossed over into your
offline life at all, with regard to language, etc.? For example, are
there any terms used solely online that you've found yourself
verbalizing offline? If so, have you ever had to explain to someone not familiar with the
MUD what the word/phrase you just used meant?

A: Yes they have crossed over into my offline life. I have used terms that are
primarily for online/MUD use and I feel the need to explain what they mean
to people that give me an odd look. I have also used my MUD names for
usernames, nicknames for other people and on my vehicles license plates. It
is pretty funny but I have found myself speaking in character offline to
people that also play the game. Most people that game find it funny and can
relate to why I am doing it.

It isn't just saying MUD means Multi-User blah blah blah. Because then the
person is just as confused so you have to go into explaining what exactly a
MUD is and why you said what ever it was you said.