LIFE AMONG THE RUINS: AN EXAMINATION OF MONUMENT AND POWER IN THE

ABANDONED GAME STAR WARS: GALAXIES

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Life Among the Ruins: An Examination of Monument and Power in the Abandoned Game
Star Wars: Galaxies

In the genre of Massively Multiplayer Online video games are titles that have been abandoned by their developers. These cloud-based games are inaccessible and disappear when shut down unless new servers are launched. Such is the case with *Star Wars Galaxies*, which was discontinued in 2011, but later pirated servers run by fans of the game continue to host the content for themselves. This study examines the community of one server (titled Legends), analyzing the virtual world and its player cities to draw conclusions about the players and their governments. This dissertation is a multi-method approach, employing archaeological methods (site mapping, structural analysis) and anthropological methods (semi-structured interviews, ethnography). Some of the findings are that players engage in spheres of governmental influence that interact with the play experience in different ways, that players aren't engaging in traditional forms of urbanization, and that these virtual cities and structures are more prone to change than consistency. These findings are relevant to studies and theories about virtual reality (VR) and future technologies such as the metaverse in that they reveal how players create meanings of place in the virtual, and how they create settlements and governments alongside and within the play experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It takes a village to write a dissertation. I would like to thank in general all the faculty who taught and mentored me during my coursework. All of you provided insight formally and informally for writing this dissertation. And thanks to those who gave me feedback on my work outside of class too (such as Maile Hutterer), and those I met at conferences when those were still a thing.

In specifics though, I would like to start with my friends and mentors, Amanda Cote and Maxwell Foxman. Thank you for all of the support you've given me from that first day we met in the library when we were all starting something new. You've been there for me in a lot of ways, and thanks for being on my committee as well. I would also like to thank my committee chair and advisor, Donna Davis, who has been the best advisor and cheerleader for me. You were like my academic grandma, and I appreciate everything you did to help me navigate this path. When I met with you as part of my campus tour four years ago, that's when I knew UO was the place for me. I also want to thank my outside committee member, Leah Lowthorp, who has nudged me when I was wandering through anthropology theory and managed to find ways to contribute to this study. I also want to acknowledge that this dissertation wouldn't have been finished without the help of therapy.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the unseen help and encouragement from my family. My wife and kids were the only reason that I stuck through this grueling process, and they helped me when I was broken, depressed, and stressed. Thank you for your love, your support, and your encouragement.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the dreamers, the explorers, and the creatives who are navigating the interdisciplinary game studies field as graduate students.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

Five years ago I was looking for a topic for a class paper in my master's degree program. I remembered the nostalgia that I had for an older Massively Multiplayer Online game— *Phantasy Star Online*—and did a small study on that. The germ of that paper has stuck with me through most of my graduate studies, manifesting in various academic conference presentations and early drafts of my dissertation concept. Up until a few years ago, I was going to do a multi-game ethnography across various dying Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs) to study the differences between their communities. While *Phantasy Star Online* was on the list, so was *Star Wars Galaxies (SWG)*, a game that came up a lot in the articles about abandoned MMOs that have been revived.

I had been struggling for a while to discover the theoretical angle to approach these games—such as studying them as ghost towns—and then found myself in the archaeogaming literature. This inspired me to take an archaeology class in the last term of my coursework, where once again I had to write a class paper. This time, the process of conducting digital archaeology inspired a change of direction to the dissertation into its current form: a multi-method analysis of how power and place are created via the player cities of this abandoned game, *SWG*, as a virtual ruin.

One of my interlocutors, Ivan, had a lot to say about nostalgia and his history with the game. I met him on the planet of Dantooine, an underdeveloped planet of sprawling purple grasslands and scrubby alien vegetation. This planet only had a small mention in the *Star Wars* movies—Princess Leia lied and said the Rebel base was on Dantooine—meaning it is one

unfamiliar and unique to players of the game. I've met Ivan outside their large generic house, one that is filled with Ivan's self-described treasures: weapons, paintings, furniture, server rewards, and themed rooms. While the house seems out of place, as a beige box among the magenta flowers and tentacle-like shrubs, the location carries a lot of meaning to Ivan, who has been visiting the Mining Outpost on this smaller planet forever.

Ivan's avatar was a male blue-skinned Rodian, the same alien species as Greedo from the first *Star Wars* movie. Its humanoid body is starkly in contrast to the very alien head: large dark eyes, tendrils instead of hair, and a wide nozzle-like mouth. We sat outside his house, as he and I chatted through the video conferencing software running in the background. His cordial nature shifted from the hearty laughter and jokes to a more somber and pensive tone as we discussed his nostalgia.

I asked if he's nostalgic in general for video games. He said that it entirely depends on the game and some he has "serious nostalgia" for. Some games he listed first are pillars of the MMO (massively multiplayer online) genre: World of Warcraft, Guild Wars 1 & 2, Black Desert Online. But Ivan said:

> I still have nostalgia feelings for other games long since past: X-Wing, TIE Fighter, X-Wing vs TIE Fighter, X-Wing Alliance, Dark Forces/Jedi Knight series, Republic Commandos, (the original) Star Wars Battlefront 1 & 2… mostly because…well, Star Wars.

It was interesting hearing him come to the conclusion after listing all of these games that he is nostalgic for are likely due to his love of *Star Wars*. Ivan has been involved in *SWG* for a long time, playing on the original servers as a teen and squeezing in as much time online as he could over his weekends.

I asked him about that experience, and the role that nostalgia played with this game. He took a moment and reflected on the first character he made, so many years ago. This game felt real to him, and brought the Star Wars galaxy into his life:

> I felt like the game was real, that Star Wars was real and I was living it. I spent probably an hour or more creating my Mon Calamari[1] character, Zandor Felok. I tweaked all of his looks, I studied how the beginner professions worked. And then, I stepped into Theed and a new life was happening. Through a whirlwind of months, I joined a guild, made a lot of friends, and had fun being a scrappy rebel…

Ivan still has strong memories of his first experience with the game, creating his first avatar and remembering its name all these years later. Zandor would bounce between professions regularly, as a Ranger, Combat Medic, Rifleman, and Creature Handler. Ivan still remembers his digital pets and claims they were almost as real and fun as his real world pets. The ghost of Zandor lives on in Ivan's current avatar as he plays the Commando profession, an analog to the earlier professions of the original game.

Years later, on the Legends server, Ivan still had a house on Dantooine. While not the same in code or appearance, the spirit of his player house never left this planet. His roots and memories are tied to this location, hunting with his guild, and running quests for the Pirates in the neutral zone. The virtual location had meaning to Ivan, who still erected and built new monuments with his player house and the city it is a part of.

Virtual worlds

I was attempting to complete one of my lightsaber quests and needed to venture to an oasis on the other side of Tatooine. I pulled out my speeder bike, and my avatar Tohy climbed aboard. As she straddled this hovering motorcycle, we oriented our self toward the way point—

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[1] The Mon Calamari race of fish-squid-like aliens first appeared in The Return of the Jedi, with Admiral Ackbar. His face has since been meme-fied for his iconic line: "It's a trap!"

the coordinates of our destination—and hit the gas. We made our way out of the city of Mos Eisley and were headed toward a desert plateau; I wasn't worried because my speeder bike can climb mountains in a hilarious fashion. As I crested the plateau, I immediately found myself surrounded by buildings. I tried to weave in and out of the structures, most of which were the same style of house, getting a little frustrated as I just wanted to speed through the landscape and was instead roadblocked. As time went by, I started to pay closer attention to the houses in my way; most were shades of beige to look like stucco igloos. Domes on the roof, square walls, and rounded doorways.

I was stunned by how many houses there were; on and on and on these structures went, nearly to the horizon. This was hard to tell actually, because the poor draw distance of the game meant I thought I was beyond the suburbs, just to see another wave materialize almost right in front of my speeder. This felt so surreal, to travel through waves and waves of houses, installations, and sometimes guild halls. All of this evidence of player life contrasted with my experience in this virtual world. I never ran into a player outside of an established city like Mos Eisley; I never ran into a player around or near a player structure. This experience, and others like it, made me feel like I was in virtual ruins, with evidence of prior life from the past, but nothing in the present. Tohy and I eventually made it out of these suburbs, and instead found ourselves drifting across the barren desert of Tatooine. The brown landscape felt flat, and I tuned out as I navigated with my map and compass to find this oasis, which was hundreds of meters away.

This feeling of wandering through a virtual world with signs of life, but no life itself, can also be found in some of my field note entries. From April 12, 2019 I wrote the following:

> I spent some time reworking my controls again, but at least this time I learned how to use auto-run, which made my lengthy traversals more bearable. Speaking of which,

that's what I did this play session. I had to run back to a spaceport, figure out how to fly my ship, travel to Naboo, run to the cave to find some lightsaber crystals, and then run back to a spaceport. I saw quite a bit of the landscape of Tatooine and Naboo today, and while it kind of was nice to have some new scenery, it wasn't that appealing. Still really empty, basic landscapes, with stuff like houses appearing only feet in front of me.

This echoes what I wrote just a few days earlier. Many of my initial notes of the game were of my reactions of the virtual world. I was comparing this game to other nostalgic games I had played recently, and one of my first findings was the landscape. From April 8, 2019 I wrote:

> I'm grateful for my speeder, which made the travel much quicker. Still really tedious and boring. The landscape is fairly empty, very basic, and non-descript. As I inched slowly towards the marker on my mini-map, I couldn't help but wonder why are these planets so massive, and yet so empty. It is an argument and debate that happens very frequently in Open World games: to be realistic (the world is filled with basic, boring landscapes, on a massive scale), or to be enjoyable (a world that is filled with meaningful and fun interactions and content).

> But I sped past complexes, villages, houses, and settlements. It is kind of cool that there is so much player-created content in this game, meaning that players created these houses and villages, instead of the developers. Kind of a crowdsourcing the map content.

At this stage in my study, I made the analogy that the emptiness of the world could be fixed or solved from player interventions. Instead of the game developers having to fill these virtual worlds with content, they could let the players crowdsource it. This initial reaction to SWG is part of why I wanted to examine these player cities. I wanted to examine how players are building structures, the power dynamics at play in their urbanization, and what this could mean if framed as virtual ruins and the conundrum of the present and past being fused together.

About this study

At the core of this study was an examination of how player cities are places and emblematic of the community. By mapping these player cities, I examined the tensions of power between individualism and collectivism in the community and analyzed the urbanization of these

virtual settlements. I interviewed players about their experiences in the game, what items they valued, and what home meant to them. Combined with my field notes, I distilled findings about how players are creating communities and imbuing the virtual space with meaning.

This dissertation—and the findings of how players created cities and the layers of power in their governments—are relevant to discussions of new technologies such as the metaverse.[2] If and when individuals enter this virtual space as players, there will be discussions on what home means in virtual reality (VR). The theory of material culture and how we can understand a culture from its objects then applies to immaterial, digital objects as well. The methods of this dissertation—of conducting site mapping and structural analysis—could also be applied to other virtual worlds and games. Digital cartography—the process of making maps of virtual worlds with digital tools—has the potential to be used in other studies and to reveal important findings about virtual communities.

This dissertation also contributes to the field of game studies by studying players living in the ruins of abandoned MMOs. These findings are helpful in discussions about the history of video games and the potential future of their communities. All MMOs will eventually die, and their closure can be prepared for by examining the abandonment and ruins of older games.

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[2] What exactly is the metaverse? That is a complicated question, but basically it is a proposed futuristic VR platform being pushed by the tech giant Meta (previously known as Facebook). This platform is a VR space that is controlled by one singular company, that is also making the Oculus headsets to engage with this platform. I say proposed, because while the idea and much of the technology is in place, there is not the computing power to create streaming content that is compatible with the hopes and dreams of these visionaries. The metaverse also includes many other futuristic and harmful technologies such as non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and blockchain technology to make living in the virtual world just as bad or worse as the meat space. Much of the marketing of the metaverse is about how it will be a replacement for the mundane and boring aspects of life (attending business meetings, going shopping) but recreated one-to-one from our current reality instead of taking advantage of the affordances of the technology. Instead of using the infinite possibilities of virtual reality, Meta is pitching how our avatars will look just like us and engage in corporate America just like we currently do. If you can't tell, I have negative biases against the metaverse, but understand that it is probably going to be a reality someday.

The following chapter outlines the literature and theory that is the backbone of this study. The dissertation continues with a chapter that includes a history of the game and server, analyzing it as a field site. Next is a methods chapter that discusses the methodology incorporated in this interdisciplinary study. The findings and discussions of those findings are split into two chapters based upon their corresponding methods and research questions. These two chapters then are a discussion on the findings about places, and a discussion on the findings about people. Then the dissertation ends with a chapter that contextualizes this dissertation.

CHAPTER II:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

David Roberts was a Scottish painter known for his detailed paintings of Egypt and the

Near East that he made during tours of the region (1838-1840). These paintings, along with his

lithograph prints, made him a prominent Orientalist painter.[3] Many of his paintings focused not

only on the religious sites and history of the area but also on the ruins. These majestic

paintings—such as the one featured in Figure 1—evoke feelings of wonder and awe, as they

capture a fragment of time and space enveloped in history. It is paintings like this that inspired

Brian Dillion to compile *Ruins* (2011), an edited volume on the depiction of ruins in art history,

poetry, and pop culture today. Dillon writes about the artistic fascination with ruins and what

they mean to viewers:

> "Ruins embody a set of temporal and historical paradoxes. The ruined building is a
> remnant of, and portal into, the past; its decay is a concrete reminder of the passage of
> time… At the same time, the ruin casts us forward in time; it predicts a future in which
> our present will slump into similar disrepair or fall victim to some unforeseeable
> calamity. The ruin, despite its state of decay, somehow outlives us. And the cultural
> gaze that we turn on ruins is a way of loosening ourselves from the grip of punctual
> chronologies, setting ourselves adrift in time." (p. 11)

While Dillon is referring to physical ruins, we can also extrapolate this sentiment into the

many—and recurring—digital and virtual ruins that populate the internet and gaming. This

artwork by Roberts, and this quote by Dillon, serve as examples of the underlying heart of this

dissertation, and what it contributes to the field of game studies. By studying players living in the

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[3] I understand the negative effects of orientalism and its cultural baggage (Said, 1985 & 1978), and merely
wanted to address the harmful effects that it has, especially as I mention an Orientalist Painter.

ruins of abandoned MMOs we learn more about the history of video games, while also learning about the potential future of their communities.
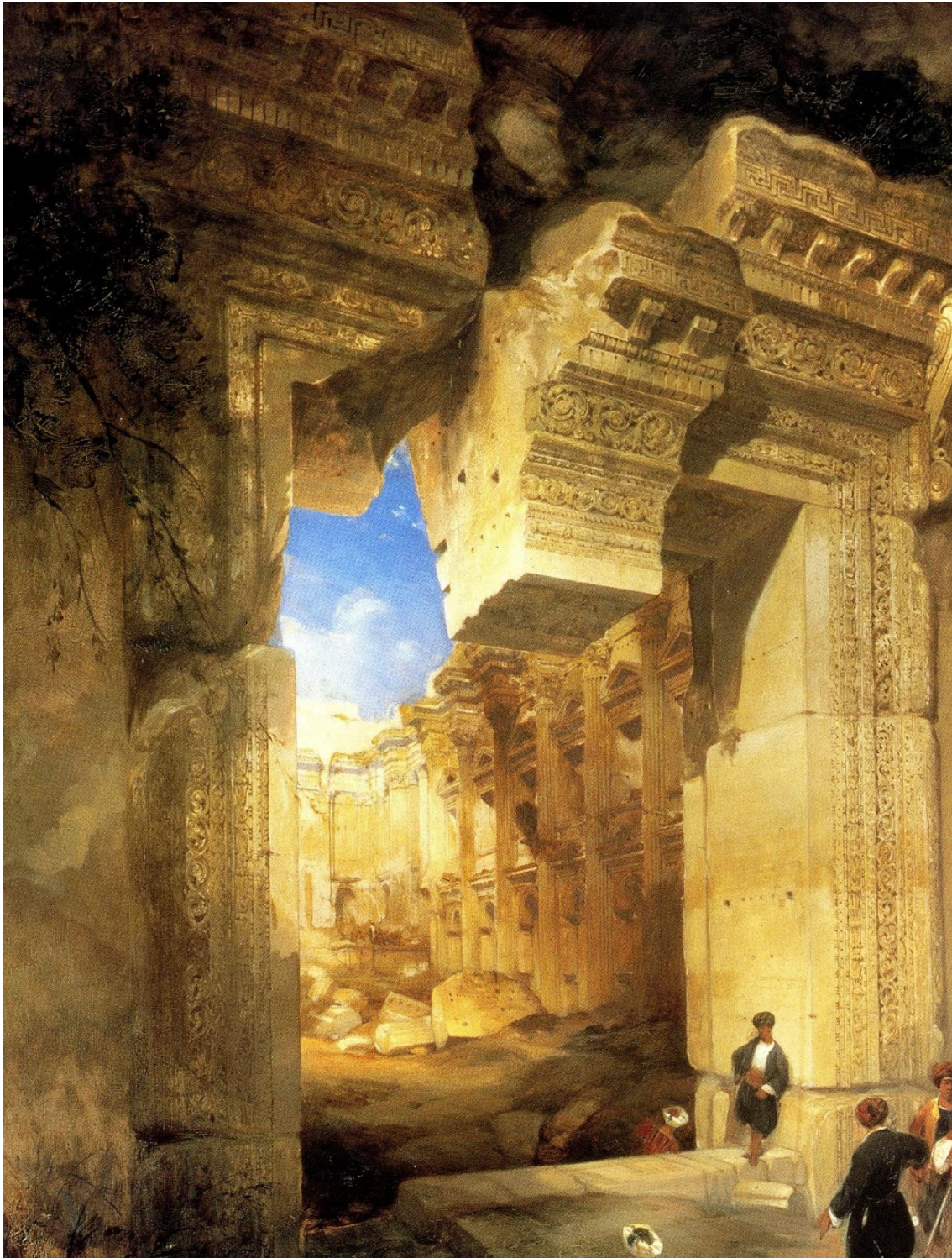
FIGURE 1: David Roberts, The Entrance to the Golden Temple in Baalbeck, *1841*

All MMOs will eventually die, and their closure can be prepared for by studying the past closures of other MMOs. Not only that, but these virtual worlds created and shaped by MMOs may not deteriorate in the same way as physical ruins, but the entropy and decay they embody in the abandonment of players and communities are still a temporal paradox worthy of research. These abandoned spaces—and often the loss of the original spaces—are a tragedy, which makes every ruin infused with nostalgia (Simmel, 1958).

There are many different frames to analyze the nostalgic communities of abandoned MMOs. Pearce (2011) studied the nostalgia of a game's community after it was abandoned, but framed the findings through the lens of refugees, and that this community were digital nomads trying to find a new experience similar to the one from their online game, *Uru*, that was shut down. Consalvo and Begy (2015) studied the chronology of an MMO—leading up to its sunsetting—framed through the parasocial relationship that players had with their virtual pets. Nardi's (2010) ethnographic study of *World of Warcraft* framed her findings along the divide between casual and core gamers, as found within the lifetime of a guild. Likewise, Crenshaw (2017) conducted a similar ethnographic study for their dissertation on a private *World of Warcraft* server and framed their findings within the limits of neoliberalism as it applied to ownership over the play experience. In addition to these varied theoretical frames, these other studies also drafted their findings based upon analysis of players, performance, rituals, and the social frameworks that build the community. But those methods and frames aren't the focus of this dissertation This study extends the understanding of these cultures methodologically through the exploration of these spaces as ruins and an examination of their virtual space.

As a theoretical frame, the ruin magnifies what initially drew me to this topic: why are players engaging with the ruins of games past, with the entanglement of entropy, modernity,

decay, past, present, and future? The feeling of playing these older MMO games in the present is like a virtual ghost town (Bassil, 2020; Clayton, 2021). The dated graphics and empty worlds lend themselves to a feeling of decay, a moment trapped in time. The following chapter then is an interdisciplinary review of the literature to this theoretical frame, of analyzing this game as the ruins of a virtual world. Some key elements of this dissertation are the literature on nostalgia and cultural memory, neo-functionalism, virtual worlds, space and place, and the tensions between individualism and collectivism.

(Neo)Functionalism

In anthropology, functionalism is the theoretical approach to describing the different parts of society and their relationships through an organic analogy. Thus, the analogy is the comparison of the different parts of society to the organs of a living organism: the organism lives through the system of its parts, much like the society can function and exist via the system of its members. Functionalist analyses examine the social significance of phenomena, meaning the function that they serve a community or society in maintaining the whole (Jarvie, 1973). Two major forms of functionalism that developed are Malinowski's *biocultural functionalism* and Radcliffe-Brown's *structural-functionalism*. Malinowski (1922) suggested that individuals have physiological needs (reproduction, food, shelter) and that social institutions exist to meet these needs. However, Radcliffe-Brown focused on social structure rather than biological needs. He suggested that a society is a system of relationships maintaining itself through feedback, while institutions are orderly sets of relationships whose function is to maintain the society (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Both of these are important because while biocultural functionalism favored the individual and structural-functionalism found the individual irrelevant (Goldschmidt 1996, p. 510), this study asked a similar question: does the community of the Legends server favor

individualism over collectivism? This question is at the core of the tension of power and the layers of in-game government created in the ludographic[4] experience.

However, functionalism as a theory has been abandoned in anthropology due to criticism during the 1970s. Some criticisms of the theory include its disregard for the historical process and its static nature of analysis leading to the maintenance of the status-quo (Goldschmidt, 1996). As a theory, it does not emphasize nor take into account social transformations and cultural changes, and as such its views are typically outdated when compared to Marxist and feminist theory. Thus, the theoretical framework has been revised over time, through neo-functionalism and contemporary functionalism. Neo-functionalism is more appropriate for my study, as it includes micro and macro levels of analysis and divorces itself of the outdated baggage of the original theory (Bettinger, 1996).

As a theoretical framework, neo-functionalism works as a frame to examine my data as it centers on the institutional and societal relationships of the community. It focuses on the metaphor of an organism to determine the individual value and input that players have, while also dissecting their various roles. This is important, as other research suggests that players have varying playstyles based on the uses and gratifications they gain from the phenomenon of playing video games (Hamari & Tuunanen, 2014; Tseng, 2011; Yee, 2006). As a medium, video games then embrace—and often encourage—the varying needs, uses, and benefits those players bring to and get out of the experience. Thus, neo-functionalism and its attention to the varying roles and relationships of individuals in institutions and societies is an appropriate anthropological lens to approach a community based within a virtual world. The two dominant forms of functionalism place the locus of power and study either on the individual or the society,

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[4] Ludographic: of or relating to the gameplay of a video game, divorced from the narrative or story.

which mirrors how this study will examine the power structures of individualism versus collectivism in gameplay.

Power: Individualism versus Collectivism

Through the theory of neo-functionalism, a site for examining these relationships of power would be brick and mortar locations. Dwellings serve as a focal point for both personal and social identities and shape the history of place memory in both individuals and communities (Lawrence & Low, 1990; Li et al., 2018). The theories and literature on urbanization are too deep for this dissertation to approach or discuss, however one aspect relevant to this study is the social organization and governing power that leads to the construction of urban environments (Crumley, 1995; DeMarrais, 2013; Hamilton et al., 2007; Jennings & Earle, 2016; Liu et al., 2004; Service, 1975). The construction of homes and houses is both an individual action by the player, as well as one governed by the power structures of the virtual community. Thus, this study teases out the perceptions of power at play in player cities: how does their construction fit into the literature in game studies on individualism versus collectivism?

Collectivism is defined as a set of feelings, beliefs, behavioral intentions, and behaviors related to solidarity and concern for others, in contrast to individualism which prioritizes the individual over others (Hui, 1988). While this binary has a strong theoretical background elsewhere, it is not articulated to the same level in game studies. Tangential work though has mapped player motivations and activities, such as the foundational work by Yee (2006). Yee's model included three major motivations for playing MMOs: achievement, social, and immersion. Two of these motivations—with their subgroupings outlined in Yee's paper—include this binary of individualism and collectivism, with players seeking individual achievement or social collectivism. Other literature on player motivations teases out similar core concepts, of how

players choose to play by themselves or in groups (Jeng & Teng, 2008; Vahlo et al., 2018), with some studies finding that MMOs are defined by the motivations of collectivism, in particular, stressing social capital and community (Kaye et al., 2017). The genre of MMORPGs[5] is a site to unpack many of the tensions between individualism and collectivism, with some games like *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) trending away from civic engagement, or away from the collaborative effort in favor of measures of individual achievement (Braithwaite, 2015; Crenshaw, 2017).

Szablewicz (2020) analyzed the perspective of gamers in their construction of a "spiritual homeland" within their virtual worlds. These imagined communities become a social and geographical reality and are expressed through the tensions of camaraderie and political power. Thus, the principle of collectivism within video games and their communities is a source of power to player governments, and Szablewicz analyzed how these structures interact with— either enforcing or restricting—players' freedoms of expression, such as individualism.

In addition to studying the spatiality of organizations and the organizational implications of space (Sailer & Penn, 2010) is a study of how player cities are emblematic of their governmental structures and powers. Maps also play a role in the enforcement of government and are often tools of empire, with the act of mapping and the scientific cataloging of the world being used to make it governable (McKinnon, 2011). Cities then—with urbanization—exist solely with the creation of a government of some kind. Scholars have typically linked urbanization to state formation in the evolution of complex societies, however, the earliest cities were premised on limiting outside domination and thus usually acted to impede efforts to create more centralized structures of control (Jennings & Earle, 2016). And Hamilton and colleagues (2007) argue that there are two types of forces in group dynamics: cohesive and disruptive. Thus,

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[5] Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, a subdivision of the MMO genre.

the groups that use their collective efforts to work together (cohesive forces) are different from groups that instead seek individualistic attitudes and behaviors (disruptive forces). Civic design and urbanization can reveal power dynamics, as to who holds it, who does not benefit from it, what forces are at play—either cohesive or disruptive—and the types of government being used within the settlement. This leads to the theory of functionalism from anthropology and the study of how individuals work within a society.

Nostalgia and Cultural Memory

A basic answer about why people are drawn to ruins—such as players to *SWG*—is their nostalgia and cultural memory. Nostalgia comes from the Greek roots, *nostos*—to return home, and *algia*—longing, thus it is a longing for a home that no longer exists (Boym, 2008). In this way, the concept is rooted in an attempt to return to a physical or metaphorical home. Nostalgia is a reactionary emotion to conjure imagined pasts and identities (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2018). The varied findings on nostalgia seem to hinge on the separation of *collective nostalgia* (an event shared with in-group members) from *personal nostalgia* (an event from the individual's experience; Wildschut et al., 2014). The literature on nostalgia repeatedly discusses its social aspects and how communities use nostalgia to form identities (Bennett, 2015; Smeekes, 2015). And while there is growing literature on video game nostalgia specifically (Wulf et al., 2018 & 2017), and the erosion of video game history (Guins, 2014), more important to this study are questions of how cultural memory and nostalgia play into monuments and ruins.

Cultural memory can be framed as a form of collective nostalgia, tied to the emotional responses of communities or groups. It is even argued that the politics of community are imagined at all levels—especially when it comes to the nation-state—and cultural memory then creates an identity and reinforces it (Anderson, 2006). During the summer of 2020, conversations

about historical monuments culminated in the toppling and removal of some statues dedicated to individuals who upheld slavery (Ebrahimji, 2020). However, research suggests that "rather than preserving public memory, the monument displaces it altogether, supplanting the community's memory-work with its own material form" (Young, 2000, p. 94). Discussions then of cultural memory and collective nostalgia are then tied directly to monuments, of which ruins are a part.

 Virtual Worlds

Returning to Pearce's (2011) book on the diaspora of Uru fans, this study outlined some of the history of the genre of MMOs and their worlds, and the importance of studying virtual worlds. While virtual worlds and their implications have been a topic of science fiction (Murray, 1997), Pearce explains what makes them unique is that they are spatial, contiguous, explorable, persistent, have embodied identities (avatars), inhabitable, consequential participation, populous, and a sense of coherence (Pearce, 2011). Not only did Pearce argue that virtual worlds need to include play elements of interactivity and exploration, but more importantly that they need to be populated by players and their avatars, and that these virtual worlds are inherently social constructions (p. 17).

Other key scholars in the study of video game communities wrote a foundational book on conducting ethnography in virtual worlds (Boellstorff et al., 2012). They described virtual worlds as possessing the following characteristics: have a sense of worldness, are multi-user in nature, they are persistent, and they allow participants to embody themselves (p. 7). However, the definition of the term "virtual world" is used in different ways by academics, industry professionals, and the media (Bell, 2008). In studying the literature, it appears that the attributes presented by Boellstorff et al. are becoming the common denominators, however perhaps the most crucial component of a "virtual world" would be its virtual nature, or that it needs

networked computers (Bell, 2008). This study then builds primarily upon the digital environment of the media text but also includes an exploration of how this community grows and interacts collectively. The study of virtual worlds builds upon theories and literature on space, as virtual worlds are related to their meat space[6] counterparts. While there is no direct corollary of *SWG* in the physical world, the broader concepts of space and place still resonate as they were conceptualized before virtual space became a reality.

Space

The archaeological theory of space has its roots in Morgan (1881), with his study of Native American housing. Their rituals and customs surrounding hospitality hint at a cultural delineation between the home and the outside world, and their attitudes and opinions on intergenerational familial compounds suggest a different attitude about a house and its role than current Western ideals. Lawrence and Low (1990) emphasized the importance of studying the buildings—especially dwellings—as they serve human needs as well as being the focal point of personal and social identities. Li and colleagues (2018) also built upon spatial theory by discussing how urban locations can tap into place memory and the construction of an urban landscape as a part of history.

Morgan (1871) also found that house architecture can illustrate the development of civilization. While Morgan's theories about evolutionary archaeology are controversial today, the house is still a relevant unit of analysis in the reconstruction of culture. Indeed, the archaeological study of settlements can reveal social hierarchies as they manifest in population nucleation and the economic integration between the urban center and rural areas (Liu et al.,

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[6] I like to use this term when discussing virtual worlds, because it is the best way to differentiate the two. The common term "real world," to delinate the offline implies that what it alone is real. But as I've noticed in my research and my experience as a player, everything that happens in cyberspace or virtual worlds is just as real as the meat space. This term of course comes from early cyberpunk novels such as *Neuromancer* by William Gibson.

2004). And while settlements are an important subject of study for this dissertation, the literature

on space includes other aspects of the environment. Analysis of the physical (and virtual

environment) adds richness and depth to the data (O'Toole & Were, 2008), and it is through

communicating with the virtual environment that players deepen their presence in the game

world (Janik, 2017). The communication and interaction that players have with their virtual

environment highlight the connection that media and space have—especially with the notion of

'communicative spaces' (Bratner, 2018). Also known in media studies as the spatial turn.

The twentieth century saw the development of media studies as a field, as centered on

mass media, and how this type of communication unified people across space and time.

However, the spatial turn at its basic level was a rejection of some of these narratives and the

recognition that in many ways spatial differences impact the social worlds we live in

(McKinnon, 2011). And in addition, Lefebvre's writings about the spatial turn take the theories

of space—previously only used in architecture—and used them as a medium and tool to study

social practices (Stanek, 2012). Thus, there is a growing movement in the field to adapt theories

of space and architecture to study communication such as geomedia.

Geomedia is the latest technology of maps and are social constructs for the interactions

that people have in the virtual and physical world. Examples include apps like Foursquare or

Pokémon Go, which rely on physical location and GPS signals to craft their virtual environment.

Despite the scientific and objective nature of maps and geomedia, they are still social constructs

that are not neutral, and they set limits and conditions for communication and understanding

(Bratner, 2018). The creation of maps attempts to create a single, official version of reality by

creating borders for states and controlling populaces (McKinnon, 2011). Maps have been long

implicated as part of the controlling impulses of empire, as mapping and scientific cataloging of the world would render it governable (Foucault, 1976; McKinnon, 2011).

With that in mind, it may seem hegemonic to use maps and cartography as a method in academic research, but it doesn't have to be. Rather, interactive maps can be used in data collection and qualitative visual research (Bratner, 2018), and as an epistemology, they can help academics reconsider the authority and power of maps through the process of creating and using them (McKinnon, 2011). Stanek (2012) notes that discourse on space should perhaps instead be redirected to architectural discourse and research into "buildings," "streets," and "neighborhoods," all of which can be found in maps and player cities. As mentioned in a later section, this dissertation analyzes the layers of power involved in the creation and maintenance of player cities, which then can be analyzed through the creation of maps.

Place

Building upon spatial theory is the concept of "place," which is often defined as a location with boundaries, imbued with value, and conducive to social interactions (McKinnon, 2011; McNeill, 2007). As an extension of space, these areas of place should be studied to determine cultural meanings, as opposed to how space affects individuals (Johnson, 1977). However, as Gabbert and Jordan-Smith (2007) note, perhaps most important to the study of place is how it becomes reconceptualized from text to process, from static entity to performance and event. Thus, for this study, the field site is framed as a place, in that it is a social location of performance, and that players in the Legends server are imbuing meaning into their virtual world.

Part of this concept of place then, are some of the meanings ascribed to the virtual environment and how to study those meanings. Locative media is an example of the intersection

of sociality and geography (through maps) and serves the role of intermediary for users in their creation of location attachment (Bratner, 2018). Cultural geographers have demonstrated that the meanings created by place are imbued with cultural and political implications, as it encompasses proximity and distance, affecting the communication of the community (O'Toole & Were, 2008). Tilley (1994) argues that the concept of place privileges difference and singularity, while a concept of landscape is more holistic and encompasses instead of excludes. This leads to discussions of inclusion and exclusion, the layers of power inherent to social groups, and individualism versus collectivism.

The layers of power inherent to the concept of place can be examined through map-making and reading. As mentioned earlier, maps are forms of political discourse that serve to maintain hegemony, but can be repurposed toward transformative agendas; spatial tools can be used to challenge power structures and inequality (Rubel, 2017). In fact, the interpretation of maps and their reading creates additional meaning to the place and the location (McKinnion, 2011; Rubel, 2017). Additionally the physical—or in this case, virtual—territory of a group can catalyze the group's cultural formation (O'Toole & Were, 2008). Thus, the very act of setting boundaries and territories for groups creates these said groups and their culture. But as O'Toole and Were note, a group's "place identity" is often a merging of the individual place identities of the users (p. 618). Thus, the individual and the collective each have place identities, in a symbiotic way.

And while much of the literature on place and collective group identities describe physical locations, as social interaction is increasingly taking place in virtual settings additional literature on virtual place is being developed (McNeill, 2007). This literature suggests then a study of place can be done through map-making, and that these maps can be used to identify

individual and collective meanings, especially as it relates to housing and homeownership. This then relates to the literature on power and the tensions of individualism versus collectivism.

The tensions between collectivism and individualism can be seen in housing and suburban communities. Homeownership is often framed as an individual goal, and yet it has a significant influence between the success or failure of a community (Graves, Weiler, & Tynon, 2009). In studying the labor and housing models of boomtown sites, Graves and colleagues found that modeling of the housing market can predict the dramatic cycles of these communities—with their booms and busts into ghost towns (p. 131). Thus, the health of a community can be studied through the housing of its inhabitants, which could then be applied to virtual space.

Ruins as Place

My first experience with *SWG* was memorable, but not in a traditional way. After logging into the Legends server, I was immediately halted by the clunkiness of the game: the dated graphics, the bizarre keyboard controls, and the difficulty changing the user interface. On first glance, the game was a time capsule, a preserved example of what game design was in the early 2000s. I struggled to get past the low-resolution textures, the bare-bones polygons, and the extremely short draw distance. But after adjusting myself to this ancient virtual world, I began to wonder where everyone was. There was some player activity in the major cities—Mos Eisley in particular—but traversing between was a solitary experience. I swept across the desert of Tatooine on my speeder *en route* to finish a beginner's quest, and stumbled upon various player cities. Here were seemingly empty houses, devoid of life and yet often locked. Some buildings were large, while others small, and I tried desperately to weave my speeder between them. I

thought little of it—besides a little frustration that these obstacles were in my way—and continued on my way to my objective.

Most of my play sessions before finalizing my research plans were like this: my avatar and I navigating the large, but dated virtual world, barely interacting with other players because they were few and far between. These planets felt like ghost towns, and for a while I framed my experience that way. As a rhetorical frame, there is evidence that these abandoned virtual worlds can be seen as ghost towns, preserved relics of a past community. But I later felt that my negative opinions and perspectives on the game were different from other players'. While I saw an empty world, the nostalgia of my interlocutors romanticized the space. They saw the ghosts of the past and loved the game for what it was. I instead saw only the crumbling façade, the ancient technology and the dated graphics, and the emptiness of a world designed for social experiences that I was lacking.

What is a ruin? And why do I consider this game a ruin? From a conceptual stand point, the quote by Dillon at the start of this chapter outlines what ruins typically represent: physical spaces whose decay represent the temporal paradox of the past and present. Ruins are romanticized in art, poetry, and video games. This decay and nostalgia represent two of the underlying feelings I had as a researcher and player in *SWG*. Not my personal nostalgia, but the collective nostalgia that keeps the Legends server alive. It is because of this unseen feeling that the world itself is preserved and intact. And as ruins are physical, the virtual ruin grants a dimension of exploration and research of the space. Thus, the theoretical frame of the ruin guides the methods discussed in a later chapter.

This dissertation then is an examination of ruins as place, how the virtual ruins of an MMO have meaning to players, and the power dynamics of players creating cities and

settlements. And part of analyzing this virtual space as ruin includes the methods of digital cartography and mapping the virtual similar to mapping the physical. The ruins of *SWG* are an embodiment of the feeling of nostalgia, where the past is solidified and protected. "The past is crucial for our sense of self. Without the ability to recall our past we are not able to understand who we are in the present," (Smeekes, 2015, p. 163). However, it is through mapping player cities and their growth that I hope to examine the tensions of power between the individual player and the collective group of players. As houses are emblematic of personal identity and community attitudes, it is fitting to frame this dissertation within player cities in *SWG*.

This study was an experience of bringing together theories of archaeology, game studies, and anthropology, building upon but different from the other ethnographic studies of game worlds and MMOs. I argue that the contemporary player cities of *SWG* are built upon, around, and within virtual ruins. It is through this framing of the game's virtual environment that I used archeological methods and anthropological theory to study the players living among the ruins: the entanglement of entropy, modernity, decay, past, present, and future. Ruins are a place, and I examined how they create meaning beyond being just a virtual space, and the intersection of power over who controls what in these player cities among the ruins.

CHAPTER III:

HISTORY OF *STAR WARS: GALAXIES*

AND THE LEGENDS SERVER

I exited my luxury yacht—a server reward for playing on Legends for a period of time—

and stumbled onto the planet of Rori, one of the three moons of Naboo. This smaller planet was a

tropical one, filled with densely forested swamps, jungle-like in appearance and covered with

dark clouds. It had prevalent rain, as I found out when I traveled to meet Alex outside his home. I

pass stone obelisks and ruins that I later learn were built by the Gungans (amphibian humanoids

in Star Wars), and the still waters of the swamp wove among the damp undergrowth. The eerie

silence of the cold mist lingers as I float along in my speeder.

I finally stop at my coordinates outside a large Naboo house. The pastel green roof and

domes accent the red sandstone walls, all of which feel right at place on this swampy jungle

planet. Alex's avatar greets me as we set up the conference call, a tall brown-furred Wookie,

wearing white body armor. As we talk about Alex's history with *SWG*, he brought up the

significant role that nostalgia has played in his enjoyment of the Legends server. He said:

> …coming back to it as a mature gamer who can appreciate its depth is rewarding. The
> missions, crafting, and game economy mean a lot more to me now. That being said, I
> probably would not have been as infatuated with Legends had I no nostalgic precedent
> for it. But, although it is a very outdated and irrelevant game, it's still pretty freaking
> cool, even when compared to more modern games.

Alex was playing *SWG* when the game was live back in the day, during his adolescence (or

middle school to early high school, according to him). He played the game through the ups and

downs of the server, from before the combat upgrade, through the new game enhancements. He

admitted that now, looking back, he can see how the publisher "butchered the beauty of the

original game." While he didn't like the changes that happened over the lifespan of the game, he wasn't violent or vitriolic in his opposition.

As we sat outside his house on Rori, he talked about how connected he is to his guild on Legends. That is one reason he enjoys playing on the Legends server, as opposed to others—the community and the friends he has access to. It made sense, his large house was near the center of this rank 4 city. Just a stone's throw away was the guild hall that he went to for assembling groups and running instances. And around the corner from his house were some gardens and other civic buildings paid for by the citizens of the city. While I didn't see any other avatars running around the city while we chatted, there was still evidence of the thriving community. The rain has let up, but the sky is still full of dark clouds.

As we concluded our interview, I thought about what Alex said about his experience with *SWG*. He wasn't the only interlocutor to have a lot of nostalgia for the game, but his account seemed to be the most nuanced. He admitted the flaws, admitted that his nostalgia was likely the only reason he came back to *SWG*, but also that he had shopped around and played on other servers (such as SWGEmu). His history with the game mirrored the many ups and downs that SWG experienced. And a historical analysis of *SWG* gives greater depth to Alex's account as well as the other interviews I conducted.

Star Wars games

As a fictional universe of interconnected media, the *Star Wars* intellectual property began in 1977 with the release of the first movie. Since then, the transmedia phenomenon has grown to include spin-off stories in other media such as tabletop games, novels, comics, and also video games. Since its inception, the story of *Star Wars* has always been about merchandising and

selling licensed content to fans (Altman & Gross, 2021), and it was only a matter of time before this monument of pop culture embraced the growing popularity of the MMORPG genre.

The first licensed video game based upon *Star Wars* began with the Atari 2600 game, *The Empire Strikes Back* in 1982 (Fritjof, 2018). In the 40 years following, over 110 games were licensed out for different developers and released for various arcade platforms and home consoles (Fritjof, 2018). *SWG* then is merely one game in the sea of *Star Wars*-related video games, as the owner of the intellectual property continues to license other developers and publishers to create entries in the growing media franchise.

History of the Game

Pre-history and announcement. Lucasfilm is the production company responsible for the *Star Wars* franchise and was founded in 1971 by George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*. In 1982 Lucasfilm Games was founded as a video game development group alongside the film company, however, it was rebranded to LucasArts during a reorganization in 1990. LucasArts was the development company responsible for the creation of many original games—*Maniac Mansion, The Curse of Monkey Island*, and *Grim Fandango* to name a few—as well as the liaison for the licensing of *Star Wars* games to other developers and publishers.

On the heels of the success of *EverQuest*—a 3D fantasy-themed MMORPG originally developed by Verant Interactive with Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) as the publisher—LucasArts announced a partnership with these creators to create an online game in the *Star Wars* universe (IGN, 2000). These three companies were seen as giants as the time, giving hope to fans that the game would be a success (IGN, 2000). Details were naturally vague at this time, with an anticipated release of sometime in 2001.

Development. However, in 2001 the game was not in beta testing yet. At the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) of that year, it was announced that the core game would not include any space mechanics, as that would be saved for the first expansion that was expected to be available six months after the game's release (IGN, 2001).[7] In addition, this presentation at E3 also updated the release of the core game to the second half of 2002, and announced an official website for the game, which served as a hub for the game's community. This website included screen shots, movies, an updated FAQ, concept art, profiles on the development team, features of the upcoming game, and a forum. Throughout the development of the game, new content would be revealed and published on this website.

A closed beta of the game began in July 2002, with additional transparency from SOE on the status of the beta (IGN, 2002).[8] New content was released on their website as the beta testing progressed, allowing even those outside the closed beta a glimpse into how the game was progressing. This beta testing would continue in phases, with the population reaching 50,000 during the third phase in May of 2003 (Colayco, 2003).

Raph Koster, who was the original Creative Director, and Richard Vogel, who was an Executive Producer, both gave a postmortem of the game at the Game Developers Conference of 2021 (Koster & Vogel, 2021).[9] In 2001, after the MMO they were working on got canceled, they were hired by Verant to assist with the development of *SWG*. They founded the Austin studio for

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[7] "The staggered release schedule of the space component of the Star Wars Galaxies series will benefit players because they will have time to establish their characters and explore different elements of the core game before we add the space layer," said Richard Vogel, director of development at Verant's Austin studio. "Once the space component becomes available, players who have been with us since the beginning will be ready to buy their own starships and launch into this new arena." (IGN, 2001).

[8] According to Koster and Vogel (2021), this started with 250 players testing the chat system only because nothing else worked at the time.

[9] From the introduction slide of this postmortem: "The development timeline was impossible. The feature set was far ahead of its time. The game was incredibly buggy and broken. And yet, here we are talking about it 10 years after it closed down. This is the story of the worst game to ever become a classic, and the most infamous patch in video game history."

Verant and were brought in to guide the small group of developers who just started work on

SWG. Koster and Vogel described how one requirement from SOE management was that *SWG*

would not cannibalize from the player base of *EverQuest*. The original plan was to use the same

engine that was being developed for *EverQuest II* at the time, however, Verant felt that this

engine wouldn't meet the needs of the game and the direction that they wanted to take (Koster &

Vogel, 2021).

Instead of using the *EverQuest II* engine, they implemented a skill-based system (similar

to *Ultima Online*). In many ways, the team wanted to develop the "next level MMO," one that

evolved past the level-centric and class-based RPG standards of the time (Koster & Vogel,

2021). This point of differentiation is important to note later on. But this system was complex,

with nearly every item, ability, or skill having an experience meter. Players then learned new

skills based upon their experience in various aspects of the game, which then unlocked more

advanced professions and sub-professions. Figure 2 includes a screenshot of how this system was

displayed in the game, and Figure 3 is a profession calculator tool made by fans, since the system

was very obtuse and difficult to track or understand.

Difficulties arose in the development of *SWG*, starting with the condensed timeline. SOE

as the publisher wanted a very quick turnaround, and the pressure was felt by Verant to push out

a game as soon as possible, even though many developers wanted more time to refine the game

(Koster & Vogel, 2021). Another difficulty of the game's development was the Jedi dilemma.

The studio mandated that Jedis be playable, and that they fit into the lore of the series. However,

since the game took place during the middle of the original trilogy of movies, this also meant that

Jedis were supposed to be rare, but also ultra-powerful. Koster described this as an impossible

dilemma to create an "uber-class" that every player would want to play as, but to force it into the

restraints of the game; this dilemma was called "the game's original sin" (Koster & Vogel, 2021).
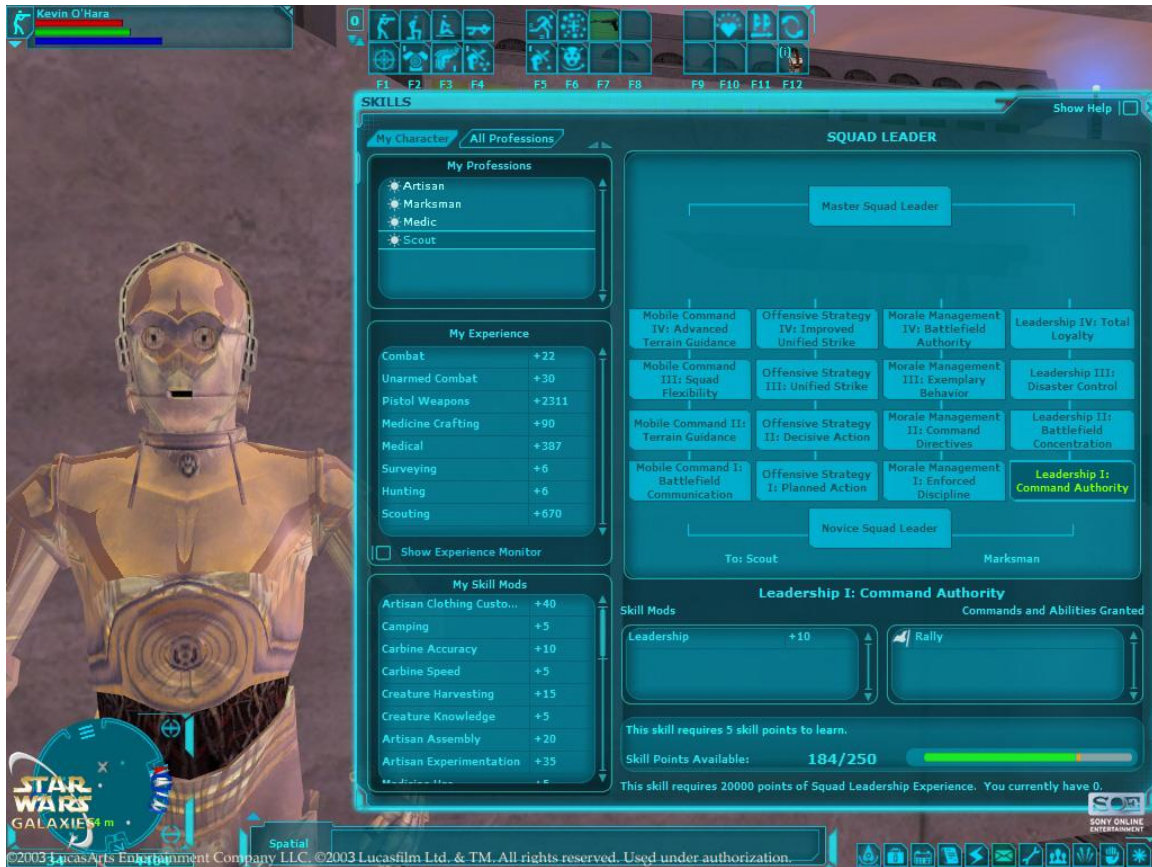
FIGURE 2: Screenshot of the in-game profession screen

Another hurdle for the development of *SWG* was the approval process. This process got so bad that the team had to hire a producer whose sole responsibility was to receive approval from LucasArts, Lucas Film, and at times from George Lucas himself. Since this game was in development during the production of the prequel movies,[10] there was a lot of reference material that was not-yet-released that had to be handled with utmost secrecy (Koster & Vogel, 2021).

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[10] The Star Wars movie series began with a trilogy (known as the original trilogy to fans), then decades later a new trilogy of prequel movies came out that took place chronologically before the first three movies. Then decades later after the IP was sold to Disney a new trilogy was released, known as the sequels.

Another studio mandate was to ship the game with multiple planets, which included enormous amounts of map data, especially for the technology available in 2003 (Koster & Vogel, 2021). This near-impossible amount of data led to a genius workaround where the developers created a fractal-based procedural terrain generation tool for the maps. These maps were so large that the servers at the time couldn't even host them in their entirety, they had to generate the maps in real-time as players navigated them. (Koster & Vogel, 2021). This of course led to the buggy nature of the game at launch, as the technology could not handle the scope and vision of the studio.
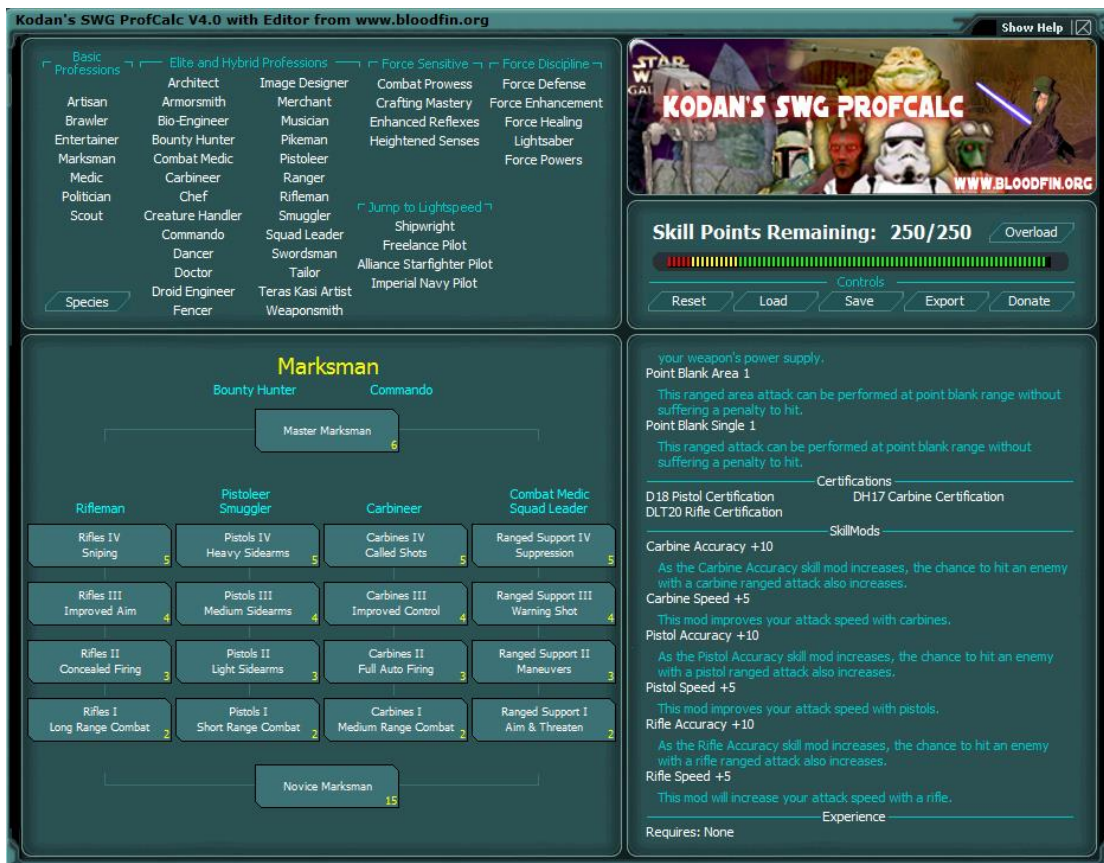
FIGURE 3: Profession Calculator

Another system that pushed the limitations of their technology was the crafting system. It was based upon randomized stats for materials which then led to varying stats for items and

equipment crafted from those materials, all of which were typically one-of-a-kind and led to

billions of inventory to track in the database (Koster & Vogel, 2021). This complex crafting

system—which according to some players is one of the most granular and deep of its kind—was

also bolstered by a completely player-driven economy, where no items were given a monetary

value by the developers,[11] only by the players who crafted and sold them (Koster & Vogel,

2021). This crafting system compounded the technological limitations of the map content and the

on-the-fly rendering of the virtual world (both systems were pushing the hardware to the limits

of its memory cabailities), leading to game-breaking bugs and poor performance.

In summary, many of the systems of the game were simply ahead of their time, which put

enormous strain on the servers to host the game, which led to undesirable play experiences at

launch. The development of the game was also hindered by the impossible demands of the

publisher (SOE), and the difficulty of working with Lucasfilm for the approval process.

Release. The game *SWG* was released on June 26, 2003, after being in development for

less than three years. Since the production timeline for *SWG* was impossibly short (Ross, 2021),

when it was released, there were many features either left out or in dire need of refining (Koster

& Vogel, 2021). One of these was the combat, which at the release was incredibly buggy and

very primitive. A major patch after release was the combat upgrade, which refined this mechanic

and added additional features (Combat Upgrade Changes, n.d.). However, this patch was met

with some criticism, as some fans enjoyed the non-combat elements of the game. As mentioned

earlier, the original vision of the game was to evolve the MMO genre to include more "sandbox-

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[11] Much later in the games life cycle were "Junk Vendors" finally implemented, which were NPCs where players could finally sell their items for pennies. The standard concept of junk loot—or items that you gather throughout the game that you just sell to the game's merchants—was noticeably absent from SWG initially due to the time restraints of the developers (Koster & Vogel, 2021).

y" elements.[12] The game before this patch was released has gained some nostalgia, with players

wishing for a Pre-Combat Upgrade experience out of their private servers (Royce, 2021;

Snowytechna, 2008).

Reviews of the game were mixed (Metacritic, 2003), and player numbers didn't spike as

the developers hoped. Because the release of *SWG* was so weak, it truly struggled to keep fans

interested even as it released expansions and attempted to improve the game from its buggy and

unrefined state (Koster & Vogel, 2021; Lopez, 2004).

*Expansions***.** There were three main expansions to the game, along with a few minor ones

(more detail on that later). The first of these, Jump to Lightspeed, was released on October 27,

2004, and as mentioned earlier added space combat, as well as playable sectors of space

surrounding the 10 planets. It also included two new playable races and a new profession.

Reviews for this expansion praised the new space combat but criticized the game for lack of

improvement (Lopez, 2004). Rage of the Wookies—the second expansion—was released on

May 5, 2005, and a substantial portion of the content was based on the film *Star Wars: Episode

III – Revenge of the Sith*, which was released two weeks after. Rage of the Wookies added the

planet of Kashyyyk—which included several instanced "dungeon" areas, two new creature

mounts, new starships, and resource mining in space. Again, reviews of this expansion praised

the new quest content but criticized the buggy nature of the game (Rausch, 2005). The third

expansion, Trials of Obi-Wan, was released on November 1, 2005, and added the planet

Mustafar and soon after the infamous patch known as the New Game Enhancements (see more

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[12] Sandbox is a term within video games to describe mechanics, systems, and gameplay loops that are freeform or devoid of narrative direction. Much like how a child is able to go and do what they want within the sandbox, many games create a similar atmosphere: giving the player an illusion of control to choose what they want to do and to explore various systems and mechanics.

about this later). Like the second expansion, this one was also based on the latest *Star Wars*

movie, as the DVD was released on the same day as this expansion.

Following Trials of Obi-Wan came the minor expansions, which were for the trading card

game Verant developed to be played within the game client. This game within a game played

mainly like a physical trading card game and could be seen as a precursor to digital card games

like *Hearthstone*. This trading card game was treated as a benefit for subscribers to *SWG*, as it

was only available to them. The core game—Champions of the Force—was released in August

2008, followed a few months later by the first expansion—Squadrons over Corellia—in

December of 2008. The later expansions were: Galactic Hunters (March 2009), Agents of

Deception (June 2009), and The Shadow Syndicate (September 2009). Each set contained up to

300 cards, and former and current *SWG* subscribers received a 58-card starter deck, along with

five free 15-card booster packs per month. In addition, this game also featured Loot cards, which

were special cards for rare items that players could redeem for in-game items part of the MMO.

These Loot cards were randomly found in booster packs, cementing the co-dependent

relationship between *SWG* and the trading card game. As this trading card game was only

accessible within the game client, it also shut down with *SWG* on December 15, 2011.

New Game Enhancements. Koster and Vogel in their postmortem spend significant time

discussing what they label "the most infamous patch in video game history" (2021). This

hyperbole captures the feelings of players and the developers at the time. As mentioned prior, the

original vision of the developers was to evolve the MMO genre past the level-based and class-

centric system currently employed by *EverQuest*. This meant that *SWG* at launch did not have

traditional leveling mechanics, nor was there an emphasis on class-centric combat abilities. It is

difficult to imagine an MMORPG that did not include leveling and combat abilities since the

genre is always trying to replicate the success of *World of Warcraft* and follow its formula. But at the release of *SWG,* the genre was still being defined, with varying takes on the MMORPG template.

One week after the release of the third expansion (November 2005), the entire character development process was changed in the New Game Enhancements (NGE). Most professions and sub-professions simply were erased from the game, and many were folded into the new class system (Ross, 2021). Combat was condensed to a point and click affair, simplified and refined even more from the CU patch earlier. Character stats were also changed, focusing on only eight attributes now. Previously, every single item or action within the game had a stat bar, so the amount of times you crafted a specific item, or the amount of times you swung your lightsaber, increased the stat for each of those two systems. This meant a nearly infinite amount of data to track and compile. The NGE patch scrapped the unique skill-based system to instead adopt a level-based class-centric one that became the standard for the genre.

FIGURE 4: New Profession System

Now the game focused on nine professions (the new class system) which were: Bounty hunter, commando, entertainer, Jedi, medic, officer, smuggler, spy, and trader. Figure 4 shows the new profession select screen as part of the character creation process. One aspect of the new professions in the NGE was the inclusion of Jedi at the start. No longer was it a lengthy, difficult puzzle to solve, but instead something players could select when rolling a new character. This cheapened the experience in the eyes of many players but was seen as a positive by management who followed feedback from years of research and focus groups (Olivetti, 2015). While originally the vision of the game pre-NGE was disliked by many players, the NGE patch radically changed *SWG* into something entirely different than what current fans of the game loved. In essence, the skill-based system with its complexity and flaws, was the source of this game's downfall, as removing it alienated what current players it had.

The backlash to the NGE was so bad that mainstream news outlets like The New York Times (Schiesel, 2005) and The Washington Post (Musgrove, 2006) wrote about it, each of them focusing on the negative reactions from fans. Despite this, the initial reaction by SOE was to defend the patch and its changes (Olivetti, 2015). In Schiesel's article, they quote Senior Director Nancy MacIntyre about why the NGE was implemented:

> There was lots of reading, much too much, in the game. There was a lot of wandering around learning about different abilities. We really needed to give people the experience of being Han Solo or Luke Skywalker rather than being Uncle Owen, the moister farmer. We wanted more instant gratification: kill, get treasure, repeat. We needed to give people an opportunity to be a part of what they have seen in the movies rather than something they had created themselves.

This attitude, that players wanted to recreate the movies instead of having a virtual sandbox to play in, is problematic as it suggests a monolithic approach to player attitudes, instead of the current research that suggests there are multiple play styles and types of players (Jeng & Teng, 2008; Vahlo et al., 2018; Yee, 2006). What this approach also addresses, is trying

to woo new players to the game—making it appealing to more traditional MMO tropes and systems—instead of refining the game and pleasing the current, loyal fan base. While the game was constantly belittled for having animal milking, player-created beauty pageants, simulated PTSD, and deep crafting, it turned out that this freedom and all the weird, quirky systems were things that people truly loved (Ross, 2021). In fact, after the implementation of the NGE, the subscriber base truly fell from 250,000 to barely above 100,000 by mid-2006 (Olivetti, 2015). The negative reactions from fans of the game were so severe, that even two years after the closure of the game in 2013, developers at SOE were still receiving death threats and hate mail over the NGE patch (Priest, 2013).

Decline and closure. Despite the exodus of players from the game in 2006, the game of *SWG* still lingered on for five more years afterward, with the servers closing on December 15, 2011. As was mentioned previously, the licensing agreement between LucasArts and SOE was set to expire in 2012, and a new Star Wars MMO was releasing later that month (*Star Wars: The Old Republic*, from BioWare). SOE felt that they stood no chance of keeping their game alive and pulled the plug.

The decline of the game meant that on June 24, 2011, SOE and LucasArts announced that they had mutually agreed to shut down *SWG*. Current subscribers could play for free in the final months,[13] and there would be a closing celebration event for the last week of service. Players and fans mourned the death of the game, and many were nostalgic for the pre-NGE days (Lynley, 2011). The end of the game itself was a tumultuous one, as captured by a livestream on Giant Bomb (Gerstmann, 2011). During the celebrations at the end of the server, players and developers engaged in rule breaking: players were planting deciduous trees on Tatooine, they

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[13] No new accounts were accepted after September 15, 2011.

could now fly their starships in the atmosphere of the planets, and the ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi

appeared amongst the fireworks to say goodbye to all the players (Good, 2011; Hurley, 2015).

Following the closure of the server, SOE put together a memory book for the *SWG*

community, detailing the history of the game, preserving screenshots of the virtual world, and

discussing the final results of the galactic conflict—as a core part of the game was the civil war

that pitted the Rebel Alliance against the Galactic Empire. This memory book served as a visual

source of what *SWG* looked like, with more screenshots than copy.

History of the Legends server

Preserving the Experience. There were many attempts made to preserve the *SWG*

experience even before the official servers were shut down (Ross, 2021). One major attempt at

preserving this virtual world was an emulation approach, where players took the code from the

installation disks and attempted to reverse-engineer the servers themselves (Messner, 2015). This

approach is best seen in the SWGEmu, a pillar amongst nostalgic players of *SWG*. SWGEmu

then does not use any stolen or copyrighted code of the servers themselves, limiting the legal

liability of the hosts of SWGEmu in the case of a shutdown notice from Disney. However,

SWGEmu is incredibly limited, as the hosts have had to build all of the content themselves,

which means that players on this server are lacking the full *SWG* experience.

A different approach then is the use of the original server code itself. In 2013, a former

developer of *SWG* leaked a copy of the production release source code for the client, server,

third-party libraries, and development tools online (Messner, 2015). This of course is

occasionally a practice with private servers, which sometimes use unethical means of obtaining

the code for running a server for the virtual world (Hansen, 2019). While it isn't explicitly

mentioned anywhere on the Legends website as to which approach it is using—emulation or the source code—secondary sources say that it is the latter.

Legends itself. The history of the Legends server begins with another *SWG* server, known as Reborn. It launched in 2015, after being worked on in secret for quite some time, with an attitude of "no admins, no rules. Pure anarchy let the community police itself," (Levarris, 2015). This libertarian approach likely led to the eventual downfall of the Reborn server, and some of the developers from that failed project moved on to build the Legends server, once again using the leaked code as a foundation to build a functioning server with the NGE (Levarris, 2015; Neliev, 2017).

The Legends server then launched five years after the closure of the *SWG* servers, on January 11, 2016. Since that time, Legends has maintained a growing audience of players, hosted an online forum, and a vibrant Discord channel. But tracing the history of Legends is mainly available through combing the online forum, with posts describing in broad strokes much of what went on during the early years of its life.

The first year included a lot of bug fixes, and by May of 2016 there was another rift amongst the staff, and the team lost two of its admins (Neliev, 2017). Over the months the server saw steady growth and then was hit by unrelenting DDOS[14] attacks in September, which led to half of the team to split from Legends in October (Neliev, 2017). Over all, this first year was tumultuous, but included seven updates to the server were released as well as the First Galactic Senate was elected (Neliev, 2021).

The second year was one of additional growth, with the first anniversary of the server reaching 10,000 registered accounts and broke 1000 simultaneous logins (Neliev, 2017). In

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[14] Short for *distributed denial-of-service*, this is when a website or computer becomes unavailable due to a flood of too much traffic. A powerful weapon on the internet used by hackers for various purposes.

addition, by January 2017 the last staff member from the Reborn server resigned, which marked

a new beginning for Legends (Neliev, 2017). Year two saw five updates—including a missing

quest line from the original game[15]—and the launch of the Discord channel, which is still

running to this day (Neliev, 2021).

The third year began in January 2019, and also saw more growth to the community and

the server. Seven updates were released, bringing the content of Legends almost exactly to where

the official servers left off (Neliev, 2021). The server celebrated the 15th anniversary of *SWG*—a

continuing tradition for the server to have community celebrations and events—and also saw the

release of the first Community Transmission (Neliev, 2021). The Community Transmission is

the name for the server's newsletter, which is released on a quarterly basis and includes updates

from the staff on new (and sometimes exclusive) content, spotlights on members of the

community, as well as Q&A based on questions from players.

The fourth and fifth years of the server have included minor updates beyond the

continued growth of the community and player base. Additional custom and exclusive content

was added, such as new quest lines and theme parks,[16] as well as updates to in game systems

beyond the vision of SOE (Neliev, 2021). During this time period a big announcement was

made, about a new expansion-level update that the staff are working on to add to the game

(Royce, 2020). As Royce describes in their news article about the update, the Legends staff are

working on an unofficial expansion titled The City in the Clouds, which will include a brand new

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[15] The Witches of Dathomir theme park, which was released on December 14, 2010 on the official servers. As is the case with many SWG emulation efforts and pirated servers like Legends, there is a lot of minor content that was released in patches (or even entire expansions) that are missing, which takes effort by the staff to reintroduce.

[16] Theme parks are a term for a series of narrative-driven quests that take place in an isolated area and culminate in a final showdown or dungeon. In some ways, this can be seen as a derogative term (meaning the player has no control, and is instead being led along like a child at Disney Land), but to most players additional content—in the form of theme parks or not—is a benefit.

planet to explore (Bespin) along with new content and updates to the player city system. At the time of writing this expansion is still in development with no news about a release date.

CHAPTER IV:

FIELDSITE

Tohy Wavingcrest is the name of my *SWG* avatar, a light-skinned female twi'lek (see

Figure 5). While there are many options for skin-color (since canonically there are green and

blue twi'leks), I chose one that mirrors my personal appearance, likely as a subconscious way of

imbuing myself into my avatar. Tohy is a Jedi, and at the moment wears her open Jedi robes

which reveal the lack of armor I have yet to find to stack alongside them. Whenever I load up the

game I am greeted by my character in her underwear, emblematic of the sexualization of twi'leks

in the extended *Star Wars* universe.[17]

FIGURE 5: Tohy my avatar

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[17] One of the first twi'leks depicted onscreen was Oola, a slave dancer for Jabba the Hutt. There is a page devoted to the hypersexualization of the species on the Non-canon Star Wars Wiki, Banthapedia: "Half-naked Twi'Lek Chicks make up an alarming percentage of the population of the galaxy. They can be found everywhere from Tatooine to the halls of the Galactic Senate on Coruscant. They are collected by the wealthy and powerful." The article lists 11 famous female twi'leks from Star Wars lore that all wear as little clothing as possible. This phenomenon of course can be found in fan content as well.

I think the reason I picked a twi'lek is that cosmetically they are an alien species that resonates with me. This avatar of course shaped my experiences in the game, as it changed how I acted and how others perceived me. It carries over some of my positionality as a researcher, including the privileges I have as a white, heterosexual male. I don't really want to get too Freudian, but my character is shaped by the male gaze and all of that baggage. Tohy and I won't feel the sting of racism or sexism that other players might, because my female avatar has different meaning with a male player.

Circling back to Tohy's profession though, as it is a misnomer: it really should be "Force User," because those who pick the Jedi profession have the option to choose the light or the dark side. One of my strongest memories with Tohy was completing the introductory Jedi quest line. I sat in Tatooine, after assembling the pieces to craft a lightsaber. The desert planet felt desolate and unforgiving, but I had persevered through the challenges and the long distances in the fetch quests. I had bought the power source from the auction house, and sat there weighing what I wanted from the game. Would Tohy and I be a Jedi, or a Sith?[18] As the twin suns began to set in the sky, I stared into Tohy's back and thought of the logics of the choice: with the light side of the Force, I could use support and healing spells, while with the dark side I could use attack and buff spells. But beyond the ludographic consequences of my choice was the moral one: do I want to present myself as a follower of good, or an agent of chaos? While Tohy didn't offer her opinion, the consequences of my choice would impact her and my play style. We sat there on Tatooine for a while, until I eventually decided to close the game and make the decision another

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[18] The story of Star Wars centers on a Buddhist view of nature. There is a magic power, known as the Force, that flows through everything. This power has a light side and a dark side, and this black and white morality also means that each side are like yin and yang to each other. The Jedi religion worships the light side of the Force and use this magical ability for good, while the Sith are their opposite.

time. It was nearly a week later when I chose to make a blue lightsaber, and by so doing choose

the light side and start on the path to becoming a Jedi.

Following this background on the game and the server, it is pertinent to discuss how this

game served as a fieldsite for this study. Tohy and I worked in harmony to collect the data for

this dissertation, she and I explored this fieldsite and interviewed my interlocutors. She and I

shared many other experiences, flying in outer space and across the galaxy. Understanding the

past and present of this virtual world is important in an analysis of the community and its player

cities and governments. Below is a discussion on the difference between the player base of the

Legends server and the original *SWG* server, as well as a discussion on how the nature of this

virtual world as a text for analysis. This site analysis then sets up much of what is delineated in

the methods chapter.

The World of Legends

As mentioned previously, the game *SWG* was released in 2003 and the official servers

were shut down in 2011. With this closure of the official servers came discontinuation of the

original virtual worlds—including the player cities and content. Technically, the source code for

the virtual worlds is still accessible through installation discs, but the hosted content was erased

when the servers were closed.[19] Thus, this project is examining the reconstruction of new

experiences through old technologies and the ruins of an abandoned game.

As the Legends server was launched in 2016, the community that surrounds this server is

not as old as the original game, but rather a new site for refugees of the game. The player cities,

monuments, and objects that are at the heart of this fieldsite are new when compared to the

history of the game, but are created within the older technology and code of the virtual world

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[19] There are attempts by fans to reverse engineer the game entirely, but that is not in the scope of this
project, which seeks to focus on the most popular server for the game.

itself.[20] However, as mentioned previously the Legends server is not the only private server for fans for *SWG*. The Legends server appears on most metrics to be the largest private server for *SWG*, and is based upon the NGE code. Due to its popularity and its dedication to the last version of *SWG* before it was shut down, Legends was chosen as the fieldsite for this dissertation. As of 2022, it boasts over 2,000 active player accounts with an average of 1200 characters online concurrently.[21] This population is important to the scope of the dissertation, as it was large enough to not be exhausted for interviewees.

Site Analysis

Player housing. Within the mechanics of the game, players are able to construct their own houses and other structures—such as factories for harvesting or crafting materials, items, etc. (Structure Schematics, n.d.). However, these structures are still technically "items" or artifacts within the game's code. For example, in the open world game of *Minecraft*, players create their own dwellings and structures wholly from raw materials. They use their imagination to create unique and personalized structures that they can define as housing. However, in *SWG*, these houses are limited and merely templates provided by the game developers. Players can choose between a handful of different housing styles and sizes, and are able to store said houses within their inventory (Structure Schematics, n.d.). Thus, players are using prefabricated houses provided to them by the old game code and can put them into their pockets when they want to move to a new location. Greater detail on the specific types of housing is explored in the findings chapter of this dissertation, exploring which houses are more popular.

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[20] There could be a lot to discuss in terms of platform studies, separating the code and the program from the content being analyzed. There are some interesting discussions to be had about the relatively new content being created within the older content, the disconnect between the old experiences of the original game (no longer accessible) and replaced by the new experiences of the Legends server that uses the abandoned code. It is truly a new community build upon and without the ruins of the old.

[21] These statistics were pulled from the Legends website, but I have my doubts about the terminology they use. They claim that half of the total population are "online concurrently."

Housing deeds. When a player has a housing deed (the item to create a house), the majority of the virtual world is open to them to settle on. The few exceptions would be the galaxy cities (those made by the game developers) and terrain that is unsuitable for housing (bodies of water and mountains). But if the player wishes to place their house within the geographic area of an established player city, they must first gain permission from the mayor or city council of that player city (Player City, n.d.). Thus, the player-run government dictates and controls the zoning within its jurisdiction. But the player has immense freedom to settle where they wish, as exemplified by the suburban sprawl outside of Mos Eisley, where many players have placed their houses without forming a player city government.

Player cities. As a unit of analysis, player cities are useful as they are microcosms for the power dynamics of the game: they are both sites of individualism and collectivism. Players can individually place their own houses, factories, and other structures for their own gain within the city boundaries. Zoning permission is given by the government on the promise of contributions to the community and its collectivism. The government of these player cities is also bound by the mechanics of the game, while also extending beyond it. Votes are cast regularly in-game to elect the mayor and city council (with some stories of coup d'états and election rigging), however many player cities also engage in other community-building efforts outside of the game—such as hosting their own Discord channels—revealing how these communities are built within but also extend beyond the virtual world. Player cities can also host guild halls, which are separate player-run communities for group activities and raids that are not bound by geographic location nor part of the galactic senate. These player governments also extend into larger bodies that are involved in a game-wide (galactic scale) strata of power.

Sandbox galaxy. As mentioned previously, the *SWG* is a sandbox game and gives immense freedom to the player to do as they wish outside of a controlled narrative. Players can engage in various systems and activities—both combat-based, and not—such as harvesting materials, crafting starships, and mining asteroids. This freedom to do so much is a plus to this virtual world as a fieldsite because it means that when players engage in the housing and cities it is a conscious choice among many other various choices.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

I was on the planet of Tatooine—where I spent a lot of my time—after a long period of space mining. I had a small spaceship that I used to shoot asteroids and farm for resources and loot[22] to sell to vendors or on the player-run bazaar. The space sections of the game introduced wide expanses of nothing, black infinity broken up with specks of white for the stars. But sprinkled among this nothing were small asteroids or enemy ships to shoot. There were Alliance ships and Imperial ships, and since I was not aligned with either faction I could shoot any ship I saw as a pirate. A lot of the loot I earned in outer space were space ship parts (engines, mechanisms, chassis, etc.). In my inexperience, I thought I could use these parts on my space ship, especially since my engine was toast from being shot too many times (all of your ship parts have a durability factor that are affected by space battle). But as I sat in the cantina, I realized that I could use none of my items. The complicated systems in place meant that all of these parts were useless to me.

So in frustration, I sought out the bazaar and bought a few parts from other players. Again, I couldn't equip these items; they didn't match my ship's type or I didn't have the required experience in space travel to use them. Frustrated again, I bought some additional

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[22] Loot: items dropped by enemies that are either used by your character or sold for money in video games. Loot can either be valuable or junk, depending on the randomized rewards built into the systems of the game.

resources to craft my own. I then realized I needed to find a spaceship crafting terminal to begin the crafting process. After I found one I attempted to craft some parts. Like many other games, SWG had a system where players could craft, or take raw materials and combine them in different ways to create more advanced items. I knew that I had some resources—carbonaceous asteroid, copper, inert gas—that I could use to create something. But then I didn't have the appropriate skill leveled up in spaceship crafting, nor the appropriate tools, nor the schematics. Defeated, I gave up on crafting.

At another point, I tried to craft some new items again, and was led to try setting up a house as well. In a later chapter I discuss how players (including myself) associate the meaning of home to be a place to make and craft. Below is an entry from my field notes about my experience trying to craft and settle down:

> I went on the bazaar to try and find some crafting tools. I sadly don't have enough credits to buy the tools or the materials I need to craft some better armor or lightsabers. So I tried to harvest some materials that I could then sell at a junk dealer. I went first to Yavin, thinking that maybe it would be a good place to also settle down with a house/settlement. I got wrecked though by the mobs there. So I traveled to Corellia and did the same thing. This time I still died a couple times, but not nearly as bad (technically I was just incapacitated, and came back). I was able to harvest some meat, leather, and other stuff, but didn't have time to sell.

> With a sandbox game like this, I really wish I knew where to start to learn about the systems and mechanics. Like crafting, it is still pretty much a mystery to me. But I want to be able to craft stuff, like armor, weapons, and starship stuff. I think I need plans, (I have a couple), and I need crafting tools (I don't have), and I need materials (also don't have). And another wish that I have is that I could build a settlement or house. I really have no idea how to start with that, but feel like it would be really fun.

These were my attempts to craft items in SWG, none of which were successful. Unlike other games, this one had such a depth and complexity that to be honest, as a player, I found almost impossible to navigate. The systems and requirements were just too much for a beginner like myself to understand to use. So I gave up on crafting. In the previous chapter, I had outlined

the rocky history of *SWG* and how as a game it was lauded for its granular approach to crafting, but this system defeated me. I talked about the complicated history of the game, how fans approached it, and the role that the Legends server had in preserving the experience, all of which came to a head when I was unable to truly dive into the sandbox nature of *SWG* and craft some spaceship parts.

Conclusion

This chapter was a historical analysis of both the game, *SWG*, and the Legends server. Based upon online sources—such as games journalism and forum posts—I was able to piece together the history of this virtual world and use that as a foundation to establish this game as a fieldsite of analysis. The history of the game, the server, and the relevant in-game systems are important points of reference in understanding this study. The history and development of *SWG* were tumultuous, which led to its closure and the birth of the Legends server years later.

CHAPTER V:

METHODS

Tohy dismounts from her speeder outside a large house on the desert planet of Tatooine. Sand as far as the eye can see, and this palace is just outside the official settlement of Anchorhead. I'm here to visit Felicity's home, we've just finished our virtual interview and she offered to give me a housing tour. As I wait for her to log into the game, she talks about her memories of the game over the conferencing software. She's returned to the game after a long period away: she started in the middle of the expansions and recently got hit with a twinge of nostalgia to seek it out. She's been on the Legends server for about nine months now and finds herself retreading similar ground years later.

When Felicity logs on, her Ithorian[23] trader avatar materializes outside her house. The building itself is one of the more unique ones: it has a small stucco igloo-like structure next to a deep circular hole which represents an underground spaceship hangar. Part of this Large Tatooine House (Style 3),[24] includes a large hill of sand, as well a few palm trees and a wind turbine. It is a very decorative house, one that is unique to the planet since there aren't any other underground hangar houses available. Felicity spends a significant portion of her time at her home, with any errands she needs taking her either to Anchorhead next door, or a shuttle to Mos Eisley if need be. She opens the door, and changes the setting to make her house public, just long enough for us to conduct the tour. Like most other players, Felicity likes her privacy, and the game allows for player homes to be inaccessible to the public. Tohy and I are immediately

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[23] Ithorians are a species with a head similar to a hammerhead shark atop their human-like body. One can be seen in the cantina of the first *Star Wars* movie, and another has a small role in the *Book of Boba Fett* television series.

[24] The official name of this structure.

greeted with the clutter of crates, boxes, and dressers. I ask her about how she approaches the

interior design of her house and she says, "I really don't, I need storage more than decorations."

She chuckles, as do I, and she leads me through the various boxes in the front room of her house.

She outlines all of the different supplies she has stored in her house, but then gets very excited to

tell me about the things she crafts regularly. As a trader, she can specialize in one of four fields:

domestic goods (food and clothing), structures (ships and houses), munitions (armor and

weapons), or engineering (droids). Felicity tells me about how this avatar—the Ithorian—

specializes in domestic goods, but her alternative avatars specialize in the other three, and all

share the house and resources.

  We move into the next room, which feels like yet another jumble of clutter and crates.

Felicity reveals that the one way she segregates the rooms of her house are the types of crafting

supplies needed in each room. The first room was actually the food section, with a Food and

Chemical Crafting Station in the back. I peer around and see it tucked in the corner. This room

has a Clothing and Armor Crafting Station, and is surrounded by containers of metal fasteners,

dyes, cloth, and fiber panels. I don't get the impression that any of these boxes mean anything to

Felicity, based on how she discusses the resources. But then I ask what are some items that she

would never sell or throw away, she responded: "I never sell my server rewards. I never sell my

crafting supplies." I probe and ask why, what makes them valuable to her? She said that she

never knew when she might need that supply, and she's always looking for new schematics[25] or

new items to craft.

  We chatted about these items that she crafts, and what it's like making so many domestic

goods such as armor and clothing. She laughs and says, "Well I never run out of backpacks for

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[25] The official name for the recipes needed to craft anything in the game. Before a player can craft
anything, they need the tools (or a crafting station), the recipe, and the raw materials.

my characters!" These backpacks and storage in her avatars' clothing are where she keeps many

of her server rewards and unique items. Instead, she displays in her house all of her crafting

supplies. She told me that's because she doesn't care what other players think about her house, it

isn't public anyways. She then led me through her cache, pointing out what each container

contained as we slowly weaved through the piles. I tried to keep my fieldnotes positive about this

experience, or at least neutral in my word choice, but I admit that I called Felicity a hoarder.

Research Questions

This dissertation arose from preliminary research and participant observation and through

a grounded approach led to a crystallization of new questions. The research questions delineated

below and the literature outlined previously lend themselves to other methods for analysis

(besides participant observation and ethnography), as they grapple with spatial theory and the

theories of place. The research questions of this dissertation are:

RQ1: Are there patterns of urbanization happening across player cities?

RQ2: How are player cities changing over time?

RQ3: What are the stratifications of power within the community and how do they interact?
(such as the player city governments, the guilds, and individualism)

RQ4: How do players engage with a sense of place within this virtual space?

RQ5: What are the demographics of players on the Legends server? How are issues of race,
gender, and hegemony at play in the community?

Foundational concepts

To answer the above research questions, the primary methods for analyzing the layers of

power and the concepts of place in the virtual world were site mapping and structural analysis.

These findings then were triangulated with the supplementary methods of interviews and more

participant observation via ethnography. Before discussing these various methods and how they were used in this dissertation, below are a couple of broad concepts that shaped the data collection process: my self-reflexivity, my grounded approach, and the sampling process.

Self-reflexivity. It is worth acknowledging and noting my positionality in the creation and construction of this study. I am a fan of the Star Wars intellectual property, having grown up with plastic lightsaber fights and Lego spaceships. However, I did not play *SWG* when the official servers were live. As such, I do not have personal nostalgia for this game, but I was an avid fan and player of contemporary MMOs at the time (the early 2000s).

In addition, I feel that it is important to note my epistemology in the construction of this study. I have no desire to find "objective truth," or a sense of neutrality in my findings. I cannot truly divorce myself from the collection and analysis of my data, and as such, I embrace my biases at every step of the process. This attitude was formed before I put pen to paper in collecting and transcribing my field notes, and as such my opinions found therein are very honest and biased. If I did not have such opinions about neutrality and biases, I likely would not conduct a study like this.

Grounded theory. Grounded theory is a research methodology that results in the production of a theory that explains patterns in data, and that predicts what social scientists might expect to find in similar data sets. When practicing this popular social science method, a researcher begins with a set of data and then identifies patterns, trends, and relationships among the data. Based on these, the researcher constructs a theory that is "grounded" in the data itself. The methods described below resulted in high volumes of transcribed data. These transcripts were analyzed via a close reading of the text, with a grounded theory approach: letting the findings and connections arise through multiple readings and codes. The transcripts were

analyzed via textual analysis via an application (Dedoose) that tracked the codes across the corpus and the lines that have thus been coded.

However, this study is not technically based in grounded theory, as it instead entered the research with presupposed hypotheses. There was preliminary research done first, with no intentions, research questions, or hypotheses. Then, the research questions mentioned previously arose out of this preliminary research data. Then more data was collected, as these research questions hypothesized certain relationships or results. However, in many instances these hypotheses turned out to be untrue and other results emerged. Thus, this dissertation takes an adjusted form of grounded theory—a grounded approach—as its guiding paradigm. In the textual analysis, the themes and subthemes emerged on their own with no expectations from the researcher. But other methods such as the site mapping and structural analyses asked specific questions (what are patterns of urbanization, how are cities changing), only for the data to suggest that these hypotheses were completely false. I claim then that this study takes a grounded approach to the data, instead of being a purely grounded theory study. In other words, although I entered the project with some expectations, these varied across different parts of the study and I was continually open to discovering that I was wrong in my presuppositions.

Rank	Title	Citizens*	Radius	Enabled civic structures
1	Outpost	5 declared	150 m	Small gardens
2	Village	10 declared	200 m	Medium gardens, Bank, Garage, Cantina
3	Township	15 declared	300 m	Large gardens, Cloning facility, Hospital
4	City	30 declared	400 m	Shuttleport, Theater
5	Metropolis	40 declared	450 m	

TABLE 1: Describing the five ranks of player cities, as dictated by the game. *Player city rank is determined by the citizenship.

Sampling. While this study is rooted in qualitative analysis, I employed some statistical philosophies to limit my scope. This means that I used sampling to create a manageable amount

of player cities to study and that it is worth mentioning how I found players to interview. As this

study analyzed 10 player cities and one settlement—out of the total of 233 across the seven

planets—a stratified random sample was created.[26] First, two planets were selected, and then all

of the player cities on that planet were sorted based on their ranking. *SWG* provides rankings of

the cities in a hierarchy based upon certain milestones, meaning those player cities that are more

populous have access to greater in-game resources and benefits (see Table 1). Then for each of

the five ranks, a random number generator was used to select one city per ranking from the two

planets, and an additional settlement was also chosen. This settlement—an unincorporated

suburb of Mos Eisley—was chosen because Mos Eisley is arguably the largest official city in the

game, being the most populous by players. On the outskirts of Mos Eisley are sprawling

"suburbs" of player houses and factories, none of which are part of a formalized player city.

City Name	Planet	Survey 1	Rank 1*	Survey 2	Rank 2**
Sandy View Moisture Farm	Tatooine	July 2020	1	January 2022	1
Rising Sun	Tatooine	July 2020	2	January 2022	[D]
Mos Ferun	Tatooine	July 2020	3	January 2022	3
Phoenix	Tatooine	July 2020	4	January 2022	3 [N]
Beggar's Canyon	Tatooine	July 2020	5	January 2022	5
Mos Eisley suburbs	Tatooine	July 2020	--	January 2022	--
Another Dimension	Naboo	July 2020	1	--	[D]
Smuggler's Run	Naboo	June 2020	2	January 2022	[D]
Rapture	Naboo	July 2020	3	--	3
Werowocomoco	Naboo	June 2020	4	--	4
Aurebesh	Naboo	May 2020	5	--	4

*TABLE 2: Model of player cities in the sample. * the rank of the city at the first survey; ** the rank of the city at the second survey. [D]: the city has been dissolved. [N]: the city has a new name.*

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[26] The preliminary study conducted for a class paper analyzed the city of Aurebesh, as it is the oldest player city on the server. This city was included in the sample, despite not being chosen randomly, and included as an additional rank 5 city on the planet of Naboo.

In addition, five of the player cities had a second survey conducted around 18 months after the first. This allows for two points of comparison with the cities: one where cities are compared to similar ones on a different planet based upon their rank (inter-city comparisons), and another where the cities are compared to themselves to capture their transition and change (intra-city comparisons), as shown in Table 2.

Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted during January of 2022. These interviews were used to triangulate the preliminary findings of the site mapping and settlement analysis. There were two types of interviews, a general interview to discuss the majority of the research questions (N = 12), and a second interview conducted during a "house tour" (N = 5). While I will address the specifics of these interviews later, it is worth noting that they were each be done via snowball sampling. A recruitment message was posted in the Legends online forum, and volunteers reached out to me to schedule interviews.

Method 1: Site Mapping

In order to assess the value of place, and create a study of erected structures, the primary method of this dissertation is site mapping and structural analysis. This is the transcribing of geographic data from within the game to diagram where houses, factories, and structures are located and compare these maps to the various player cities and settlements in the sample. This includes a map of the location, as well as coding the existing structures. This can be vital to understanding a community based upon its social environment, and documenting where architectural spaces are in relation to each other can map out the society's values (Jennings & Earle, 2016; Li et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2004; O'toole & Were, 2008).

The virtual world of a video game is an archaeological site and can be analyzed via the game-sites on the surface (Reinhard, 2018, p. 91). When applying this method to a game site,

some things to document include the archaeological record (such as the changes in the game data over time), and the remains of human occupation, considering how these things are left behind to create a history of the site (p. 93). And Reinhard also argues that player cities become vibrant and viable when there are more players and a healthy in-game economy, and yet when players leave, the digitally built environment remains as a shell of what it once was (p. 106). Conducting a virtual survey then includes using digital tools to map and measure the in-game environment, as well as record it with video or image capturing tools.

However, in the case of this study, its connection to archaeology is likely a stretch. Archaeology is more interested in the ancient, in uncovering the data or findings below strata. So instead of an archaeological survey, this method would be more of a site mapping to gather what a current community is creating and building. These site maps though will still be vital and can be used as points of comparison to contrast how different player cities are establishing themselves if the size of the city influences how tightly knit the community is, and if there are patterns of greater collectivism or individualism across planets (Hui, 1988; Jennings & Earle, 2016).

For this study, I collected screenshots of the map overlay built into *SWG* to capture the placement and footprint of structures.[27] Then these screenshots were cobbled together in an image editing software to create a master map. This master map was of low quality and included extraneous detail, so a simplified map was designed by scratch via tracing the structural footprints within the image editing software. This workflow was then applied to each city, resulting in the final maps included in Appendix A. The method of map analysis is fairly niche

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[27] The survey was able to capture an accurate visualization of the structures and dwellings of the cities in the sample, but unable to capture other geologic features (such as the topography or the water). However, I did attempt through other means to capture and recreate the topography as best as possible, however, the fidelity of these features are not nearly as accurate as the structural location.

and not systematized. Thus, for the visual analysis of site mapping, I just made notes of visual patterns I noticed after comparing maps side by side. After the creation of the many maps, their layout and blueprint were compared to the variations within the sample: such as comparing a rank 2 city on Tatooine to a rank 2 city on Naboo, or comparing a rank 1 city to a rank 5 city, or comparing how a rank 3 city changed over time to a rank 4 city. The main points of visual analysis were these: the clumping of types of structures (are there a lot of player houses here, or a lot of factories), as well as comparing distances between structures (is there a lot of space between where the city hall is and the guild hall). These patterns were compiled as notes and then used to shape the results in a later chapter.

Method 2: Structural Analysis

Following the creation of the visual maps via the site mapping method, part of the analysis included coding the types of structures found in and around the cities. This coding was done via the codebook found in Appendix C. Determining the types of structures found in-game meant a reliance on player-generated content in the form of wikis for the game found online (Player City, n.d.; Structure Schematics, n.d.). There are few official guides and sources of information related to *SWG* still online since the closure of the servers. Thus, I had to rely on the few guides and wikis that are related to the game and its server. However, based upon the official terminology for types of structures for player cities (Player City, n.d.), a codebook (mentioned previously) was crafted to account for the various types of housing—planet specific structures versus generic structures, large footprints versus small or medium footprints—as well as the various types of other structures prior to data collection. This codebook for the structural analysis was not based upon a grounded approach (or textual analysis), rather being an accounting of the typology created by the game itself, devoid of my research.

This four-part taxonomy includes *player housing, installations, gardens,* and *civic structures*. *Player housing* are structures that are basic dwellings. They come in a variety of types, both in planet-specific structures, generic structures, and sizes (Structure Schematics, n.d.), but all are noted for their purpose of serving the individual player. *Installations* are similar in that they are individual spaces, but are forms of production in that they either extract resources from the environment or manufacture resources from the player's reserves. *Gardens* are paid for and maintained by the city's treasury, for the explicit use of beautification and serve no ludographic function. *Civic structures* are public spaces that benefit the community in some way. These can include structures that offer benefits to the inhabitants of the city, or the Guild Halls which serve a smaller subset of the community. This structural analysis of the maps led to quantitative data, frequencies of structures, and their types. No statistical measures were used to analyze this data besides a frequency table, as seen in the findings chapter.

Method 3: Interviews

As mentioned earlier, I built upon the findings of the site mapping and structural analysis with interviews in two formats. These were semi-structured and followed two interview guides based on the two topics (see Appendix B). The first were general interviews, asking about the player, their nostalgia for the game, why they play, what kinds of artifacts they collect, if they have a player house, and how involved they are in the in-game governing body (either at the guild level or the server level). These interviews were conducted via snowball sampling, as outlined previously. Then, during each interview, I asked if they have any friends or contacts I should also reach out to. This allowed for rapport to be built naturally, with early adopters of the interviews placing me in contact with their in-game friends and exposing their relationships.

The second type of semi-structured interview was focused on the player's house and its specifics. This second interview is not as vital but served as a deeper dive into the questions on home and objects. The second interview didn't occur every time due to the subject's time restraints but would occur immediately after the regularly planned interview. The reasons for the delineation between these two interviews are twofold: one, most of the research questions can be asked in a separate setting and can be off-the-cuff, and two, additional richness can come from housing tours, a separate method in anthropology (Money, 2007). These interviews were conducted via the video conferencing app Zoom, with the first portion being only in the main video call space, and the second portion being done by the participant sharing their screen and logging into the Legends server to show me around their house. In total, I conducted 12 interviews before reaching saturation in the results. During the data collection phase, pseudonyms were assigned to the interviewees to protect their anonymity. These pseudonyms were assigned alphabetically according to the order they were interviewed, via a random name generator (the first interviewee was given an "A" name, the second a "B," etc.; see Table 3). As part of my IRB agreement for the privacy of my interlocutors, I don't include images of their avatars. However, in Appendix D you can find images of the various alien species in the game.

Returning to my housing tour with my interlocutor Felicity, I was reminded about how different her tour was to others. She took a very pragmatic approach, and treated her house as a safe storage space. When asked what home means to her, it was just a place to unload her loot. However, despite this attitude, I felt that based upon what she stored and what she accumulated in her house, she also valued it as a place of creation. Walking through her home I was flooded with more information on resources, materials, and crafting than I ever knew was possible in this game. Felicity has been drawn to this game because of how many options she has in her creation:

every armor piece can be customized, every schematic can be tweaked. The possibilities are nearly endless for the items she creates, because each has different stats and buffs based upon the items used to craft them. Walking through her home, I learned more about the crafting system and what it looks like in the virtual space. It is one thing to jump onto the bazaar and see the many different sourced items for sale, but it is another to see how those items are made by players.

I asked Felicity if she ever displayed her creations as trophies or as items for sale. She said that she tried that when she played on the original servers. But in Legends, she just sticks to amassing her resources and materials mostly. She then takes me to the very last room in the very back of her house, and shows off some rare armor. She has just two full sets on display, but her voice slowly filled with pride as she told me about the difficulty she had in finding the exact fiberblast panel needed, or where she found the metal fasteners, and the stats these armor pieces gave.

Method 4: Field notes of participatory observation

The founding figures in ethnographic video game research—Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor—coauthored a handbook on the method for virtual worlds (Boellstorff et al., 2012). They wrote that while ethnographers have a wide toolbox of methods, the foundational one is "participant observation, the cornerstone of ethnography," (p. 65). The medium of video games is built upon the principles of play and interaction, and to conduct good participant observation means to incorporate play and research in parallel as the same engaged activity (p. 69). While it is possible to merely conduct research in virtual worlds as an observer, I feel that such an approach only captures a tiny portion of the experience, and instead participant observation—

playing the game alongside your interlocutors—is the best practice for conducting research on the community of players.

As part of the process of conducting participatory observation, I kept field notes of my experience. These notes were gathered after each play session and outlined my feelings about what I observed and did, and served as a personal tool for reflection. They were later subjected to textual analysis and this shaped the findings and results chapters, with an additional layer of analysis added in retrospect to pull themes across the experience. This study began on March 1st, 2019, when I created my first character. But my participant observation began in earnest in June 2021 after my committee approved my proposal. In total, I logged 116 hours of playtime to supplement my other methods and findings.

Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Pseudonym
27	Male	White	Alex
24	Male	White	Brian
36	Male	White	Chris
18	Male	White	David
30	Male	White-washed Portuguese*	Elliot
51	Female	NA	Felicity
44	Male	White	Gaston
32	Male	White	Henry
35	Male	Mixed	Ivan
23	Male	Mixed	Jacob
31	Male	White	Kevin
43	Non-binary	White	Locklen

*TABLE 3: Demographics of Interview Subjects. *This is the exact terminology used by the interlocutor.*

Sample

As discussed in the previous chapter, this multi-method study included varied data from various sources, all of which will be discussed in their respective sections. However, the following section summarizes and repeats what data was collected and analyzed as the sample

for this dissertation. There were 12 player cities analyzed (and one unincorporated suburban sprawl), with 18 maps in total due to the second survey of some of the cities to serve as a comparison. From these maps, there were 2614 player structures coded based upon the typology of the game.

In addition, there were 12 in-depth interviews conducted before saturation in the findings. Within these interviews, the participants self-identified themselves for their ethnicity, (see Table 3). The sample was mostly male (83.33%), white (75%), and skewed older ($M = 32.83$, $SD = 9.60$). In addition to coding these interviews, I also played the game for 116 hours and logged my experiences in field notes (9000 words) after each play session, and similarly coded these field notes. I also collected ~70,000 words from the global chat while playing. These chat logs were consulted as part of my field notes to give some additional flavor to my analysis but were not coded to the same depth.

It is worth noting the evolution of the cities from the first surveys in the summer of 2020 (May-July) to the second surveys in January of 2022. While only a handful of these cities were mapped—those on the planet of Tatooine, as discussed later—there were changes in the cities beyond the footprint of the city layout. Three cities dissolved: Another Dimension, Smuggler's Run, and Rising Sun, with Smuggler's Run likely being reformed into a new city in a similar location, Somewhere-over-the-RNBW.[28] One city had a name change, Phoenix became Bounty's End, and shrunk from a rank 4 to a rank 3 city. Aurebesh also shrank from a rank 5 to a rank 4 city, and no cities in the sample grew in rank during the period of the surveys.

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[28] At the founding of a player city, the mayor and citizens are able to declare what faction the city aligns with, either the Rebel Alliance, the Galactic Empire, or neither. After the founding, the citizens can rename their city and change faction alignment. In the case of the one renaming (Phoenix to Bounty's End), there was a shift from no alignment to Imperial; and Smuggler's Run went from a Rebel aligned city to Somewhere-over-the-RNBW being Imperial with new coordinates.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the literature, exploring the patterns of urban design can reveal the power structures of the civic bodies that create them (Hui, 1988; Jennings & Earle, 2016; Li et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2018). These findings would be compared to other cities, to find other patterns of power structures and civic design in other groups on the server. While commercial platforms and video games may impose their own rules and regulations as a form of governance (Rolfes & Passig, 2019), in *SWG* players are creating their own governments and instituting their own rules. Video game communities such as *SWG* then craft their own rules—such as the placement of gardens, civic structures, and individual dwellings—that members of the community agree to live by within the domains of the game (Rolfes & Passig, 2019). While *SWG* may give individual players incredible freedoms, there is still a mechanic of regulation built into player cities: no player can set up a house within the city boundaries without zoning permission from the mayor or city council. Thus, the players of this community and its city dictate and control where houses are placed, and grant their own form of governance over the appearance and layout of the city. As players are erecting these structures and changing the landscape, they are erecting monuments to their memory, and these monuments carry symbolic power (Tilley, 1994) that I analyze in the following chapters.

CHAPTER VI:

DISCUSSION - PLACES

I was knee-deep in my preliminary research, having spent a lot of time playing the game for exploratory findings. I was exploring a lot of the game mechanics and systems, and thought about settling down myself. I was given a housing deed for a Mustafarian Bunker, so I thought about placing my house inside Aurebesh. However, after I realized that I would need permission from the city council for zoning, I backed out. Instead I placed it just yards outside of the city limits to avoid the bureaucracy (and likely due to a libertarian attitude Tohy and I had).

It felt kind of nice to have a place of my own, and I emptied my pockets and bags of all the loot I had acquired and didn't want to sell. There was a lot of organizing: I rearranged my crates and items over and over. Eventually, I settled on a very simple plan, with some of my prized items in the basement (farther away from me and the door), and all my resources and needed junk on the ground floor with easy access.

My small bunker, unique in its shape but bland in appearance, felt alien in the lush green environment of Naboo. The dark metal, and the sharp edges of my house contrasted with the thick grass and rolling mountains. Giant fambaa lumbered nearby, like enormous herbivore dinosaurs. While they didn't pose an immediate threat to me or my house, they dwarf my bunker as they aimlessly meander the open savannah.

I came back a few times to my house, unloading, reorganizing, admiring. But then my gameplay sessions were put on hold: I had a lot of cramming and studying to do in preparation for my comprehensive exams and the oral defense of my dissertation proposal. But when I surfaced from my ordeal and jumped back into Naboo, I found an empty lot. Where my house

once stood, only bare grass. And checking my bag revealed I had no credits left. I forgot about the monetary upkeep of owning a house: depending upon the size of your house, the game automatically deducts money to pay for the "utilities." And when you run out of credits to pay for your upkeep, your house is removed, placed back into your bag. This was a double-hit to my ego, for not only did I lose that connection to the game (my house was uprooted), but I also had no money at all. While my house wasn't completely gone—I still had the deed and could place it again—it felt like a loss, that I no longer had a home.

This feeling lingered with me, and I never placed my house again. I instead spent more time doing my research (collecting data, interviewing interlocutors, visiting player cities), and a little bit of time engaging in the game itself. When I wasn't interacting with the players and community, my solo play revolved around accumulating credits again to maybe one day afford the upkeep of a home again. This focus on the data collection stage leads to a discussion on the exact methods I used as part of my dissertation.

The following chapter outlines the data collected on places, specifically the methods of site mapping and structural analysis, and discussions on these findings within the context of the research questions. At the center of this dissertation is the site mapping and structural analysis, which include visual maps (in Appendix A), frequency tables, and a stacked histogram.

Site Mapping

I think I've understated how much I loved the map collection and creation stage. It was the reason I pivoted this dissertation to center on these images and rely on them in the research questions. As an example, I wanted to talk about my experience of mapping the suburbs of Mos Eisley. I navigated myself out of the spaceport having disembarked from my spaceship. Once in the maze-like corridors, I went on the exact same path I've trod a thousand times, especially

since every planet's spaceport is identical on the inside. Tohy and I eventually made it to the opening and were blasted by the harsh desert suns of Tatooine. Alien avatars milled around, along with the static NPCs of the city. The chat was filled with the normal chatter of this time of day, barks about joining the empire, botted calls for buffs. We ran down the alley way with domed stucco buildings on either side. We eventually got to the gates of the city, and I hit the hotkey to pull out my trusty speeder to make my way northwest.

When I landed near the area of usable land, the player structures appear. I press M and the overlay map layers on top of my viewport, obscuring the virtual world I see. We head north now, watching until the structures start to dwindle on the map, and turn west. We again hit the gas on our speederbike and head west for a while. Rows and rows of structures, some down in the valley, some up on the ridge. After a few minutes, we turn south and again weave around houses for a while.[29] Like my other surveys, I capture video of the map for around fifteen minutes and call it a day.

Months later, I'm pulling screenshots from the video and dropping them into my photo editing software. I piece these screenshots together as best I can, with overlapping structures as reference points. This large house can be seen in this screenshot and that one as well, and so I cobbled them together. I finally get all of the structures on my map as best I can and move on to the fun step. In the map overlay, there is still the background of the game, so to eliminate this distraction, I outline each and every house and installation in a new layer to divorce the map from this beginning rough draft. At this point in my data collection phase, I've gotten into a groove. I can recognize most of the structures, having figured that out through trial and error

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[29] I'll admit, there is no scientific way that I captured these suburbs. I really just went with what felt right, in either direction. This of course would change my outcomes I'm sure, but how or why it matters is up to you.

earlier.[30] It's almost soothing to be doing some creation while also being an exercise that doesn't require my brain's entire bandwidth. I even have templates of the structures, so I'm able to copy and paste onto a new layer and lay it on top of the map overlay. After a few days' work—color coding the structures, dropping in the common outlines based on the templates—I've finished documenting the hundreds of houses in this unincorporated sprawl. I double check my work repeatedly (I don't want to miss one structure for accuracy's sake) and then export my newly made map.

Making the second survey was more scientific, as I had to review my previous video to find the coordinates of my starting point. The landscape hasn't changed: still beige texture on the ground and darker brown on the low-poly hills. But the houses have changed, the guild halls have changed. I jump back and forth from my two monitors, one with my game open, the other with the video footage from my previous survey. The process seems tedious, but the end result was satisfying. Part of me wanted to survey more cities, but I decided that finishing my dissertation is more important than having a larger pool of maps to analyze.

Tohy and I spend a little time off our speederbike; to be honest, it's been an extension of our virtual body for most of the game, walking only when absolutely necessary. Her robes move weirdly as she walks, and the crunch of her sand under her feet breaks through the background Star Wars music. We stop outside a guild hall, one of the hundreds I've seen through this process, and I reflect momentarily on what else I can or should do. The second survey feels complete, so I think I'll move on to something else. Part of me feels like I need to be social in the

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[30] While there are some official guides on the various structures in the game, they are significantly lacking and none of them include the blueprint for the structures. Thus, when working with the digital footprints of the map, I had to consult my video recordings and determine what structure they were from the 3D model, and not the map's blueprint. It was a lot of work, and I most certainly have made mistakes in categorizing structures, but I did my absolute best to correct errors as I discovered them.

game, as I haven't made any real friends yet (despite conducting interviews with my

interlocutors already). I don't have a guild to call on even. But we sit there for a minute or two,

contemplating what we should do if we were to actually playing the game and not just collecting

data for this study. I finally log off and say goodbye.

This method of site mapping was the most fun to collect data for, but also difficult to

analyze due to my inexperience with researching visual media.[31] Through the creation of maps

and cartography, I was able to visualize these virtual worlds in a different way, to explore the

power dynamics between individualism and collectivism, the tensions between player freedom to

place their structures where they want, and the community's civic engineering. These images are

found in Appendix A.

Themes that arose in the analysis include the clumping patterns and distance between

structures that arose in their construction. I assumed that larger cities would have more

symmetry[32] than smaller ones, as the first city mapped (Aurebesh) has a distinctly symmetrical

footprint, and is the oldest city on the *Legends* server. However, there are very few other cities

with such symmetry (none that extend throughout the entire city like Aurebesh), suggesting that

while there is some collective civic engineering or planning, it is not as dominant as

hypothesized, even in the larger cities. But if there is to be symmetry in the structures, it is

almost exclusively player houses and gardens. Those two types are symmetrical in their

placement, rather than more community-driven structures (civic), or the individualistic

installations (factories and extractors). Related to this finding about symmetry in player houses,

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[31] I consulted the SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods, but sadly the methodology toolbox for these things—much like the methods of Art History—is very nebulous and ill defined, rather letting the researcher follow their intuition.

[32] For symmetry, I define it as a pattern that repeats from one side to another, mirrored across the X or Y axis.

this symmetry is mostly in small houses and large houses are less likely to be in a grid or organized in a symmetrical pattern.

However, installations are often organized not in symmetry, but in grids. And in addition, installations are often found outside of the city limits instead of within, in clusters of multiple installations, and are often in the proximity of player houses. Installations are rarely by themselves, and clusters of factories and extractors are often near at least one player house. In addition, factories (especially large factories) come in multiples, they are rarely in isolation.

Themes around Guild Halls include that they are almost equally within city limits as they are outside, and they are mostly in proximity to player houses. This can be at least one, but usually multiple player houses—likely those players involved in the guild. In addition, there are more Guild Halls in larger cities than smaller ones.

And lastly are other various themes that arose in the analysis of the maps. Surprisingly, there was more change than consistency when comparing the same city to its two surveys. This means longitudinally, there is greater change in placement of houses, installations, and even guild halls than permanence over 18 months. And comparing between planets, Tatooine cities average more gardens than Naboo cities. And half of the Naboo sample are in near proximity to bodies of water.

RQ1: Urbanization

The first research question asked if there are patterns of urbanization happening between player cities and across planets. To answer this question, I used the method of site mapping to create maps and then analyze them, looking for clumping patterns and the distances between structures. These patterns were to be extrapolated to conclude the tensions between player freedom to place structures where they want and the community's civic engineering.

I assumed that larger cities would have more symmetry than smaller ones, as the first city mapped has a distinctly symmetrical layout. However, no other city had symmetry in its layout quite like Aurebesh, suggesting that it is instead an anomaly. With the ease of restructuring and rebuilding in the virtual world compared to the physical one, it does stand to reason that if a player city wanted to create a symmetrical layout, it should be a quick process. But the lack of symmetry in these player cities does not suggest a lack of collectivism or civic planning. Some of the symmetry or grid layouts that I did find through the site mapping came from clusters of small houses.

These clusters of small houses—as found in Beggar's Canyon, Rising Sun, Ultraviolet, and Rapture—suggest that there was some collectivism occurring. These groupings of player houses mirror neighborhoods. Perhaps these neighborhoods arise from newer players who are relying on each other as friends to play together. And as these players become more and more established—eventually being able to afford a larger house—they might become more individualistic and less invested in the collective needs of their friends or groupmates, less interested in staying within a neighborhood.

Another pattern that suggested individualism and how it exerted itself would be the clumping patterns of installations. Installations—which include factories that produce items and miners or extractors that excavate resources from the virtual world—are extremely individualistic, as they only benefit the player who owns them. As such, they are typically outside city boundaries and often near player housing. Since these players are using these installations to create items, they are likely placed near their own houses to access them easily and store what they produce. In addition, these installations are often in grids and are rarely consistent (see the following section), in similar situations across the various cities and planets.

Thus, individualism can be found in how prevalent these installations are because they only benefit the singular player.

In contrast, there are patterns of collectivism that arose from one of the civic buildings. Guild halls were equally inside and outside city limits, suggesting that guilds are divorced from the city government. I know from observation that often guilds found or flock to a particular city, they are not the only source of collective power for the player city. As many guild halls operated outside the city, it highlighted how these buildings offer services removed from the city and serve players in different ways. But another finding about guild halls is that they were always in proximity to player houses, suggesting that individuals wanted to be near these buildings for the services they provide. Members of these guilds could see these structures as beacons or hubs of activity, and convene at these locations for a reason. Again, these are patterns and evidence of collectivism, of players working together as they form these bodies of government. The power that guilds have was noticeable from their prevalence in the cities, especially since they were more common in higher-ranked cities than in lower-ranked ones.

This research question presupposed that player cities follow patterns of urbanization and that players flock toward a city and create a community together instead of remaining in the rural unincorporated virtual landscape. As urban theory is an entire field of literature that I barely touch on, I cannot speak to the nuances and intricacies of how these player cities form and how they mirror their physical counterparts in the meat space. However, I can speak about the broad strokes that I found in this dissertation. I found that few patterns arise across player cities. For the most part, each player city—regardless of planet or size/rank—was unique in its layout and footprint. While I hoped to infer more about the tensions of power in these player cities based on

their civic engineering and layouts, the little that I did find suggests that these tensions were subtler than I originally thought.

Perhaps the mayor and city council didn't plan a symmetrical city with an abundance of civic buildings and gardens, but smaller groups planned their own neighborhoods. Guilds flocked to their guild hall, within or without the city limits. And the bureaucracy of placing a structure within a player city means the more individualistic structures of installations self-select outside the city boundaries. This research question also presupposed that the meaning of these community efforts would shape their appearance (because players are working collectively, they will shape their cities to meet their needs), instead of asking how players are creating meaning regardless of the virtual layout. Instead of attempting to find meaning in the layout and site mapping, the meaning arose in other ways and means that perhaps the digital nature of these player cities disrupts how they are shaped in response to meaning. Perhaps meaning instead arises regardless of appearance or civic planning, and if these cities were laid out in any way shape, or form, players would still create communal spaces of friendships and belonging.

Structural Analysis

Following the site mapping of the player cities came a quantitative analysis of the structures therein. This structural analysis consisted of coding each player building based upon the typology of the game's system. *SWG* divides buildings into four categories: housing, installations, gardens, and civic structures. These structures were color coded for the site maps for ease of sorting, and those same colors are used in the following frequency tables and the stacked histogram (Figure 5) below.

Planet	Name	Total Housing	Total Installations	Total Gardens	Total Civic	Rank
Naboo	Another Dimension	32	0	3	3	1
	Smugglers Run 1	25	2	14	5	2
	SotRNBW (S. Run 2)	32	21	1	4	2
	Rapture	102	19	10	18	3
	Werowocomoco	52	69	1	26	4
	Aurebesh	142	60	14	28	5
	Ultraviolet	168	23	8	21	5
Tatooine	Sandy View 1	19	28	1	2	1
	Sandy View 2	33	18	1	3	1
	Rising Sun	63	15	3	14	2
	Mos Ferun 1	48	5	9	5	3
	Mos Ferun 2	47	4	11	7	3
	Phoenix 2	53	19	2	5	3
	Phoenix 1	78	27	22	9	4
	Beggars Canyon 1	69	5	21	9	5
	Beggars Canyon 2	71	5	21	9	5
	Mos Eisley 1	415	96	0	6	-
	Mos Eisley 2	285	125	0	14	-
	Totals	1743	541	142	188	-

TABLE 4: Structural totals across the sample

Table 4 divides the sample based on their planet (either Naboo or Tatooine) and then sorts the cities based on their rank. It includes a combination of all the nodes within each of the four typologies, which are then separated in the following tables. Table 5 divides the player housing into the various codes used based again on the game's typology. Every player house had two codes, one for their size (either small or large), and one for their type (planet specific, generic, specialized or rare, and vehicle). One specific house was coded due to its popularity, the Mustafarian Bunker, likely one of the most common houses on the server.[33] As an example though, each Mustafarian Bunker was coded as follows: small house, specialized house,

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[33] This was originally a reward for purchasing the Trials of Obiwan expansion and is limited to one per account, however on the Legends server it is a "server reward" in that you receive it after playing on the server for a set period of time. Again, it is limited to one per account, but is also available to every player for free, which is why it is likely the most common house type on the server.

mustafarian bunker. The mustafarian bunker code is then a child node of the specialized house node.

Table 6 contains the frequencies for the installations and gardens categories, each with three codes. As a note, installations can either gather resources (miners or extractors) or produce items (small and large factories). Gardens are simply categorized by their size, and are technically planet locked (a small garden on Tatooine looks different than a small garden on Naboo). However, since there aren't any generic gardens, it wasn't worth separating the gardens based on their planet. Table 7 contains all the categories of the civic structures, which are often limited by their city's ranking. Some buildings such as the city hall and shuttleport are restricted to one per city, while others such as the cantina and bank are not restricted. In addition, the guild hall and the cantina can technically be placed outside of city limits, and often are, while the other civic structures are only available within their city.

And lastly, Figure 5 is a stacked histogram to show visually the composition of each of the player cities based upon their ranking. It clumps the totals of the four categories into their respective colors, and displays the similarities and differences that these cities have to each other visually. However, the Mos Eisley suburbs were not included in this histogram because they proved to be outliers: they contain significantly more structures than any of the other cities and made it difficult to visualize the other columns.

Name	Small Houses	Large Houses	Naboo Houses	Tatooine Houses	Generic Houses	Vehicle Houses	Special Houses	Mustaf. Bunker
Another Dimension	19	13	13	-	11	1	7	7
Smugglers Run 1	26	6	12	-	3	0	7	7
SotRNBW (S. Run 2)	20	5	22	-	3	0	0	0
Rapture	70	32	61	-	14	0	27	18
Werowocomoco	35	17	12	-	29	0	11	9
Aurebesh	83	59	32	-	70	1	39	28
Ultraviolet	111	57	120	-	16	2	30	23
Sandy View 1	8	11	-	12	2	0	5	2
Sandy View 2	19	14	-	17	5	0	11	4
Rising Sun	44	19	-	45	3	1	14	4
Mos Ferun 1	27	21	-	31	4	0	13	3
Mos Ferun 2	26	21	-	37	1	0	9	1
Phoenix 2	38	15	-	32	4	2	15	6
Phoenix 1	38	40	-	46	7	5	20	7
Beggars Canyon 1	43	26	-	48	2	1	18	8
Beggars Canyon 2	47	24	-	51	3	1	16	6
Mos Eisley 1	353	62	-	247	115	2	51	47
Mos Eisley 2	237	48	-	184	61	2	38	29
Totals	1244	490	272	750	353	18	331	209

TABLE 5: Division of all player housing categories

Name	Small Factories	Large Factories	Miners & Extractors	Small Gardens	Medium Gardens	Large Gardens
Another Dimension	19	1	8	0	1	0
Smugglers Run 1	6	2	10	1	0	0
SotRNBW (S. Run 2)	0	0	0	3	0	0
Rapture	6	3	6	2	0	1
Werowocomoco	0	0	2	6	8	0
Aurebesh	9	2	10	1	0	0
Ultraviolet	5	10	4	6	2	2
Sandy View 1	0	3	2	2	7	0
Sandy View 2	0	3	1	10	1	0
Rising Sun	4	8	7	2	0	0
Mos Ferun 1	11	4	12	18	4	0
Mos Ferun 2	16	7	46	1	0	0
Phoenix 2	19	10	31	12	0	2
Phoenix 1	7	2	14	5	3	0
Beggars Canyon 1	4	0	1	13	5	3
Beggars Canyon 2	1	0	4	13	5	3
Mos Eisley 1	47	20	29	-	-	-
Mos Eisley 2	52	20	53	-	-	-
Totals	206	95	240	95	36	11

TABLE 6: Division of all installations and gardens categories

Name	Cantina	Medical Center	Theater	Bank	Cloning Facility	City Hall	Garage	Shuttle port	Guild Hall
Another Dimension	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Smugglers Run 1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
SotRNBW (S. Run 2)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Rapture	1	1	0	6	1	1	0	0	4
Werowocomoco	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Aurebesh	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Ultraviolet	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	12
Sandy View 1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	2
Sandy View 2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Rising Sun	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Mos Ferun 1	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	2
Mos Ferun 2	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	12
Phoenix 2	4	2	1	8	1	1	1	1	9
Phoenix 1	2	1	2	3	1	1	0	1	10
Beggars Canyon 1	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Beggars Canyon 2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Mos Eisley 1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Mos Eisley 2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
Totals	16	9	5	27	9	16	9	6	81

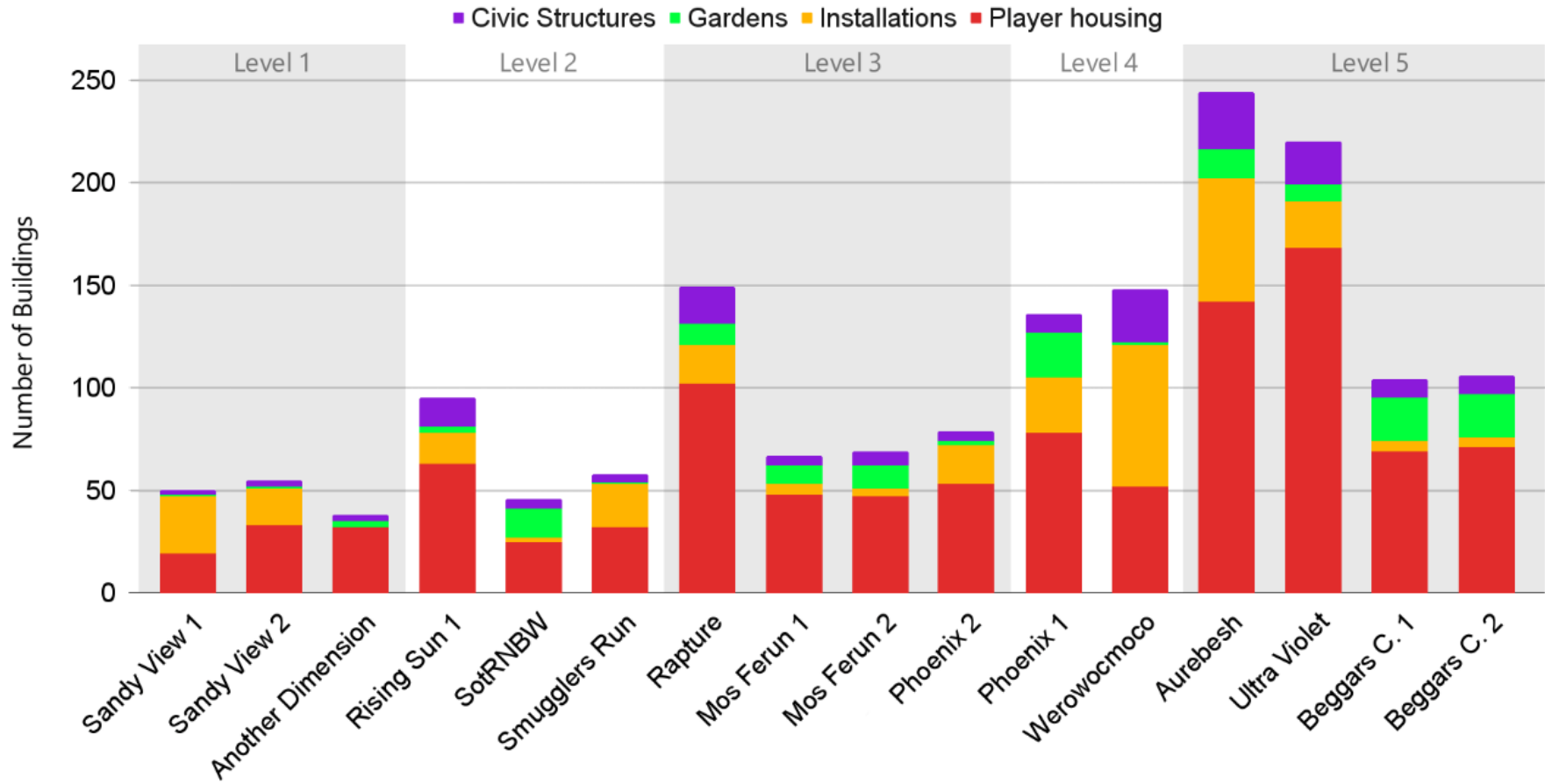*TABLE 7: Division of all civic structure categories*

FIGURE 6: Stacked Histogram of the cities (excluding the Mos Eisley suburbs)

Patterns of change. With the two surveys, there was an opportunity to capture some of the changes that occurred within these player cities over time. Tables 8 and 9 illustrate two aspects of the change that I recorded and the patterns that arose. Table 8 looks at the change in total structures—across the four typologies—that occurred across the two surveys. This change in total structures are logged numerically and as percentages for increases (in green), decreases (in red), and no change (black).

Name	Total Housing	Total Installations	Total Gardens	Total Civic	Rank
Smugglers Run 1	25	2	14	5	2
SotRNBW (S. Run 2)	32	21	1	4	2
Change	+7 (+28%)	+19 (+950%)	-13 (-92.9%)	-1 (-20%)	-
Sandy View 1	19	28	1	2	1
Sandy View 2	33	18	1	3	1
Change	+14 (+73.7%)	-10 (-35.7%)	0 (0%)	+1 (+50%)	-
Mos Ferun 1	48	5	9	5	3
Mos Ferun 2	47	4	11	7	3
Change	-1 (-2.1%)	-1 (-20%)	+2 (+22.2%)	+2 (+40%)	-
Phoenix 1	78	27	22	9	4
Phoenix 2	53	19	2	5	3
Change	-25 (-32.1%)	-8 (-29.6%)	-20 (-90.9%)	-4 (-44.4%)	-1
Beggars Canyon 1	69	5	21	9	5
Beggars Canyon 2	71	5	21	9	5
Change	+2 (+2.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	-
Mos Eisley 1	415	96	0	6	-
Mos Eisley 2	285	125	0	14	-
Change	-130 (-31.3%)	+29 (+30.2%)	0 (0%)	+8 (+133.3%)	-

TABLE 8: Rate of Change Longitudinally in Total Structures

Table 9 however compares the footprints of the two surveys to see which structures remained in their same position across the two surveys, looking at the rate of consistency in the player city instead. This was done by overlaying the first and second surveys digitally and seeing which of the structures were in similar positions in both (allowing for minor movements and or reorientations of structures).

Name	Housing	Installations	Gardens	Civic
SotRNBW (S. Run 2)	32	21	1	4
Consistent Structures	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**
Sandy View 2	33	18	1	3
Consistent Structures	**10 (30.3%)**	**7 (38.9%)**	**1 (100%)**	**1 (33.3%)**
Mos Ferun 2	47	4	11	7
Consistent Structures	**29 (61.7%)**	**1 (25%)**	**7 (63.6%)**	**1 (14.3%)**
Phoenix 2	53	19	2	5
Consistent Structures	**11 (20.8%)**	**1 (5.3%)**	**0 (0%)**	**1 (20%)**
Beggars Canyon 2	71	5	21	9
Consistent Structures	**45 (63.4%)**	**0 (0%)**	**18 (85.7%)**	**7 (77.8%)**
Mos Eisley 2	285	125	-	14
Consistent Structures	**74 (26%)**	**25 (20%)**	**-**	**2 (14.3%)**
Average[34]	**40.4%**	**17.8%**	**62.3%**	**31.9%**

TABLE 9: Rate of Consistency Longitudinally Between Samples

RQ2: Change and Consistency

The second research question asked how player cities changed over time. This of course assumed that there were noticeable patterns that could be observed in aggregate. But sadly, due to the smallish sample size,[35] I couldn't objectively say that there were noticeable, recurring patterns. I can say though that the seemingly random changes did reveal a few things about the longitudinal health and growth of player cities on the Legends server.

Two ways that I analyzed the change in player cities over time include a comparison in the total number of structures from survey 1 to survey 2 (Table 8). This table highlighted the range of variability between the two surveys of the cities and suggested that within 18 months the number of structures across the four types could see a change of ~30%, either in growth or shrinkage. The percentages of change averaged between 25-35 in most instances. However, there were four outliers, two cities, and two structure types. The city Phoenix shrunk from a rank 4 city

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[34] Due to the nature of SotRNBW being a relocation of Smugglers Run, there was no chance for any of the structures to be consistent and were excluded from the averages. Also, since the unincorporated Mos Eisley sprawl could not include gardens, they were also excluded from the average.

[35] I am not interested in generalizable data.

to a rank 3 city, and as such all four structure types shrunk from the first survey to the second. The city of Beggar's Canyon however barely grew at all, with 3 out of the four structure types seeing no change and housing only grew by 2.9%. The garden structure types saw the greatest percentage of decrease over the two surveys, with Smuggler's Run and Phoenix both losing over 90% of their gardens in the second survey. The civic structures also saw a huge variance in change, as three out of the six cities saw an increase of over 40%, and one of the cities saw a decrease of nearly 45%. And one more outlier would be Smuggler's Run, which saw a 950% increase in installations.

A limitation of this study is that I didn't ask citizens of these cities to discuss the changes that occurred. There could be a wide variety of reasons for the shrinkage of Phoenix ranging from cultural reasons (guilds losing membership, new city government, group of friends losing interest, etc.) to economic reasons (new resources elsewhere, vendors moving, growing trade elsewhere, etc.). In addition, since I didn't ask citizens of Beggars Canyon why the city didn't grow over time, I can't pinpoint the reason it saw no change in many of the structure types.

Another way that I analyzed how player cities change over time was by comparing the footprints of the city from the site mapping. In that way, I tracked which structures remained consistent from survey to survey. Of the four structure types, I hypothesized that some would be more consistent than others. Installations for example would likely be the least consistent: extractors and miners are extremely transient as resources come and go regularly. In addition, these structures are the cheapest to maintain, players often own more than one, and are the most individualistic of the other structures (they benefit only the player). Gardens are on the other extreme, in that they are relegated only to city boundaries and are thus placed and owned by the

mayor of the player city for the benefit of its citizens. By that logic, I thought they would be the most consistent.

Based on the data, we can see that my hypotheses were validated. On average, installations had the least amount of consistency from survey to survey (only 17.8% of installations remained the same across all cities), and gardens had the most amount of consistency (62.3% of gardens didn't move over 18 months). Surprising to me however was the rate of consistency between houses and civic structures. Again, since civic structures are collective buildings—either only located in cities that benefit its citizens like medical bays and shuttleports, or as guild halls—I hypothesized that they would be more consistent than the highly individualized player houses. One explanation though, about why there is more consistency between houses than civic structures could just be that there are more houses per city.

But what do these findings mean? When I proposed this research question I was looking to find two distinct patterns, either an upward trajectory of growth where player cities increase over time or a downward trajectory of decay where players abandoned the game and cities shrink. Either of these two patterns could be likely, due to the evolving nature of the game and its server, as by many metrics the server is growing in size—despite it being based upon an abandoned and dated MMO and is left in a virtual state of ruin. However, the findings of this study were not really either of those two trajectories, rather falling into a much more random state of chaos. Based upon my preliminary findings from Aurebesh, I thought that it was a standard for rank 5 cities to all trend toward civic planning, coordinated layouts, and a collaborative effort to create a pleasing and ordered player city. However, I found that no other city really stuck to such a plan to the same degree as Aurebesh.

Measuring the change in player cities over time is vastly different in the virtual than the physical world, due in part to the realities of construction in both. Physical buildings need time, effort, and dedication to erect and destroy. Virtual buildings on the other hand do not. This means the rate of change in a virtual city is likely to be greater and quicker because players of *SWG* can literally press a couple of buttons and place their house inside their backpack to place it on a new planet.

But in conclusion, this finding that the change and consistency of the player cities seem to be random and chaotic has underlying meanings to the questions about power and group dynamics. Much of this dissertation asked about who holds greater power in these player communities, either the individuals or the collective government. From a neo-functionalist perspective, these player cities are run as a collective organism, with each member performing a vital function for the entire group. But after examining which structures change, which structures remain consistent, and noticing that the cities do not progress toward a centralized government in layout and design, suggested that there are still layers of power at the individual level that do not contribute to the collectivism of the community.

From the theoretical framework of neo-functionalism it would appear that instead of urbanization (i.e., players congregating in the select cities), there is a pattern of diversification: with the increase in population comes a spreading out of players and the formation of more cities and communities. This suggests that the locus of power leans more toward individuals, in that they go where they want and create new cities and governments where they want, instead of relying upon established systems and cities. Thus, as the server grows there isn't a concentration of players in older cities and guilds but rather new ones are being formed around the needs of these new players. This is especially apparent when you consider that at the time of the second

survey (January 2022), the oldest city on the server—Aurebesh—actually had decreased to a rank 4 city, instead of the rank 5 it was at the first survey.

Applying this to a greater context, it suggests that games are still a democratic and equalizing form of mass media. In the current capitalist and neoliberal society of the United States, it appears that the economics and power of the oligarchs become more and more concentrated, removing such power from the disenfranchised. This economic and political pattern in the meat space however does not follow the sociological patterns of *SWG*. Instead of power and influence amassing into the established governments, cities, and players, it appears that as populations grow these player cities only sustain randomized changes. This lack of autocracy suggests a much more socialist and or democratic model of governing amongst players in the game. It suggests that power lies heavily in the hands of players and that they can control the culture of their societies and communities, as they currently do.

RQ3: Layers of Power

The third research question asked about the stratifications of power within the community and how they interacted with each other. In other sections of this discussion, I argue for a spectrum of individualism versus collectivism, the forms of collective governing and communities have different and competing interests within the game of *SWG*. In one sphere is the local player city government, with its city council and a mayor who can be voted in and out of office by the citizens of that city. In a different sphere is the player guilds, which operate at a less organized level and are not tied to a virtual location—despite guild halls serving as a museum and recruitment center for its members. Informal leadership positions are granted much like group projects, with roles being decided but not set in stone. And in a different sphere is the galactic senate, which operates at the server-wide level to institute changes to the game and its

community based upon the decisions of its players (also technically voted in, but through a process carried out on the forums). And all three of these spheres interact with the individualism of the player itself, their needs, their wants, and their desires.

Power of the city. Since the unit of analysis was predominately player cities, it would make sense that the city's government has a strong influence. However, in the site analysis, I didn't detect the types of power or influence that I expected. Yes, city governments control what structures are erected within the city limits (and often where they're erected), but analyzing the site maps did not reveal a controlling influence in the way of civic planning. The site analysis did reveal that gardens played a small role in the sample, making up only 5% of all structures. This suggests that player cities either didn't have the funds or the desire to add aesthetic structures that served no in-game purpose. These symbols of affluence or conspicuous structures were not as dominant as other structures, suggesting that cities are not as powerful as individual players who can erect nearly four times as many installations as there were gardens.

But the interviews revealed other ways for the city government to influence the game. When asked about the role that cities play in the game, players discussed how cities enable the micro-economies of the city and a social community. Brian said "[Cities are] communities of like-minded players, in close proximity, selling their services to the community and the greater public. Being a part of an active community gives the player a sense of greater importance." Chris echoed similar sentiments when asked the same question saying that cities are for "social interactions and player built micro-economies." City governments then hold the power to cultivate community within the city, both by including and excluding players. As Brian mentioned, most cities are filled with like-minded players who enjoy similar aspects of the

game.[36] All of the interviewees mentioned that the city governments—the mayor and council—were active in their cities and that the game itself needs and thrives on these player-formed governments. And a similar thought was that these player governments transcend the game itself, with cities hosting their own private Discord server and paratextual communication platforms. While not uncommon—guilds in MMOs have needed to communicate outside the game to coordinate group activities since their inception—this means the power of the city is not dependent upon its virtual environment but on the people who inhabit it and make it a place.

Power of the guild. It was hard to tease out the differences between the power or influence of the city versus the guild because, in many ways, guilds and cities offer the same benefits. One difference of course is the visibility of guilds: your avatar displays what guild you are in no matter where you are, meaning the reputation of your guild follows you in your social interactions. Some guilds have positive or negative reputations, but most don't.

The importance of guilds was mixed among the interviewees, some saw them as integral and others did not. Those who thought guilds were important to the game mentioned that guilds were opportunities for players to call upon each other for help and to feel needed by the community. Alex also mentioned that the benefits of a guild Discord included "a speed and intimacy of communication, which is crucial for new players, running instances, and all-around connectivity." This acknowledgment that intimate, responsive, communication through social media means that players get the help and guidance they need was tied to how their guild provided that community.

However, the site analysis revealed that the dominant number of civic structures were guild halls, making up nearly half of all civic structures in the sample. This means that guilds

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[36] Some cities are devoted to Role Playing. Most cities pick a faction (either the Rebel Alliance or the Galactic Empire) to align their game play with. And other cities center on running certain raids together.

built and maintained almost as many structures as player cities, signaling that they had as much

power and money as player governments. And since guilds outnumber player cities on the server,

there is an argument to be made that their influence is different and separate from player cities—

some cities have multiple guilds, whereas some guilds are in no cities.

Power of the Senate. The Galactic Senate serves a unique role in the community of *SWG*.

While it is rooted in the game itself—Senators have access to the in-game senate in Theed on the

planet of Naboo—much of it takes place in the paratextual communication platforms outside the

game. One of the duties expected is that the senators are active in the online forum and Discord,

and senators campaign there (as the voting takes place out of the game). Senators serve as player

ambassadors to the development team of the Legends server, interfacing with the leadership on

the needs and desires of players in various aspects of the game. They serve a similar role as

community managers, except they are volunteers who are on the player side instead of the

developer side. Senators serve on one of five committees,[37] each of which discusses various

aspects of the game and how it can be improved or fixed for the players.

While in the interviews, players felt that the Galactic Senate holds a vital role in the

game, their sphere of power and influence was not as noticeable as others. They do serve a much

more collectivist role, working as representatives of the entire game's community, but their

influence was not immediately seen in the player cities. Senators don't work with or interact with

in-game government in any meaningful way, nor are they accountable to geographic regions or

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[37] These committees are: PvE Committee, PvP Committee, Space Committee, Crafting Committee, and Role Playing Committee. The PvE Committee deals with all ground-based combat content as professions related to PvE combat. The PvP Committee deals with all ground-based player vs player content such as the Galactic Civil War, the Battlefields, Invasions, and professions related to PvP combat. The Space Committee includes all space content including combat at the PvE and PvP level. The Crafting Committee deals with all crafting professions and the Beastmaster content. And the Role Play Committee deals with all role playing content, such as planning and hosting roleplaying events.

planets. And while they are labeled as senators and identified as a form of government, when examining their roles and duties, they are more of bug testers and pitchmen

Power of the player. The individual player probably holds the most power in the play experience. They have immense freedom to do as they choose and how to play within the sandbox game of *SWG*. However, the amount of individualism manifested in the player cities and interviews seemed balanced compared to the collectivism. While players were in control of where they placed their installations, these structures were only a portion of all of the entire sample. In addition, while there were settlement patterns at times with player houses (collectivism), more often than not there was random chaos (individualism). The player cedes power to the other spheres in many ways—such as participating in a guild or joining a player city—but if they choose they can maintain most of the power in their play experience by avoiding both. And when interviewing players, every single one felt that this game was a community or group-centered game, not an individual-centered one. This acknowledgment does not mean that there is no power given to the player, but that these players were more willing to seek out the benefits of collectivism when they choose. Players feel that the game is richer when shared with others, as compared with just focusing on themselves (Crenshaw, 2017).

At the initiation of this dissertation, I imagined the various layers of power as stratifications, with some being more surface level and some being more central and at the core of the game community. However, this study revealed the tensions of power to be spheres of influence that manifest in different ways and sometimes interact or conflict with each other. This applies neo-functionalism, as each layer works independently and dependently of each other, forming interconnected relationships to accomplish different purposes or needs within the game.

These findings have meaning beyond this dissertation. The evidence that there are
spheres of player-run government and multiple forms of power interacting with each other
suggests that there is a demand for this kind of involvement from players in their online
communities and games. This isn't a blanket statement, suggesting that all players want similar
structures in all games, but the findings suggest that these structures serve a meaningful role in
the play experience. Some players will seek out opportunities to perform different types of
collectivism and collaboration, whether it is at a regional level with player governments, or at a
larger level such as a role-playing senate. Building an online game, especially an MMO, means
finding ways to incorporate voluntary structures of power and collaboration with players and the
game itself.

While most MMOs have community managers, game masters, and other liaisons between
the developers and the players, offering an in-game roleplaying opportunity to volunteers who
are active in the community at large (outside the game) creates incentives for players to
collaborate and support each other in and out of the game. I argue that the staying power of the
Legends server comes from these different spheres of power—the player city, the guild, the
senate—all being optional and supplementing the player's power of individualism. Finding
meaningful ways to incorporate different types of group dynamics helps meet the different needs
of players because most want to participate in the game with friends and acquaintances. With
guilds being the end-all for most group collaboration in online games, the player misses out on
other opportunities to share different forms of collectivist collaboration.

Conclusion

Following my virtual presentation at ArgaCon—a conference for archaeogaming, mostly
filled with archaeologists who are commenting on video games—I wrote about how fired up I

was to continue this study. ArgaCon was a chance for me to present my class paper that started

this whole study, of analyzing player houses and cities, and gave me some needed feedback on

how to push this dissertation in the new direction. On August 2020 I wrote the following in my

field notes:

> I surveyed all five cities from Corellia today, found out one of them has been renamed
> (Eureka is now Number One), and one of the cities has been dissolved (Napa Valley
> does not exist anymore, I even checked the website's aggregated list). There are still
> some houses in that area where Napa Valley used to exist, but the city hall is gone. I
> then traveled to Dantooine and was thinking about capturing more surveys, but got a
> little burnt out. Maybe tomorrow. I have officially mapped three out of the seven
> planets, so I'm nearly halfway there. Still undecided about my total sample…Also, I
> have not decided on a good timeline for follow up surveys. There are a lot of details
> that will likely get ironed out by my committee in the future that I probably shouldn't
> stress too much about right now. Speaking of which, I really need to talk to my advisor.

I went through a lot of variations on how to survey the player cities of the galaxy. I was hoping

to get better data from the admins of the server, but they never responded to me. Getting the

actual data from the backend would have changed this study drastically. I asked questions of

myself of how many cities were enough, how many were too much, and my committee let me

decide all on my own these details. In the end though, these questions of which player cities to

study and analyze were answered and led to the above chapter. These player cities are worth

studying as they are emblematic of the culture that players are forming in the ruins of this game.

This chapter was an analysis of the findings for the research questions related to places.

The findings of this dissertation ask questions about how player cities arise, their governments,

and how they interact in space and place to create civic environments within the virtual. These

conversations and findings will become more relevant in the future, as technologies such as VR

and the metaverse create new—yet similar—virtual communities that mirror our own cities and

governments. Player housing will likely arise in these virtual spaces of the future, and

conversations about change and consistency, of government and power will be pertinent then as they are now. Understanding some of the difficulties and nuances of how virtual communities are maintained and player perceptions of them as ruins after the fact are relevant to all MMOs as well because every game ends. The virtual entropy though will linger on in memories and digital space.

CHAPTER VII:

DISCUSSION - PEOPLE

Tohy and I found ourselves outside of David's house for another housing tour. We had taken our luxury yacht to the starport in Kor Vella, a smaller town on the planet of Corellia. Kor Vella was a quaint town, with many boxy but futuristic buildings. Standing on a couple of plateaus, sections of the town were connected by small bridges over the deep canyons. The planet of Corellia itself was another one that the developers of *SWG* had some freedom on; it too was mentioned in the movies but never depicted. Here the landscape was a low-definition brown texture, with a purple horizon and yellow sky. The effect made it appear to always be sunrise. We traveled to David's house after leaving Kor Vella and finding the player city that David's friend and guildmate founded. Here the landscape changed to yellow grass with red wildflowers, and I made it a goal to visit the rest of the planet at another time to see what other surprises the landscape had in store.

We had just finished an interview and I felt that David was the perfect interlocutor to open up their house for my analysis. David had mentioned how seriously he took interior design, and I wanted to examine it for myself. When he let me inside of his house, I was immediately shocked at what I saw. Many public spaces I've entered—guild halls, player homes, etc.—follow a very cluttered design philosophy. Everything is there, sometimes it is planned out, but not very well. There are unique items everywhere, such as holograms that wander around your feet, or giant paintings on the wall of the original trilogy cast. These items are displayed as if they were in a hoarder's museum, proudly but in a very eclectic and maximalist way.

But David's house was different. Instead of items that were used to flex his personality—unique server rewards, or very rare armor sets—he created distinct themes for each and every room of his house. Instead of flashy rare items, there were normal items but used tastefully or creatively. He led me through his first room, where he had commissioned some specialized bookcases to serve as divider walls. They brought a new flow to the space, separating sections for the various themes.

I asked David about server rewards, which were typically where players got the holograms and flashy paintings. He said: "I always collect them, but sometimes I sell them if I think they look bad," and laughs. We chuckle at that, because in my experience I find that many of the server rewards do look bad. I ask what he displays and why he displays it. He says that the feeling of accomplishment, from trophies and exotic items, is good, but he also enjoys the thrill of planning a themed room: "I enjoy interior design in Star Wars Galaxies."

The first room is an imperial office, with desks and chairs and cabinets. The lights from a Star Destroyer have been hung from the walls, setting the mood and atmosphere. The sleek blacks and industrial metals are a weird combination of sci-fi and corporate America. He tells me about the process of picking out the items, of hiring crafters to work for him, finding the schematics to fit his vision. I'm in awe as he walks me through the space.

The second room he shows off felt more familiar but also clearly David's style. This room is the weapons display, and while it has an abundance of weapons on the walls, they're carefully arranged by type, color, and size. Again, the décor is dark, mostly black and pewter, but this time it feels entirely like an armory from the future. David leads me through each and every one of his weapons: melee weapons such as polearms and lightsabers, and ranged weapons such as pistols, carbines, and rifles. Some weapons have stories ("I got that one after I finished the

theme park at Jabba's Palace," "That rifle dropped when I killed a krayt dragon"), while others just "look cool." After he finished with all of the weapons, he leads me upstairs to see the next room.

This one also had bookshelf walls, but the entire floor was themed like a casino. One section was the bar with drinks and a robot bar tender, another section was a game room with card games and dice tables, and the last section had slot machines. "My main is a smuggler, so I made this room as a 'retreat.'" David and I spent a little time interacting with the various items up here, making the machines light up and blast their chimes and whistles. It was a lot of fun, especially since I had never seen anything like this before.

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After discussing the findings for the research questions on place, this chapter discusses the findings related to people. These research questions asked how players are creating meanings of place in the virtual environment, and what the demographics look like for the server and how hegemony might arise. To answer these research questions I conducted interviews (including housing tours like the one mentioned above) as well as took field notes of my participant observation. These two methods, and the two research questions related to them, dealt with the people of SWG and how they are creating meaning in the game.

Tohy and I

Earlier I included a discussion on my creation of Tohy as my avatar, and other stories of my experience with her on the Legends server. However, there are still discussions to be made about how this avatar affected me, and how my positionality affected my findings. First and foremost, I and my avatar are the main people that shaped this research and the findings, and thus I needed to analyze what that meant.

As mentioned previously, I had no experience with *SWG* before this study. I did not have nostalgia for the game, which gave me a different opinion on the virtual world than my interlocutors. I have interviewed players of other games from this era (*Phantasy Star Online*), and found that there are new players engaging with it without nostalgia for its glory days. These players often enjoy older games due to the lack of monetization and micro transactions that influence the modern industry of video games. Players of SWG also mentioned a dislike of modern video games as an influence for why they engage with the medium, but all of my interlocutors had nostalgia first and foremost.

My lack of nostalgia is likely the reason for my dislike of several aspects of the technology of this game. From the outset of playing it, I've been wrestling with feelings of boredom and frustration. These experiences led to my framing of this study as ruins of an abandoned game: I felt that this game has little to offer modern players but is given an afterlife by players who cling to the past. This also likely led to my devotion to only collecting dissertation data near the end, instead of actually enjoying the process and seeking entertainment.

This positionality can also be contrasted with my history with the *Star Wars* fandom. I have trouble associating with that term, being a fan of *Star Wars*, because of the negative connotations it is starting to have. A very vocal minority of "fans" of the series have become very toxic, attacking certain movies or shows in the series, and assaulting actors of the Disney age with racist and sexist bigotry. My relationship with *Star Wars* fandom is complicated, much like my relationship with the term "gamer," because it holds negative connotations based upon the toxic behavior of a few. While I love the intellectual property, I struggle to really identify with the community surrounding it. This complicated relationship with *Star Wars* is also a perspective I brought to this study as a researcher.

And lastly, my relationship with my avatar can be found in my field notes as well as my write-up in this dissertation. I bounced between referring to what I do in game as myself, as only her, as a combination of both of us. The pronouns I use varied from I, her, and we, signaling varying forms of identification. In the past, I've been tempted to list my avatar as a co-author in my research, but for this dissertation it didn't feel appropriate. However, the fact that I chose an avatar that mimics my racial and ethnic identity but is gender swapped blurs the role that fantasy and identification have in my subconscious entertainment. Despite what my avatar looked like, most players likely perceived me as a white male, and I didn't provide any contrary evidence. My projected identity and my identification with my avatar shaped how I viewed the world, and how the world viewed me. I didn't engage in role play scenarios, but I am sure that my play style was affected by playing as a female Twi'lek. I also aligned myself with the light side of the force for performing stereoetypically "feminine" playstyles of defense and healing.

Again, much could be written on the hegemony of this game and of the queerness of my gender-swapped avatar and the gender dynamics at play. However, I leave those discussions to the expert scholars who have written on these topics. I only have surface level understandings of the theory of critical studies in video games, but recognize that they are important and at play in this community and within me.

Interviews

As mentioned previously, interviews were conducted with twelve interlocutors. Some of these interviews included a second part, the housing tour, based upon the preferences of the subjects and the time constraints of those involved. Following these interviews, the recordings were transcribed by the researcher and these transcriptions were analyzed for themes. Based upon the research questions and a grounded approach to the interview data, a codebook was

created that looked at four themes and their related subthemes. These four themes are described

in detail below, as well as examples of each from the interview transcripts.

Place. Commentary or descriptions of the environment—social and virtual—of the game,

and meanings that the interviewees as players create or express. This encompasses discussions

on player housing, the community of the server, and the virtual world of the game. From this

theme came discussions on how players form attachments to their homes, and how vital the

community is to their enjoyment of the game, and their positive experiences with the virtual

world as a whole. Below are three subthemes connected to place.

Housing. Specifically, when interviewees discuss player housing, the opinions on their

own as well as others. Players spoke positively about their houses and how they felt like home.

They spoke about where their houses were, and why they chose those locations (typically for

interpersonal reasons, sometimes for nostalgia). Players also spoke about the types of houses

they had, with a variety between large and small and generic and planet specific. Most of the

responses were subjective, talking about the feelings and emotions connected to housing.

Examples include:

> Home is a place that would be where my characters could enjoy returning to in-between
> missions or tours of duty to just relax or meet with friends. I will sometimes just return
> to [my character's] home and have him spend time there while I do stuff in real life
> (laughs). (Locklen)

> Originally, I went for a remote, simple house in the middle of the desert on Tatooine.
> Since it was difficult to get to, I opted to join a guild and I have moved that same house
> to a guild neighborhood on Dantooine. (Kevin)

Community. Discussions from the interviewees about the social environment of the

server, such as friends, guild-mates, and other relationships in the game. Discussions on

community were prevalent, as the relationships that my interlocutors had on the server were

often the reason they continued to play. Nostalgia got them to return, but guilds and friends got

them to stay. Many of the interlocutors discussed the strength of these relationships, such as

playing with the same friends years later on the Legends server. The friendships discussed often

were linked to player cities or guilds, meaning players would form relationships out of these two

spheres of influence. Examples include:

> I usually find myself on Lok or Tatooine, planets that my guilds and I had spent most of our time. I occasionally will visit areas where our old guild town used to be. (Jacob)

> In Mos Eisley I find the community to be comparable to the original days of SWG, somewhat, but I miss other planets and cities being just as crowded then, whereas now they aren't. (Locklen)

World. Commentary on the virtual world as a whole—not including player housing—

such as the planetary environment and gameplay structures such as quests. For the most part,

discussions of the virtual world were tied to their concepts of home—such as why they placed

their house where they did. The virtual world was always framed in a positive light, discussing

how they enjoyed the scenery or the meanings that the planet had for them. The term "ruin" was

never mentioned by my interlocutors, nor the term "ghost town," but there were discussions on

how the social world felt emptier than their memory of the golden age of *SWG*. Examples

include:

> My house is on Naboo, and I chose that planet because it was always a beautiful location to me and the Emperor had a palace there. I love the scenery in Naboo, and the houses for the planet are some of the more elegant ones. (Locklen)

> I lived on Dantooine, at the Mining Outpost. That was always my home, closest to the starport as you could get at one point, and this spot became my base of operations where I had all my houses on the build line, up front. This allowed me to be able to get to places faster and move around quicker if I was PvPing. (Ivan)

Power. Discussions on the layers of power within the game and the server. This includes

the opposing tensions of individualism and collectivism, as well as the benefits of guilds, and the

role of the government in the server. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are several

overlapping spheres of influence in *SWG*, and the interviews shaped the findings related to that,

as through discussions about who holds the power or ownership of the play experience: the game

developers, the players, or the holders of the intellectual property. While these discussions were

never explicit, how the interlocutors discussed their history with the game revealed that they felt

players held the power along the spectrum of individualism and collectivism. Below are four

subthemes related to power.

Individualism. When interviewees discuss their personal goals, objectives, or actions in

the game, or when they center their discussion of the game upon themselves solely. These

themes included first person accounts, when my interlocutors would discuss how and why they

individually do and experience things in the game. Many discussions about their history and

nostalgia for the game included memories of personal accomplishments, of individual

experiences, or how they enjoy returning to the game as individuals. This self-centering is

evident in the following examples:

> I sell everything. I'm not into keeping items at all. The name of my shop is 'Naboo
> plainsfolk loot' and everything I sold was taken off the corpses of Naboo NPC civilians
> in the area I killed for sport. It was just something I did for fun to break the monotony
> of grinding, and to be honest it was something unique that I could only do in this game.
> (Gaston)

> Home is where I spend the majority of my time, and my creativity can come to life.
> Literally anything you can imagine is possible to create. It's also a place where I can
> show off my creations and my collections from my travels across the galaxy. (Henry)

Collectivism. When interviewees discuss collective actions or goals related to the

gameplay, such as working together to complete a quest (but not including guilds). Discussions

in this theme were often requesting and giving help to the community and or their player city.

There were also examples, as seen below in Felicity, of how friends would parallel play, such as

crafting items on their own but in proximity to each other. While not always having

interdependent play experiences, the discussions in this theme highlight the recurrence and value

of collectivism for the interlocutors. When they spoke of working together and playing together,

they were always good and positive memories. Examples include:

> Home is a place to set up shop for your vendors as well as a starting point to meet up with your group…My cousin also plays on the Legends server, and it helps having a group to raid or craft with. I have a lot of memories from the pre-CU days with friends crafting together. (Felicity)

> I'll never get rid of my harvesters, they're an item that has value to me. They allow me to collect resources to make more starship parts for my friends. (Elliot)

Guilds. Specifically, when interviewees discuss guilds in general, as well as their role

within a guild and or how the guild they were a part of interacting with them. Sometimes there

was overlap between this subtheme and the one above, as concepts of friendship, community,

and the social are all tied to guilds. Some memories, such as Ivan's below, showcase how the

interlocutors followed or were influenced by their guild. Social relationships that were built upon

collective gameplay and social support for achievement's sake are why guilds are found in most

online multiplayer games. Examples include:

> I'm with my old guild with the core members all back and it's nice to see everyone again and do things together... I'm enjoying the game more for the community and seeing old friends rather than the gameplay now… I joined the Legends server because that was where my guild was. (Ivan)

> I take interior design seriously, with tasteful organization and décor. Modeled after how I would want to actually live in the house, and it's a painstaking process that requires hundreds of hours. My guild hall alone has taken over 100 plus hours and I'm still only about halfway done. (David)

Government. Discussions about player governments within the game—either at the

player city level, guild level, or the galactic senate level. In the interviews, discussions about

player governments echoed the sentiments about collectivism and community. In this way, there

was overlap between some of the previous subthemes, instead of a delineation between the

power of what these governments wield. When explicitly asking about player governments at all

levels, the interlocutors had positive experiences and memories. Unlike the meat space, where

there are many reasons to have disdain for government and politics, the interlocutors saw that

player governments played a crucial and supporting role in the play experience. Examples

include:

> Player cities and guilds run very similarly to real-world governments. You can compare
> their duties to the multiple branches of the U.S. Departments: Defense handles imperial
> or rebel bases in the city, Interior handles city layout and maintenance, Commerce
> handles merchants and the micro-economy. (Chris)

> Player cities are communities of like-minded players, in close proximity, selling their
> services to the community and the greater public. Being a part of an active community
> gives the player a sense of greater importance, and city governments allow that. Not
> only that, but the Galactic Senate plays an integral part of playing the game. This is a
> group-centered game. You could play by yourself, but being in a group is very
> satisfying and inspiring. (Brian)

Nostalgia. Commentary from the players on their nostalgia for the game, how it impacts

them, their play experience, or what they think about the past of the game and or it's server.

These discussions on nostalgia revealed that most players define nostalgia as a feeling that

inspired them to enjoy the game now, or that reminded them of enjoyment in the past. This

theme revealed that nostalgia was also the surface level reason for why players currently engage

with the game. Digging deeper into the psychology of nostalgia could reveal the differences this

emotion manifests in the personal history of players. Many interlocutors, such as David,

connected their feelings of nostalgia to a desire to reject modern games, feeling that games in the

past were better or different due to trends in monetization. Examples include:

> [Nostalgia has played] a big part, I played *SWG* daily for years! And rose-tinted glasses
> have certainly played a big part of it. Honestly, it isn't as good as I remember, but I've
> been spoiled playing *Guild Wars 2* for 6 years now and the way modern MMOs are
> more refined with more thought to quality of life. *SWG* now seems very slow to me,
> with too much wasted time. (Ivan)

[Nostalgia] has played a large role in my enjoyment as I still have fond memories of playing. However, I honestly think the game stands up over time. I don't think the appeal of the game is mostly nostalgia. It has many design choices that speak to an older philosophy of game design that I think is much better. (David)

Enjoyment. Discussions on how the interviewees either enjoy or don't aspects of the game, and their feelings about the experience. Overwhelmingly, discussions of the game included a love for it, or how the interlocutors enjoyed returning to it. Occasionally the players would admit the shortcomings of the game, such as how the graphics or smaller social environment weren't as fun this time around. Enjoyment seemed to be tied to nostalgia, as discussions about how or why the interlocutors enjoyed the game came from memories of playing SWG in the past, or how it compared to their experiences in the past with the game. Examples include:

SWG was one of my favorite games, so coming back to it as a mature gamer who can appreciate its depth is rewarding. The missions, crafting, and game economy mean a lot more to me now…Although it is a very outdated and irrelevant game, it's still pretty freaking cool, even when compared to more modern games. (Alex)

It's very enjoyable. As for describing it, I consider SWG to be one of the best video gaming experiences I've ever engaged in. It is a wonderful experience to immerse yourself in the Star Wars universe. (Chris)

Field Notes

As a crucial part of the method of ethnography, it was important for me to write down my experiences and reflect on the participant observation I was engaging in. Every play session ended in a reflective period where I transcribed my notes in a digital word document to keep track of these notes alongside the screen captured video recording. In some ways, the videos served as a secondary source alongside my analysis of my field notes, to compare my findings and feelings in retrospect. These notes were then later analyzed via a grounded approach and coded according to the four codes—and their child nodes—listed below. These codes are

included in the codebook that was created for analyzing my field notes, and their descriptions are included here.

Gameplay. Commentary on the actual experience of playing the game. This includes my attitudes as a player, my observations of the virtual world, and how I played the game. I wrote a lot about trying to understand mechanics and systems within the game. SWG was more complicated than I anticipated, so much of my commentary about the experience of playing the game came from trying to discover or learn about these systems. Included in the gameplay theme are the subthemes of frustration, user interface, and environment. Examples include the following three separate passages:

> Basically I started a basic quest, and got through quite a bit of it before I met my first enemies (Tusken raiders) who absolutely wrecked me! I tried again to retrieve the item, but this time tried being more strategic in aggro'ing the Tusken Raider, and still got wrecked. At that point I decided to just call it a game and quit.

> Either way, I finally figured out combat (kind of) and grinded with some little lizards and frogs outside of Mos Eisley. Then I got sucked up into quests because I was trying desperately to find a vendor to sell my junk to. Still haven't found anything. But I did end up finding the bazaar (the universe's auction house), so I put a few things up, but it looks like I might not sell them. I dunno.

> But after getting power-leveled to 90, it's a weird experience. Kind of an identity crisis, because I have the stats of a level 90 body, but I'm equipped with level 1 armor and weapons (actually, no weapon, because I still can't use that blaster I'm pretty sure). What am I? What is Tohy? Who is she? I need to find better gear, but I don't have the gold/credits to buy any. I wish I could find an actual merchant to sell and buy gear (instead of the auction house), but again, maybe I just need to look these things up.

Frustration. Whenever I express frustration with playing the game, or other negative feelings similar to anger. It turns out that this game elicited a lot of frustration from me; the prevalence of this theme is mirrored in my overall experience with the game. I likely would not have played SWG for as long as I did if it wasn't tied to my dissertation research. Below are some separate examples:

Today was a pretty good and pretty bad day. I started off thinking "I'll go grind to finish that last quest from last time." And I died, twice, to a wimpy monster. So I was starting to think I must be doing something poorly, and was getting frustrated with the game (not a good way to start a game, let alone a play session).

Ugg, today was kind of good, but kind of frustrating. I accomplished a few of my goals (got a spaceship, and almost got a lightsaber), but also realized how bad this game is. Just too clunky, the graphics aren't optimized, and the controls are hard to master. I spent some time reworking my controls again, but at least this time I learned how to use auto-run, which made my lengthy traversals more bearable.

I hope that soon I can figure out more about finally getting my lightsaber (equipping a force crystal has been frustrating me, even though technically I have tuned a Krayt Dragon pearl. Not really sure how data plans work, or how to craft, or why I can't craft anything yet. So much that I need to learn, so little time. I spend my whole gaming session just trying to work on one quest (which still isn't done since I've had to do so much planet hopping), that I don't really have time to learn more about the game because I'm bogged down with just getting from point A to point B.

User interface. Commentary on the user interface, as well as the game's systems and the experience of navigating these. Since *SWG* was developed nearly 20 years ago, the field of user interface was not as well tuned as it is today. The nuances of these older systems and menus are often unintuitive and led to much of my writing just trying to figure out how to navigate the game or change the controls. Some examples would be:

After some confusion, I finally got into my ship and floated in outer space for a while, which wasn't fun at all. New control system (you know, based off of plane/space controls), which was a bit of a pain to figure out. I just hate that there are always windows with controls that you must click, but then the mouse pointer is mapped to do something else, making it impossible to click on the quest window thing that you desperately want to click. Pretty frustrating.

All of the systems and mechanics are still pretty lost on me. It's not helpful that most of the UI is small, and I feel like I have to squint just to see what it is. I am really grateful for Blizzard's UI design, thinking back on *Diablo II* and *World of Warcraft*, I feel like they have pretty easy systems to use and understand, but I am so lost playing *SWG:L*.

Environment. Discussion on the environment, the virtual world, and the visual aspect of the game (unrelated to the interface). In my fieldnotes I wrote about the virtual environment with mixed feelings, sometimes impressed by the variety of the environment, and sometimes bored by the lack of content. The amount of level design devoted to the landscapes and environments are lacking (as explained in the history chapter), but when I wrote about it in my fieldnotes I did not know that the developers struggled to populate the game with a rich, exciting environment. Examples include the following two passages:

> To do this quest, I needed to go to an oasis, which was a LONG way away from Mos Eisley. I'm grateful for my speeder, which made the travel much quicker. Still really tedious and boring. The landscape is fairly empty, very basic, and non-descript. As I inched slowly towards the marker on my mini-map, I couldn't help but wonder why are these planets so massive, and yet so empty. It is an argument and debate that happens very frequently in Open World games: to be realistic (the world is filled with basic, boring landscapes, on a massive scale), or to be enjoyable (a world that is filled with meaningful and fun interactions and content)."

> I saw quite a bit of the landscape of Tatooine and Naboo today, and while it kind of was nice to have some new scenery, it wasn't that appealing. Still really empty, basic landscapes, with stuff like houses appearing only feet in front of me (due to the terrible draw distance).

Community. Commentary on my fellow players, my attitudes toward them, and what they're doing in the game (player content, or actions/chat). I wrote positively about the community—for obvious reasons, I was trying to study it—and noted the behaviors of my fellow players from time to time. In contrast, I also mentioned some of the loneliness or absence of community I felt in this game. There were vast stretches of the virtual world where I was the only player around. I also took note of the chat and communication that occurred within the game. Occasionally I also mentioned the community of SWG outside of the game world, as I engaged with it via the forums and Discord server. The one subtheme of community is player cities. Below are two separate examples:

Today was a boring day. I logged into the game, and was reminded of the passing of Peter Mayhew. This legacy actor who played Chewbacca in the Star Wars series passed away on April 30th, and there was a little shrine set up to him and Chewbacca within Mos Eisley today. I knelt by the shrine for a minute out of respect for him and his work in this series.

Today I introduced myself on the forums and dug around there a little bit. I found out that they've been having a homeshow competition almost every month for a while now. Each month players nominate a house for the competition, and the judges vote on the best decorated house. Worth investigating for my research, I could probably look over at least a few different winners across the months/years. This month they're also doing a demolition event. By the sounds of it, normally unoccupied housing is deleted by the game after a window of time (I think it's 90 days of not logging in), but this month they are giving players the chance to blow up houses that qualify for demolition, I think? The announcement about it seemed a little unclear.

Player cities. Commentary on the content of the player cities, or when I conduct surveys of them, what I feel about these communities. A lot of my commentary in my fieldnotes about the visiting player cities was sparse, I rarely went into detail about what I saw or experienced. But I did reflect on what I thought, which often was positive being impressed by the amount of player structures. Examples include the following two passages:

It is kind of cool that there is so much player-created content in this game, meaning that players created these houses and villages, instead of the developers. Kind of a crowdsourcing the map content.

… I found a player town with many, many houses and dwellings. As I entered this player town (a player-created community with its own taxes and benefits), a message played: 'Welcome to ___, if you'd like to join, contact __, __, or __ on Discord.' (Again, I don't remember either the name of the city or the name of the players to contact on the Discord server). This was kind of cool, and made me think again on settling down and making a house. I really want to, but know I need some credits to pay my taxes. And I have no idea how to really earn credits.

Research. Discussions on either additional research related to the game—such as looking up information in guides and walkthroughs—or commentary on my dissertation research. Much of my commentary on my academic research was sparse, mainly just acknowledging that I did it,

and as mentioned previously I was frequently flummoxed by the game's mechanics and systems,

needing to rely on studying outside sources to learn how to play. The two subthemes within

research were paratexts and academic research. Below are two separate examples:

> Finding any content or guides on *SWG* is difficult, because some of it might be irrelevant as it came before this radical change to the game. Anything written pre-NGE is worthless to me, because the *Legends* server relies upon the NGE patch, and thus is built around the most recent structuring of the game… However, I guess I've gotten some help. Maybe? I'm learning that Light Side Jedis are more closely aligned with Tanks, as opposed to Dark Side Jedis, which are more melee heavy and DPS focused. So that will shape my game play.

> Honestly, still don't know where my pilot skill is found. I find myself frequently having to do google searches when I play this game, only to get frustrated because the guides are so fractured and unhelpful. I did jump on the *SWG:L* discord to ask a question. That was nice, so I think I might do that a little more. Granted, the results I get from the Discord will be pretty basic, requiring me to better understand how to accomplish what I'm told.

Paratexts. Specific research related to the paratexts of the game, when I talk about what I

read or learned outside of the game through guides, walkthroughs, articles, etc. Occasionally I

would have an extra journal entry, where I would write about what I learned through my research

of paratexts, and include that in my fieldnotes despite not being connected to a specific play

session. In this way, I was able to engage and learn about the game, and record my reflections on

it without playing. Some examples would be:

> Maybe last week (I honestly can't remember) I found this cool video outlining the upcoming expansion pack that the devs of *SWG:L* have put together. Basically, the developers of *SWG:L* have made the playable planet of Bespin, or as it is known in the movies as Cloud City. It is honestly pretty remarkable that 8 years after the game was shut down, that the fans and hosts of this private server are actually making new content, and significant content at that.

> Today I was watching some tutorial videos… It is part of a series about how to play *SWG:L*, and was actually started recently (only in February of 2020). I didn't learn much, as this video was mostly about the first few quest lines, but it does emphasize how much of this game is designed to be a sandbox, and that there are so many systems

and mechanics that I have yet to learn about, let alone master. I've got a lot of researching to do to get up to date on everything about this game however. I'm going to give this game a second chance…

Academic research. All commentary about the nitty-gritty of my dissertation research, such as what I'm doing or why. As mentioned previously, much of my commentary and discussion in my fieldnotes about my academic research was concise. But this subtheme also was tied to others such as boredom or frustration, as I expressed negative feelings about how the study or research was going. Examples include the following passages:

> Today I started a survey of the player-generated city that I want to study for my archaeology class: Aurebesh on the planet of Naboo. I went to the SWG:L site and found their listings of player cities, sorted by the oldest and picked Aurebesh (due to it being alphabetically the first) out of the four cities founded on February 29, 2016. This is only three days after [*SWG:L]* went live… I really hope that this data reveals a lot, it was kind of interesting entering the player houses that I could, they seem to all have very similar attitudes toward storage and decoration.

> Today I surveyed 2 cities on Naboo (Another Dimension and Rapture), then traveled to Tatooine to start another planet's worth of surveying. Part of me originally wanted to do 5 cities on all planets (seven, for a total of 36 because of Aurebesh), but now I'm reconsidering the scope. I think I might just do two planets now, as well as the unincorporated suburbs of Mos Eisley. Today I wandered around the outskirts of Mos Eisley for a while, and I might add it to my other video capture from a few months ago. I guess the capture part isn't too bad, I can often record 2 cities in 30 mins, but it's the future map making that terrifies me.

Boredom. Commentary on my general attitude toward the game, not specific to the experience or the content, but my feelings about the play session and *SWG* as a whole. There was some overlap of this theme with the frustration subtheme, but for the most part my notes and attitudes could fall into either of these categories or feelings. While both are relatively negative in nature, boredom is more apathetic and thus more neutral in tone and tenor than frustration, especially since frustration excerpts were typically targeting specifics. This theme of boredom was much more generalizable and less specific. Below are three separate examples:

But anyways, this game is still a game. Not really into it that much. At least when I play it, I do have a little bit of fun, but it isn't addicting or anything.

Not a whole lot to report today. Just played for 30 minutes. I planned on playing longer, but got distracted with other things. So I just basically sat in the cantina in Mos Eisley until I logged off. I'll admit, my desire to play this game is waning.

Ran some space missions. Blew stuff up. Got bored at the end.

As another layer of recording, I had video recordings of my play sessions made via screen capturing software. These video recordings were useful in revisiting many of my experiences and helped in other aspects of data collection (in particular the creation of the site maps listed previously). And as mentioned previously, I recorded the chat logs of all my play sessions. After consulting the chat logs, I found that it mostly was spammed messaging: automated messages offering buffs, looking for a group, or looking to trade items, which were sent out every five minutes. Below are some of those repeated messages found in these chat logs:

> Eshyydrrl says, "Send an invite for stims in T minus 15 minutes."
> Tig' silva says, "Need free space xp and/or just want to shoot #&*%? send me a tell
> & take a ship to the Kash avatar platform & head to /way 4832 -965 -5139 dock with
> Desimond's gunboat. hop in a turret and have fun!"
> Kairos shouts, "WTS Multiple Items, Examine me for the list, PST/ Send mail if AFK
> and Thanks for looking!"
> Melika Aster shouts, "Invite me for group buffs, I auto leave every 2 minutes!"

These examples of the automated spam messaging are filled with in-game jargon, but to translate they are offering buffs (character boosts), or offering to escort you in a party for additional experience points, or to trade. Because these same messages came from the same accounts over and over, they flooded the chat and made it difficult to find examples of players actually chatting.

Occasionally though, other chat would occur (which I labeled as small talk, instead of the spammed messages shown above). This small talk often revolved around general chat (what was

going on in the outside world), discussions about the game (commentary on other players' armor set), but often about Star Wars news. One example of this is on the anniversary of Carrie Fisher's death—a prominent actor in the original movie series—the server erected a shrine and players discussed what her character meant to them. These messages flooded the chat of the game, and while *Star Wars* News wasn't a common occurrence, when it did happen it briefly overtook the spammed messaging in the chat logs. These chat logs captured the pulse of the community, showcasing what the players talked about which then can be extrapolated into their priorities and what they value.

<div align="center">*   *   *   *   *</div>

I logged into the game on April 18ᵗʰ, and after Tohy materialized in the square of Mos Eisley, I noticed something odd. There was a shrine erected to Peter Mayhew, the actor who portrayed Chewbacca in the Star Wars movies. He had passed away earlier that month, but the admin of the Legends server wanted to commemorate his passing. There was a unique hologram of Chewbacca, and two alien flowers adjacent to a fountain in the middle of the plaza (see Figure 7). Players were paying their respects in the chat, and a couple spent time to kneel in front of it. I thought about what this meant to players of the game, to acknowledge the passing of a beloved actor and how the virtual world reacted to the outside. For the most part, Mos Eisley continued as usual, with players milling about, but that one shrine in the square was a chance to slow down and engage in performance and ritual.

FIGURE 7: The shrine to Peter Mayhew

I did not witness the shrine to Carrie Fisher myself, but on the anniversary of her death each December, the Legends server creates a memorial. I watched a video on YouTube that showed what that shrine looked like in 2020, and it felt much more honorific. Atop a mountain in Dantooine, there rests a stone gazebo with a larger than life statue of Princess Leia inserting the Death Star plans into R2-D2 (see Figure 8, a screenshot from that video). Players milled about the shrine, mentioning what the actress meant to them in the chat. Some were saluting, blowing kisses, and other affectionate and reverent actions.

FIGURE 8: The shrine to Carrie Fisher, 2020

As a player, I would not remember these anniversaries myself, nor would I think much about the actors who gave themselves for the roles in the movies. But these shrines reminded me of the people apart of the universe. The human role that made this intellectual property possible. These shrines became places of worship, to pay respects, and to be reminded of the philosophical questions of life and death. They created moments of unity across the server where all the fans could come together, and have a pseudo-religious experience. They also emphasize some of the various forms of meaning players make around the spaces of the game.

RQ4: Home and Place

One of the most fruitful questions asked in the interview was "What does home mean to you?" This question brought out a wide variety of answers and revealed that players had a lot to say about their virtual homes within the game. This place attachment and the meanings associated with these houses meant that players were engaging with the space as a place.

Among the various answers to this question, five recurring themes emerged. To some, "home" either meant: a social place, a liminal space, a crafting place, a monument of memory, or a storage locker. Elliot said "Home is the people I share time with. A place is nothing without that," and David also mentioned that "home is the friends you play with." To some players, the home was a social destination, a place where the community gathered. Guild friendships were nurtured and home became a place where they could find that belonging and comradery. These friendships, for some, have been the most enjoyable part of the experience, and Alex mentioned that these friendships have lasted for almost 20 years. Thus, this theme means that virtual homes are social gatherings for players, they are collective and communal. This means that not every game needs to have player housing, but every MMO should feel like "home" to players, where they can find a sense of belonging and comradery. Online communities will thrive when they have this feeling when participants feel at home in these virtual spaces.

To other players, home was a liminal space. Gaston mentioned that it is a place in this world that is uniquely yours, where you can rest and recuperate. Home is a place that gives you a root in the world, the place you have literally placed a building on a plot of land, but also that transient place outside of your adventures and experiences. Locklen called it "A place to go between adventures…Home is a place that would be where my characters would enjoy returning to in between missions or tours of duty to just relax or meet with friends." And to Brian, home was somewhere to spend countless hours after combat or crafting to brainstorm new ways to display their rare items or what to do next. To these players, home was a place in between adventures, a liminal space to travel to and recuperate before and after their experiences. This theme means that a virtual home may not be noticeably important to players—they may not be wishing to have player housing in every game—but they do want situations that link their

various scenarios and adventures. Players want virtual liminal spaces, the connective tissue between the experiences they enjoy and remember. This of course is similar to the architectural principle of liminal spaces, and psychological concepts of rest and recuperation.

However, to other players, home was the place to craft and create new items. Felicity mentioned that home was a place of a lot of grinding, and memories of friends crafting together. She felt that home was a place where she and her friends would socialize while creating items and could explore their creativity. Jacob felt similarly, mentioning "I love crafting and home is where all my crafting stuff and vendors are. I am at home if all I see are my stations." And to Henry, home was "where I spend the majority of my time, and creativity can come to life. Literally anything you can imagine is possible to create." There can be something very Zen about the act of creation, and while it may not be a necessary component of every game, those that do incorporate it need to consider the mechanics and rewards of crafting. This theme reveals that many players associate the core truth of this game with the act of crafting and creating, meaning that this mechanic is fun and enjoyable. Players should have a designated place to create in a game, a place set aside where they can focus and enter a flow-like state.

And home is also a monument of memory. Like Felicity mentioned earlier, home is a place of memories with her friends. And to Kevin, their house was emblematic of the nostalgia and memories they have of the game as a whole, and returning there was a chance to relive many of their memories from the Legends server and the golden age of *SWG*. And to Chris "home for me is being able to play the game I have such fond memories of with great people." Despite the technological affordances of modern video games—capturing the moments and experience through livestreaming for instance—there are still so many ephemeral memories associated with MMOs such as SWG. Perhaps this game's lasting power and lingering atmosphere come from

these player houses, where players are able to craft and erect monuments of memory. These museums of the rare items they've collected or the shared experiences of running instances with friends have a communal and restorative aspect. Because players can return to their city and their homes, this ritual of return reinforces memories and allows for players to revisit them. This of course can be seen in other games, such as *World of Warcraft*, where players have strong memories and associations with certain capital cities and feel a sense of betrayal when these monuments of memory are changed and altered (Crenshaw, 2017). While players may have lasting memories of lobbies and other liminal spaces in games, the ability to customize these social virtual environments adds additional depth and meaning to them. From a sociological perspective, this could tie into the literature on shared meaning and memory, and how identities are formed around these spaces.

But on the flip side of this place attachment, some players still had very pragmatic attitudes toward the concept of home. To them, these houses and structures were places "to drop off [their] shit," unload their stash, a safe storage space for their belongings. Ivan simply said, "home is where all my crap is." So despite many players seeing home as a place of meaning, where they could gather with friends, craft new items, or relive their memories, others just found their house to simply be a storage locker for their belongings. This final theme from the interviews on player housing reveals that not everything has a strong or important meaning. Sometimes games are just experiences that players engage in, and then move on from. This finding of course does not undercut all that I've discussed previously but highlights the multi-faceted components of the concept of "home" in virtual space.

This research question has meaning beyond this dissertation. It can be used to analyze how players view virtual homes and what virtual items can or will mean to them. It has

ramifications not only in other MMOs and online games but also in the broader field of VR and the metaverse. Individuals and players are creating meanings and place attachment to digital items and spaces, sometimes in ways that mirror their meat-space equivalents, but also in new and nuanced ways. These findings are only a springboard for more questions about all of the potential meanings and ways that players will become attached to their virtual space, and what home could mean to them in other virtual environments. Players of these emerging technologies could become more attached to the social aspect of these spaces, and find meaning in how they create a sense of home through their friends and community. And future researchers should approach these spaces as places of meaning and memory, of collective friendships, and museums of collective (and personal) achievements within the virtual space.

RQ5: Demographics and Hegemony

The final research question could be an entire dissertation in and of itself. It asked what the demographics are of the players, and how are issues of race, gender, and hegemony at play in the community. I would be remiss if I didn't at least conduct a surface-level analysis of the demographics of the community and extrapolate what that could mean to the individual players' experience. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the sample skewed older with middle-aged players such as Felicity (51), Gaston (44), and Locklen (43). I heard about—but sadly did not interview for this study—a couple who met in *SWG* in the early days, married, and now play the game together with their 14-year-old son. This is evidence about how old the game is, that players can have teenagers younger than it.

And again, perhaps unsurprisingly based on the literature on cultural issues in video games, the sample skewed male and white. While there were a few who identified as "mixed" ethnicity (Ivan & Jacob), and a non-binary individual (Locklen), this sample aligns with the

research that gamer communities are not diverse, or at least that diverse players tend to be harder

to find due to several of their self-protective strategies, such as hiding their identity or only

playing with people they know (Cote, 2020; Fickle, 2019; Gray, 2012; Ruberg, 2019). I didn't

notice any harassment though in my participant observation though, nor in my informal

following of the digital communication. While there is likely hegemony at play—perhaps in

subtle ways—I believe it helps that the community is older, as the added maturity means less

overt sexism and racism.[38]

So in some ways, I've argued that the game is more diverse with the power resting in

individual players who are forming new cities and changing the current ones at random. Power is

not crystalizing into the hands of the few, but rather remaining in a democratic and informal

collectivist group of players. However, the demographics showed that his game was

conventional in its predominance of white, male players. Both of these are still true—that there

are signs of inequity, non-diversity, and exclusion within a community that is also avoiding

autocratic, centralized, systems of control. What this means to the game and its server could be

that the community is still growing and has the opportunity to become more diverse, more

inclusive, and queerer.

I am not arguing that the developers of the Legends server need to change the content of

the game to make it less bigoted, nor that the players need to reduce their toxicity within the

game. But rather, for players to ask why these spaces are still predominately white and male,

why this game itself—as tied to the larger Star Wars franchise—is not more diverse. To question

what they are doing to exclude other players, or what they could do to invite diverse players to

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[38] I'm not saying that only young players are racist or sexist, but that older players are less likely to engage in using racial slurs, misogyny, or bigotry in the chat. Moderators of the forum also likely help keep the online communication friendly and cordial.

engage with this sandbox game. Due to the nature of *SWG*—being open-ended and allowing for diverse forms of play beyond just combat—there is the opportunity for diversity and inclusion in its player base.

What this means beyond this dissertation is that despite the advances that gender studies have made in the gaming space, there are still deep roots for the previous generation of games. These online environments are still hegemonic and there needs to be greater diversity and inclusion to create parity for the incoming generation of gamers.

Conclusion

The above discussion proposes meanings out of the findings related to people and hypothesizes how these meanings arose and what they could mean to the game studies area as a whole. As an interdisciplinary dissertation, these findings could be applied to virtual studies in archaeology and archaeogaming, as well as online anthropology and sociology. They could also be used in conversations about digital preservation—how, when, and why to preserve online communities or social media.

The interviews served as an opportunity for me to question the community of players and probe into the hows and whys of their play experience. They revealed that nostalgia is a driving force for why players are living in these ruins, and also revealed how attached players are to their houses. The symbolism of home varied among my interlocutors, with five different themes arising from their answers to the question. And while there was a diversity, there was also a depth of discussion from my interlocutors. They had a lot to say about what home means to them, and this reveals a strong place attachment that players are having with the virtual world.

The housing tours served as an extension of the interviews and gave me an opportunity to step into the homes of my interlocutors. Many of them adopted new cadences and emotion when

they were showing off their homes and items, as opposed to how they answered my interview

questions just minutes earlier. There was an excitement and sense of accomplishment and

permeated much of their discussions on what items meant the most to them, and why. I also

found that many players are hoarders, and despite the ease of throwing virtual items away, many

players struggle to do so.

CHAPTER VIII:

CONCLUSION

We stood outside on the planet of Naboo, Tohy and I, as we watched the sun set. We enjoyed this planet the most, as the scenery was appealing and the architecture was uniquely beautiful. The capitol city of Theed was on the horizon, with its many waterfalls cascading and the red sandstone catching the setting sun. Our speederbike was humming next to us, as we just took in the scenery and I thought about what this study meant to me and why I was doing it. A big part of me is nostalgic for older video games, and I have tried to probe into the psychology behind this longing for years now. I guess in many ways I fall into the trap of researching games that I want to play, and studying what I find fun.

But as the sun set on the cityscape, I realized that sometimes it is more important to push ourselves and the game studies field in new directions, and to experiment outside our comfort zone. I wouldn't be enjoying this sunset if I only wrote about games I liked to play. And this study wouldn't have happened if I didn't push myself to use different methods, to explore interdisciplinary work, or to stay in my media studies lane.

My outside coursework on art history, anthropology, and archaeology gave me new perspectives and opinions on research and why it matters. If nothing else, Tohy and I are able to observe and study this sunset in this world. And if we are able to find meaning in it, then maybe we could share some of that meaning with others. I dedicated this dissertation to fellow game studies graduate students, dreamers and explorers, because I feel that there is so much to study that we can't even comprehend how to study it all. I feel that more studies should be done like mine, not just cartographies of virtual worlds, but of player-researchers wanting to study

something in a unique and interesting way. While not every study is going to change a field, being a new and different voice matters for the future scholars. I hope that future creatives find ways to create and make their data instead of just feeling stifled by the rigors of writing academic prose. Being inundated by erudite journals to read and write can feel suffocating at times, and I wish that I took more time to create virtual worlds as I did to write about them.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

The blending of player-creators and player-researchers is something I am excited to witness, and I hope catches on. It is also symbolic of the findings of this study, of how individualism and collectivism manifest in player governments, over who controls the play experience, and why that matters. Concepts of home, belonging, and settlement are metaphors for the human experience and especially the graduate student one.

This dissertation is an examination of how player cities are places and emblematic of the community. Through mapping these player cities, I examined the tensions of power between individualism and collectivism in the community, finding that there are layers of power not apparent in the civic design and planning of player cities. I analyzed the urbanization of these virtual settlements, finding that there were only minor patterns of urbanization. I interviewed players about their experiences in the game and found that to them home meant one of five themes: a social place, a liminal space, a crafting place, a monument of memory, or a storage locker.

This dissertation, and the findings about how players are creating cities and the layers of power in their governments, are relevant to the present and future of gaming and VR. Currently, there are many communities surrounding abandoned MMOs, and the findings of this dissertation could inspire further research into how and why players are still engaging with these games.

There is a lot of potential to dig deeper into video game nostalgia, perhaps from angles and perspectives other than the psychology of this emotion.

The future of games and VR includes the metaverse, which is being touted as a replacement for the meat space in various ways. The marketing emphasizes not only the sameness of the experience—how VR can replicate the shopping experience—but also enhance it. In this way, there are opportunities for individuals and players to create similar governing bodies as those found in *SWG*. There will be sociological discussions about the individualistic behaviors and collectivist communities that coalesce in the metaverse, and how the technology of these virtual spaces can promote either.

The findings of this dissertation are also relevant to community managers and developers of current and future MMOs. As all MMOs will eventually die, studying these players living among the ruins of an abandoned game can prepare stakeholders for the inevitable future. By studying the closure of other MMOs, and how players adapt to create lasting environments, we can learn about the preservation and future of current MMOs. These temporal paradoxes of the future and past are embodied in these ruins and are relevant to the community of virtual worlds.

This dissertation has many limitations, and the above conclusions only scratch the surface of the theories at play in this study. Additional research and reflection could be drawn from the data, and I hope that future researchers will conduct similar cartographic histories of virtual spaces because mapping them benefits us all. From a preservationist standpoint, there are many reasons to conduct site maps of these online worlds, but I think the most important reason is that maps are a symbol of history and community. If anything, my biggest wish is that more archaeogaming researchers push this niche discipline even farther than I did. This dissertation is

dedicated to the future scholars who will build upon these basic findings. Video game research should be fun, which is at the core of why I approached this subject and used these methods.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

After a while of reflection on the city of Theed at dusk, I logged out. For a moment, I was at the character selection screen and could see my avatar, Tohy, staring back at me. As Leia's theme from the *Star Wars* movies reverberated in the background, I felt in that moment a sense of the wonder that the *Star Wars* universe used to light within me. I loved this galaxy far, far, away because of all the freedoms it represented, the binary between good and evil, and that fantasy of flying your spaceship. Tohy and I stared at each other, and I eventually closed my laptop, putting a pause on this experience until I was ready to return to this game in the future. Who knows what'll happen, maybe I'll be nostalgic for *SWG* in ten years when I think back on my dissertation.

APPENDIX A: SITE MAPS
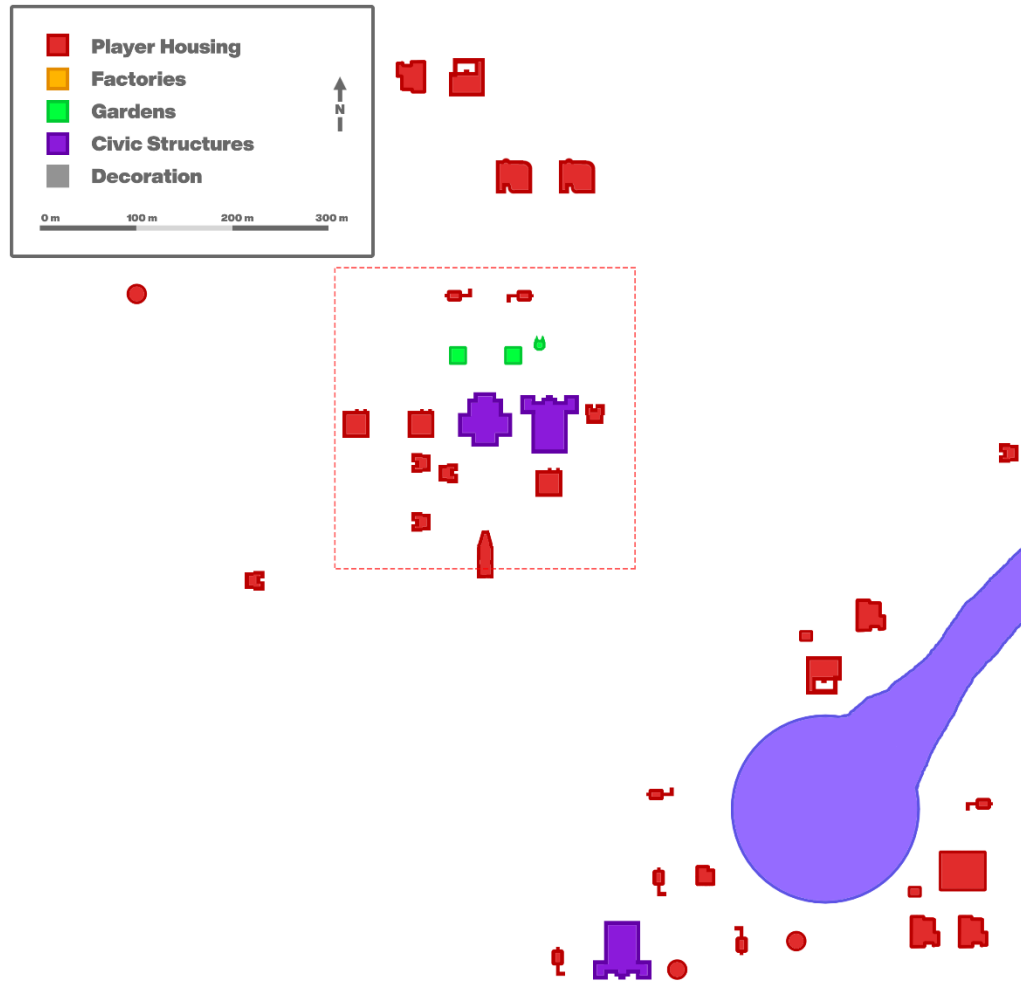
FIGURE 9: Another Dimension
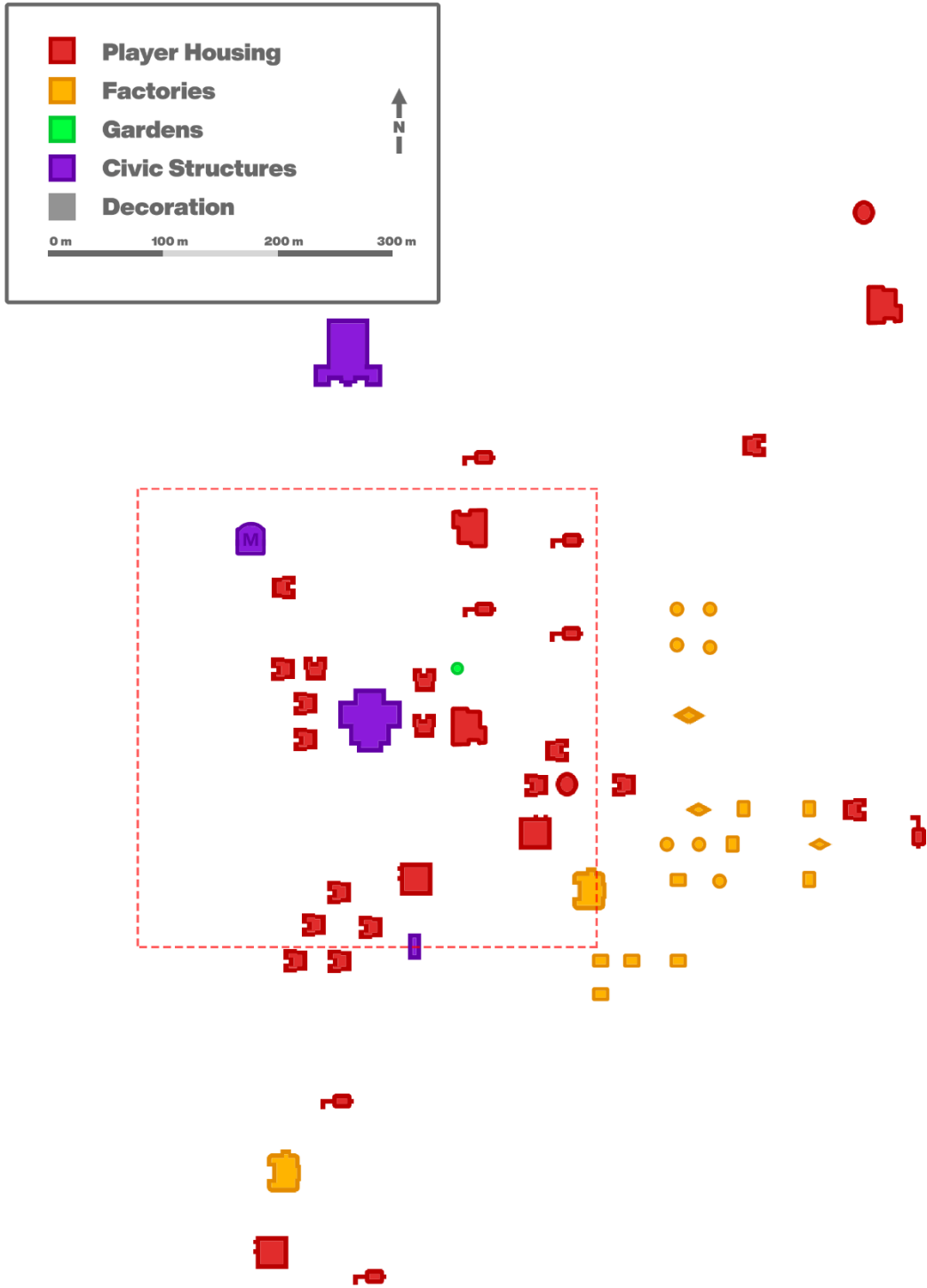
FIGURE 10: Smugglers Run
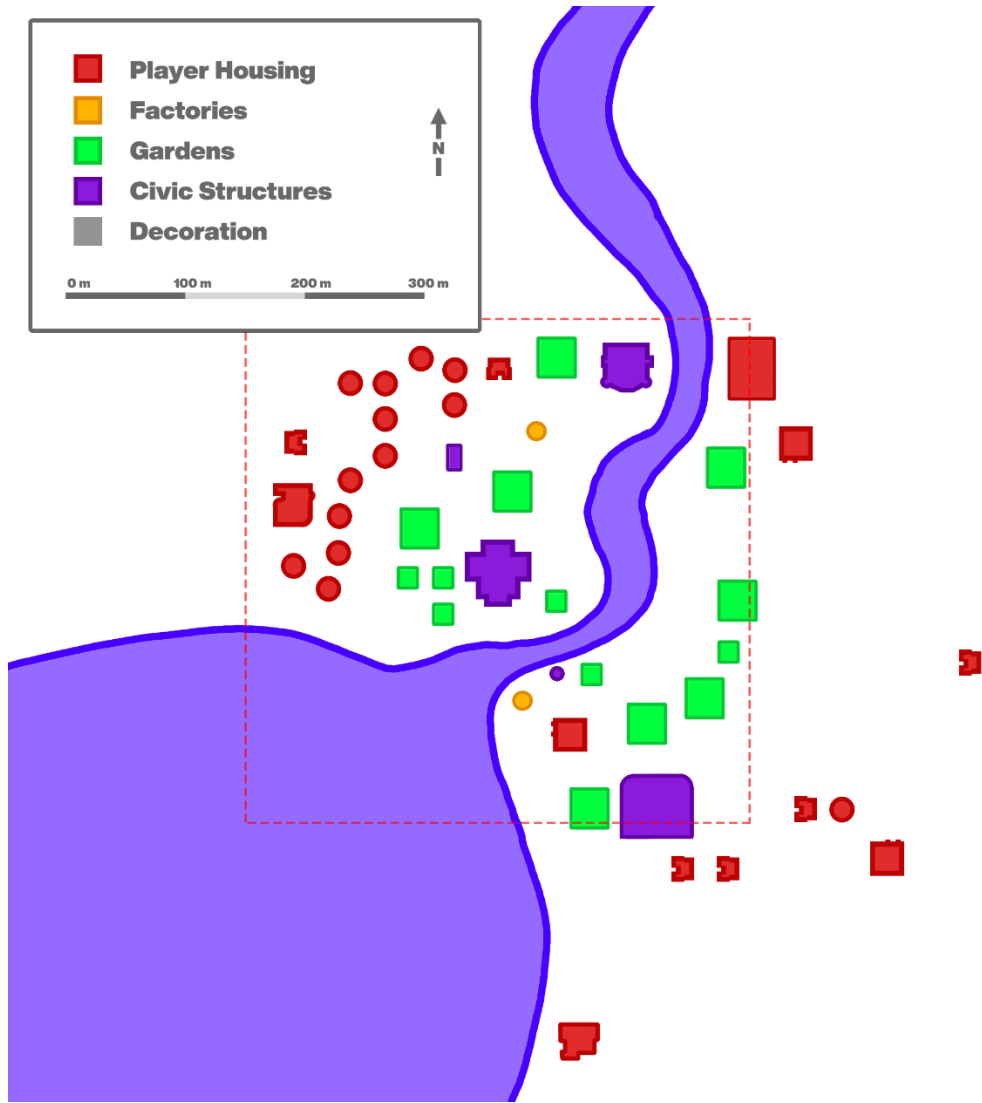
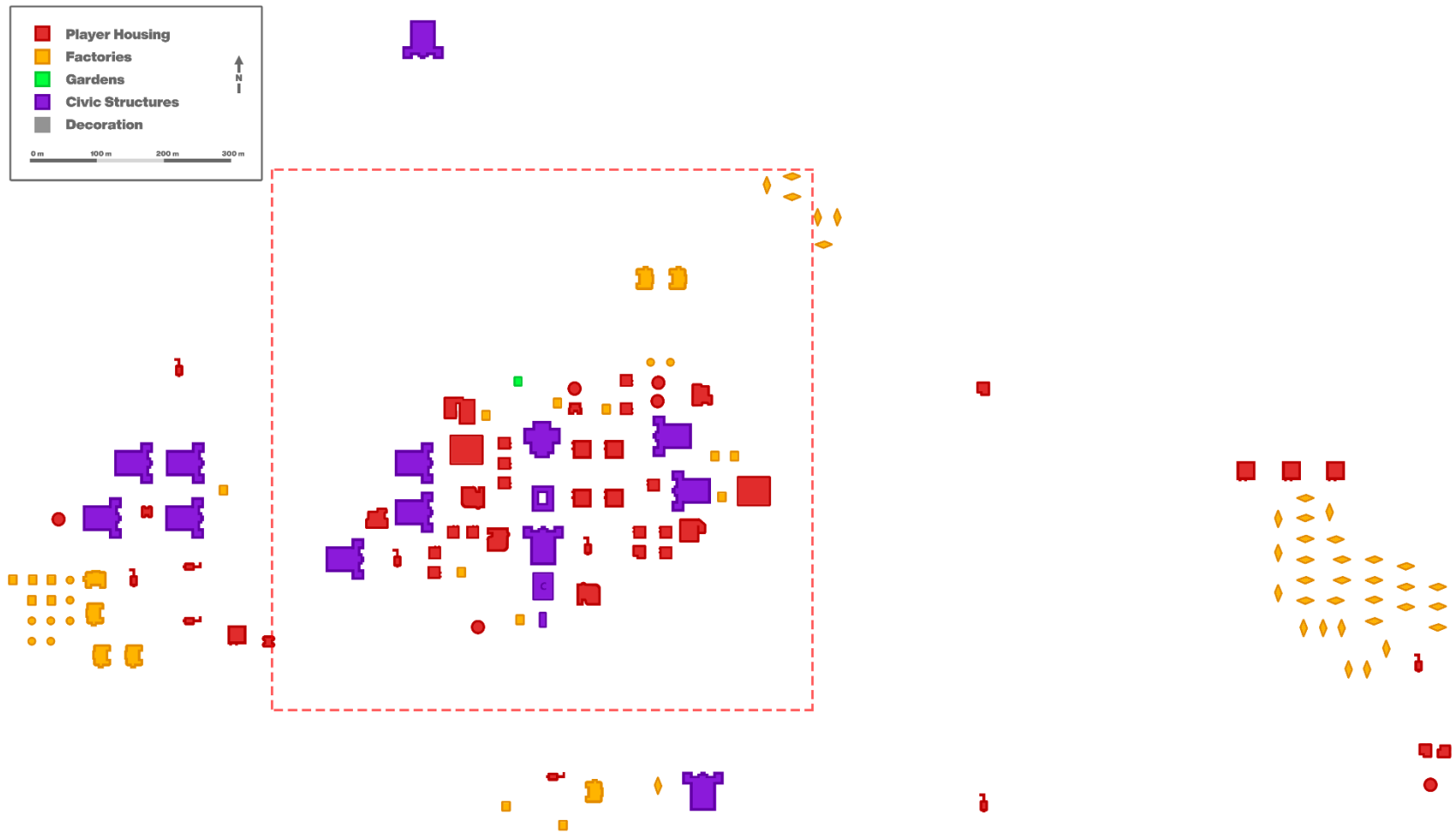*FIGURE 11: Somewhere-over-the-RNBW (Smugglers Run 2)*
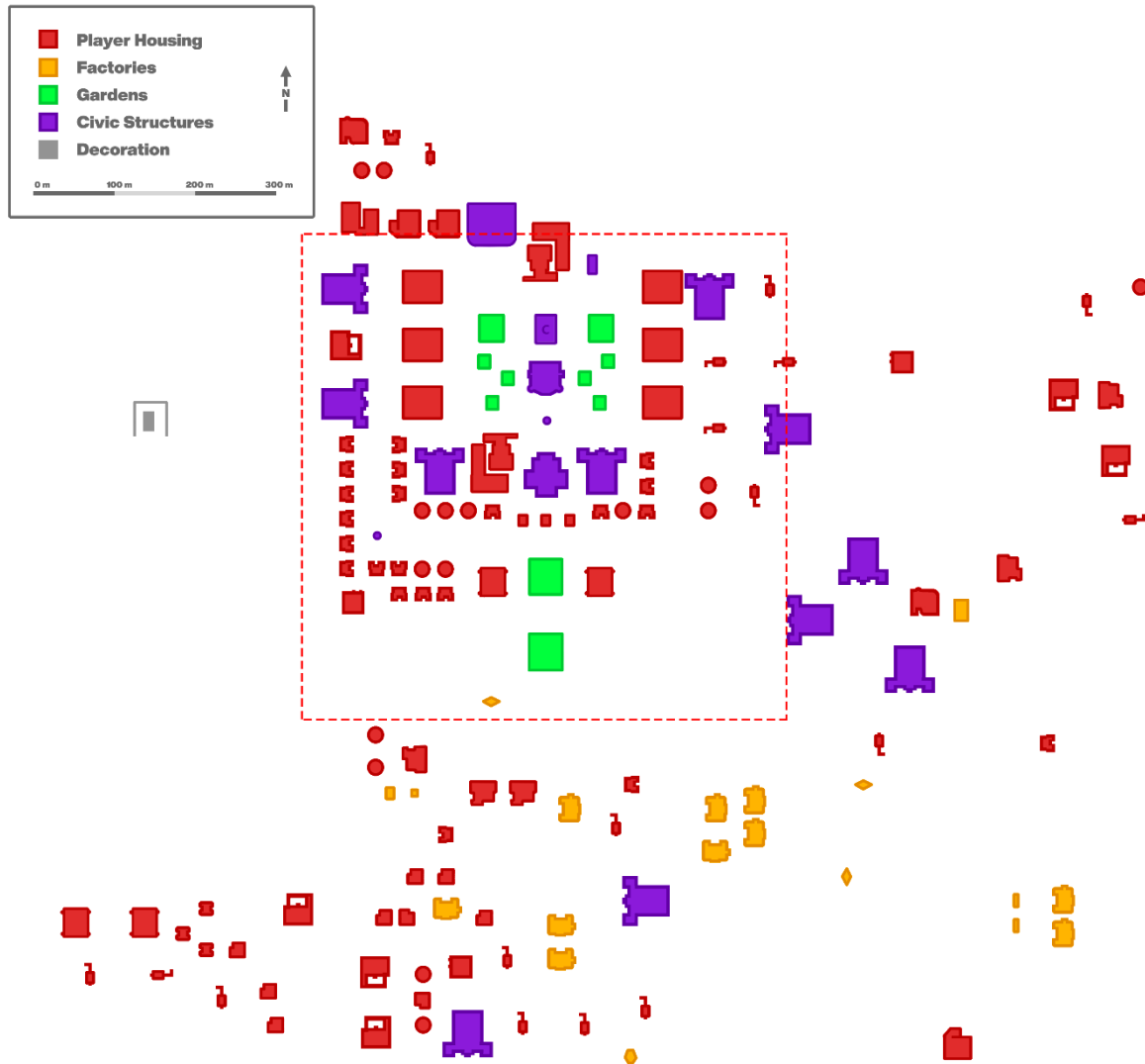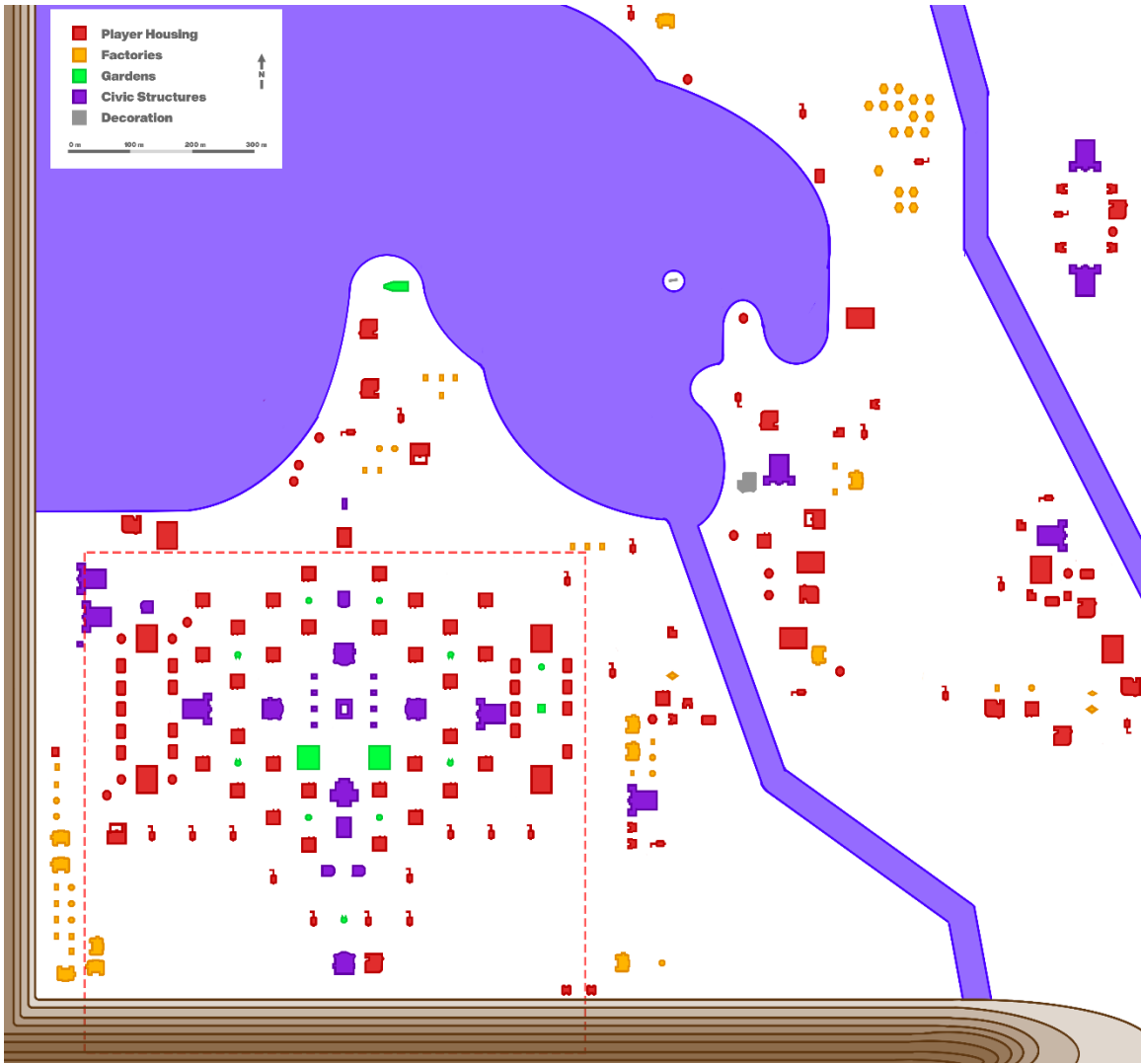
FIGURE 12: Rapture
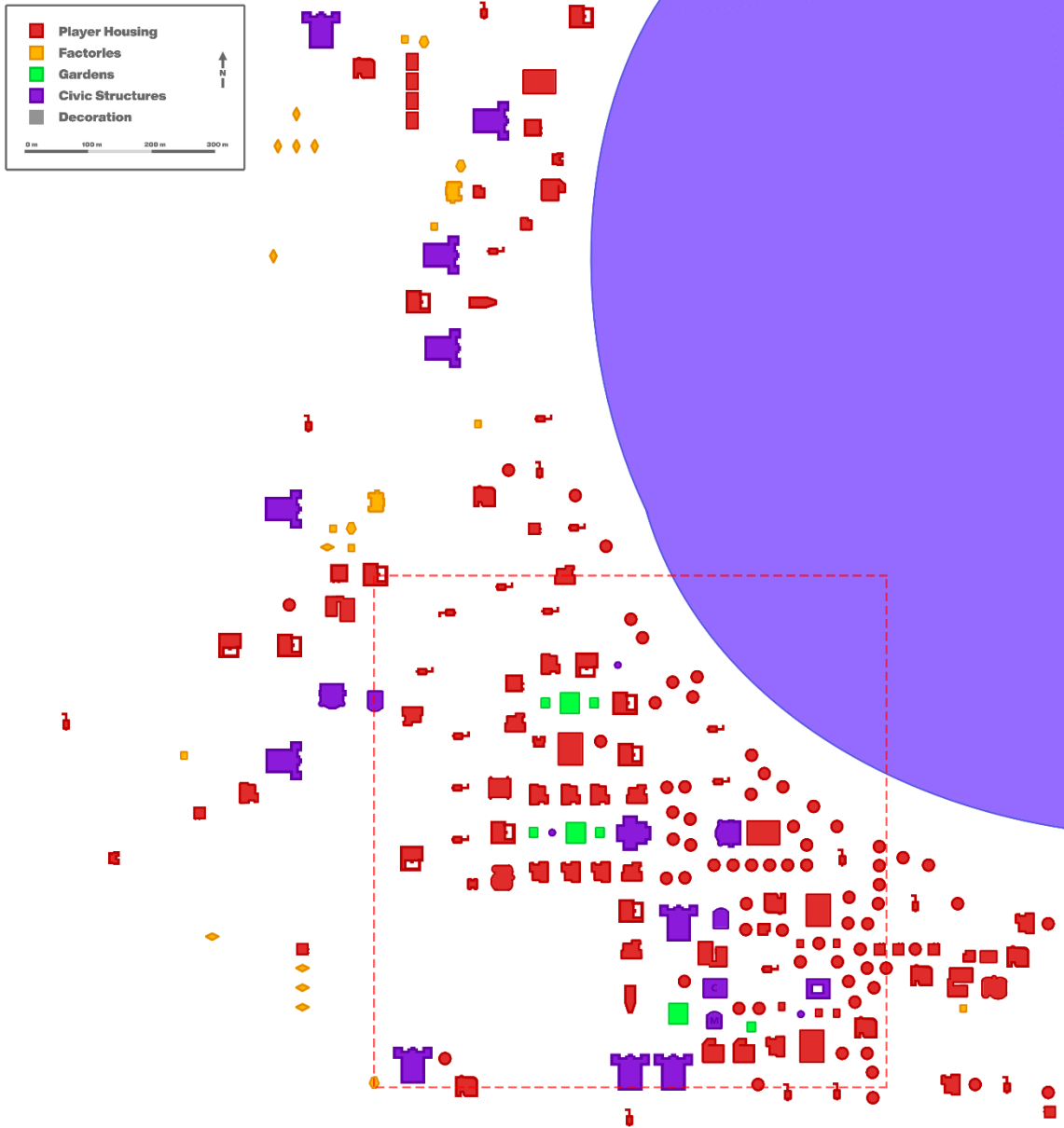
FIGURE 13: Werowocomoco
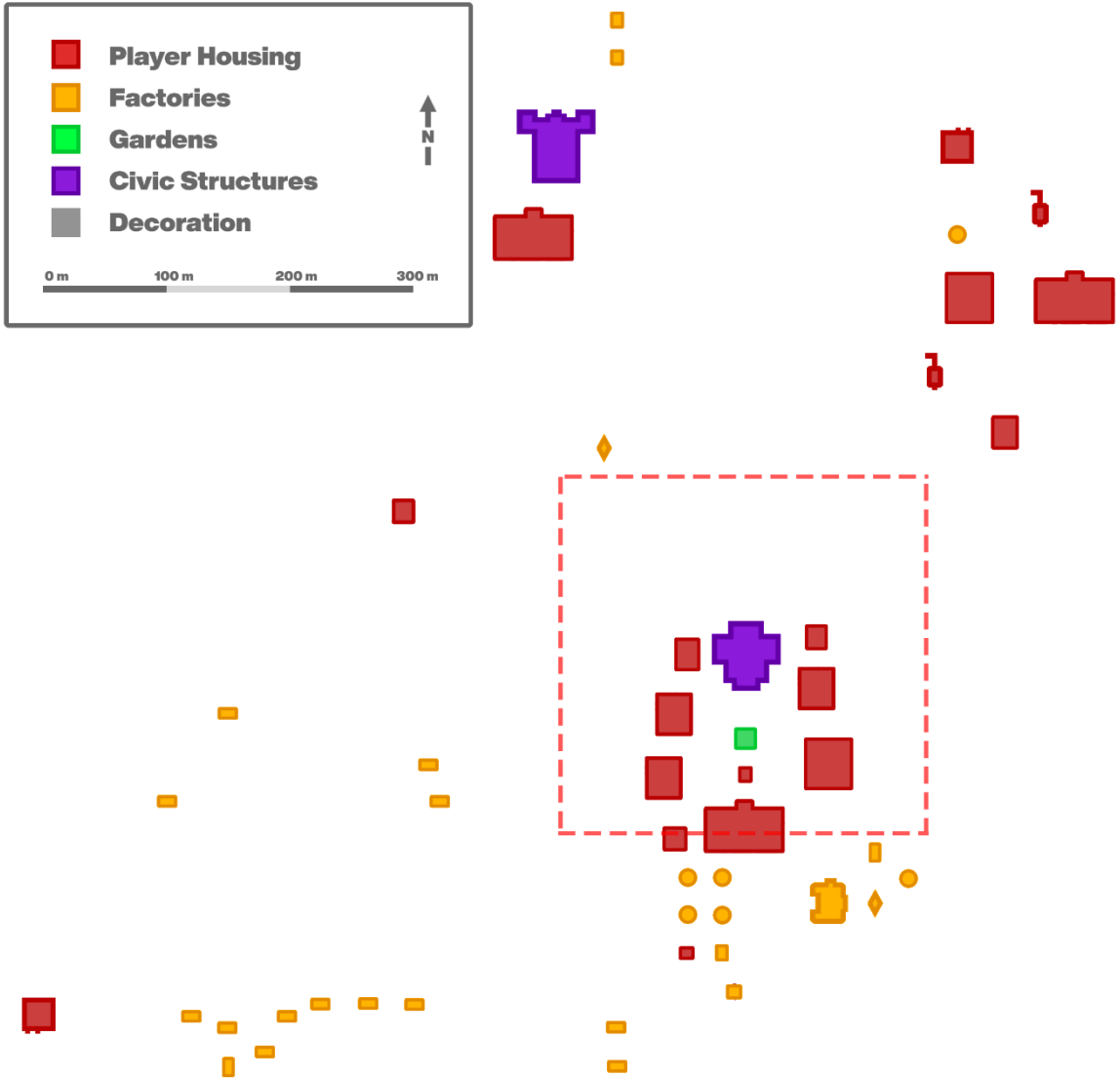
FIGURE 14: Aurebesh

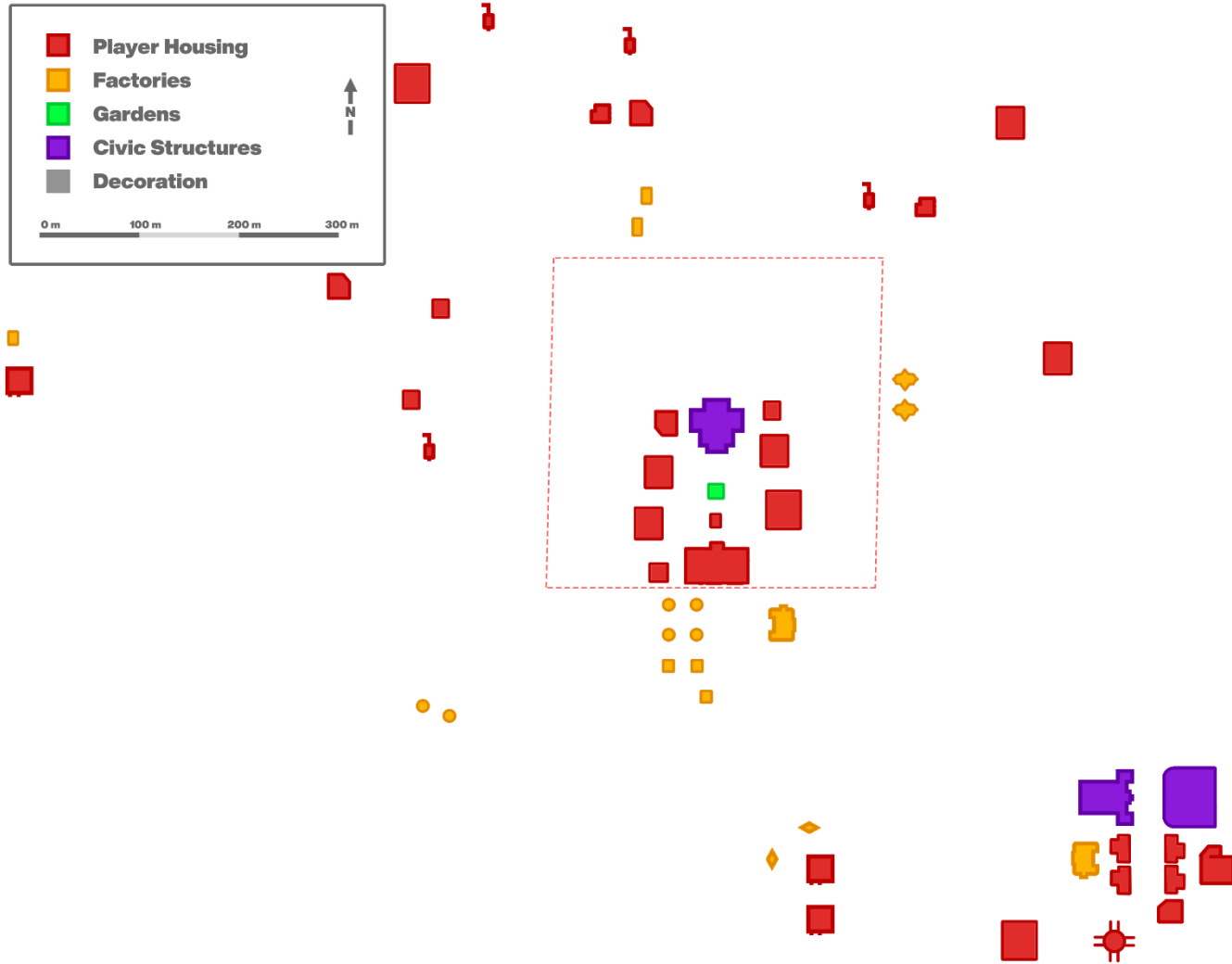*FIGURE 15: Ultraviolet*

FIGURE 16: Sandy View 1
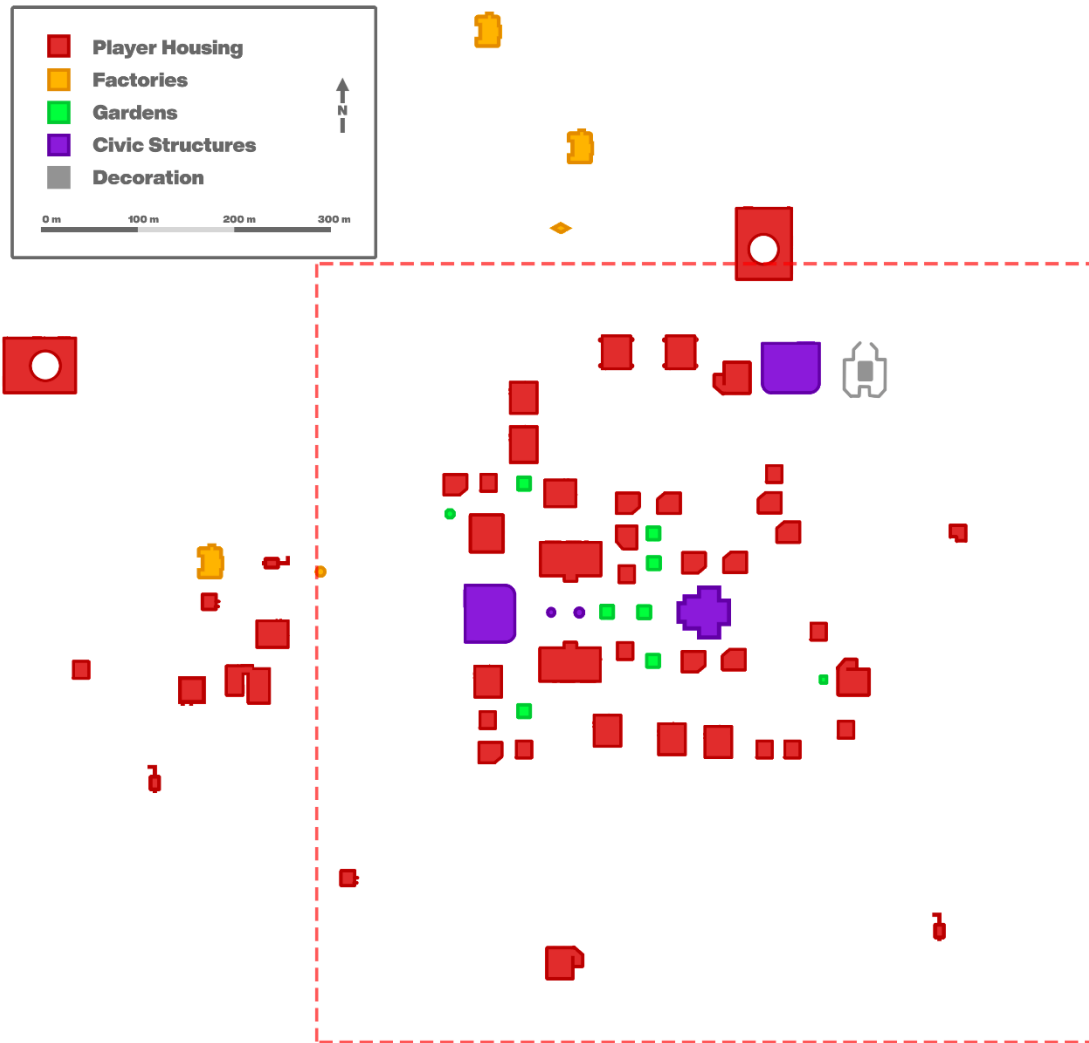
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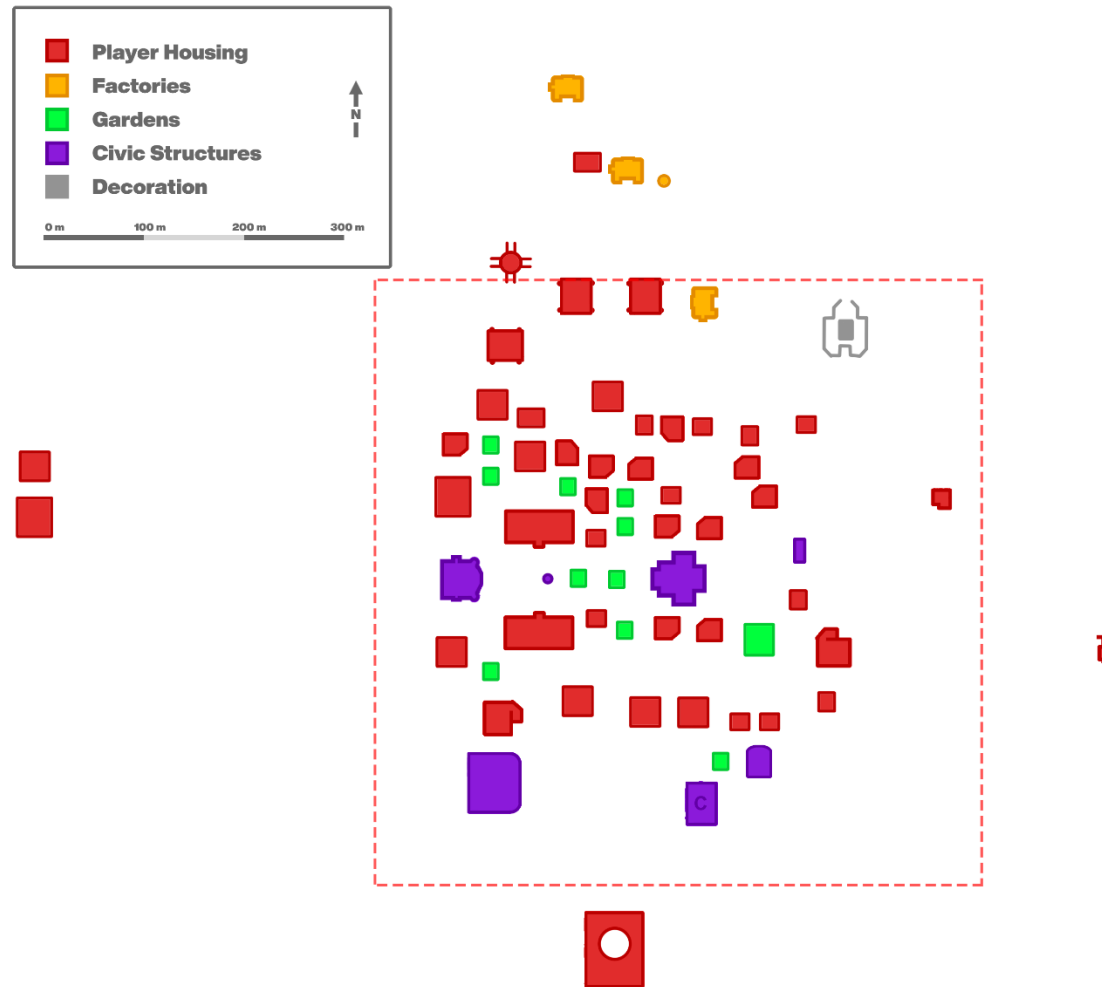
FIGURE 18: Rising Sun
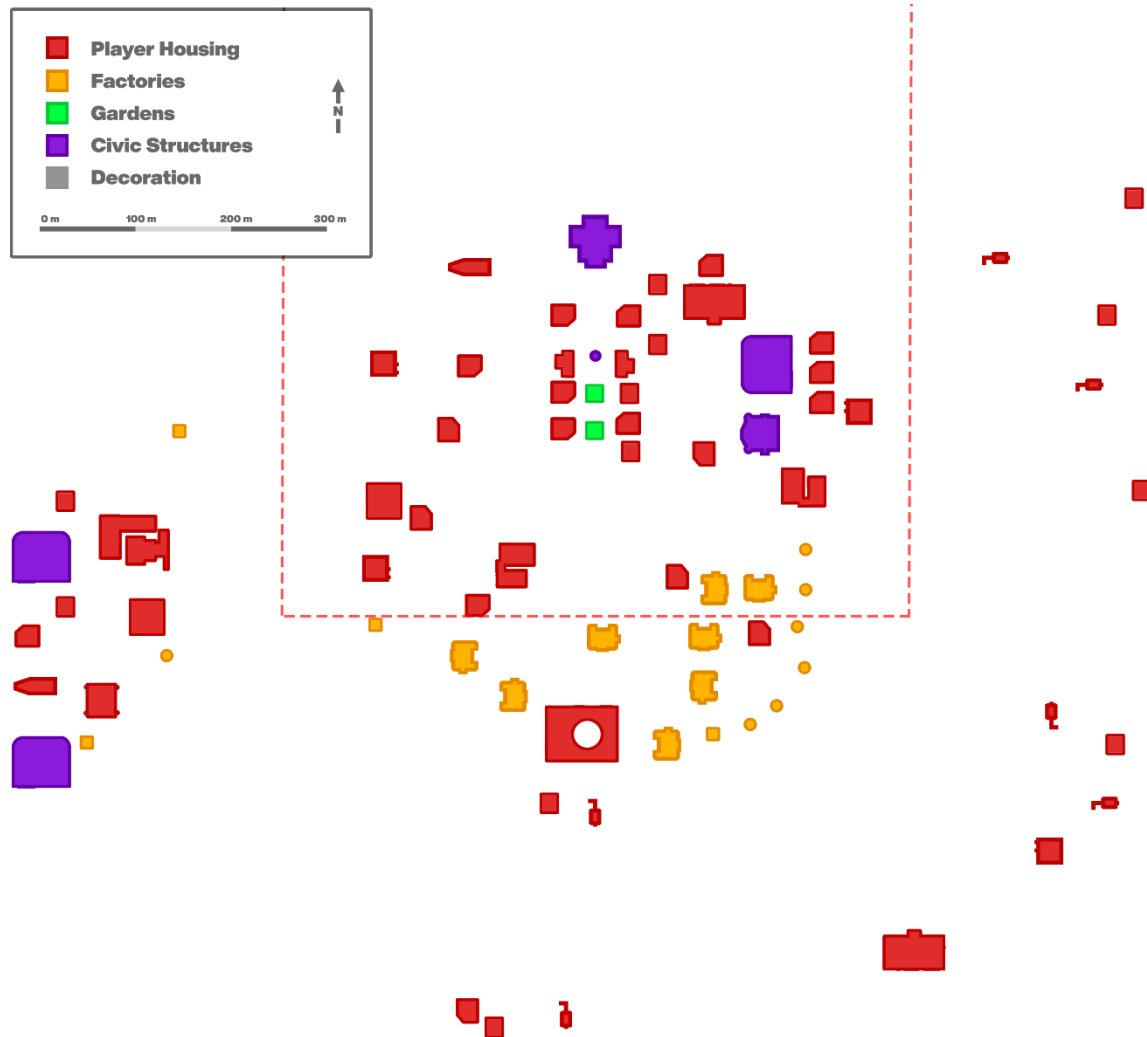
FIGURE 19: Mos Ferun 1

FIGURE 20: Mos Ferun 2
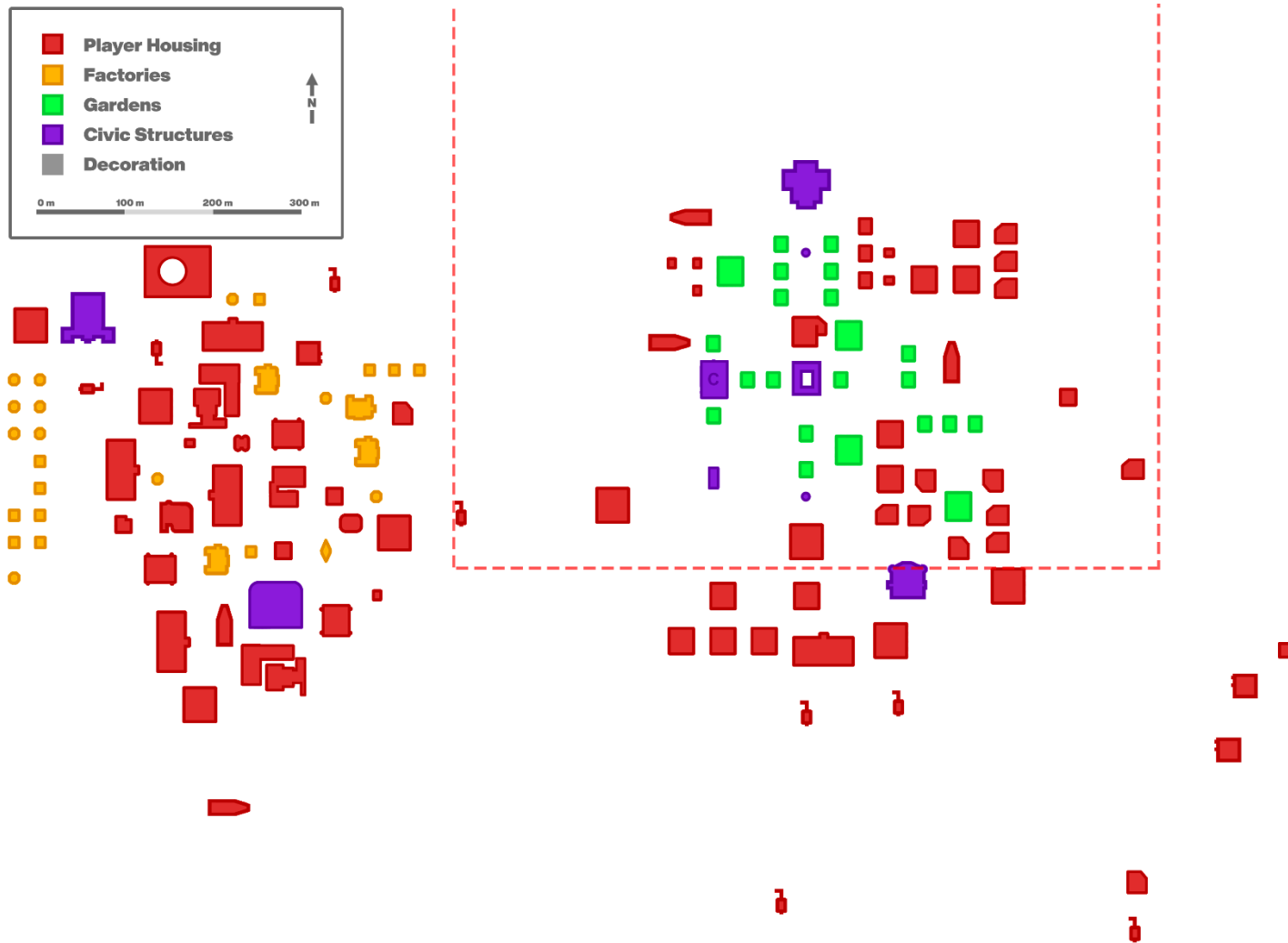
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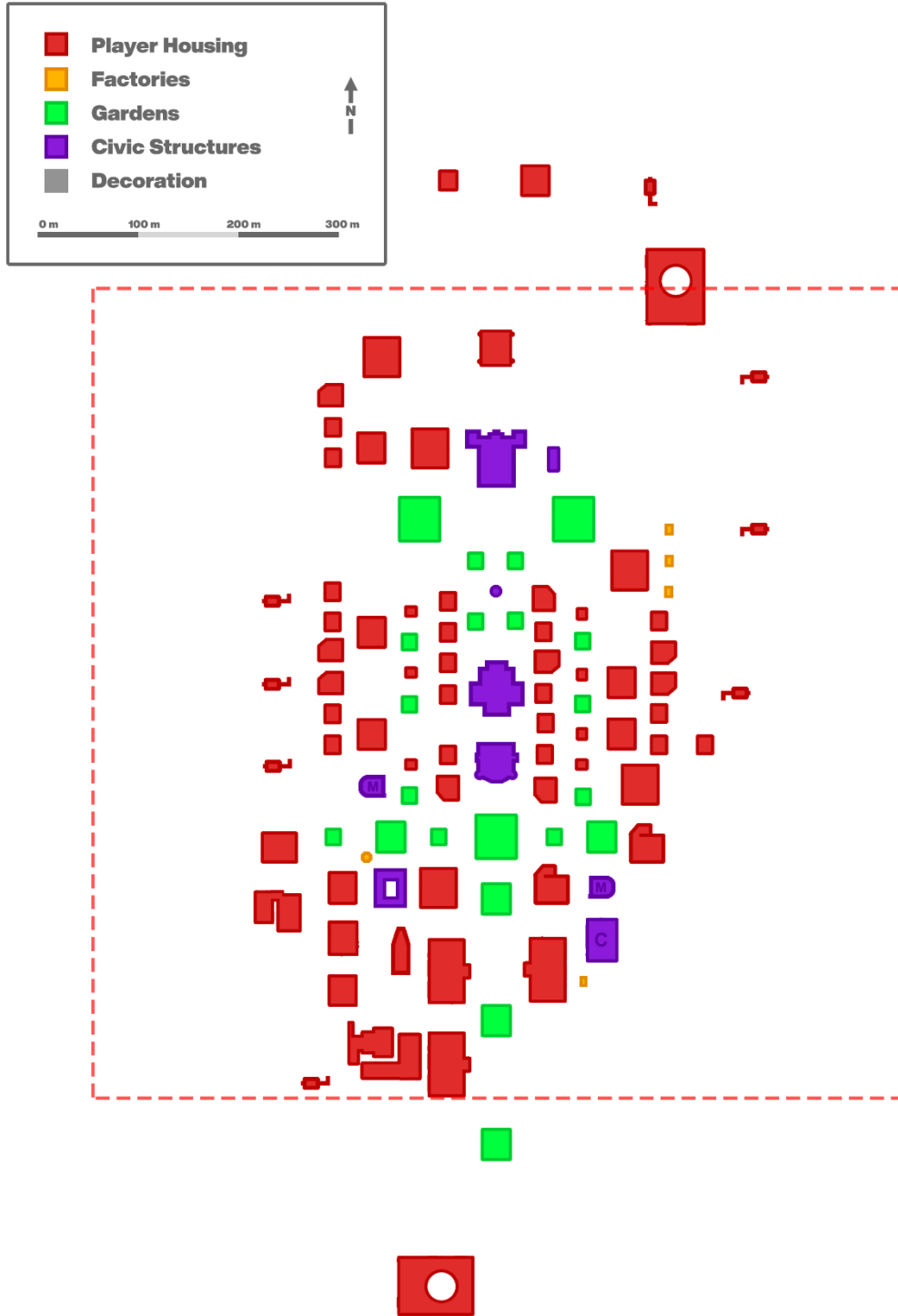
FIGURE 22: Phoenix 1

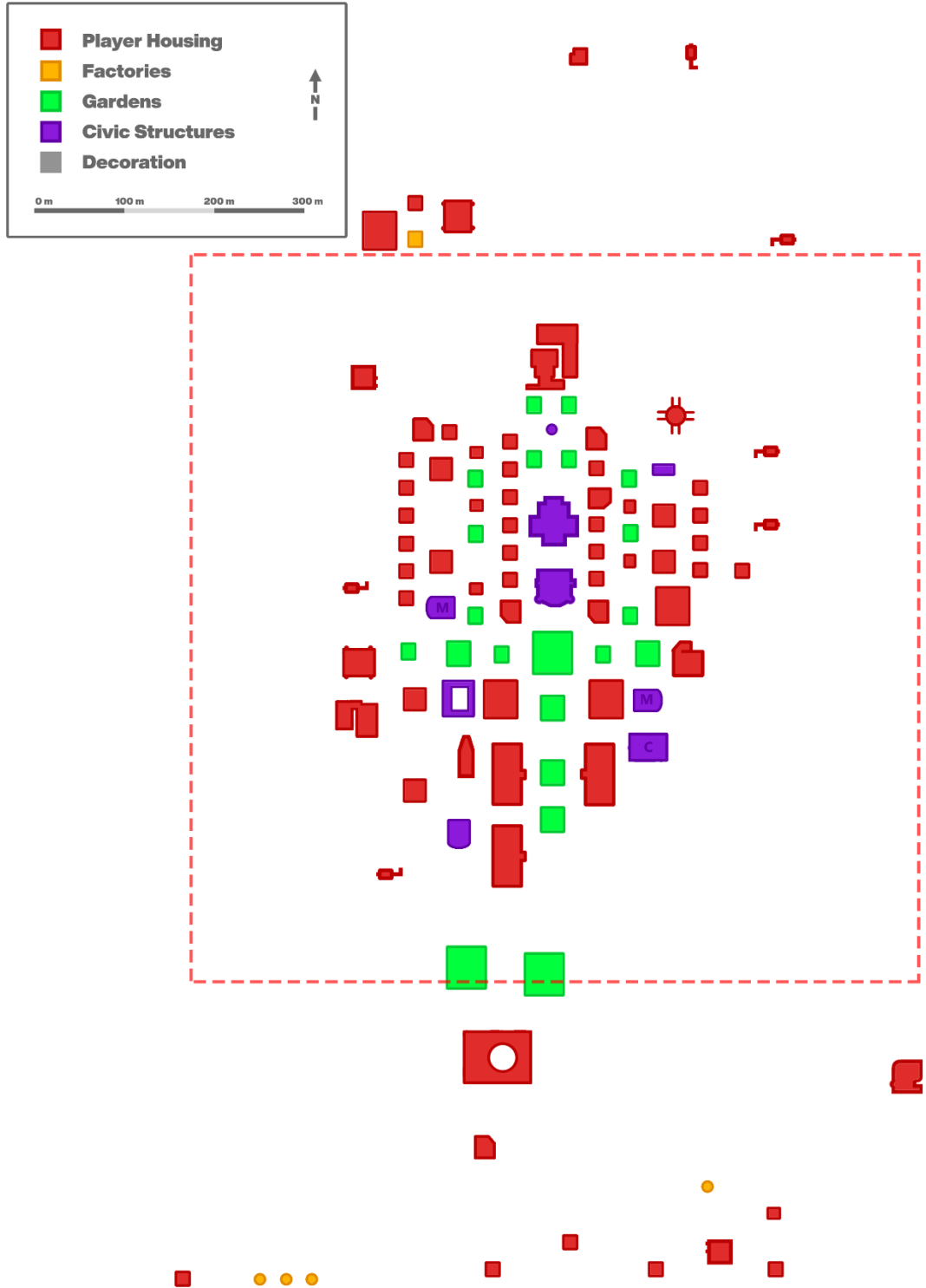*FIGURE 23: Beggars Canyon 1*

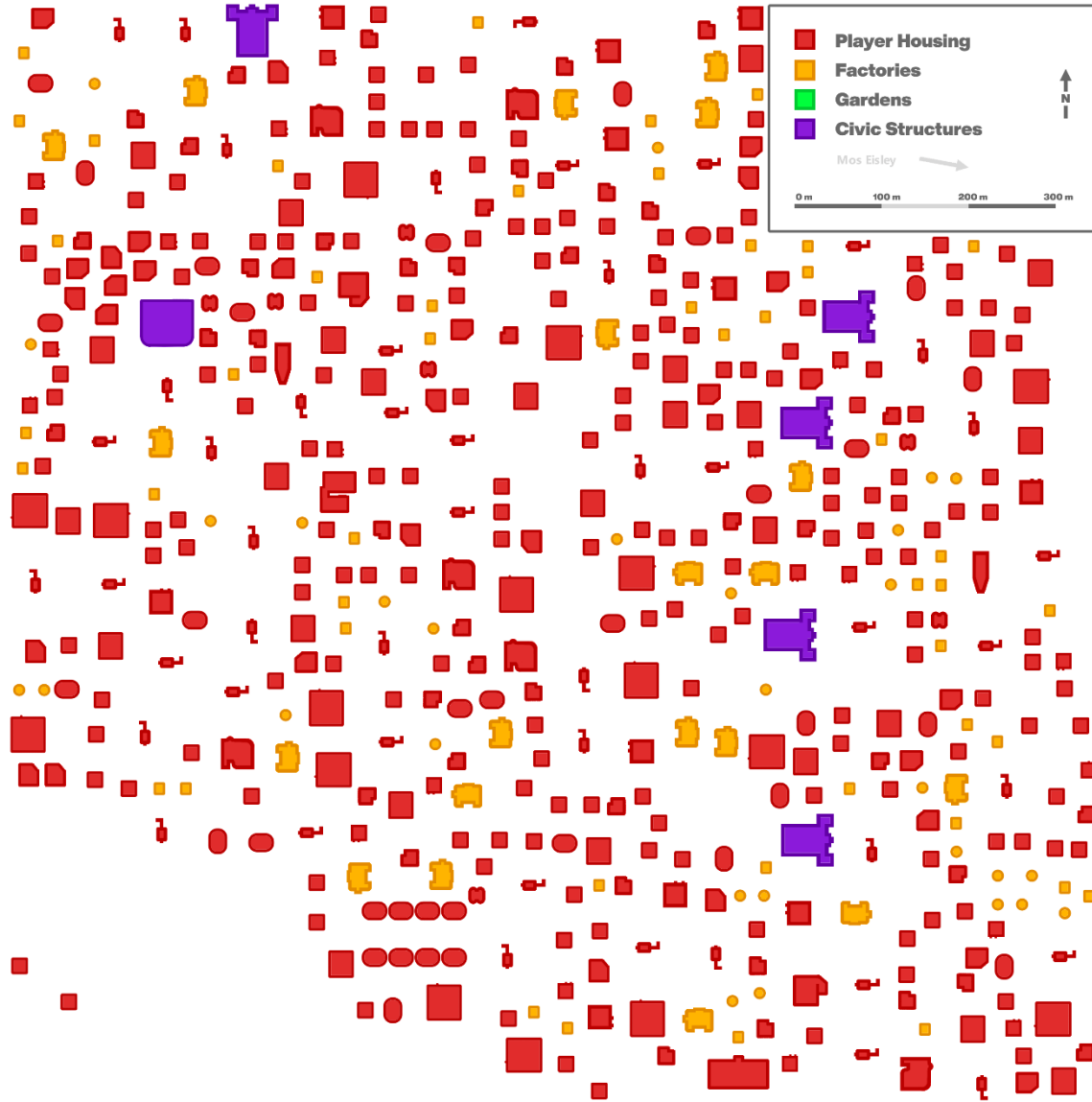*FIGURE 24: Beggars Canyon 2*

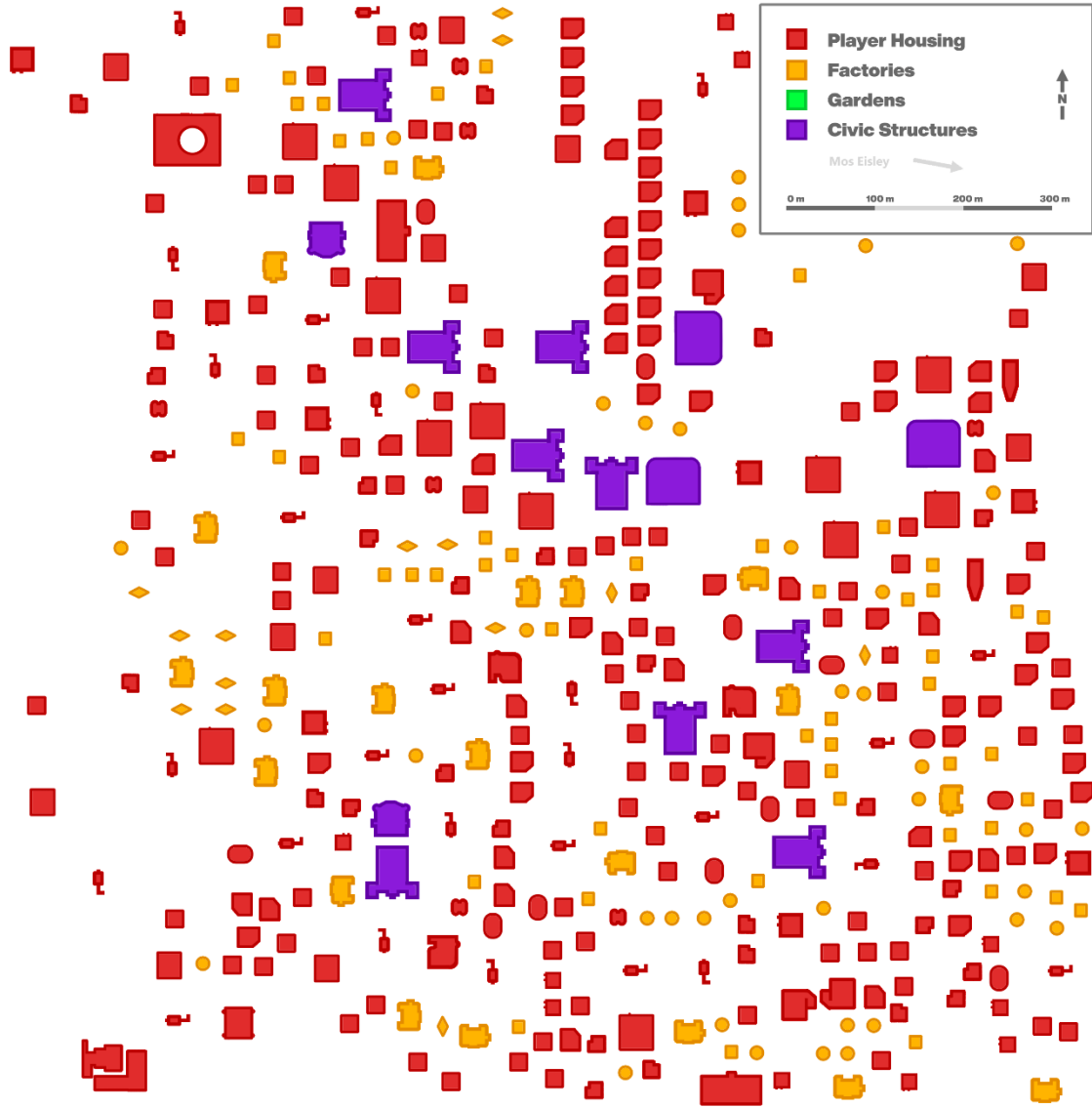*FIGURE 25: Mos Eisley suburbs 1*

FIGURE 26: Mos Eisley suburbs 2

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide (Basic)

Warm-up questions:
1. How long have you been playing video games?
2. What are some of your first memories of video games?
3. What are some of your favorite games?
4. When were you first introduced to Star Wars?
5. What do you love about this galaxy far, far, away?
6. What is your favorite Star Wars story (movie, book, show, etc.)?

Personal history:
1. How long have you been playing *SWG*? How long have you been playing on the Legends server?
   a. What did you enjoy about *SWG* while the servers were live?
   b. What were your opinions on the NGE (New Game Enhancements)?
2. What characters have you rolled in the past, and which are/were your favorites?
3. What is your role in the history of the Legends server?
   a. How long do you see Legends or *SWG Emu* sticking around? Do you think they're growing in popularity, or waning?
4. How would you describe the virtual landscape of SWG on the Legends server?
   a. What influence do you think player population has on the virtual world?
5. Do you have a house in a player city?
   a. If so, where?
   b. If not, why?
6. Who do you think owns or controls the history of the game, the players, the developers of SWG, or Disney?

Collection and memory:
1. What items are you displaying in your house and why?
2. What items will you never sell or throw away? What makes them valuable to you?
3. Do you think that Guild Halls are decorated differently than player houses? What types items are displayed in Guild Halls more than player houses?
4. Have you ever needed a bigger house? What factors are involved in determining the size of your house?
5. How often do you collect your server rewards? What do you do with them?
6. Which items do you think look the coolest? Is there any gear that you avoid because they aren't aesthetically pleasing to you?

Layers of power:
1. How involved are you in the community of this game?
   a. What spaces do you go to communicate with other players?
   b. What memories do you share with in-game friends?
2. What role do you see player-made cities filling in the game experience?

      a. Are the mayor/city council very involved in your city? What does that mean to you?
3. How beneficial are guilds in your play experience?
      a. When do you go to the guild hall and why?
4. How involved are you in the galactic senate?
      a. Do you view the galactic senate as role-playing in the Star Wars narrative, or an integral part of the play experience? Why or why not?
      b. Do you feel that the galactic senate influences your play in a meaningful way? Would you want it to?
5. Does the game need player-formed governments?
      a. Could there be other systems of player governments besides democratic ones?
6. Do you see *SWG* as an individual-centered game, or a group-centered game?

Demographics:
Answer the following as if you were responding to the census. (If you are uncomfortable responding to any of these, you don't have to):
1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. Where are you originally from?
4. What gender do you identify with?
5. How would you define your sexual orientation?
6. Do you identify as a gamer?
      a. Why do you feel this way?

Final questions:
1. Based on our conversation so far, is there anything else you'd like to say or think I should know?
2. Can you think of any questions I should ask other participants that I didn't ask you?

Interview Guide (Housing Tour)
1. So tell me about your house, why this location, why this building, and what it means to you.
2. How did you get your housing deed?
3. How involved are you in the city government?
4. Are you a member of a local guild? Why or why not?
5. Show me the various rooms of your house:
      a. What do these items mean to you?
      b. What do you choose to display and why?
      c. How do you segregate the rooms in your house? (Do materials go here and items to sell go there? Do you have a room separate for holograms?)
6. What do you do with the memorial items the server hands out at various milestones?
      a. Do you have a favorite memorial item?
7. How do you approach interior design in this game?
      a. How much do you craft yourself, and how much do you buy from other players?
8. Have you ever moved your house?

APPENDIX C: CODE BOOKS

Code Book – Interviews

Notes: overlapping codes (multiple codes over one sentence) is permitted, but limit to 4 per sentence. Coding level is a max of 4 lines at a time (an entire paragraph cannot be a single code, break it up).

CODE	DESCRIPTION
PLACE	Commentary or descriptions of the environment—social and virtual—of the game, and meanings that the interviewees as players create or express.
Housing	**Child node to Place** Specifically, when interviewees discuss player housing, the opinions on their own as well as others.
Community	**Child node to Place** Discussions from the interviewees about the social environment of the server, such as friends, guild-mates, and other relationships in the game.
World	**Child node to Place** Commentary on the virtual world as a whole—not including player housing—such as the planetary environment and gameplay structures such as quests.
POWER	Discussions on the layers of power within the game and the server. This includes the opposing tensions of individualism and collectivism, as well as the benefits of guilds, and the role of the government in the server.
Individualism	**Child node to Power** When interviewees discuss their personal goals, objectives, or actions in the game, or when they center their discussion of the game upon themselves solely.
Collectivism	**Child node to Power** When interviewees discuss collective actions or goals related to the gameplay, such as working together to complete a quest (but not including guilds).
Guilds	**Child node to Power** Specifically, when interviewees discuss guilds in general, as well as their role within a guild and or how the guild they were apart of interacted with them.

Government	**Child node to Power** Discussions about player governments within the game—either at the player city level, guild level, or the galactic senate level.
NOSTALGIA	Commentary from the players on their nostalgia for the game, how it impacts them, their play experience, or what they think about the past of the game and or it's server.
ENJOYMENT	Discussions on how the interviewees either enjoy or don't aspects of the game, and their feelings about the experience.

Code Book – Site Mapping

Same notes as before. More information [found at this link](#). Houses include multiple child nodes

(such as a Large Naboo house: "Large" code and "Naboo" code).

CODE	DESCRIPTION
Player Housing	Structure placed by a player, with the individualism perspective.
Large Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing of any type, but with a large footprint.
Small Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing of any type, but with a small footprint.
Naboo Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing specific to the planet of Naboo.
Tatooine Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing specific to the planet of Tatooine.
Generic Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing that can be placed on any planet.
Vehicle Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing based upon known vehicles in the Star Wars universe (Sandcrawler, AT-AT, Sail Barge, YT-1300, etc.)
Specialized Housing	**Child node to Player Housing** Housing that is unique, but not based on a vehicle (Diner, Nightsister hut, Dagobah Hut, Kashyyyk Tree House, Meditation Room, etc.)
Mustafarian Bunker	**Child node to Player Housing** Examples of this specific house.
Installations	Player structures, used to autonomously craft materials into items (factories), or to autonomously collect materials (harvesters).
Equipment Factory	**Child node to Installations** Factory that makes equipment.

Food Factory	**Child node to Installations**
	Factory that makes food.
Structure Factory	**Child node to Installations**
	Factory that makes structures.
Wearables Factory	**Child node to Installations**
	Factory that makes wearables.
Micro Flora Farm	**Child node to Installations**
	Harvester that farms flora.
Personal Chemical Extractor	**Child node to Installations**
	Harvester that collects chemicals.
Personal Mineral Extractor	**Child node to Installations**
	Harvester that collects minerals.
Personal Moisture Vaporator	**Child node to Installations**
	Harvester that collects moisture.
Personal Natural Gas Processor	**Child node to Installations**
	Harvester that collects natural gas.
Wind Power Generator	**Child node to Installations**
	Harvester that creates wind power??
Gardens	Technically city structures (bought and paid for by the taxes of its citizens) used to beautify the player city.
Exotic Gardens	**Child node to Gardens**
	Gardens available on any planet (generic).
Naboo Gardens	**Child node to Gardens**
	Gardens only available on the planet of Naboo.
Tatooine Gardens	**Child node to Gardens**
	Gardens only available on the planet of Tatooine.
Fountain	**Child node to Gardens**
	Fountain, form of beautification.
Civic Structures	Public buildings used for the benefit of the player city; collectivism In nature.
Cantina	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	General meeting place; can receive inspiration buffs from Entertainers there.
Medical Center	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	Provides medical buffs and healing for players around the city.
Theater	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	A structure for gatherings and performances; entertainers can give Buffs while dancing in a theater.
Bank	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	A structure to house Bank Terminals.

Cloning Facility	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	Place to regenerate after players die in vicinity of the city.
City Hall	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	Necessary structure for a player city; placing this structure is the impetus of the city.
Garage	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	A structure that allows players to repair their vehicles.
Shuttleport	**Child node to Civic Structures**
	Transportation hub for inter and intra planetary travel.

Code Book – Field Notes

Notes: overlapping codes (multiple codes over one sentence) is permitted, but limit to 4 per sentence. Coding level is a max of 4 lines at a time (an entire paragraph cannot be a single code, break it up).

CODE	DESCRIPTION
GAMEPLAY	Commentary on the actual experience of playing the game. This includes my attitudes as a player, my observations of the virtual world, and how I played the game.
Frustration	**Child node to Gameplay**
	Whenever I express frustration with playing the game, or other negative feelings similar to anger.
User Interface	**Child node to Gameplay**
	Commentary on the user interface, as well as the game's systems and the experience of navigating these.
Environment	**Child node to Gameplay**
	Discussion on the environment, the virtual world, and the visual aspect of the game (unrelated to the interface).
COMMUNITY	Commentary on my fellow players, my attitudes toward them and what they're doing in the game (player content, or actions/chat).
Player Cities	**Child node to Community**
	Commentary on the content of the player cities, or when I conduct surveys of them, what I feel about these communities.
RESEARCH	Discussions on either additional research related to the game (such as looking up information in guides and walkthroughs) or commentary on my dissertation research.
Paratexts	**Child node to Research**
	Specific research related to the paratexts of the game, when I talk

	about what I read or learned outside of the game through guides, walkthroughs, articles, etc.
Academic Research	All commentary about the nitty-gritty of my dissertation research, such as what I'm doing or why.
BOREDOM	Commentary on my general attitude toward the game, not specific to the experience or the content, but my feelings about the play session and *SWG* as a whole.

APPENDIX D: ASSORTED IMAGES

FIGURES 27 & 28: A male Bothan (left) and a male human (right).

FIGURES 29 & 30: A male Ithorian (left) and a female Mon Calamari (right).

FIGURE 31: Male and female Rodians.

FIGURES 32 & 33: Two Sullustans (left) and male and female Trandoshans (right).

FIGURES 34 & 35: Male and female Wookies (left), male and female Zabraks (right).

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