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1 Appendix A: Glossary of terms

Affinity space – a location, real or virtual, in which individuals can engage in informal learning and production of knowledge. It is not necessarily an integrated community, and individuals freely move in and out of the space. See also participatory culture and passionate affinity space.

Affordances – the possibilities of action provided by a specific environment and props. Affordances exist in the context of the actor, meaning that if the actor is not capable of using a prop, or simply unaware of the potential applications of that prop, it does not provide him with any affordances, even though it might provide affordances to another actor.

Avatar or player character – the character inside the video game whom the game places under the player’s control. In RPGs, the player exercises a significant degree of control over the appearance, personality and abilities of the avatar, leading to a very strong degree of identification. See also player, non-player character, RPG.

Closed-world game – a game that, in contrast to open-world games, imposes a pre-defined path of progression on the player, usually through a linear or semi-linear storyline. See also open-world game, game world.

Diegesis – the world in which a story takes place. This need not be an imaginary world, it may also be the real world. As an adjective, diegetic is especially useful in distinguishing between those parts of a media that occur within the story, and those that occur outside of it. For instance, diegetic music is music that is played within the world of the story, and can be heard by the characters there; non-diegetic music is a soundtrack audible to the audience, but not a part of the world, and not audible to the characters. Common non-diegetic elements in films and games include text overlays, music, and narration.

Downloadable content (DLC) – a digitally distributed content package that adds new content or gameplay possibilities to a game. DLCs may be very significant in size, to the point of appearing to be separate games, but nonetheless require the original game to be played. Unlike fan-produced mods, DLC is developed and sold by the game publisher. See also expansion pack, mod.

Dungeon master (DM) – in tabletop RPGs, the DM is the player who creates and controls the game session. While other players each have one character of their own to control, the DM runs the world itself, determining the actions of all non-player characters, and adjudicating player behaviour according to the game rules. See also role-playing game, tabletop.
Expansion pack – now a deprecated term. Expansion packs are the equivalent of DLC at the time when new content had to be distributed on physical media. In all other ways, they are identical to downloadable content. See also mod.

Feelie – a reference to a device that added tactile sensations to films in Aldous Huxley’s science-fiction novel Brave New World. The term was commonly used to the material props that accompanied adventure games published by the American game developer Infocom during the 1980s. More broadly, feelies are any video game paratexts that have been designed as material extrusions from the game diegesis, such as maps and booklets. A feelie thus replicates an object from the game world both in terms of its content, and in some aspect of its tactile properties. See also paratext.

Game modding, mods, modders – the process of incorporating user-generated content (mods) into a video game, supplementing and/or replacing existing game content. People who engage in this process are called modders. Some games empower modders by providing modding tools. See also mod.

Game world – a world, or part of a world, that serves as the playing ground of a game. The game world comprises all the locations the player can access. Places that form a part of the imaginary world in which the game is set, but which cannot be accessed within the game, are not a part of the game world. See also imaginary world and virtual world.

Heritage, cultural – the body of tangible and intangible culture a society inherits from earlier generations. Tangible culture includes physical artefacts such as buildings, works of art and other items, while intangible culture is composed of non-physical aspects of culture, such as behaviours, customs, oral traditions, beliefs, et cetera. In recent heritage studies discourse (e.g. Laurajane Smith), a strong argument has been made that intangible heritage is primary, in the sense that without it, tangible heritage items cannot actually be heritage, because they cannot be understood.

Heritage, natural – sometimes discussed in conjunction with cultural heritage, natural heritage is the environment a society inherits, the landscape, fauna and flora. Preserving cultural heritage does not necessarily entail preserving natural heritage, but in the case of indigenous, and especially Aboriginal Australia, natural heritage is inseparable from cultural heritage. Natural heritage may also have both tangible and intangible aspects, but intangible natural heritage is rarely discussed except as part of Indigenous intangible cultural heritage.

Heritage, virtual – the depiction of an item of heritage (tangible or intangible) through digital technology and with the use of its procedural and interactive affordances. Note that virtual heritage also has an alternative meaning, with some scholars in heritage studies using it to refer to heritage that comes from the virtual; for example, an online community exists only virtually, but it may have (or be) its own cultural heritage.
 Imaginary world – a place, world, or complete universe conceived by a human author, as theorised by Mark J. P. Wolf. Imaginary worlds can exist purely in one person’s imagination, but they are shared and accessed through the media, from songs and books, to films and video games. Commonly, media products will not depict the entire imaginary world, but only one part of it, while providing hints about the existence of the rest of the world. The imaginary world is not merely a location, but encompasses all the inhabitants and contents of the world. See also game world, transmedia world, virtual world, world-building.

Indigenous Australians – the Indigenous community of Australia includes two distinct cultural groups – the Aboriginal peoples of the mainland and Tasmania, and the Torres Strait Islanders. The term “indigenous” is capitalised in this case, as it is the name of the specific community rather than a reference to their indigeneity. See also indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples – the concept of indigenous peoples refers to communities that are considered local as far back as history can trace them. In the light of the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the term has acquired the specific political qualities of having suffered repression, disempowerment and cultural loss. See also Indigenous Australians.

Lore – knowledge. In modern fan usage, the term appears to be derived from the fantasy body of works of J.R.R. Tolkien, where it was used in some of the appendices of the novel The Lord of the Rings in reference to bodies of cultural knowledge (e.g. hobbit lore). In fan communities, lore denotes specifically information about the imaginary world of the film, game, or other work.

Massively multiplayer online game (MMO) – a game that permits large numbers of players to play together or compete in the same game world. This number can vary from dozens to thousands of players. One particular type of the MMO is a subgenre of the RPG, commonly referred to using the acronym MMORPG.

Mod – the outcome of the process of game modding, a mod is a distributable package with data that, once installed on top of the target game, alters the original game experience by changing existing game content or introducing additional content. See also downloadable content, expansion pack, game modding.

Non-player character (NPC) – any character in the game that is controlled by the artificial intelligence rather than a player. See also avatar.

Open-world game or sandbox game – a game that provides the player with freedom to move through the game world in a non-linear fashion. While some places may still be closed off until the player completes a particular task, the emphasis in open-world games is on maximising the player’s freedom to explore. See also game world, closed-world game.
Paratext – a work designed as a companion piece for another text, for example a film poster, game manual, or game guide. While paratexts are materially distinct from the main text, and thus can be studied as texts, they lack coherency outside of the context of the main text. See also feelie.

Participatory culture – a culture that enables strong individual contributions to culture, due to low technological and social barriers as well as the presence of informal support and mentorship networks enabling experienced participants to train novices. See also affinity space and passionate affinity space.

Passionate affinity space (PAS) – an expansion on the concept of the affinity space theorised by James Paul Gee. The emphasis on passion highlights that participants of passionate affinity spaces collaborate to explore a common interest they are strongly and personally interested in.

Player – the person playing the video game. Many games allow multiple players to play together, either cooperatively or competitively. See also avatar.

Presence – the feeling of experiencing a game world as though it was truly present. Presence is critical for heritage purposes, as a game’s ability to evoke presence determines its ability to communicate cultural and natural heritage. Three kinds of presence can be identified: environmental, social and cultural, with the first referring to the natural environment, the second to virtual characters and their societies, and the third to the cultural products of these societies. See also game world.

Procedural rhetoric – a form of rhetorical argument used in games, according to Ian Bogost. The mechanics and procedures used in the gameplay serve to convey ideas and persuade the user to accept them as true.

Role-playing game (RPG) – a game that, through its gameplay mechanics, places a significant emphasis on the development of the player character, both through the improvement of quantifiable character skills and through obtaining and using progressively better items.

Role-playing game, computer (cRPG) – a digital RPG where the role of the dungeon master is played by the computer program. Originally, cRPGs were based heavily on tabletop RPGs. Modern cRPGs only retain some features of the tabletop RPG, supplementing them with features from the live-action RPG.

Role-playing game, live-action (LARP) – a type of non-digital role-playing game. In a LARP, costumes and live acting are used to either supplement, or to replace dice and rulebooks.

Role-playing game, tabletop/pen-and-paper – the main form of non-digital RPG. Pen-and-paper or tabletop RPGs are designed to be played primarily through oral dialogue assisted by paper, pencils, dice, and a handbook of written rules that govern interactions between players.

Serious game – a game designed with a primary goal other than entertainment in mind. Serious games are used for training, education, language learning, cultural heritage, and numerous other areas. Serious games are typically less interested in being fun than in serving their specific informative design goal.
Nonetheless, the purpose of employing a game for serious purposes is to make serious activities more fun via gameplay.

**Transmedia world** – a media world that exists across multiple media, as described by Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca. There concept is similar to Wolf’s *imaginary world*, except where Wolf admits the possibility of an imaginary world existing in just one media product or even only in the author’s imagination, the transmedia world is supposed to incorporate multiple products across multiple media.

**Video game** – any entertainment-oriented computer, mobile device, or console application. The term is subject to debate. In the context of the present work, a video game is defined as having an identifiable player role, and being ergodic, i.e. requiring a non-trivial effort to interact with.

**Virtual world** – a simulated world. Virtuality as a concept implies that something has some or all of the virtues of the real thing, without being real. A virtual world is thus a simulation of a world that in some aspects behaves like a real world. Typically, this means the virtual world is a navigable and interactive space, where interactions are guided by programming, or procedure. Most *game worlds* are in some aspects virtual worlds. See also *imaginary world*.

**World-building** – the art and process of constructing an *imaginary world* as described by Wolf. In the realms of science-fiction and fantasy literature, there is an extensive history of world-building as a practice; there is also a much briefer history of world-building *theory*, i.e. a body of recommendations for effective creation of convincing imaginary worlds. Different media provide different challenges and affordances for the depiction of, and interaction with imaginary worlds. Consequently, world-building practices and strategies must differ across media. World-building also encompasses the audience’s internal processes of translating the world depicted in a medium into the world imagined in their minds; this process is facilitated by world-building structures such as maps which aid audiences in imagining and conceptualising the world in question. See also *imaginary world*. 
2 Appendix B: Aboriginal virtual heritage protocols

2.1 Digital Songlines protocol

The following protocol was developed by Leavy and colleagues during the development of the Digital Songlines project and first published in 2007 (Wyeld, et al., 2007).

1. “That the stories of Traditional Owners be recognized as a ‘body of knowledge’ that may be tens of thousands of years old;

2. That the stories are sourced from the Traditional Owner who represents the country from which that story might originate;

3. That the communities make their own decision on what stories they want to have represented in Virtual Heritage;

4. That an approval process be implemented and approved by communities;

5. That the story represents the community and clan and is specifically placed geographically;

6. Ownership and copyright of the story is always held by the nominated Traditional Owner group or community council;

7. That the content of the Virtual Heritage application including artist styles is approved by the community at all key production stages;

8. That the story provided by the community is not modified unless approved and endorsed by the Traditional Owner representative of that community;

9. That the community be paid industry standard rates and receive royalties from revenue earned from any capitalisation or commercialisation;

10. That Indigenous people design and participate in the creation of the virtual Heritage application development at all stages of planning, design and production.”

2.2 Virtual Songlines protocol

Subsequently Leavy revised his protocol during the Virtual Songlines project that resumed where Digital Songlines had ended. The following is the revised protocol as of 2017.

1. “The Knowledge of Traditional Owners be recognized as a ‘Body of Knowledge’ that is tens of thousands of years old and IP&C is always retained by Traditional Owners where that knowledge originates;

2. Communities determine and endorse the stories, design and treatment of their knowledge integrated into each Virtual Songlines project and play a role in planning, design and production stages;

3. Only knowledge that is of that community or clan be used and therefore ownership and copyright in this is held by those Traditional Owners participating in that Project;

4. Artistic styles (as in the user interface) be determined by those participating in projects and is approved through agreed reporting phases during research, development and production;

5. The original intent of the traditional knowledge be retained and not modified without approval and endorsement of those Traditional Owners participating;

6. That the community be remunerated and royalties paid from any projects that might be commercialised.”

(source: private correspondence with Brett Leavy)
Appendix C – Auto ethnographic research journal

3.1 Auto ethnographic account of engagement with TES

My first contact with The Elder Scrolls occurred more than two decades ago, around 1996, when I first obtained a copy of Arena. My enjoyment of Arena was intense, but brief. I was duly impressed by the scope of the game world. However, the game was in many ways far more unforgiving than its sequels; after perhaps about twenty hours of playing the game, while deep in the second or third of the main storyline’s dungeons, my character contracted cholera. Like all diseases in Arena, cholera led to a gradual death by loss of hitpoints. I did not have a cure disease potion or spell, and leaving the dungeon to return to the nearest city took long enough to kill me every time. Not having an earlier, undiseased saved game, I realised my character is trapped, and promptly abandoned the game. Arena left a strong impression, and I always meant to return to it, but ultimately, there were always other games.

Daggerfall also stayed off my radar.

Then along came Morrowind, leading to an immediate and extremely strong affect. I remember being enchanted by the world of possibilities; by the fact that immediately after exiting the Customs Office in Seyda Neen, I was left entirely to my own devices and free to go in any direction. The feeling Morrowind exuded was that of freedom within a virtual world. The game manual explicitly declared this freedom to be a core goal of Morrowind, but it wasn’t just the game or its creators’ own proclamations: Morrowind was preceded by word-of-mouth, by claims that at a time when RPGs seemed to be getting smaller and more linear due to rising expenses of game development, here was a game that fulfilled the wildest fantasies of RPG gamers. I would ultimately come to spend hundreds of hours in Morrowind and its expansions. The enchantment with the possibilities the world afforded soon morphed into an enchantment with the world itself, its unique weirdness, its sense of culture, and also simply its visual beauty. An act as prosaic as finding a shipwreck on the banks of the Odai River could somehow be impactful enough to warrant recounting to my lecturers. As I was concentrating on finishing my Master’s thesis, I used Morrowind as a carrot to push myself forward, rewarding myself with gameplay time for work done.

Oblivion, when it came, was almost anticlimactic. Perhaps because it didn’t come out of nowhere for me like Morrowind had, but was instead an object of anticipation, I found myself in equal parts impressed and disappointed: the game was good, but it couldn’t rise to match the lofty heights of my anticipation. In the intervening years, I had entered the games industry, and strangely, my own experiences working on an RPG game ill-disposed me towards Oblivion. There was a number of features on our ultimately-cancelled project, The Roots, of which I was strongly critical, as they felt like unwarranted...
simplifications: for example, having only one skill and animation set to handle the player’s use of axes and blunt weapons, when *Morrowind* had two separate skills; or having a radar-like minimap that always pointed the player in the right direction, instead of letting the player discover the way. These same simplifications showed up in *Oblivion*, a fact I did not much appreciate, though in retrospect, it certainly indicated our never-published RPG was actually following the same trends industry leaders followed. In any case, working on *The Roots* did also make me aware of the importance of world-building, and looking back, I find it interesting how naturally I followed the ideas I’d so much later read about in Wolf’s imaginary worlds book, especially the notion that even when you don’t directly show a backstory to the player, you can still drop random hints about the backstory in order to suggest that there is one. At the time, as I was preparing the text-based descriptions for the items you can find in the game, it seemed natural to use these snippets of text as an opportunity to hint at past stories of our fantasy world – past stories that didn’t exist even in anyone’s head.

However, what bothered me most of all about *Oblivion* was that it simply wasn’t *Morrowind* in terms of atmosphere. As I look at *Oblivion* today, I appreciate the way it differed so strongly from *Morrowind*: that it did try to convey the refined feel of the Empire’s capital region, contrasted to *Morrowind*’s provinciality – but I never did like how the world became a generic medieval setting, with even the Imperial Legion, previously clearly visually referencing the Romans, was now just knights in full plate armour. I still spent many hours with *Oblivion*, and even more with the wonderfully bizarre expansion, *The Shivering Isles*. However, I never truly finished the game in the sense of doing everything I wanted to do; it was only after *Skyrim* was announced (five years later!) that I sighed, and returned to *Oblivion* in order to finish the story of the *Knights of the Nine* DLC, more out of a desire to not leave dangling threads behind than any genuine interest.

When *Skyrim* was announced, apart from watching an initial trailer for the game, I intentionally kept myself blacked out (as much as was possible, given so many people talking about the game). This meant that when I played the game at last, it felt like as much of a revelation as *Morrowind* once did, simply because I knew so little about what to expect. It was as I played *Skyrim* that the basic idea of my PhD topic came to me. *Skyrim* very naturally makes you wonder about the possibilities of using RPGs for culture. At that point, I had already been playing the game for two years, and “conveniently” I had recently lost my industry job in one of those typical end-of-project dismissals. In this sense, *TES* also provided a vital element of continuity for me as I transitioned back from industry work into the academia – writing a PhD would be completely novel, but at least I’d be working with *Morrowind* and *Skyrim*. In this sense, *TES* had become a safe space to fall back on, and I felt comfortable with the notion of spending four years dealing with *TES*. 

3.2 The setup
Although I’ve played *Skyrim* for hundreds of hours, I have only actually thrice so far gone through the introductory sections of the game. The nature of *Skyrim* is such that you spend most of your time exploring the world, and you invariably leave much untouched in all the places you visit. I suppose I probably did cover most of what the first major city you encounter, Whiterun, has to offer, but there are still likely to be surprises.

For the purposes of this journal, I have also chosen to play with the new *Special Edition* version of the game. This is mainly a graphical upgrade, which was done alongside the PS4/Xbox One re-edition of the game, but at least it means some degree of novelty about the experience.

*Skyrim* is a massive game, and inevitably was released with many small bugs in the world; it is impossible to fully playtest a world of this scope and complexity. These bugs only rarely get in the way of the game, but I see no need to record them here, so I have chosen to play the game with the *Unofficial Patch* installed.

The recent introduction of the *Creation Club*, an official outlet for potentially fan-produced DLC-like mods, raised another question: I had gone ahead and obtained *Survival Mode*, one of the first products available in the Club, and spent a few hours playing around with it. The gameplay changes certainly did have an impact on the experience, and could be interesting to examine, but the overall experience was raw, and frankly, annoying – there’s nothing quite like eating twenty cabbages only to be informed by the game that you’re still starving. In terms of thinking about how interaction with the environment could be enhanced for a better indigenous-oriented experience, there would be a lot of merit in a comparative analysis between *Survival Mode* and the various non-paid survival mods that exist, such as *Campfire* and *Frostfall*. But there is no room for that here, and *Survival Mode* by itself just seems rather annoying. It would get in the way of exploring the world rather than enhancing this process. So, no *Survival Mode*: I am playing *Skyrim Special Edition* almost vanilla, just with the *Unofficial Skyrim Special Edition Patch* (...and, because you can disable *Survival Mode*, but you cannot uninstall it, also with the *Unofficial Skyrim Survival Mode Patch*). Note that even the presence of these two mods is sufficient to automatically disable achievements in the game – no achievements for me.

In terms of my note-taking setup, Cuttell had discussed the preferability of recording spoken notes rather than writing, because it helps to maintain immersion. In my case, I am not interested in immersion, I am interested in observing the world. And frankly, I am not interested in transcribing ten hours of recorded notes. So, I have chosen to write as I go, pausing the game frequently.
### 3.3 The journal

#### 3.3.1 Session 1 – November 14

The loading screen. You see many different loading screens throughout *Skyrim*. The basic structure is simple: a 3D model of an object, character or creature, and alongside it, a short, two-line text snippet providing some fragment of information either about gameplay, or about the game world. This is just about the only time the game speaks to the player in a non-diegetic voice, telling you about your interactions with the game. When a particular area takes too long to load, the loading screen switches to a different text snippet, albeit without a change of accompanying image. Anyway, it is notable that while typically loading screens are fairly randomly chosen, this first screen at the start of the game is evidently chosen for this occasion, telling the player about the prophecy concerning the return of the world-destroying dragon, Alduin. I do not recall if any more loading screens in the early part of the game are tailored to the particular situation – I will find out.

The game intro is very sparse in terms of non-interactive content. All previous *TES* games had extended animated sequences with text, voiceovers, or even live actors (in *Daggerfall*). *Skyrim* just shows you a black screen with a “Bethesda presents” sign, and then immediately places you in the action. Blackness fades away into blurriness, which gradually clarifies as you presumably awake from unconsciousness.

You are travelling on a cart, and unable to move. Why can you not move? The characters sitting opposite you explain it: they are tied up, you must be as well.

The rather lengthy cart ride’s main purpose is of course to provide room for the world-building conversation that’s about to begin: if you’re going to have a bunch of characters speaking for an extended period of time, and you don’t want to take control away from the player for a cutscene, you’d best give him something to do that doesn’t allow him to ignore the conversation. Like, for example, admire the passing countryside. Time and again, we hear and see a flock of birds flying away from the roadside bushes – *look at us, we’ve improved the environment since the last game!* In the *Special Edition*, the misty weather in which we are barely able to see the terrain alongside also serves to show another detail: “God-rays”, or the way streaks of light break through the fog to create a sense of three-dimensional lighting.

One of the characters – his name, I will later find out, is Rolof – speaks to me. Conveniently, he is able to tell me what I “must have” been doing to find myself caught this way. The conversation that follows has the purpose of explaining the basic conflict in the world: the Empire (well-known from previous games) is being challenged in the Skyrim province by the Stormcloak rebels. One of the core game features is already hinted at, by a peculiar bit of mise-en-scene – alongside you is Ulfric Stormcloak, leader of the
rebellion, who alone among the prisoners is gagged. You don’t know why. Later, you will find out that he is able to use his voice as a magical ability, and has apparently somehow shouted the king of Skyrim to death. Too much exposition at once is exhausting, however, so this will come in drips and drabs; for now, we find ourselves wondering, why is he gagged?

As we approach the township of Helgen, the weather conveniently clears up into sunshine, brightening up the green forested mountains we are travelling through.

As the conversation continues, a realisation that we are most likely headed for execution is used as an excuse for one of the prisoners to rattle off a list of five of the gods worshipped in Skyrim, begging for divine assistance.

Blast! I may need to re-think my note-taking strategy. So far, I have simply made use of multi-tasking to switch between Skyrim and this document. Unfortunately, after a few such switches, Skyrim now refuses to return properly. Something’s messed up, and I will have to quit and restart. Later in the game, this would not be a problem. Right now, it means I’ll have to go through that whole cart ride again...

Another cart-ride later, we are entering the town. Apart from more expository dialogue among the prisoners on the cart, the player is presented with right surroundings. Much scripted goings-on in the town. Apart from soldiers, we see a typical Nord township with Scandinavian-looking houses and inhabitants. The player would probably not notice everything there is to see the first time, but the game just keeps moving forward. A father commands his child to get inside, evidently because he knows an execution will take place: and because the developers want to signal to us: look, in Skyrim, it’s no longer just adults, we also have children characters! Which had not been the case in earlier games, of course.

An attentive player will also note a greater range of character animations and poses – the child sitting cross-legged on the ground, the adults leaning against a balustrade.

As we drive deeper into the town, I look behind us, and catch a glimpse of a startling view – the player’s very first view of the Throat of the World, the mountain towering over all of Skyrim. It is notable that Skyrim’s environment is obsessed with verticality. Once upon a time, Morrowind was almost flat, in spite of taking place around a supposedly very tall volcano – but Morrowind had such limited drawing distance, that height and fog had to be used constantly to justify the player’s inability to look into the distance. Skyrim screams at the player at all times: climb up! Look how far you’ll be able to see!

As the ride ends, I now have quite a load of knowledge: I know about the war in Skyrim, I know the two main factions involved, the names of the leaders of both sides of the war, I know a few snippets of Nord culture (“A Nord’s last thoughts should be of home”), and I know about the existence of another faction,
the Thalmor, whose involvement is not yet explained, but who are apparently elves. Weren’t elves always just another part of the Empire, the more lore-grounded player will ask. A really lore-grounded player will possibly recall a mention of the Thalmor in the *Redguard* manual. But in terms of world chronology, that was centuries ago! We’re being barraged with information about the basics of the game world, and how it has changed since the previous game, and for the most part, this is done without an NPC simply reciting the facts in a straightforward but entirely unnatural manner. It’s a very good introduction.

We’re even shown that the Empire, like its Roman archetype, is a fussy yet careless bureaucracy – on the one hand, “The Empire loves their damn lists” and each prisoner must respond to his name to ensure everyone’s accounted for. On the other hand, the fact that my character is not on the list, will be shortly used as an excuse to allow me to define my character’s name, race and appearance, but the Imperial captain in charge of the prisoners will not care in the slightest that she is about to order the execution of a person who was not on her list. The little disagreement between the scribe-soldier and the captain over this issue is clearly intended to shift the player’s resentment over the upcoming execution (the player will later have the opportunity to side with the Empire – hard to do, when you blame them for trying to kill you!) from the Empire to the cold-mannered captain commanding the execution, who, conveniently enough, will die shortly. I’m jumping ahead a little, but I will note that for me at least, the blame-shifting failed. I still found it very hard to even seriously consider the Empire an option given their initial behaviour towards me. Hard to blame the captain, when General Tullius is right there, and apparently also blithely unconcerned about the excess prisoners.

One of the other prisoners decides not to wait to be executed, and starts running away. The Imperial captain has her archers execute him. You need these touches to make long scenes more interesting. And you want to show off the possibility of more complex events taking place in scripted sequences.

The first session ends before the character generation process, after approximately 1 hour, but probably less than 10 minutes of actual gameplay time. It is evident that I will need to take fewer notes as I go on, if this is to be viable. But the introduction is a pivotal moment, most carefully arranged for the player’s exposition into the world. It warrants this level of depth.

### 3.3.2 Session 2 – November 14

Picking up where I left off, I proceed to generate a character by choosing their sex, race, name, and appearance. This time, I do not spend much time fine-tuning my appearance: I don’t need to look “good” for this. The choice of race is also used by the game as an opportunity to give me more information about each of the available races and ethnicities. This time, I choose to play as an Imperial,
mainly because I am planning to side with the Imperials in the upcoming “escape from Helgen” sequence, and I really find it impossible to justify with any other race. As I said, they are trying to execute me just because I happened to be there. Only a fellow Imperial could forgive that.

Once I’ve created my character, the game acknowledges the choice, by having the scribe respond with a different line depending on my race. Responsiveness to player choices is important as an immersion-builder.

I then follow the callous Imperial captain towards the block, where the execution scene plays out. Lots of further exposition and world-building occurs at this point, with General Tullius’ speech telling us about how the civil war started. A dragon can be heard in the background, and one of the soldiers wonders what that sound was. Clearly, dragons are not a part of the furniture – yet. Right before the first head falls, a priestess attempts to perform our last rites. Observant veteran players will note she invokes the blessings of the Eight Divines – it had always been Nine in the past.

The execution itself is a fairly complex animation sequence involving three characters whose positions and animations must be coordinated both with one another, and with elements of the environment. Custom animations of this kind are an important way of diversifying the NPCs interactions with the world around them, something that had been far more limited in earlier titles.

I now move forward and kneel down with my head on the block – all this, like most of my movements so far, happen automatically, with no control on my part other than being able to turn my head. Once I have my head on the block, I can no longer even look around, as my head is stuck looking sideways at the executioner. Not a particularly tense moment, since we understand that the game cannot very well kill us off right at the outset. The scene has all the hallmarks of a dramatic last-instant reprieve; as the executioner raises his massive axe over his head, in the background we catch our first sight of the dragon, which proceeds to land on top of the tower right behind the executioner. A shockwave knocks the executioner down right when he was about to kill me. In a film, it would be dramatic, but not here.

In the ensuing chaos, the game finally begins: I get up from the block, none of the Imperial soldiers care about the prisoners any longer, and the executioner is already dead. Rolof, who was slated to be executed after me, has somehow been able to free himself, and yells at me to follow him. I am able to move freely at last. As I follow Rolof, I see that the landscape around me has completely changed. What was a town just moments ago, is now a burning ruin. Now, that is dramatic – I have the illusion of witnessing the destruction of the town firsthand, although in fact it’s only a trick – the entire landscape was replaced all at once by the destroyed version when my vision was blurred during the initial dragon
strike. It’s all the more impressive because there is no loading screen involved and no pause, in spite of the game loading a very significant amount of content data all at once.

What follows is a bit of exposition – we meet Ulfric, so we know he survived – and an action sequence that puts the burning landscape to good use. Ralof has led me into a tower, where we make our way up the staircase until the dragon knocks a hole in the wall literally right before us, and breathes fire into the tower – conveniently missing me and Ralof. This sequence is intended to teach me the controls, but without the dreariness of a tutorial. I’ve mastered walking, now I must jump through the hole into another building next to us. Ralof doesn’t follow for the time being. Because I’m supposed to still be getting the hang of the controls, the other escaped prisoners have conveniently forgotten to untie my hands, so I can’t perform any actions.

The ruined building into which I have leapt is filled with “clutter”, as worthless items such as crockery and other commonplace household elements are often called by the developers. All of these items are carefully designed to build the world’s material culture; even at this early point in the game, an observant player can already see a lot of the ways in which Nord culture differs from the other provinces seen in previous games; for instance, most of the crockery is carved in wood rather than made of metal or porcelain.

As I walk out of the burning inn, I witness a scene with the Imperial soldier-scribe who earlier was the only one concerned about the appropriateness of executing me – his name is Hadvar, and although an Imperial soldier, he is himself a Nord, native to Skyrim. Conveniently, I see him rescuing a local child, so that I can see the Imperial Legion is not so bad, even if they tried to kill me. Hadvar now tells me to follow him, if I want to stay alive – and as I’m still being led around by the nose in the tutorial, he neglects to cut my hands free.

More drama follows, another close encounter with the dragon, and more running through ruins. By extending this sequence in such a way, the developers achieve three things; firstly, they make the escape sequence feel more epic, secondly, they ensure that the player justifiably feels like he owes his life to both Ralof and Hadvar, the Stormcloaks and the Empire, and thirdly, they can show more of the game’s art assets and features, in particular a relatively large-scale battle between the dragon and several mages and soldiers, bigger than any of the battles earlier games would have allowed.

The sequence concludes when I, following Hadvar, run into Ralof. Their brief exchange makes it clear they know one another, but are not about to put aside their factional loyalties to cooperate. I must seek shelter in the keep, and Ralof and Hadvar both take their places at one of the keep entrances. This is why I had to be given an opportunity to develop some sympathy towards Hadvar: by choosing to follow
of the two men, I side with Empire against Stormcloaks or vice-versa. This choice is not binding on the player, and I will have an opportunity later to again choose loyalty to either side, or to stay neutral in the war, but I do not know this at the start of the game. I would imagine most players, the first time they played this sequence, found themselves automatically choosing Ralof; both men have helped to save you, but Hadvar did lead you to an execution earlier, so who’s to say what he’ll do after you escape?

I do follow Hadvar this time. It’s a conscious choice. I’m well familiar with the Stormcloak path through the keep, but I only tried the Imperial path once before, and I do not remember it well. Diegetically, I’ve justified my choice by playing an Imperial character; he is certain that his execution is all just a mistake and trusts the Imperial soldier Hadvar to clear it up.

Inside the keep, Hadvar says one more line about the dragon as the bringer of the End Times. This is one of four or five lines that, over the course of the entire sequence, helped to reveal the role dragons play in legends, as well as the fact that nobody actually expected to ever see dragons. Exposition in the introduction is never piled on in a big chunk; it’s smeared over a long and exciting sequence. Oh, and at last, my hands are freed. The tutorial is far from over; Hadvar and I will now descend into the underground levels of the keep to find another way out, somewhere where the dragon is not waiting. Along the way, we will fight the escaping Stormcloaks, though Ralof is nowhere to be seen. Had I followed Ralof instead, the situation would be reversed, and I’d be fighting Imperial soldiers.

We are in the barracks, and Ralof invites me to loot the chests and shelves for equipment. I find armour and my first weapon, I pick up a few gold coins that had been scattered over a table – perhaps someone was counting them when the dragon arrived? – and two books. The two books are Mixed Unit Tactics and The Holds of Skyrim. Both are perfectly well justified in a military barracks, but The Holds of Skyrim is also important as it supplies the player with an overview of the game world. By contrast, Mixed Unit Tactics is utterly useless, but provides some enjoyable lore about an earlier war in a completely different part of the world. Books are absolutely central to exposition of lore in TES; what makes them particularly effective is that they’re not forced upon the player, I can pick them up or not, so it’s up to me how much lore I want to learn. They are also effective because they are always embedded in a particular point of view. The Holds of Skyrim is written for Imperial officers, and so discusses Skyrim from an Imperial point of view – how to defend against the Stormcloaks? Which cities have strategic value, and why? The player must tease out the relevant details from this discussion.

I’m also now finding food items. Vegetables tell me what kind of crops are grown in Skyrim. Wine is also present in the barracks. One of the UESP articles summarises the number of bottles of different types of beverages in the game, based on data from the editor; it’s fascinating to note that the province is almost
equally divided between wine-drinkers and mead-drinkers, which seems to reflect well the civil war conflict; wine is imported from the Empire, while mead, as we see later in the game, is produced locally.

The rest of the keep is a typical dungeon crawl; we walk from room to room, fighting Stormcloaks, and descending deeper underground. Each room has a clear purpose, however, and the mise-on-scene continues to provide insight into the world; I find herbs and garlic hanging under the ceiling to dry; rabbits and pheasants hanging for the meat to mature, showing me what kind of game is available in the province. Indeed, the very fact that I keep finding game meat is one of the many ways in which the game conveys the rough nature of the province’s economy, where so much of the meat is obtained by hunting rather than farming.

Much of the clutter I see also has a small gameplay purpose: it can be pushed and kicked around, showing off the game’s physics. The player can also pick up an item and hold it in the air to throw it or place it elsewhere in the world, rather than stowing it in the inventory. One of the more amusing activities players quickly discovered is placing buckets on NPCs’ heads; the NPCs oddly seem not to be bothered by the bucket, but it prevents them from seeing anything the player does. Put a bucket on a guard’s head, and steal with impunity...

Following in the footsteps of Oblivion’s introductory dungeon, the keep also gradually provides me with a diverse range of equipment, to give me an opportunity to try out different weapons types, to learn thieving skills like lock picking and sneaking, and to learn to cast magic spells. Indeed, I’m not even halfway through when I find myself overburdened – so much stuff to pick up, mainly from the Stormcloak soldiers we kill. Lockpicking is an action mini-game, where I must rotate the pick and trigger the lock with the press of a button when the pick is in the right position; if I get it right, the lock opens, but if I try to press the button when it’s in the wrong position, I risk breaking the pick.

The Book of the Dragonborn. It was sitting in the torture chamber, where we save the torturer from Stormcloaks. More world-building. The Book of the Dragonborn is about me; in theory, I do not know this, but in practice, when the book goes to great lengths to explain how anyone can be Dragonborn, players get the hint right quick.

The keep continues to expose me to details of the environment, complex lighting and mise-on-scene, as well as environmental traps, such as puddles of oil or grease that can be set on fire with a fire magic spell. Because I rarely used magic, I actually only noticed this by accident after about two hundred hours of playing the game, but here it is in the first dungeon, and very likely to be noticed by a magic-user player.
The dungeon morphs into a cave, showing off to the player that firstly, unlike previous games, *Skyrim* mixes and matches different types of dungeon modules to produce more visually complex underground environments; secondly, water is no longer limited to flat areas at sea level. We can encounter streams flowing downwards over rocky beds, and pools with a surface at any height above sea level. Given the verticality of *Skyrim*’s environment, it’s a necessity.

Apart from Stormcloaks, once we get into the deeper dungeons, we encounter frostbite spiders – giant, dog-sized spiders with a nasty poisonous bite – and then a bear. The frostbite spiders, when killed, yield a frostbite poison I can use on my weapons for additional damage. One of the spiders also reveals… a ring. This is an odd peculiarity of the random loot generated on animals – time and again, you’ll find a spider, wolf, bear, or sabrecat with coins, rings, or even gems. Do you find them in their stomachs, swallowed by accident? Are they stuck to the fur? No one knows. Speaking of bears, the bear yields bear claws and my first bear hide. Finally, we leave the cave and get out into the countryside.

Hadvar has an uncle that happens to live in nearby Riverwood, he recommends you go there, and probably most players would do so on their first playthrough, even though you do now have the freedom to go in any direction. Where you emerge from the cave, a road can be seen that leads to Riverwood, and while Hadvar recommends splitting up, you can in fact travel with him. Players are introduced very carefully into the open-world: the game continues to hold their hands until they are ready to let go and start exploring.

The second session ends at this point, after 2 hours and 25 minutes of total time, but probably only about an hour of actual gameplay time. Fortunately, from this point onwards, with the introduction basically over, less detail is needed in the notes.

### 3.3.3 Session 3 – November 15

Returning to the saved game right outside of the cave through which we escaped from Helgen, I am once again struck by the “promise” of the world. Our position on the slope of a snow-covered hill, facing downwards into a forested valley below, speaks of grandeur, open exploration, and rugged nature. If that’s not enough to entice you, how about the mountain you see on the other side of the valley, towards which your path actually leads? As you take a few steps down the slope, you see that on top of that opposite mountain is an enormous man-made structure. Some sort of ruin, built in a style that veteran *TES* players will not recognise: something very old in terms of the world, but very new for the players.
As I walk down the path – Hadvar continuing his awkward run-a-few-steps-and-wait-for-player routine, rather incongruous with his declaration that we should split up – I pick up some snowberries, and then after turning a corner, I catch sight of my first blue butterfly on this playthrough. Butterflies are something of a novelty in *Skyrim*, along with dragonflies, nocturnal moths and torchbugs. If the player chooses to follow the butterfly, he’ll soon discover that it can be caught by hand. Its wings, like the herbs I picked up earlier, and the snowberries, the bear claws, and the “bone meal” I collected (scraped?) off skeletons in the dungeon, are all ingredients that can be used in alchemy to create potions of various effect. This is an important aspect in encouraging the player to explore the environment: there are so many things here that have a use. In *Skyrim*, this utility is somewhat overshadowed by the excess of material stuff you can collect – even in the first dungeon, I found myself dropping excess items because I had more than I could carry, and once I sold the loot, I would find myself never short of money, particularly since most items you may wish to buy can also be found in various kinds of dungeons. Because of this, once the sheer novelty of experimenting with potions, or crafting weapons and armour, wears off – you will realise that the stuff you collect in nature hardly matters. You never, ever find yourself walking through the wilderness, desperately searching for a particular plant to cure your disease or heal your wounds. *Oblivion* had previously managed to achieve something more with the nirnroot, a special herb that had you prowling the coasts of lakes and rivers in search of its peculiar glow and hum, because there was a narrative reward for collecting nirnroots, and therefore a reward for paying attention to the hints about its favoured habitats. Nirnroot does show up in *Skyrim*, of course, as well, but because there is no longer any narrative about it, it’s just not interesting.

Nonetheless: when you first begin the game, all the ingredients you find in nature are mysterious. Each ingredient has four effects, and all are simply “unknown”. You will be able to discover the effects by trial-and-error in an alchemy lab (peculiarly, while you can find recipes for potions which suggest what effect a particular ingredient, you can never directly learn about an ingredient’s effect; you must always try it yourself), and this is a most powerful motivator for a player: when I see the word “unknown”, I want to reveal what’s hidden. When I collect one, two, three new ingredients, my mind races with the possibility that there are other ingredients out there I do not yet know. *Gotta catch ‘em all!* It works!

As I keep walking, I am struck by two things: firstly, once again I am reminded of the wonderful, amazing detail of *Skyrim’s* environments. They are so filled with detail and diversity, you do not ever get a sense that something is missing in in terms of visuals. If you started questioning this, you would soon realise that in fact, there’s a lot of common environmental stuff that is still missing; truly realistic environments are far, far off still. But these *feel* complete! It is a gestalt, you see enough to sense completeness. A
fallen tree, covered with fungi and lichen; a patch of ferns; roots sticking out from the underside of a small escarpment. Grass mingles with wild flowers.

My method of note-taking also helps me to notice something that otherwise remains almost invisible to the player. Yes, I’m still ALT-TABbing out of the game to take notes, even though it occasionally forces me to save, quit, and reload the game. When I do so, I pause in the game, but the background sound continues. I write these words listening to an ongoing chorus of crickets, chirping birds, and the whistle of wind. Under normal circumstances, these effects build immersion, but don’t bring attention to themselves. It’s only when you switch to a different window and hear the now-incongruous background soundtrack that you realise it’s there all the time. Music in *Skyrim* is incidental; unlike earlier games, your exploration is not constantly accompanied by background music – here, music accompanies battles, events, and cultural spaces, but it is not there constantly. Nature has reasserted itself – which is what *Skyrim* is all about, really. The rugged frontier for the rugged outdoorsmen, mining gold from exposed lodes, flaying hides off bears and wolves, and… collecting flowers.

The sun is beginning to set. Not a coincidence, that my first walk through the landscape has been coordinated with time, to ensure that I will catch the golden rays of the sun changing the colour of the landscape. It’s beautiful and – what was that word Erik Champion and Paul Martin used talking about *Oblivion*? Sublime.

I reach a crossroads, and while I continue more or less to follow in Hadvar’s footsteps towards Riverwood, I step off the track. The radar makes me do it. Oh, veteran TES players like me hate that radar! It takes away all the surprise of discovering a landmark unexpectedly, of just running into it. But look what it does in terms of positives! When I first stepped out of the cave, the radar not only indicated the direction I must follow to Riverwood – without being too straightforward, because it only points in a straight line, and the landscape does not permit me to follow a straight line – but also on the radar I saw several other icons in various directions. A little house icon – I will soon learn, though no manual ever bothers to tell you so, that it refers to solitary houses, shacks. Many others are visible too, all equally inexplicable at first, and all beckoning you to come and see what’s inside. A strange obelisk icon – that’s one of the standing stones, which allow me to gain a particular special affinity or power, for example being able to develop all skills of a particular type (fighter/mage/thief) faster than others. In previous games, you did this once, at the start of the game, by choosing a star sign. In *Skyrim*, you approach a stone and activate it, and you gain its powers until you choose to use a different stone. *Skyrim* really does not like the player being boxed into a particular playing style. You can always change.
Speaking of which, I neglected to mention what, to players of earlier TES games, was one of the biggest surprises when you first leave that initial dungeon. In Oblivion, the tutorial dungeon ended with the game suggesting to you based on your behaviour what class of character you are – barbarian, knight, assassin, thief, monk, spellsword, nightblade, an overwhelming range of classes combining particular sets of skills to reflect particular playing styles. You could confirm the game’s suggestion, or choose a different class, and I for one found it very pleasurable that the game actually identified me as an assassin, which was what I had played Morrowind with: what had been a conscious choice in Morrowind so imbued my playing style (I learned to favour the skills that help me progress faster with my chosen class), that by the time Oblivion came along, the game could immediately recognise me for what I was. And then Skyrim just doesn’t mention class at all. The whole system is gone! This is a bit of a shock initially, but one which I barely registered on this current playthrough, because – hey, I’m used to being classless now. Just between us, though, I’m still the assassin. It takes a very conscious choice on my part to abandon the behavioural tropes the two previous games have set into my playing style by the simple mechanism of rewarding me for favouring some skills over others. Sneaking up with a blade, striking with a bow from a distant hiding spot, concocting potions while ignoring magic usage, running and jumping to improve my acrobatics (the latter is no longer an option in Skyrim, acrobatics are gone as a skill) – these behaviours have become me.

Why was the disappearance of classes so shocking? I remember thinking about it a lot initially. It shouldn’t be a problem. All it removed was a constraint, a set of rules that told you that you are better off using these skills and these items compared to others. What I felt at the time, and to some degree still do, is that to me, the class choice was not just a constraint: it was also a guideline and a challenge. Can you be an assassin, asked Morrowind, and I rose up to that challenger. Isn’t that what role-playing is supposed to be about? Playing a role? Well, Skyrim tells me: you just step into this great big sandbox, and be all you want to be. Yes, it’s liberating – but it does also take the fun out of choosing a role and being required and rewarded for sticking with it.

Digressions about class aside, I step off the path to Riverwood, enticed by the way the icon for the nearby standing stone has grown bigger, and is actually kind of glowing. I’m close, and I can’t bloody well just walk by without checking it out, even though on this playthrough, I know exactly what’s there (of course, it is beneficial to use that stone). So I step off the beaten path, making a first baby step into exploring the world on my own – well, I would be, if this was the first time I were playing an open-world RPG. And this is what the radar helps to accomplish: yes, it takes away the surprise of unexpectedly finding a place or landmark, but in return it populates the world with possibilities. As you walk along, you can see all the time where you can go to find something interesting; the places you’ve visited also show
up on your personal map, and their icons change from black to white, so this is also a tallying mechanism. What do tourists do? They make lists, they cross items off lists, they choose to visit a particular area of the city based on the fact that their tourist map shows an encouragingly large set of attractive icons in that part of the map. They sometimes cross off icons. Heck, I’ve seen in stores special scratchable world maps for children, so that they can scratch away those places they’ve visited, revealing a more detailed version of the map underneath the scratch-off surface. World-building is not just placing stuff in the world: it’s also letting people know the stuff is there, and how it can be reached. A possibility is not a possibility if you do not know it exists. Yes, *Skyrim*’s world (and *Oblivion*’s before it) is in fact better and more attractive for exploration than *Morrowind*’s had been, because it advertises itself.

My shortcut – how silly of me to forget this – is of course unnecessary. As I tumble down a cliff to the standing stones underneath, I catch a glimpse of Hadvar running ahead past the stones, because hey – the road zigs towards them, goes right by them, and then zags away. Oh, well. But the stones – for the umpteenth time, I am struck by how carefully choreographed this opening part of the game is, how ideally everything is set up for the player to be awestruck and enticed into further exploration. The stones are set on a small platform on the edge of a cliff. Below you is a large inland lake, surrounded by forests and mountains. Directly over the lake is the setting sun. Magic. A “Kodak moment” if there ever was one. Yes, I took a screenshot.

And hey, isn’t it convenient, how I will reach Riverwood just as evening falls, so that Hadvar’s (or Ralof’s, had I chosen the Stormcloak alternative – the two *both* happen to have relatives in Riverwood) invitation to visit his uncle, and the uncle’s invitation to stay the night, will actually be attractive for the player? Now, of course, all this works only provided the player follows the game’s prescribed course, rather than veering away in some different course – but you’ve got a road, you’ve got your NPC friend, you’ve got the narrative, everything is there, conspiring to get you to play along, to make the opening of this open-world sandbox a satisfyingly linear introduction. Speaking of narrative, I have not yet mentioned the quest system. It is the quest system that generates the little arrow pointing me on my radar towards Riverwood. I have been given a quest – a short, two-line snippet of text in my quest log reminding me that I should go to Riverwood. Hadvar has already also given me another quest, so now I have multiple quests in my quest log – he suggested that I should join the Imperial legion. If I make that quest my “active quest”, an arrow will also appear on the radar pointing me towards the very, very distant city of Solitude. Many quests can be active at once, and later in the game, it is not unusual for the player to veer off his path because he notices that the arrow pointer of some trivial and long-ignored quest is now attractively close to his location. Quests, in spite of the word, are not all epic. A
quest can be any task that moves forward one of the many small and large narratives on offer. In fact, the game introduces a very useful distinction between major and minor quests – the major ones, which often have multiple sequential and sometimes branching subquests (go to Riverwood... go to Whiterun... speak to the Jarl of Whiterun... etc.), all get separate pages in your quest log. Then there’s all the trivial minor quests, all single or dual-stage (if dual-stage, only because when you’re sent off to find an item, you must be reminded to bring it back afterwards to the quest giver), and all stuffed together into a single page of the quest log, with no individual description for each quest. The value of the quest log in keeping the player engaged is immense – you never run low of things to do, and you can always look to your quest log for inspiration on what to do next. If anything, in Skyrim the quest log can be overwhelming sometimes. So much stuff to do, how will I ever make this list shrink, when every time I perform a quest, I run into new places and people, and accidentally or intentionally pick up two new quests in return?

Oh, yes. The path now runs alongside the edge of a fast-flowing mountain river, which emerges from the lake, and will ultimately, if I recall, reach the sea far in the north. The river is filled with rocks, it leaps down in waterfalls and rapids, it moves. This is another novelty of Skyrim compared to Oblivion where waters were always perfectly still and flat, and you just happen to be exposed to it right off the bat. Skyrim works very hard to ensure its innovations are visible straight away.

I do not leap into the water, as I normally would – because it’s what players do, they jump off cliffs, dive into waters, they almost try to get themselves killed, to establish the boundaries of what they can do in the game. This time, however, I’ll just follow the path. As I do so, I catch a glimpse of a much smaller path branching off, towards another radar icon – it looks like a mine (which, of course, I know is exactly what it is). Roads in Skyrim are backbones, and as you go along, you keep encountering branches towards all these different possibilities. The world is very, very structured, once you get to know it. This was written about... by... Totten! Christopher Totten. Book about games and architecture.

Walking on along my riverside road to Riverwood, I see something I perhaps would have missed had I dived in the water, and experienced the thrill of a fast water current dragging me along through curiously un-dangerous rapids and waterfalls – I see fish leaping up over a small waterfall. Salmon! And that is what salmon do in reality. In these small ways, Skyrim tries to convey how its animal life actually functions, to create an illusion of greater biological complexity, when of course all the animals you encounter are simply randomly generated based on encounter tables for particular areas.

Two dead wolves (I’m positive I saw them in the same spot a few weeks ago, when I tried playing the game from scratch with the Survival Mode mod – could be coincidence, or it could be intentionally
scripted to ensure the player has some danger to deal with on his first journey), and a short diversion swim across the now more-placid river to pick up a nirnroot, I finally reach Riverwood. My exploration is rewarded firstly by a big sign “Riverwood discovered”, which also triggers a short chime we hear for every discovered location, and then a musical background piece. Not coincidentally, my entry into Riverwood happens just as one of the NPCs, a young man named Sven, walks towards the gate, but pauses to converse with his mother, Hilde. She is excitedly yelling about seeing a dragon over the barrow on the other side of the river (so that’s what that mountainside ruin is – a barrow), which Sven dismisses as crazy, and chides his mother for making up such nonsense. This is the first of the many, many NPC vignettes that we’ll encounter in the game – conversations between two or more characters that happen in the background, without your participation, though in some key locations are evidently triggered by your approach, so as to raise the probability of you noticing them.

I will deal with Hilde later. 1 hour and 44 minutes have passed, and I must end the present session. Amazingly, I have so far spent just over 5 hours altogether on this experiment... and I’ve covered what is probably half an hour of actual gameplay time. But the process of taking these notes is also about bringing to the foreground my earlier, unannotated experiences. My notes, looking back, are constantly digressing into the describing the game as a whole rather than just what I’m seeing at any moment. I think this is good, but I also think I will need to concentrate more on the path ahead, because otherwise I risk either spending too much time on this component of the study – or not getting far enough into the game.

3.3.4 Session 4 – November 17
When I resume, I don’t get to talk to Hilde, because she immediately enters her home. It is evening time, and the people of Riverwood are heading home. I look around, trying to recall the very first time I entered this town, and the newness of it. A chicken crosses the road (why did...?) right in front of me. That’s new. Well, earlier games often had some sort of livestock – the guar in Morrowind, sheep in Oblivion, and in Skyrim, there are cows and chickens. What is different is that chickens have nests, and they actually lay eggs that you can pick up every once in a while. Actually, throughout the countryside, you can also find the nests of wild birds – rock warblers, thrushes, and one or two others. You can often see birds in the sky, and you can buy bird feathers in alchemist shops; I’m not sure if you can actually shoot down a bird to obtain such items yourself. I’ve tried, but never succeeded.

The settlement is surrounded by a wooden wall, which is peculiar. There seems to be no reason for it to be fortified. Another big attention-grabber right off the bat is the lumber mill. Its location is eminently justified diegetically – we’re in a forest, for one thing, but more importantly, the mill is powered by a
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water wheel, and the fast-flowing river makes the location perfect. I see Hod and Gerdur, the owners of the mill, just as they’re about to leave their work. Hod doesn’t talk much; like probably most NPCs, actually, he only responds with one-line comments, there is no option to ask him questions of any kind. However, he has enough of these comments, as well as the occasional reactive comment that he makes when you’re simply walking by, that he still feels like he is a distinct individual. I must admit, while Oblivion crashed and burned with its randomly-generated NPC conversations, and Morrowind’s NPCs, for all the richness of their dialogue options, only rarely had any personal backstory or distinct personality, Skyrim’s NPCs are a great bunch. They have less to say than before, but in saying less… they wind up saying more.

Gerdur also has a few comments she makes as one-liners, but she can also be asked a couple of questions: foremost for a player being the one about where supplies can be purchased. When I ask about the town, she also tells me that some people think she owns the town, but in fact she just owns the mill. What a great comment! In that one sentence, she tells me a) Riverwood basically exists because of the mill; b) who owns the mill, and c) although she has a husband it is Gerdur that owns the mill, a key bit of information about the social structure of Skyrim. True to their Scandinavian inspirations, the Nord women are independent figures whose possessions are not subsumed by their husbands. And so, Hod runs the mill, but Gerdur owns it.

Incidentally, Gerdur is Ralof’s sister. If I had sided with Ralof, he would have referred me to her, and she would have welcomed me into their house, as well as offering me free supplies. Needless to say, Ralof is nowhere to be seen, and is not mentioned. It would obviously be most peculiar if both Ralof and Hadvar returned to their home town at the same time, given they’re on opposing sides. On the subject of Gerdur being Ralof’s sister – she really is Ralof’s sister. If you open up the data files in the editor, and have a look at the NPCs, you’ll see that apart from their other attributes and inventory, NPCs in Skyrim now have a list of relations – unlike Oblivion and Morrowind, where even a husband and wife living in the same house had no actual relationship as far as the game was concerned.

Since I’m not with Ralof, I need to find Hadvar’s uncle, Alvor. Gerdur mentioned Alvor is the smith, so I will head to the smithy – a big house in the centre of town. Actually, the centre of town, apart from a couple of houses, contains only the smithy, the general shop, and the inn. Small place, not much to do. Let’s see how much we can discover.

Before getting to the smithy, I get… sidetracked. Which is what happens a lot in Skyrim – ooh, shiny thing, let’s see it. On my way to the smithy, I ran into Gerdur again, and this time she mentioned that the Riverwood Trader had recently had a strange break-in, the thieves only stole one thing. Any RPG
player knows what that means: a quest. Before I go to the shop, I walk past Hilde’s house, and I see that it’s not actually locked as I thought it would be this time of day. However, when I step inside, Hilde doesn’t provide the conversation options I recall her having, and in fact she seems quite hostile, asking me what I want. Now I remember. NPCs in *Skyrim* don’t immediately lock their homes at night. You can enter, but when you do, they are quick to remind you you’re on their turf, and in fact, it’s best if you just leave. A small change in behaviour, which is used by the game to clearly signal ownership and social structure. When an NPC becomes a friend, they will not try to kick you out of their house, a clear indicator of your relationship. You are also permitted to take some of the items in their home without stealing; in short, access to homes and the personal property inside are used as indicators of social relationships.

When I enter the Riverwood Traders – surprised they’re still open in the evening, but it’s probably just this once, for the benefits of the player – I see another scripted vignette. Lucan Valerius, the owner, is arguing with his sister, Camilla. Their brief argument – cut short by Lucan noting the presence of you, a customer – doesn’t say much, but just enough for you to guess that Camilla wants to try to recover the stolen item personally, while Lucan insists she will not take such risks. Before talking to Lucan, I try talking a few times to Camilla. All she has to offer are one-liners, but a few of them. She suggests that maybe I can persuade her brother to change her mind: another indicator that I should consider doing their quest. She reveals her backstory in a few lines – they came to start a new life from the Imperial province, Cyrodiil, because things got bad with the Thalmor – there’s the Thalmor again – but here they found war again. All Camilla wants is to get married and live a quiet life. That’s another important hint: you can get married in *Skyrim*, and Camilla is one of the eligible ladies.

I talk to Lucan, and sure enough, I have the option of asking him if anything is wrong. He tells the story of the break-in and describes the stolen item – a large golden claw. Naturally, I have the follow-up option of offering to recover it for him (I do not have the option of saying “no” – in order to not get the quest, I can simply backtrack out of the conversation; this is an interesting design choice, because it means a few less dialogue lines – no need for an “I’m disappointed” response from the NPC when you say no – but also it means that you are that much more likely to just say yes, because that’s the only visible option). He’s very happy and promises to reward me with money. He also points me to Bleak Falls Barrow – naturally, that’s the very same barrow-ruin on the side of the mountain that I saw when I first escaped Helgen. I’d probably wind up going there anyway, because it’s big and begging for exploration, so why not give the player a little push by having a quest take him there? At this point, Camilla breaks into the conversation and says that I’ll need a guide to get there (as if), so Lucan permits her to lead me, but only to the edge of town. I follow her outside and to the edge of town, because I want to hear the
lines she says along the way, but I’m not planning to go to the Barrow in this session. I need to finish off 
exploring Riverwood and actually do some shopping and stuff, so I’m better prepared.

I had to take a break at this point, and I had a eureka moment during the break: swarms. NPCs in *Skyrim* 
work in swarms. There is an economy of scale to the world building. Look at the way different NPCs 
indicate it’s worth checking the Riverwood Traders, or the way the background events of the game 
world are revealed in drips and drabs, a line here, a line there. The more NPCs you include in the game, 
even if they have relatively few lines – many of *Skyrim’s* characters have fewer than ten unique lines of 
dialogue to say in the game, although they will typically also fall back on generic lines shared by all NPCs 
played by the same voice actor, which is usually all NPCs of one gender from one race – the more 
complexity can be revealed in the world without having to resort to big exposition dumps.

Along the way to the bridge on the edge of town, Camilla has a few more lines of exposition. First she 
points out the Barrow on the mountainside, then she mentions the thieves must be mad to be hiding 
there because of the dangers inside, trolls, traps and the like – and then she hints at the specialness of 
the claw, by wondering why the thieves only stole the claw, and how she’s not even sure where her 
brother got the claw in the first place. This is another important aspect of using conversations for 
exposition, which I’ve often used in my own work as well: if you have several lines for the player, stretch 
them out over an activity, such as the player walking towards an objective in this case, so that the player 
is not frustrated at having to stand and listen. NPCs are not human beings, their faces cannot hold our 
attention the way real people can, so conversations can be boring and a distraction for the player helps 
to keep him engaged.

I return to Alvor’s house. It’s been ages since I tried siding with Hadvar, so the interior and the 
conversations are almost like new to me. The house is bigger than I recalled, with a large basement. 
Alvor and his wife Sigrid have a child, a daughter, and this provides a lot of additional content. When I 
enter, I find them sitting at the dinner table with Hadvar. Lots of food on the plates (constantly jumping 
up and down on the table, because of the twitchy physics engine), but one of the prominent limitations 
of *Skyrim* is that NPCs don’t use small items from the environment. They can use a set piece, like a forge 
or the sawmill, but they cannot use small items, presumably because of the problems coordinating 
animations with items that may shift locations. When an NPC sits down at a table with food, he or she 
actually pops a loaf of bread from nowhere to play their eating animation. This also means that you 
could steal all the food from a table, and even the plates, and the NPCs would still sit down to it and eat 
as normal. This can be quite comical, with the large feasts set up in the various jarls’ palaces – the feast 
disappears, but the guests continue to eat.
Talking to Alvor and Hadvar, I get the first really large chunks of exposition which in this case are not cut up and divided among many NPCs. I need to find out more about the cause of the war – the Thalmor defeated the Empire and signed a treaty where the Empire promised to ban the worship of the Ninth Divine, Talos. The Nords objected most strongly, because Talos before founding the Empire and becoming a god, was a Nord. Not all of this is revealed – many shortcuts are written into the dialogue, undoubtedly intentionally. NPCs speak about some things as though they should be obvious, because of course, they should be. What rock did I crawl under from, that I don’t know about the war with the Thalmor and the treaty? All the information is of course presented from the perspective of supporters of the Empire – had I gone with Ralof, Hod and Gerdur would be telling the same story biased in the opposite direction. It’s really a pity the player has not the possibility of contrasting the two stories in one playthrough, because the different perspectives really make it clear how both sides of the war are convinced their cause is just. Hadvar even suspects the dragon must belong to the Stormcloaks, because it prevented Ulfric’s execution. He also keeps trying to persuade me to join the Legion, but he acknowledges this must be hard, since they had just tried to execute me. Naturally, Ralof would be telling me that joining the Stormcloaks is a no-brainer when the Legion had tried to execute me. Both, above all, are just trying to point me in the direction of one of the major available sidequests – fighting the civil war for one of the two sides, and leading it to victory.

I’m also given a new quest, or rather another stage in the present quest of the main story: go to Whiterun, and warn the jarl about the dragon.

Afterwards, I look around the house, chat with Dorte, the daughter – she helps her father at the forge, and tells me her mother is concerned she doesn’t do “girly things” enough (“but that’s girly talk!” she adds). A few moments later, I hear her having a vignette-style exchange with her mother – but this time, the game makes no effort to coincide it with my presence. There are many of such vignettes to be heard in houses where a family lives, and they are there to show family relations, not for the player’s benefit. The game couldn’t care less if I’m listening. Sure enough, I don’t catch everything, but it seems that mum is offering Dorte to go out on some outing together, and Dorte doesn’t want to, because she wants to work at the forge. It’s utterly meaningless from the perspective of the game’s story – pure world-building, or in this case, character building. It’s intentionally, purposefully trivial, so as to hammer across the point that NPCs in the game are not just quest-giving machines, they have their own lives, personalities and they’re a part of the world. This kind of thing is definitely best conveyed by trivial conversations, daily personal exchanges.
Speaking of trivial, Sigrid pulls out a broom and starts sweeping the floor (well, performing an animation of sweeping), while upstairs, her husband is lying on the bed and sleeping (in his daytime clothes, with no coverings – another of the game’s small limitations, people even sleep in armour), and Hadvar, last I saw him, I think was stirring the cooking pot. With the exception of little Dorthe, who simply sits at a table, all the inhabitants of the house are performing custom animations to show a range of activities. As for Dorthe, kids can occasionally be seen playing with their toys (when you adopt a child, which one of the DLCs allows, and you give him or her a toy, you’ll see them playing with it), and when they’re outdoors, they can often be seen playing tag with other kids. All these custom animations and activities are new in Skyrim, and they ramp up the NPCs tremendously, revealing the trivial side of daily life. It just occurred to me, the evolution of TES in this regard actually kind of mirrors the evolution of the study of history. It used to be historians concerned themselves mainly with events and biographies of famous people. Today, historians take great interest in the daily lives of ordinary people, the unique roles and circumstances of minorities and across gender distinctions, and the like. The same evolution is visible precisely in Skyrim’s world-building.

Before I wrap up the present session, I go back upstairs and try using the cooking pot. This is another of Skyrim’s novelties; food used to be something the player could find, but not make. The only way of processing raw food was to turn it into… potions – so, a potion of cure fatigue was made from… potatoes, which were simply treated as another alchemy ingredient with four special properties. In Skyrim, raw food items are hardly ever alchemy ingredients, but instead can be combined in cooking. I make some apple cabbage soup, made of an apple, cabbage, and a pile of salt (a dual-use item, which is both a cooking and an alchemy ingredient). I can use the cooking equipment to also make roasts, from roast salmon and rabbit to mammoth snout (apparently the only edible part of a mammoth…), and more sophisticated dishes such as Elsweyr fondue (a combination of cheese and… a potent drug from the province Elsweyr). The DLC also added the possibility of building a bakery in your own house, which would allow the cooking of a range of baked pastries using flour which can be made from grains at a flour mill.

Cooking is sadly limited in Skyrim, however. I mean, it’s an important innovation that it’s there at all, but it could have been much better. Firstly, unlike alchemy, it’s not bound to a skill, so everything always comes out the same. You can’t burn the roast. Secondly, unlike alchemy, there is no discovery involved – from the moment you first use a cooking pot, you have a complete list of available recipes, telling you exactly what items you’ll need to produce the given dish. Having to first learn a recipe could have been most interesting. Finally, I can’t help thinking of a game my daughter loves playing, Cooking Academy,
with its myriad mini-games for chopping carrots and breaking eggs; mini-games for cooking would slow the game down too much in *Skyrim*, but I still wonder.

The last thing I do is use one of the beds to sleep through the night, so that I can continue my engagement with Riverwood in daytime. I end the fourth session after 1 hour and 50 minutes, bringing the total play and annotation time to 7 hours. I’m still barely an hour of gameplay into the game. I don’t think this is a problem. Ironically, when I go up to Bleak Falls Barrow, I’ll probably spend only a few minutes time taking notes, and much more time playing, because a dungeon just doesn’t offer much of significance in world-building practices. It will balance out in the end, I think. Nonetheless, I am constantly wondering if I’m doing this annotated play thing right, or if I’m writing too much. I think in some ways, doing this for a game I’ve spent so much time on, and particularly one which is the continuation of a series I’m so familiar with, is a bit of a trap; I have so much to say, that small sections of the game blow out into massive discussions. But isn’t that a good thing?

Addendum: following the end of the session, I went onto the UESP and looked up Hadvar. Because the UESP catalogues all his lines and interactions with other NPCs, I discover that I actually missed some noteworthy scenes because I separated from Hadvar during the last bit of our journey to Riverwood. Had I entered Riverwood with Hadvar, I would have been witness to him having a reunion conversation with Alvar and Sigrid, before going inside their house to sit at the dinner table and recount to them the dragon attack. On the path to Riverwood, he would have also pointed out Bleak Falls Barrow to me, as well as mentioning that he feels I’ve earned a pardon, but General Tullius will need to approve it. Finally, he would have invited me to use the standing stones (the irony: it was ahead of the standing stones that I left his company), and would have commented on the stone I choose. This diverse range of content that I missed, from situational one-liners supplying me with information about the world, to reactive lines in response to my choices, to extended vignettes, just confirms once again that *Skyrim* builds its world through diversity and almost a carelessness: the player is bombarded with opportunities to see and hear different things, and the game makes no apologies about letting the player miss some of them. Similarly, the original dragon attack on Helgen is a complex scene involving many small vignettes, and when you read about the details of it on the UESP, you inevitably realise you’ve missed half of them.

*Skyrim*, in this sense, is the very opposite of a narrative film. Not only does it not arrange the camera and mise-en-scene perfectly for the audience, but instead it gives the audience freedom to look where they want, ignore what they want, and frankly, it couldn’t care less if you miss half of it, although it facilitates the repetition of some vignettes, and ensures that truly important information comes at the player through multiple avenues. The result could be expected to be confusing and easy to get lost in,
but instead the game’s careless storytelling seems to draw you in, challenging you to pay attention, to explore, experiment, and to revisit.

3.3.5 Session 5 – November 18
I begin session five in the morning after sleeping at Alvor’s house. I see Alvor just as he leaves the house, to go work in the forge. All the NPCs in cities and villages have their own daily routines, which can be quite detailed – the UESP lists the routines for some of the most important NPCs, and they include everything from meal times at particular places (some characters eat at home, others at the pub, etc.) to meeting other characters, performing particular duties, using interactive objects such as forges or sawmills, and so on. Characters are free to break from their routines, however; later in the game, it may happen that a dragon will attack a small village, and the guards as well as other NPCs will try to kill it. Some NPCs may die, in which case, their relatives will take over their duties. The complexity of the AI allows for a fairly robust, if still simplistic, depiction of simulated social life. It is mainly an illusion, of course. After all, it’s not like the logs at the sawmill ever actually go anywhere, and it’s not like the blacksmith actually produces anything while standing over the forge.

I ran into Sven, Helge’s son, outside. He told me about the elf Faendal taking interest in Camilla Valerius. Another opportunity for a small sidequest, but an interesting one. I later talk to Faendal, and evidently, I can choose to help either one to get closer to Camilla and drive off the rival. I don’t recall what I did last time, but I don’t think that either way you actually change anything; Camilla never marries either of them, remaining eligible for the player.

I also tried talking to Helge, but it turns out she doesn’t have any real dialogue options after all. She does however provide me a lot of background information. Again, the information is provided in an obtuse way, forcing the player to connect the dots. For example, she rants about the elf Faendal, who has the temerity to be interested in a human woman – elves should stick to their own kind! And there’s too many elves in Skyrim these days. The information she’s conveying is not that there’s too many elves in Skyrim, but rather that many Skyrim inhabitants think there are too many elves in Skyrim, and this is not necessarily related to the war, it can be just a race thing. You will soon pick up other clues that reveal that in fact, the Nords definitely have a prejudice towards elves and other non-human races (except the player, who is never a victim of the prejudices shown towards other races, no matter what race has been chosen). Nobody ever says outright what the Nord attitude to strangers is: the player is to figure it out.

I try using the sawmill – you have to activate the pile of logs for your character to perform an animation of placing a log in the sawmill cradle, and then you must walk over to the other side and pull a lever to
activate the mill, so the log starts moving towards the saw, eventually getting cut in half and falling down onto the pile of sawn-through logs. Neither the pile of unsawn, nor sawn-through logs ever gets any bigger or smaller. It’s just a decoration to give the impression of activity in the world – as usual, however, the activity is a strong indicator of Skyrim’s (the province, not the game) economy being based on primary resources.

I then went over to Alvor’s forge, and asked if he needed a hand: this is another bit of the extended game tutorial, with Alvor supplying me with raw materials and giving me tasks to complete – I must craft and refine a dagger, and then I must craft and refine a leather helmet. In each case, I activate a particular element of the forge area – the forge itself, the grindstone, the worktable, the tanning rack – where I can click on a particular option to auto-magically produce an item out of the resources I have available. Exact same system as cooking: different items require different resources, so I can’t produce everything; while I am choosing, the camera switches to third-person view, and I see my character performing a looped animation of using the given equipment. The same thing also happens when using alchemy, or enchanting weapons and armour. However, unlike cooking, each of these functions is constrained by the skill system; for example, in order to produce armours out of better materials, the player must progressively improve their skill. It’s not a sophisticated system, however, because it’s based around repetition: to learn to craft magnificent armour out of dragonbone, you just have to keep on smithing iron daggers until your skill improves. I use up some iron ingots and leather I picked up along the way (as well as using the tanning rack to tan a wolf pelt into leather – in turn, the leather can be cut up into leather strips, another resource for armour and weapons) to improve my weapons and armour. I also sell all the weapons and armour I’m not using – had lots of it from Helgen – to Alvor. I’m far from rich, and I’m actually unable to afford most of the stuff Alvor has, but it’s only a matter of time before looting dungeons will make me rich.

In the meantime, however, I must sell all I can to raise more funds. I go over to the Riverwood Trader, and sell some more junk – Alvor didn’t buy everything I had, because different merchants are limited to different types of items. As a blacksmith, Alvor sells weapons and armour. The bartender in the tavern sells food and alchemy ingredients (though only in Riverwood; usually the only alchemy ingredient bartenders sell is salt – not even garlic, which according to Skyrim has no usage whatsoever in cooking, even though it can be found in most kitchens in Skyrim, along with dried elves’ ears (it’s a plant! You don’t collect actual elves’ ears... well, you do, but only from the Falmer – Snow Elves, who have been mutated beyond all recognition, and are hostile to everyone... wait, this doesn’t sound very nice all of a sudden).
I do also buy a magic spellbook, which is used to learn a spell (one book, one spell – keeps you looking for books). That takes about half of the money I’d saved up. Ok, it will be a long while before I’m rich. I guess Skyrim’s economy system (the game’s, not the province’s) works fairly well to force the player to keep finding new quests and dungeons for the first fifty hours of the game at least, before the player reaches a point where they just have all they need, and money coming out of their ears. It’s only regrettable that it’s much, much harder to get rich from collecting raw resources – even gold mining, though easy and productive, just doesn’t go far compared to the loot you can find in a dungeon.

I proceed to the next (well, really – last) interesting place in Riverwood, which is The Sleeping Giant – a tavern. All taverns have names, but that’s about as far as their uniqueness goes. Actually, most cities and villages only have one, or two taverns at the most. I suppose technically they’re inns rather than taverns, because you can usually rent a room. Why rent a room? Sleeping in a bed provides the player with a special “rested” bonus for a few hours. When you need to wait through the night, you might as well use a bed. Of course, the Survival Mode mods all make sleeping absolutely vital, just as they do with eating – so vital, that you notice with embarrassment that your incredibly powerful warrior hero comes close to dying after not sleeping one night and not eating for one day. I can endure a lot more than that in reality, and I’m an academic.

Inns in Skyrim have a number of affordances. Firstly, like markets, they are places where people meet up, so you can hear interesting conversations there. Secondly, the bartenders can be asked for rumours (which update over the course of the game, so you can get periodic updates on how the rest of the world perceives what’s been happening) and for work tips, which usually results in information about the nearby city offering a bounty on a particular bandit leader, or hostile giant, et cetera in a nearby dungeon. These bounties are randomly generated – they are so-called Radiant Quests, where the game basically combines the potential quest target from a table appropriate to the quest giver, with a potential quest location from a table appropriate to the quest giver (i.e. a kill-the-bandit quest from a tavern will always be related to a dungeon within the immediate vicinity of the city the tavern is beholden to). Thirdly, most taverns have bards. A bard – in this case, Sven – will be playing instrumental tunes or singing songs, and can be requested to play or sing a particular tune/song. The range of songs changes over the course of the game – for example, once the player is revealed to be the Dragonborn, the Song of the Dragonborn starts being sung around various taverns. Some songs are only played in cities beholden to the Empire or to the Stormcloaks. Whatever they’re playing or singing, bards perform an animation with an appropriate instrument in their hands. The only trouble is, just like with brooms and other items NPCs use, the item just pops out of the air in their hands, which is rather ugly.
I should add, in the space of the last few conversations, I’ve picked up at least three additional mini-quests – one relating to the Bard’s College (Sven told me where he learned his craft, if I wanted to do the same), one relating to the College of Winterhold (a wizard school), and one related to the Dark Brotherhood (assassins). In each case, the quest is basically just a pointer – go to this place to find out more about this organisation. An invitation, so players are aware of the possibilities. Oh, and I also was told about the supposedly amazing statue of Azura built by Dark Elf refugees somewhere in eastern Skyrim, apparently it’s a sight to see, a fact that my quest journal immediately reflects in the form of another mini-quest.

This particular inn has an alchemist’s table standing in the corner, so I use it to convert my collected ingredients into potions. Since don’t know what most ingredients can do, I combine them through trial-and-error (the game does remember which ingredients I’ve tried with what, so when two ingredients produce no result, they are greyed out so you don’t try combining them again). I learn quite a few effects for quite a few ingredients, but most of the ingredients still get wasted without any potions to show for it. I like alchemy, because it’s so resource-intensive. You really need to gather a lot of resources to figure out what they do.

Outside, I run into the town drunk – yes, there is a town drunk. Most towns and villages have at least one or two beggars or drunks, people who have no real jobs, and loiter around all day. They can be given alcohol (the drunks) and money (the beggars). When you do so, it does produce a reaction – this guy will continue to greet me as his “favourite drinking buddy” for the rest of the game. It’s nice, as a small acknowledgement that individual NPCs remember my actions.

Soon afterwards, one of the town’s kids runs past, followed by his dog. The boy yells “Good dog!”, while the drunk mutters “Stupid dog!” soon afterwards. It’s not a lot of interaction, but enough to create the impression that these characters function in the same place, and have a history of interaction.

As I leave the town to give that Bleak Falls Barrow a try, I look at the map – oddly enough, for the first time. The world map only shows the places that I know of, and then distinguishes between places I’ve visited (whitish icons), and places I’ve heard about but not visited (grey icons). There is an auto-magical “fast travel” system in the game, where if you click on the icon of a place you’ve already visited, you can travel there instantly (although a few hours of game time pass). I hate it and never use it, because it’s not diegetic. There’s no explanation for the fact that walking on foot from one place to another, I’ll encounter hostile wolves and bandits, but if I just click the place on the map, I can go there perfectly safely. However, later on, you also encounter a diegetic fast travel system – outside of every major town (only the major ones), there is a carriage. You can pay the carriage driver to take you to any of the hold
capitals (Skyrim is divided into nine holds, each with a big or small city as its capital), including the ones you have not yet visited. Now that, I do like, and I do use. It’s a good compromise between getting the player to where he wants to be quickly, but without giving the player undue advantage or extra-diegetic abilities.

How hilarious! I just levelled up for the first time – I’m now level 2! – by... killing a mudcrab. Veteran TES players know that mudcrabs are annoying, big (half-metre or so) crabs that show up in every game since Morrowind, and are famous for their weakness and their aggression. They’re useless opponents that even a level one character has no trouble with, but they never run from anything. The thought of levelling up from such a fight is funny. How do I level up, though? Well, whenever you improve ten skills (or less than ten skills, but for a total of ten improvements), you gain a level. Gaining a level provides you with a general improvement for your character – you can improve health, magicka (magicka points are used every time you cast a spell), and fatigue (which is used up whenever you’re running). You also gain one “perk” point, which can be spent on a particular perk for any one skill (even a skill you didn’t improve). Perks are special improvements for skills, which allow you to customise a particular skill – for example, if you spend a perk on the armourer skill, you can use it to unlock the ability to use a new type of material suitable for light armour, or a new type of material suitable for heavy armour. Keep spending perks on a particular skill, and you’ll eventually be able to gain all of the perks for that skill.

As I’m walking towards the hold, I also take note of the beautiful weather – ironically, I looked up into the clear-blue skies because I thought I heard thunder. But actually, I can see heavy clouds over one of the nearby mountain ranges. Weather in Skyrim is definitely beautiful and very atmospheric, although storms are not super-exciting. I guess they put their efforts into snow storms rather than thunderstorms for this particular game. I also take note again of the background sound effects. These are actually location-based. In different places, you will be within range of different sound emitters. Stand near the water, and you’ll mainly hear the sound of rushing water. Walk through a forest, and you’ll move seamlessly through zones with crickets, birds of different types (birds chirping, woodpeckers pecking away at a tree, etc.), and so on. Usually multiple emitters are working at different distances from the player, so the overall result is a beautiful fabric of sound – genuinely, a soundscape.

Wow! You can shoot down birds. I just spotted a hawk flying low. I wasted a couple of arrows, before I saw the hawk alight on its nest in a nearby tree – funnily enough, the first time I ever noticed a nest on a tree, so far I’d only noticed the nests rock warblers and thrushes build in the rocks – at which point, shooting the hawk down was easy. The hawk flopped down to the ground, and I got me a hawk beak and some hawk feathers for my alchemy. Also – the physics system in the game enables you to “pick up”
any NPC or animal corpse, and to move it around – just as with any other physics interaction, you’re not putting the corpse in your inventory, but instead it floats in front of you in the camera, and you can drop it when you’ve placed it where you want. The dead hawk looks ugly – it’s clearly not intended to be seen from up close – but is satisfying to pick up this way, because as you move it around, the physics engine makes its wings flap around. It is a pity the corpse itself is of no use to the player. Would be fun if roasting a chicken actually involved roasting a chicken.

Speaking of weather, as I climb the mountain towards Bleak Falls Barrow, I walk right into a snow storm. It’s a very impressive experience, the intense sound of wind, the snow streaking across the screen, the reduced visibility. About all they could do to improve it further, would be to have gusts of wind that actually slow the player down.

I end the session at this point. I will actually start the next session after only a few minutes’ break, but a pause is needed to take stock. This session took 1 hour and 50 minutes, taking the total time up to about 9 hours. I have not yet completed any major quest, but as expected, this session involved more activity and less notes. The next session, in which I clear Bleak Falls Barrow, should be even less note-intensive, because dungeons are comparatively uninteresting in terms of world-building – but only comparatively.

3.3.6 Session 6 – November 19
As the next session begins, the snowstorm continues to blow, and I approach an old watch tower halfway up the mountain towards Bleak Falls Barrow. There are a couple of bandits in the tower, and I try to sneak up on them. Unfortunately, my abysmal sneaking skill, even though it actually increases in the attempt, is totally unable to hide me – revealing another of many small limitations, namely that weather conditions do not affect the NPCs’ ability to spot the player. You’d think that in a snowstorm, when I’m barely able to see twenty metres ahead, not to mention hardly hearing anything other than the wind, sneaking would be somewhat easier.

I clear out the tower. It’s just like many other ruins throughout Skyrim. It’s ruined, with massive holes in the walls, and missing floorboards at every floor. I find a few barrels filled with random loot – these kinds of barrels always contain random food items, such as apples, carrots, cabbages, sacks of flour and the like. In this particular case, it’s fine, but later in the game... it’s pretty ridiculous when you find such a barrel deep down inside a dungeon only inhabited by undead creatures. Did the skeletons order food? Or are these cabbages a thousand years old? These are questions you often ponder in Skyrim. I also find a chest at the top of the tower. This is also random loot. Most chests throughout Skyrim are sadly randomly stocked, which leads to a lot of frustration for higher level players, who find that the contents are just not worthwhile for a character of their level and resources.
Other than that, it’s well worth noting the small bits and pieces that tell the story of the environment. A small ale-keg and a couple of tankards on a little wooden table indicate that the bandits aren’t just here to watch over the path to their main hideout in the barrow. A drink every once in a while won’t hurt either.

It is worth noting that the snow storm I’m experiencing would be nowhere to be found if I were to walk back down to the bottom of the mountain, to Riverwood. Riverwood is completely free of snow. *Skyrim* doesn’t allow the environment to change, to be covered by snow for example. So, every location has a limited range of weather types. You will not see a snow storm in a snowless area. You will not see rain in a snowy area. Different locations thus also become stand-ins for different seasons. The mountains and the glaciers up north are covered by snow and provide the player with winter. Down south, there is a huge swathe of land near the city of Riften, covered in autumn-leaved birches. It’s called the Fall Forest, in case you don’t get the hint.

At last, I turn a corner, and find myself at the foot of a massive staircase that leads up to the Barrow above. The structure that invited me to explore at the start of the game is within reach. I kill three more bandits, fighting a long-range shoot-out with bows and arrows, as well as flame magic. At one point, I am severely wounded – close to dying, actually – so I quickly devour most of my food, taking my hit points back to almost full. Presumably, the bandit just stands around idly as I crunch through several cabbages, carrots, apples, mudcrab legs, rabbit legs, pheasant breasts, salmon pieces, and so on. Either that, or she (it is a she) is just too disgusted by the fact that all that meat is devoured raw.

I loot the bandits, taking all of their possessions – leaving them literally in their underwear (lucky that fantasy worlds have underwear, as I don’t think the real Vikings did. That would be embarrassing). I take a few screenshots of the epic snowstorm around Bleak Falls Barrow, but I’m sure not seeing much of the structure itself, visibility is impossible.

What can be seen, though, is that the structure is much like the upside-down ribs of a ship – all made of stone, however. There are many curves all throughout, it’s smooth, elongated, elegant, and somehow reminiscent of birds or dragons – which makes sense, given that most of these barrows originally belonged to the dragon cult, as I’ll find out during the game.

I open a massive stone door to get inside. The interior is magnificently arranged, impossible to describe – they knew this would be one of the very first, if not the first dungeon the player would enter, and they milked this moment for all it’s worth. It’s a ruin, but it’s an occupied ruin – among the broken stones, and columns, far ahead you can make out two bandits standing with their back towards you, glowing red by a campfire. Most dungeons in *Skyrim* are relatively linear – one entrance, one exit, and not much of a
labyrinth between them, either, very little branching in fact – if you see a corridor branching off, chances are it will lead to a collapsed roof or something else that makes the passage un-traversable. Only some structures are more maze-like. One interesting aspect of the typical *Skyrim* dungeon is the respect it has for the player’s time: after you reach the final chamber of the dungeon and defeat whatever’s in there, you usually discover that a path onwards from the final chamber actually spirals back and reconnects with the previously-explored part of the dungeon close to the exit (usually, this is done by having a door impossible to open from one side, so the player can only open it from the later corridor, or by having the player arrive above the original corridor, and jump down into it). Alternatively, the onward corridor can lead to a secondary exit from the dungeon – often one that’s impossible to access from the world outside, for example because it’s on top of an unclimbable slope.

One flaw in the interiors, in terms of their connection to the outside world, is that even though they often have massive holes in walls or ceilings, places where you can see the outside world, but cannot reach it (because you are not in the outside world:

One flaw in the interiors, in terms of their connection to the outside world, is that even though they often have massive holes in walls or ceilings, places where you can see the outside world, but cannot reach it (because you are not in the outside world: technically, *Skyrim*’s interiors are actually separate worlds, connected to the outside and to one another only by special doors), the exterior visible through these holes is not matched in terms of weather with the real exterior. It’s not unusual to enter a dungeon in terrible weather, and still see a shaft of light streaming down from a hole in the ceiling. But it doesn’t bother you, because it looks pretty.

The entry area has a little environmental story told – not much of a story, this time. You see a dead bandit, and in front of him, you see two dead skeevers. What’s a skeever? Ah. Well, one of the mainstays of fantasy RPGs are giant rats. Skeevers are giant rats, but I guess Bethesda didn’t want to just call them giant rats again, as they did in most of the earlier games. It’s such a simple thing, but it’s also effective world-building: encountering a familiar creature with an unfamiliar name communicates clearly that I’m in an unfamiliar cultural situation. Also, skeever sounds look.

I kill two bandits, and I’m overloaded again. Amazing that I’m so overloaded with loot as I enter the dungeon...

Many more dead skeevers, and another dead bandit, who has fallen backwards on top of what appears to be some sort of altar. Much blood, but this clearly was just a fight, not some sort of sacrifice. It just occurred to me – the very first introduction you get to skeevers are these dead skeevers. Their sheer numbers make you worry that these things will swarm you. They never do, of course.
I am now surrounded by the remains of an ancient civilisation – the same Nords as in modern Skyrim, yet different. This early in the game, I do not know much about it. For all I know, it could be something else entirely.

I walk past the bandit encampment – a campfire surrounded by a couple of bedrolls – and into another passage. Cobwebs. Big cobwebs. There will be spiders here. No point recording the details of this dungeon, however, so I’ll only note genuine novelties from this point onwards in the dungeon.

Ok, but the interior design of these barrows must be noted – *Skyrim’s* dungeons are beautiful and filled with details. Here I am, in what is essentially an enormous underground burial chamber – I guess it would be most reminiscent to the ancient Roman burial catacombs that can be found under Rome – niches in the walls, with dried up corpses (some of which get up to kill you) or skeletons. Altars in various places, and burial urns for cremated bodies. Needless to say, any time you find an urn, you’re likely to find a few gold pieces inside. Amazing how automatically you proceed to loot burial chambers – somehow, it just doesn’t register as an immoral act. When I was playing the game with my usual dark elf assassin character, I had to kind of explain this to myself, because dark elves supposedly have much more respect (and fear, perhaps) for the dead and undead than other cultures in Tamriel. I told myself that of course he’d respect a dark elf ancestral tomb, but these are just Nords...

Anyway, the other significant feature of this particular dungeon are the dozens of thick roots hanging down from the ceiling and lining the walls. It speaks to the ancientness of this tomb, that the trees above have had time to grow their roots down into the tomb.

What else would you expect to find in a burial tomb? A shelf case, with rolls of linen wrap. These evoke mummies, so they speak culture. In other tombs of this kind – probably later in this one, too – you also find embalming tools strewn all over the place. It’s like visiting the pyramids in Egypt, and finding that the embalmers left all their tools inside the burial chamber.

The corridors are well lit. All dungeons in *Skyrim*, even the darkest, most naturalistic caverns, are well-lit; sometimes the sources of lighting make sense – glowing mushrooms, shafts of light from a hole in the ceiling – other times, you find a lit torch or a brazier deep down in a burial chamber inhabited only by the undead and you... don’t care, because it looks good.

Right in front of me, a pile of dust suddenly fell from the ceiling, temporarily blocking up the view. When it clears up, I see a chamber up ahead. A bandit is standing inside, his back towards me. Because I’m sneaking, I am rewarded with a little scripted vignette – the bandit walks up to a lever in front of him, pulls it to open up a grate... and dies, as the lever fails to open the grate, but activates a dart trap. Your
first introduction to traps. Also an introduction to the dullest, most unimaginatively overused puzzle mechanism. There are three triangular blocks in the chamber, each carved to resemble animals – three animals, with each block having a different animal on each of its three sides. You must rotate the blocks to the correct position to solve the trap. The solution is usually visible somewhere in the chamber in the form of decorations, as is the case here – but sometimes you just find yourself solving it by trial and error. A couple of times, it’s interesting. After that, it’s just dull and repetitive. But it does convey information about the ancient Nords and their cult of animals. The chosen animals are clearly symbolic – throughout the game, you see wolves, bears, snakes, whales, eagles, dragons, owls, and moths, but certainly not skeevers or bunnies. Nobody ever explains these animals – just like a real archaeological excavation, you find the evidence, it’s up to you to interpret it.

Behind the grate, I find a book called Thief. It may be a biography or a work of fiction. Either way, it’s pure world-building – the story has no relevance to the game at hand (and in fact, this book probably appeared first in a previous game). But you are encouraged to read such books not just through curiosity, but also by... its price. Any time you find an item, you see its default price. This book is about ten times more expensive than other books, and based on that, you know it’s a “skill book”. That’s a book that, when you open it, will give you a bonus increase to a particular skill, related to the topic of the book.

I’ve levelled up again. Level 3 now. When you’re in a dungeon, levelling obviously happens more often – yet another confirmation that ultimately, Skyrim’s skill system is still oriented towards combat.

Soon afterwards, I meet a few live skeever, and kill them. Then I enter a spider-infested chamber – I actually have to hack through the thick webs blocking the passage. Inside, apart from a spider and some dessicated corpses (including skeevers – the spider is not picky), I find Arvel the Swift, evidently the leader of the band and the thief of Lucan’s golden claw. He begs to be cut down, I demand the claw first, but since he can’t move, I have no choice but to cut him down and hope he’ll cooperate. Naturally, he doesn’t. He runs off into the passage beyond, insisting he won’t share the treasure with anyone. As I follow him, I hear the sounds of an awoken draugr – a living Nord corpse – combat, and then nothing. When I enter the next chamber, I see a couple of draugr that I have to kill, and naturally I find Arvel’s body, the golden claw, and Arvel’s journal, which explains to me the value of the golden claw: it is a key. There is also a hint to take a close look at the “palm” of the claw (which you can do by rotating it in the inventory menu) to see three images of animals – these will provide the key to the door. Arvel is a typical example of the sort of NPC encounters you have in Skyrim – insignificant, but intended to make
the dungeon crawling more interesting. And journals, to be found on living or dead bandits and other NPCs, are definitely a mainstay as well: they tell the story of what happened, and what is to be done.

Soon afterwards, I encounter another draugr. I try to kill him with a flame spell, which I have to use for a very long time indeed to even dent him — the flame spell I have is naturally lousy, as I had it from the beginning more or less. What is notable, is that by the time I’m done, the wall behind the draugr is glowing with little embers — you can’t significantly modify the environment in Skyrim, but time and again you can leave a temporary mark of your passage.

I should note, as I go deeper into the dungeon, I am encountering various types of traps. Typical RPG stuff, spiky grates that slam shut on top of you, axe blades swinging from the ceiling above, and so on. These contribute virtually nothing to world-building, so they’re hardly relevant.

I’m using spellcasting a lot more this time round. I don’t normally use magic, but this makes for a nice change. I’ve just advanced to level 4, and improved my destruction magic skills with a couple of perks. I should add, the perks are not quite as detached from skill usage as I previously implied; most perks have a skill level requirement – i.e. you can only get this perk if you have more than X level in this skill.

After a lengthy romp through the dungeon, I finally approach the door that needs the golden claw. Like all such doors, this one is at the head of a chamber lined with bas relief carvings depicting — well, who knows what, but clearly cultural stories of the ancient Nords. The lock requires you to arrange the images of animals on three concentric circles to match the arrangement on the claw. Once the arrangement is correct, you use the claw to open the door. Beyond, I find a large burial chamber in a semi-natural cavern with waterfalls flowing all over the place. The heart of the burial chamber is the burial wall — a large, semi-circular wall covered with writing in the dragon language, also called a word wall. I’ve never actually tried to learn the dragon script, so I can’t decipher it, but yes, it does convey a story, telling a few sentences about the warrior buried in the tomb. It also evokes culture, because the style of these epitaphs is very reminiscent of the epitaphs written on Viking runestones that I’ve read about in the past. Each burial wall allows the player to learn one word in the dragon language, which is then used by the player as a “shout” — another form of magic. There are dozens of similar walls throughout Skyrim.

Naturally, the buried warrior gets up and tries to fight me, and he is the “boss” of the dungeon, the toughest fight. Afterwards, I collect from him his magical axe, and a dragon stone — meaningless to me for the moment, but will be required for the storyline soon.
I follow the passage onwards, and soon find myself emerging out of the cavern into the world outside, some distance away from Bleak Falls Burrow. I’m far up the hillside, overlooking the lake that provided such an epic sunset the previous day (previous, in terms of game time). It is purely coincidental this time, not arranged by the designers, but I emerge from the dungeon at 6 AM, so today I’m looking at the same lake in the light of dawn. A few more screenshots. Below me, I can see the hillside is strewn with mammoth bones. Nice.

I end this session at this point. This one took 2 hours and 20 minutes, taking the total playing and annotation time up to 11 hours. I expected to be playing the game for 10-15 hours, and this feels like a good estimate, provided that I spend the next four hours well. I may need to go as far as 20 hours, in order to annotate enough experiences of Whiterun. But certainly, I do think this early part of the game does a good job of exposing much of the mechanics relied on by the rest of the game for world-building and storytelling.

3.3.7 Session 7 – November 25
The next session begins with me making my way down the mountainside towards the lake, and taking screenshots like mad. I switch off the HUD for clean visuals, and just snap away like a tourist. The dawn light is incredible. For the first time, I genuinely appreciate those so-called “god rays” – yes, the light is amazingly improved compared to normal edition of *Skyrim*.

On my way back to Riverwood, I stop by a tiny hunter’s camp: hunters are in some ways like bandits – nameless and generic – but unlike bandits, they are friendly. You will see them in many places across Skyrim, often stalking animals. It’s one of the many small NPC encounters that help to create an impression of a lived-in world. The hunter – well, huntress – also makes me aware of the fact that I’ve caught a disease: ataxia. Must have contracted it from a skeever or something. Diseases are useless in *Skyrim*. I suppose nothing can beat dying of cholera in *Arena*, right? No, but really, diseases are just so lousy here, they are one of the weakest aspects of interaction with the game world. This is clear from the fact that I didn’t notice the disease until I approached the huntress, who, rather than being friendly, would say things like “get away from me!” and “you don’t look so good.”

So, on the one hand, we’ve got another example of an NPC reacting to the player’s condition, and thus helping build the social fabric of the world, where being visibly ill actually makes you socially undesirable (albeit with no genuine effects – people tell you to go away, but they don’t kick you out or anything). On the other hand, however, we’ve got the fact that I’m so unaware of my illness, I need NPCs to tell me about it. Now that I know, I go into the magic menu, then into the active effects submenu, and then – after a key press and two mouse clicks – I finally see an indication that I am indeed ill, and that it is
having an adverse effect on some of my statistics. Specifically, it makes it harder for me to pick pockets and open locks – I guess my hands must be shaking, or something. However, there is one other aspect of the illness that is worth pointing out – the very fact that it is there, that interacting with a diseased animal allowed me to catch the illness. There are various diseases in Skyrim, and they can be caught from different animals – this is not a novelty, the catching system is fundamentally the same since Arena, but it’s still a form of interaction that helps build the world. Diseases used to also be a really important aspect in Morrowind, where corprus was a particularly serious disease that played a crucial role in the story.

In the meantime, I continue, and taking some more screenshots, I find a small cabin in the woods. I know this cabin from a previous playthrough, so no surprises there. It’s a very typical example of Skyrim’s small locations conveying additional stories. The owner, Anise, seems like a completely innocent old peasant woman, who’s living all the way out here by herself, scratching out a living by growing a few potatoes and other vegetables in her garden. Her greetings match this story. It actually fooled me the first time I met her, and I soon left the cabin, not thinking there’s anything noteworthy about it. When I came back through the area some time later, I noticed that actually, there’s something suspicious about it all – for one thing, Anise is wearing robes typical of a magic user. Also, there are items related to alchemy on her table, including hagraven feathers – hagravens being pretty tough monsters, half-witches half-birds, it’s quite remarkable she’d have these. And a book about alchemy near her bed. Then… wait, is that a trapdoor I’m seeing underneath a pile of hay in the corner…? I sneak over there while Anise is outside, and pick the lock. The cellar is much more impressive than the shack above, and is a place for evil experiments, it seems – there’s an alchemy lab, an enchanting table, which is all fine, but then there’s skulls, and a letter to a certain Helgi, in which Anise explains that she wants to form a witches’ coven here. I go back up to the top. Anise is nowhere to be seen, but then I find her standing outside, flames bursting out of her hands: “none may know my secret!” I try to flame magic her, but she seems well-nigh immune, so I must switch to sparks to electrocute her. Oddly enough, this is one of the few encounters in Skyrim that make me feel bad. It was my choice to go down into the basement, and had I not done that, she wouldn’t have attacked me. It’s funny, because she is an evil witch, after all, but the fact that she is also a benign old lady colours that impression.

It’s also worth mentioning the rather clumsy property system Skyrim has – just like Oblivion before it. Any item that belongs to someone – unless they’re your friend and willing to part with the given item – is marked as owned, and by taking it, you are stealing. If you are seen stealing, the town guards will put a bounty on your head. Fair enough. But also, stolen items cannot be sold – merchants will refuse to buy them – except to the fences in the Thieves’ Guild. Which would make sense for items that are truly
special and recognizable – but a stolen carrot?! How do people recognise a stolen carrot? Another problem with the property system is that if you happen to kill the owner – as you do in this case – their property remains their property – so all the alchemy ingredients I find in Anise’s cabin cannot be sold. Luckily, with alchemy ingredients, you can at least “launder” them – when you make a potion out of stolen ingredients, the potion is legit. And yes, a cabbage soup out of stolen cabbages will also be legit. Silly, silly.

Incidentally, Anise, like all other elderly inhabitants of Skyrim, belongs to an entirely separate race (as do all the children of Skyrim). This is basically because the game determines a character’s body based on their race, and the elderly have wizened, wrinkly bodies (while children, of course, are children). It’s good to have three different ages for characters – children, adults, and the elderly – but the system is awkward, because it means that children and the elderly in Skyrim can only be Nords (because there are no separate nine races for children and the elderly). Also, it seems to me that if the character generator can age my face by procedurally adding wrinkles, the same should be doable with bodies.

When I make my way back to Riverwood, I notice Faendal picking up some firewood from a pile near the lumber mill, and carrying an armful to another pile near the blacksmith’s forge. This is neat, it’s yet another small NPC action that helps create the impression that the NPCs actually have real jobs to perform. I also use a woodchopping axe I found in the bandit camp to chop up some firewood myself on the chopping block – it’s a boring activity, as I only activate it, and then watch my character in third person chopping up block after block, but the result is a bunch of firewood that I can deliver to Hod in the lumber mill – he pays me five gold for every bunch of firewood I chop up. In other places around Skyrim, you can similarly earn work by collecting vegetables off the fields and bringing them to a farmer; ironically, plants in the fields cannot have owners, and so it’s possible to collect vegetables off one farmer’s field, and sell them to another farmer.

I sell off all the weapons and armour to Alvor – keeping some good stuff for myself, of course – and find myself crossing the 1000 gold barrier for the first time. Of course, I could easily spend all of that even in this tiny village, simply by buying some potions and other similar items. But I’m definitely getting wealthier. I then deliver the golden claw to Lucan, whose reward and some potion-selling pushes me over 2000 gp. Also, once I deliver the claw, Camilla’s greeting changes: “it’s a fine day with you around.” NPCs have disposition stats that affect how they will regard you; disposition can get lower, or higher. In Camilla’s case, her disposition has now reached a high enough level that I could ask her to marry me, and she would agree – however, in Skyrim, in order to ask someone to marry you, you have to be wearing an amulet of Mara (one of the Divines) on your neck, for some reason. That’s as close as the
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game gets to simulating any sort of courtship. Once you have an amulet, you’ll get an additional
dialogue option with any character interested in marrying you. If you ask them, they will agree, and then
tell you to meet them at the temple in Riften – apparently the only place in Skyrim where people marry.
When you get there, you find your future spouse waiting there, and you go through the marriage
ceremony, during which you must once more confirm your choice (naturally, your chosen spouse will
not be so friendly if you choose to back out at this point, although you can persuade them to have
another go), and then after a little ceremony with the priest, you’re married. Once you are married, if
you own a house, or your spouse owns a house, you can choose where the two of you will live. I also
mentioned before that if you sleep in a bed, you get a rested bonus. Well, if you sleep in a bed you own,
you get a well-rested bonus. And if you sleep in a bed you own, with your spouse, you get an additional
bonus. Slightly primitive, but still it adds a little more complexity to the game. Some spouses can also go
out with you on adventures as companions. And if they stay at home, they will be able to provide you
once a day with a home-cooked meal – a special type of food with special bonus effects. They also set
up a store (only in their own minds, however – the store doesn’t exist anywhere physically), and
whenever you ask them about how the store is doing, they give you some money from the profits.

I now set out from Riverwood to Whiterun. And by the way, isn’t it convenient that the storyline gives
you an excuse to visit the jarl? It would be kind of socially awkward for an unknown to visit the jarl
otherwise. On my way, I do a bit of hunting – a deer, a rabbit, another deer, a wolf that attacks me. I’m
being a bit perverse about it, because instead of pulling out my bow, I chase down animals and
electrocute them with the sparks spell. At one point, I chase a rabbit and keep trying to fry him even as
he jumps into the river and swims across to the other side. Hilariously, I continue with my electric spells
while in the water, and nothing happens to me. It’s a bit of a missed opportunity – if fire sets alight
those oil slicks, they could have had electricity course across a small area of water, too.

When I get close to Whiterun, I see a very visible change in flora – this is open tundra country now, a
broad, temperate but mostly tree-less grassland. It’s very striking as you make your way down the hill
into the tundra, as you see the vast open plain in front of you, with the hill on which Whiterun is built
dominating the view. Incidentally, the *Pocket Guide to the Empire, 1st Edition* that was included in the
manual for Redguard, talked about Nord settlement patterns – how those ancient settlements, of which
only ruins remain for the most part – were built on tops of mountains for defensive positions, whereas
more recent cities and villages tend to be in the valleys below. It is striking to me right now, however,
because just today in my spare time I was reading about settlement patterns in Papua New Guinea, and
it was literally the same thing – in the days of tribal warfare, villages were positioned on hilltops, but
with the arrival of the colonial powers that put an end to tribal warfare, villages moved into the valleys
closer to fertile land. The similarity is remarkable in that in both cases, there is evidence presented of a shift in settlement patterns, and an explanation is provided.

In the tundra, I pick up new varieties of ingredients for alchemy – lavender, tundra cotton, and a lot of red mountain flowers – in the higher mountains, blue mountain flowers dominated. I also meet a guard, and notice another small social behavioural detail – when you stand very close to a character, they will, after a moment, make a sharp movement backwards, to a more comfortable talking distance. You invaded their personal space. Also, guards are one of the key narrative progress indicators in Skyrim – as you proceed through the story, their greetings change, because they usually tell you the latest they’ve heard about the events taking place (usually without connecting you to the events). Right now, he’s telling me a dragon supposedly hit Helgen. It’s another way if indicating to the player the world is aware of what is going on.

Whiterun is a run-down old city, its walls look more like ruins that proper walls, which is really a bit odd, given how much conflict there had been in the recent decades in Tamriel. Outside the city walls, I pass by a mead brewery, several farms, and a stables, where I could buy a horse, if I were to show up during the day (it is evening now, and everyone’s gone home). Outside the city walls, there is also a small flat area where, sometimes, you will encounter a Khajit – those are the cat people – caravan camped out, with a couple of yurts and a campfire. There are a couple of these caravans in Skyrim, and they periodically walk from one city to another. The Khajit are not permitted into cities in Skyrim (as usual: the player excepted, if he chooses to play a Khajit), so this is why they camp outside, where you can trade with them. They are basically the gypsies of Skyrim. The Khajit caravan leaders can also occasionally give you radiant quests, sending you off to some random dungeon to recover a random item that’s been stolen from them.

At the gate, I am told that I no one is allowed to enter the city without special permission. This is mainly an excuse for the game to introduce me to the three options available when you need to get someone to change their mind – persuade, bribe, or intimidate. Just for the fun of it, I try intimidation, but predictably, the guard does not feel particularly intimidated by a lone traveller. I persuade him to let me in instead, by telling him I have news about the dragon – it is why I came to see the jarl, after all.

I stop at the gate of Whiterun, ending the present session after 2 hour and 10 minutes. So, I’m around 13 hours total playing and annotation time now. I believe I will go up to at least 17 hours, because I think I’ll need at least two 2 hour sessions to make the most of Whiterun. I do not think much more than that will be needed, however. Riverwood and Whiterun are more than enough to showcase world-building in Skyrim.
3.3.8  Session 8 – November 29

I begin the next session by levelling up – I had been able to do that for a while, but forgotten about it. I am now level 4. I then enter the city, and immediately encounter another vignette staged for my benefit – the city’s blacksmith, Adrianne Avenicci is talking to someone about a large order of swords for the Imperial Legion. She complains that it’s a large order, and points the man to another smith, from the Gray-Mane family. Her interlocutor, whose name I didn’t remember, except that his surname is Battle-Born, retorts that he’d rather deal with Ulfric Stormcloak.

I have a brief chat with Adrianne, who was just leaving her forge for the day, and tells me a little bit about Whiterun – nothing memorable. I then run into another citizen, Carlotta, who complains about the attention she gets from the men of Whiterun, all proposing to marry her. She doesn’t want that, and adds that the bard at the Bannered Mare is the worst. I take on the implied quest by proposing that I talk to him. Carlotta is an interesting character that shows how a few details can evoke a powerful sense of backstory. We’re never told anything about her husband; it’s only mentioned offhandedly that she’s a widow. She is fending off the attention of men, because she only cares about bringing up her daughter “and no man will get in the way.” This story evokes situations we know from the media, of single mothers struggling to bring up a child, doggedly determined to do so without asking or accepting anyone’s assistance. We instantly feel like we know what this character is all about.

On my way up to the Bannered Mare, I also meet Olfrid Battle-Born, who is the head of the Battle-Born clan. His opening lines reveal that there is a conflict between clans Battle-Born and Gray-Mane in Whiterun; when I ask him about both clans, he naturally presents the situation in favour of the Battle-Borns. It becomes clear that the conflict is about tradition and change – the Battle-Borns represent change, the Gray-Manes tradition. Both seem Nordish enough in their culture, though. This is an example of a colonial or post-colonial conflict, where the colonised society is torn apart by those who feel the need to modernise to take advantage of the colonial situation, and those who insist on resisting change in order to resist colonial pressures. It’s a common enough thing in discussions of international relations... outside of Skyrim. And it’s not new in the TES series, either, as similar themes had been running through Morrowind.

The city marketplace is empty this time of evening, so I enter the Bannered Mare. This is definitely a very different kind of tavern to the Sleeping Giant. It’s not... sleeping. In fact, even as I pause the game to take notes, I hear in the background a “tavern noise” background soundtrack, which is basically the din of a tavern. The people I see in the tavern are actually nowhere near as numerous as the sound implies, so it’s all about making an impression.
In the tavern, I encounter Jon Battle-Born and Olfina Gray-Mane, the latter being a barmaid here (Olfrid did say the Gray-Manes are poor). While their families may be feuding, Jon and Olfina are doing the Romeo and Juliet thing. Jon explains to me that the two families used to be actually very close, and the real point of disagreement is Ulfric Stormcloak’s uprising; he doesn’t say it outright, but it’s clear one family sides with Ulfric, the other with the Empire. No prizes for guessing who chooses which side. Jon and Olfina have a flirtatious vignette they go through, but this is one of the ones the game doesn’t care if you hear or not. I started a conversation with another character, and in the background these two started talking.

I have also been pointed – by a couple of people, actually – to the Companions at the Jorrvaskr. Every TES game has various organisations the player may join, but the mainstay is a fighters’ guild, a thieves’ guild, and a mages’ guild. There is a Thieves Guild in Skyrim, but no fighters nor mages – instead, there is the Companions and the College of Winterhold. It amounts to the same thing.

It’s worth noting that each guild is in a different city, and there are other organisations elsewhere – for example, the Bard College in Solitude, and of course the Imperial Legion and the Stormcloaks in Solitude and Windhelm. There is also the Dark Brotherhood, an assassins’ guild, but I’m not quite sure where they are as I’ve actually never tried joining them. So, most cities in Skyrim have attractions for the player. The remaining ones also have something to get the player to visit them. For example, should the player be infected by vampirism after a fight with vampires (vampirism is a disease in TES, rather than a state of undeath), the only cure for vampirism can be found in the town of Morthal, which otherwise has precious little going for it indeed.

Oh, as I was entering the tavern, a child begged me for a coin. She explained that this is what she does since her parents died. I have the option of offering to adopt her, and I propose this, but since I don’t have a house yet, she walks away disappointed. Once you adopt a child, she will live in one of the houses you own, and you can bring her clothes and toys from your travel.

I also talked with Ysolda, a young merchant-in-training who explains to me a bit more about the Khajit and why they are not trusted in Skyrim – she herself hangs out with them a lot, apparently. She needs a mammoth’s tusk for the Khajit, and I offer to get one for her. I won’t do it right now, but I did in a previous game: merely doing this tusk task will be enough for Ysolda to like you sufficiently that if you’re wearing an Amulet of Mara, she’ll agree to marry you. And there’s Hulde, who owns the tavern, and actually plans to sell it to Ysolda when she retires. She is able to supply me with rumours, but not a job at this point – I already have a bounty letter from the Whiterun hold, which I picked up in Riverwood, and I won’t be able to get another similar job until I collect the bounty on the previous one. Finally, I
meet a young man who works at Belethor’s goods store, and tells me I can buy supplies there during the day.

In general, a few minutes in Whiterun, and I’m actually a bit overwhelmed by the new information. It’s not that there is a huge amount of it while I’m inside the game; but the information is coming in dribs and drabs from various characters and various encounters, and trying to note down who said what is bothersome. But this is exactly the point: it is through all these numerous conversations that Skyrim tells its tales, not caring in the least about whether you hear all of them, or indeed what order you encounter these characters with. Each provides a different piece to some puzzle, and it’s up to you to figure out how the pieces fit, and which puzzle they fit into.

A few months ago, when playing Skyrim with a different character, I unexpectedly discovered that when I walked into this tavern and sat down in a chair, the owner called Olfina over to me to serve me. I try it this time, but it doesn’t happen, possibly because I’ve already bought something off Olfina. But this is another example of a way the game can react to my actions. I also witness many more custom animations here in the tavern – one of the patrons dances (well, twitches, really – it’s intentionally a very clumsy dance with a mug of ale in his hand) to a tune, while one of the serving girls in the kitchen uses a ladle to pour sauce over a roast on a spit. Oh, and I talk to the bard, Mikael – I use the intimidate option to tell him to leave Carlotta alone, and it works, he promises to do so. I vaguely recall that the last time I’d tried this, he didn’t back down, and challenged me to a fist-fight, which I naturally won.

There are a few situations in the game where players have opportunities to get into fist-fights, which evidently occupy the place of armed duels in Skyrim.

I explore the tavern a bit more. I go upstairs, and witness Mikael the bard going to sleep – apparently, it’s 2 AM already. It’s a good opportunity to try out the option of renting a room for the night – I go down to Hulde and pay for a room, at which point she leads me upstairs to my room. Hilariously, this turns out to be the room in which Mikael is sleeping on the bed. A bit of an awkward bug. I wake him up and tell him to play a song – then quickly go to sleep in his place.

In the early morning, I wake up well-rested – for the night, the bed was mine, after all. When I go downstairs, I encounter the town drunk, who actually has a quest for me, to get him a bottle of Argonian wine from the tavern. I don’t bother with it, but it’s a great example of the diverse range of quests Skyrim has to offer: everything from slaying a world-eating dragon to fetching wine for a drunk.

Since the marketplace is still deserted, I walk up a staircase to a higher part of the city to take some screenshots of the sunrise and the jarl’s palace, the Dragonsreach. Exploring around a bit, I hear two more vignettes – a little girl extorting money from a Battle-Born boy, of all things – and pick up an extra
quest. These are no longer really worth noting down, the story is similar – a husband and wife argue in public, giving you an opportunity to hear about their problem, and then you can walk up to one of them, in this case the husband, to offer to solve their problem by doing this quest (the conflict was that the wife didn’t want her husband going off after the thieves of his father’s sword). Oh, the husband was also a trainer – I was able to pay him to improve my single-handed weapons skill by three points (to prevent the players from paying their way through level progression, you can only train up to five points per level, not for one skill, but for all skills; this is why I only trained three points of single-handed weapons, as I hope to get some other training this level for other skills). In the same area, I also encounter a big dead tree – the Gildergreen – and a conversation with the priestess of Kynareth reveals both information about the war’s impact on her work in the temple, and about the dead Gildergreen needing a special quest to be revived. I ignore this opportunity for the moment. Meanwhile, I also listen to a street-corner preacher who does exactly what street-corner preachers do – constantly preaching to anyone who will listen. All day, he repeats the same dialogue lines, and in this case, it makes perfect sense that he’s so repetitive. He claims to be a prophet of Talos, the ninth Divine repressed by the Empire following the war. He provides you with another snippet of the story of Talos, who as a human founded the Empire, and then was declared to be a god after he died – or ascended, I guess. The High Elves object to the idea of a human becoming a god, so this is why they forced the Empire to suppress the cult.

Religion is a funny, and kind of pathetic thing in TES. When you pray to a god, which you do by simply clicking on a statue or altar of theirs, you get a temporary bonus depending on which god you prayed to, and you are also cured of diseases (other than vampirism or lycanthropy). This includes Talos, and consequently, there can be little debate about whether the Aldmeri Dominion is right or wrong about Talos being a false god – the game mechanics simply show them to be wrong, and that’s that.

Also, as I roam the city, I pick it clean of flowers – alchemy makes them valuable to me. It’s interesting how quickly you become attuned to spotting them on the screen, even as you move through a complex environment. Perhaps the best way to make the player aware of flora is to make it valuable to him.

I go back down to the marketplace, tell Carlotta Mikael won’t bother her anymore – another quest done – and get a small financial reward in return. I listen to another short vignette involving Ysolda and one of the other merchants. If I were to hang around the marketplace for a few game hours, I would hear several more vignettes – this is the place for them.

I had been worried after the first few hours of playing the game that there’s a lot more note-taking than game playing going on. But I see now that I was correct in expecting this ratio to reverse in time. Here I
am, in Whiterun, a much bigger city than Riverwood, and it feels like there’s just nothing else to note here: the scale is different, but the basic structure of telling stories in snippets by a multitude of conversations and vignettes, and using them also to inform the player about potential quests (including the random so-called radiant quests), is the same. The pattern of NPCs offering feedback on my actions by responding with different dialogues and facial expressions (although I don’t think I’ve mentioned these earlier; but yes, NPCs show if they like you or not), is the same. The guards have now begun noting my skills also – one of the guards claims to have heard about me and my honeyed words, which is basically the game acknowledging that my speechcraft skill has improved – but because speechcraft improves through specific conversations, and in my case improved when I threatened Mikael to get him to leave Carlotta alone, the player could easily read this as a comment on the event that had taken place (although... honeyed words? A threat?).

The daily routines people have, whether it’s sweeping a home, cooking in the tavern, making potions at the alchemist shop or forging blades, are richer here with more custom animations and more unique NPCs, but the difference is quantity, not quality or kind.

This is the story of *Skyrim* in every aspect. There are many, many, many more books to be found – but while they will reveal many different things about the world, the *mechanism* of telling stories through books is the same for all of them: unreliability and subjectivity. There are many biomes to be seen, and weather types to experience, but for the mechanics of how a biome is shown, and its affordances, the rest is repetition. Some plants can be picked, and are identifiable by being labelled. Other plants and trees cannot be picked, and are entirely inert. Animals can be killed, and some items can be taken off them – different types of animals offer different items, but the principle is the same (and boring: the interface for skinning an animal is identical as for taking a sword off a dead enemy – you’re hardly experiencing the process of skinning the animal). You can use particular worksites, such a chopping block, to produce resources, and the process is the same regardless of whether it’s mining metals or stone or clay with a pick, or chopping wood with an axe: an animation is performed, and as it is performed, items are added to your inventory until you have all you can carry, or – only in the case of metals – until the worksite is exhausted. Other worksites, such as alchemy labs, cooking pots, tanning racks, and forge equipment – allow you to convert one or multiple items into either a new product, or into an improvement of an existing product (somehow, it takes as much iron to forge a dagger, as it does to subsequently sharpen the dagger). Again, different sites will be encountered throughout the game, but the principle will remain the same. Finally, I can enter many dungeons – and the word “dungeon” can mean a great variety of different sites, from ancient ruins to mysterious forest caves inhabited by wild animals, to vampire lairs, and whatever else – and each one will be relatively unique in
appearance and content, many will yield new stories by way of overheard bandit conversations, notes to be found on the corpses of dead adventurers (who all insist on keeping journals – this is a remarkably literate world, for the player’s benefit), or by way of environmental storytelling (my absolute favourite: a burnt-out cabin in the woods east of Riften, where you find a dead conjurer in the middle of a pentagram, accompanied by a flame atronarch who evidently killed him and burnt down the cabin; a close inspection reveals that one of the candles of the pentagram had been blown out, telling the observant player how the atronarch got out of control).

There are only a few things which I feel I need to record more in this playthrough, in order to reasonably complete the sweep of worldbuilding methods in *Skyrim*. Firstly, I need to play through a bit more of the story, as so far all I’ve described is the introduction. I will visit the jarl in the next session. Secondly, I have not yet had any random encounters in the wilderness, and these are important. Thirdly, a bit more about what you can do with a house and with a follower would be good. For now, I end this session after 2 hours of gameplay time, the last ten minutes of which I spend in an alchemy shop, churning out potions to sell. I do need more money to improve my equipment, after all. And how many flowers can a man carry, anyway? As I do so, I also considerably improve my alchemy skill, and level up again.

However, another thing did occur to me as I was in the alchemy store. The least tangible aspect of *Skyrim*’s world-building is how the pieces fit together, how a story is told by the presence or absence of particular types of elements. Thus, Whiterun tells a story not only in all the conversations I have with characters, but also by who the characters are as a group. We’ve got Nords and numerous Imperials. Arcadia the alchemist, who is also an Imperial, tells me she’d been living in Skyrim for twenty years, and no Stormcloak will make her leave. This line of dialogue points the player’s attention to the fact that hey, there are a lot of Imperials in Whiterun, but it’s not like they’re running the place as a colony: you have Carlotta, the widow with a small child, running a stall in the marketplace. You’ve got Arcadia the alchemist. Then there’s Adrianne, a blacksmith – though admittedly, her father is one of the jarl’s advisors. Apart from Imperials, there is also a considerable Redguard presence in the city, the Redguards being the black ethnic group of humans in Tamriel. The city of Whiterun reveals itself to be open and cosmopolitan not by anyone’s words, but by the presence of these diverse peoples. And of course, we can see that it’s not all cosmopolitan and open, because we know about the conflict between the Empire’s supporters and Stormcloak supporters (not to mention the prophet of Talos, declaring he’ll keep preaching even if the jarl’s men try to arrest him). As a matter of fact, when I exit the alchemist, I encounter one more vignette in the marketplace – the elderly Gray-Mane lady is having an angry argument with two Battle-Borns; they tell her, that her son chose the wrong side (Stormcloaks) and is dead. She tells them they’re wrong, because she knows he’s still alive, and accuses them of knowing
where he’s kept a prisoner. This is both an invitation to pursue a new quest, which will ultimately reveal she is right, and will lead you to rescue her son from a Thalmor prison, and it is yet another bit of the Gray-Mane vs. Battle-Born story. Why have things gone sour between them? Perhaps not just because they support different sides, but because both are directly involved in the war, thus facing each other on the battlefield. Although the Battle-Borns’ unwillingness to reveal what they actually do know about the imprisonment of the young Gray-Mane is also yet another push for the player to side with the Stormcloaks, who seem simpler and less sneaky – which is peculiar, because you already have so many reasons to side with the Stormcloaks, it seems like overkill.

All in all, Whiterun has a very specific character as a city, and this character is visible not only in the architecture and the stories you hear, but also in the way it is put together from various NPCs – and they vary not only in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of social station and family situation, from upper class nobility through the middle class craftsmen, warriors, and merchants, to lower class petty merchants, and the homeless; from orphaned children to widows to ordinary families to large clan families. Also, the NPCs themselves reveal their status not by talking about it, but by the clothes they are wearing. The presence of different food items reveals much about the economy, what kind of produce is grown. In this way, *Skyrim* employs environmental storytelling both at a micro and macro level.

Anyway – the session ends after 2 hours, with a total play time now of 15 hours. Will the next session be the last, or will I need to push closer to 20 hours? We’ll see.

### 3.3.9 Interlude – November 29

Before I begin the next session, there is something that occurred to me while I was paging through the official game guide, and which I really should have thought of mentioning in the very first session, during character creation. Another way *Skyrim* builds its world is by a form of racial profiling: depending on the race chosen by the player, you will get different distributions of skill points at the start of the game, as well as unique special racial abilities for each of the ten races available. I vaguely recall one of the Master’s theses written about *Morrowind* discussed this aspect of *Morrowind* as a procedural form of racial rhetoric – i.e. racism. That’s a very simplistic view, which presumes that any claim of genuine differences between races and ethnicities must be derived from racism. In fact, in reality different cultural groups do propel their members to favour particular activities over others, and so there can be differences in abilities between cultures. In a fantasy world where some cultures are literally a biologically distinct race, these differences can of course go much deeper. The shorthand way of presenting information about particular cultural affinities is simply through gameplay. For example, the Bretons have a backstory of being a unique racial mix – the original human Nord settlers interbred with
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the elves inhabiting the land, and over time, human appearance prevailed, so Bretons are considered human rather than mixed or elven, but they did retain an elvish (biological or cultural? Who knows?) affinity towards magic.

In the intervening couple of days since the previous session, I also tried to figure out, what does the lighting in the revamped Skyrim remind me of? It changes the game quite dramatically, especially in those morning and nightfall moments. Then I remembered – Miasmata (2012). A small indie survival game (and an RPG... kind of), made by an unimaginably small team of two brothers. Its landscapes were not brilliant, but the lighting, with god-rays, was extremely memorable. In general, Miasmata is a game worthy of note, although it never made much of an impact. It is a game that shows a few interesting tricks when it comes to interaction with the environment. For example, unlike just about every other first-person game out there, in Miasmata you don’t stop moving the moment you let go of the “forward” key. You are carried forward a little bit further, in much the same way that a runner does not stop the moment they choose to, but only when they run out of momentum. This makes slopes in Miasmata quite harrowing experiences, both as you’re struggling to climb, and when you are walking down, constantly at risk of losing control and tumbling down. Miasmata’s map interaction was also noteworthy, as the player needed to employ triangulation of landmarks in order to establish their location on the map. This, especially at night, made it very easy to get lost. And speaking of night, Miasmata was not a casual game, and was not afraid of imposing actually genuine darkness on the player, where walking at night practically guaranteed getting lost or taking a fall. This in turn reminded me: while playing Skyrim for this journal, I have not yet actually experienced the countryside at night. In one case, I slept through the night, in another case, I spent the night in a dungeon, fortuitously emerging at dawn, and on the third night, I was in Whiterun, where I did get to see the way night-time affected NPC schedules, but I didn’t experience a night-time landscape. This is something I need to do before I finish this autoethnographic playthrough – I need a night-time session to record how this experience differs from daytime. I believe a return to the forest will be optimal for this.

So, as I sit down to begin session 9, I believe I have at least two sessions left to go: in the first, I need to experience the jarl’s palace and the storyline-related quests that follow. In the second, I need to experience Skyrim at night. And now that I think about it, there may also be a need for a third session, where I explore the experience of joining a faction.

3.3.10 Session 9 – November 29

When the session restarts, I’m back in the marketplace – and absolutely surrounded by a cacophony of voices. A vignette conversation between one of the stall-owners and a customer; another stall-owner
yelling about his merchandise; a guard telling me – for no apparent reason – that I look tired and I can rent a bed at the Bannered Mare (been there, done that). As is so often the case with *Skyrim*, the diversity of options is such that I end up distracting myself away from what I intended to do, namely to visit the jarl. Instead, I talk to the elderly Fralia Gray-Mane, who had accused the Battle-Borns of knowing what happened to her son. When I ask her how she knows they are lying about her son, she tells me it’s too dangerous to talk in public, and to meet her at her house if I wish to help. Then she leaves her stall right then in the middle of the day (I’m sure that’s not suspicious at all), and heads home. I follow her. It’s a good opportunity to record some notes about the interior of a private house in Skyrim.

The quest-related conversation with Fralia, and her other, non-kidnapped son, is the usual RPG fare. They’re just really sure those Battle-Borns must know something – and of course, they’ll turn out to be right. It’s pretty rare to be sent to break into someone’s house just to find out that there’s nothing there. I recall an article where someone who worked with Ken Rolston mentioned this as one of Rolston’s rules – that the player may not be deceived. It makes sense – imagine the frustration of searching a house and thinking you’re missing something, when in fact there’s nothing there to miss.

The Gray-Manes’ house is a typical wealthy family mansion in Skyrim. It’s very Nordic in character, with carved and painted wooden columns, simple decorations (woven baskets? That’s what they seem to be; also, holly-like wreaths of snowberry bush) on the walls, a skull on the bookshelf... err, what? That was pretty random. But everyone keeps skulls on their shelves, right? All of a sudden, the skull I found in the witch’s hideout doesn’t seem like such certain proof of her witchiness. Anyway, also there are lots of books on the shelves – people in Skyrim read a lot, far more than would be expected from a medieval world, particularly one in which there appears to be only two institutions of public education, one teaching magic and the other for bards. Books, as noted previously, serve multiple purposes. In many ways, they’re like NPCs, except in a static, portable form. You gain knowledge from books about the game world, sometimes you gain knowledge of *TES* lore that has nothing to do with this particular game, and in some rare cases, you gain quests. This was the case here, when I opened up the *Lost Legends* book, in which a scholar from Skyrim recounts a few legends from the area. My character conveniently knows exactly which of these legends is worthy of note, and I get a quest to investigate the Gauldur legend of a great warrior and sage murdered by his three sons to get his magical amulet. This is a quest I had done on my previous playthrough, it leads to three different tombs where Gauldur’s sons were buried, and naturally still haunt the places as the undead, and then once you defeat each of them, you are given a further hint that leads you to Gauldur’s own tomb. There, for some reason, you fight the undead three sons again, but once you defeat them, Gauldur’s spirit rewards you by mending the amulet that his sons had split into three fragments. Anyway, long story short: books can give quests.
As for house decorations, the Hearthfire add-on, which is installed here, but which I won’t get to explore on this playthrough, involves you building a house from scratch – the same simple production system that’s used for cooking and smithing, if you have the right items, select an option, and out pops out another part of the house. First the foundations, then the wooden frame of the house, then the clay walls, the roof, and doors. Next, you can attach further areas to the house by building them in a similar way. You can also decorate the house with furniture and hunting trophies, all of which must be produced in the same way as cooking and smithing: you activate a worktable, get the right items, and instantly create the object you’re trying to make. Unlike smithing or alchemy, there is no risk of failure here, and the items you produce are all of a uniform quality. Wish I had one of those workbenches back in high school CDT classes. This lack of complexity to production is a failure on the part of *Skyrim*, but also not a failure – the developers consciously chose to not explore this area further by adding more complexity, because the game did not require more complexity for their purposes. But as the variation in outcomes for crafting and alchemy shows, certainly more complexity could be involved.

One other thing regarding decorations: I mentioned hunting trophies. I didn’t see any in the Gray-Manes’ house, but hunting trophies are quite a common feature in Skyrim. You’ll see anything from mudcrabs and slaughterfish to wolf, bear, and deer heads mounted on walls. There are also special mounts to hang up weapons, mannequins to display armour, and glass display cases to showcase your jewellery. It’s actually rather odd, given the central theme of the game, that there are no dragon head trophies to produce for your house – but you do get to make armour out of dragon bones and dragon scales.

As I walk out of the Gray-Manes’ house, I happen to see the Hall of the Dead in front of me – the modern city catacombs, that don’t feature any walking dead. There’s a few small obelisks outside, possibly commemorations or graves (although I have seen ordinary gravestones elsewhere in Skyrim). It’s interesting to note the night-shade flowers that grow around this particular area, and just this particular area. Night-shades are evidently somehow associated with the dead in Skyrim, though whether it’s because they are planted around burial sites for cultural reasons, or whether they naturally (magically?) grow around burial sites, is a question impossible to answer.

I soon find myself in Dragonsreach, the palace of the jarl. When I enter, I’m witness to yet another vignette staged for my benefit – the jarl discussing the dragon appearances with his advisor. Immediately, the jarl’s bodyguard approaches me – sword drawn – and demands to know why I’m interrupting them – the first and only time the game actually has the characters surrounding the jarl react to the appearance of a stranger in a reasonably suspicious manner.
A conversation with the jarl ensues, where I explain what I saw in Helgen, and the topic of guards for Riverwood is raised. Even this is used as an opportunity to hint more about the politics of Skyrim, with the jarl’s advisor protesting that sending guards to Riverwood might make the jarl of Falkreath suspect the jarl of Whiterun is planning to side with the Stormcloaks and attack (at the moment, Whiterun is the only city in Skyrim that has remained neutral in the war).

The jarl thanks me, and leads me to his court wizard, Farengar, who sends me off on a quest... to Bleak Falls Barrow. Since I’d been there, and already have the item he’s looking for, when he asks me to go find it, I just go “oh, you mean this old thing?” – he’s very impressed. Had I not been to Bleak Falls Barrow yet, I would now need to go there to advance the main storyline. But also, I would have seen another character with Farengar – Delphine, the proprietor of the Sleeping Giant Inn in Riverwood. I actually only know of that possibility from descriptions, because I’d gone through Bleak Falls Barrow every time prior to getting to Whiterun. She would be disguised with a hood on her head, but I assume the voiceover subtitles would still have identified her as Delphine, allowing the player to potentially connect her with the Delphine from Riverwood. She will later turn out to be far more than an inn proprietor, and will play a very significant role in the story.

Meanwhile, as we talk with Farengar, another story event happens – Irileth, the jarl’s bodyguard, comes running in saying there’s been a dragon sighting near Whiterun. We head over to the jarl, and listen to the testimony of a guard who had just come running (fleeing) back from the Western Watchtower. Naturally, the jarl dispatches Irileth to help with the dragon, and you are sent as well, because hey, you’re the hero of the story, and apparently your one sighting of a dragon in Helgen makes you the best expert they have (well, it does, but really...). In the meantime, the jarl also sees fit to mention – because it’s such a good time for it – that he’s authorised his steward to sell me a house in Whiterun.

Before I run out to follow Irileth, I take a look at several maps in the palace. There are two large wall maps – one is a literal copy of the paper map that comes with the game, another shows the same area, but shows roads instead of cities. And then there’s a large map on the table, with a bunch of red and blue pins stuck in different cities and fort locations – that’s a map of the war, showing which locations are held by the two factions. This map will change over time, by player actions: not only because the player can join one of the two factions and actively fight the other, but also because there are many forts in Skyrim that are currently held by bandits. When the player clears out the bandits, soon afterwards one of the two factions moves in – whichever one controls the rest of the nearby area.
On my way to the city gates, I run past a couple of guards, who occasionally throw a reactive one-liner at me – some of these now reflect the storyline events (“you’re the one who helped the jarl! If only more visitors were like you!”).

When I reach the Western Watchtower, I see Irileth running up – I overtook her along the way – along with several guards. The game is designed to showcase at this point an improved capacity for large – well, larger – battles than previous titles in the series, so this is why there are a few guards with you. Previously, you’d hardly ever see more than a couple of other NPCs fighting alongside.

Around the watchtower, there are a few sites where fires are burning from the previous dragon attack – the dragon apparently flew away and only comes back after we show up. It’s interesting to note that, like the fires I lit in the dungeon, these fires hurt me. What makes this noteworthy is the fact that most fires in Skyrim do not hurt the player – for example, there’s a large firepit in the middle of the palace in Whiterun, and you can stand right in the middle of it without taking any damage. I imagine this might be the case to avoid accidental NPC deaths in a heavily NPC-visited area, but I cannot know for sure the reasons.

Killing the dragon is hardly worth describing here. It’s a major event from a narrative point of view, but it introduces nothing new in terms of world-building tools and strategies. The death of the dragon triggers follow-up dialogues of the usual type; more importantly, the player also “absorbs” the dragon’s soul, which leads the guards to start talking about old legends concerning the Dragonborn – people who were able to absorb souls of dragons to gain their power. We already had a book about the Dragonborn from Helgen, which would lead many players to infer that the player is the Dragonborn, but now that the narrative has confirmed this, we are also told what that means in practice. The player gains dragon souls every time he kills a dragon, which allows him to learn new “shouts”. A shout, of course, does not in this case involve buying a round of beer to everyone in the pub, but rather is a form of magic. When the player shouts, the force of his voice can affect the world in various ways. The first shout we know (from Bleak Falls Burrow) allows us to push opponents back. There is an interesting aspect to shouts which I have not had the opportunity to try, because it’s only supported on the Xbox with the Kinect – in that version of the game, the player can actually speak the syllables of the shout into the microphone, so that the character’s voice power is activated by the player’s own voice. Using the shout at this particular point is an optional quest task – I can do it, and thus show the guards that I do indeed have this power, but I don’t have to. What I am required to do in either case is to report back to the jarl.

There was also a fun little tidbit in the conversation with the guards about being the Dragonborn. Irileth was there also, and the guards asked her opinion. But Irileth, although she serves the jarl, is not a local –
she’s a dark elf from Morrowind. When she responds sceptically, the guards scoff: of course she doesn’t know anything about the Dragonborn, she’s a foreigner. It’s great how the dialogues rarely miss an opportunity to show that even for someone who’s been living among the Nords for a long time and has reached a high status, the prejudices are always right under the surface.

On my way back, I divert into the tundra to the west of Whiterun. It’s night time now, so I’m not only getting to experience the night-time soundscape (although a visit to a night-time forest is still on the cards for a future session), but also the very different soundscape of the tundra. Right now, I’m hearing mainly crickets and other insects, and a lot of wind. Obviously, the wind is a dominant element of the open tundra soundscape.

I explore the landscape of the tundra – the streams, the little ponds, that at this time of night have little clouds of mist above their surface. There’s a small ruined house near the road, with a couple of surviving furniture elements – conveniently, one element is a usable bed. There is also, in the distance, a large bonfire. Very large bonfire. That’s a campsite of the giants. I approach it to have a look, but very carefully – in my first Skyrim game, I tried just going straight in, but this made the giants angry. Even though I’ve just killed a dragon, at this early time giants can wipe the floor with me. But what’s interesting about giants is that they expose us to a different culture. They herd mammoths! There are often strange baskets of curdling mammoth milk around their camp, you can obtain mammoth cheese from these baskets. They have indecipherable rune-like paintings on rocks around their camp; they themselves are painted, and even though they appear incapable of speaking (or at least, they don’t ever try), it’s clear that these are intelligent beings. Also notable is the fact that unlike other opponents – intelligent or otherwise – giants do not attack the player immediately. When a giant spots the player, he (and they are all male) takes on a hostile pose, waving his club and clearly warning you not to approach. Should you approach, or should you simply stand around too long, the giant will charge – but not straight away. They are not interested in combat, they live their own lives alongside the human inhabitants.

If you think about it, the relationship between the giants and the Nords is somewhat reminiscent of relations between indigenous peoples and European settlers in various parts of the world. Two societies living alongside, one desiring mainly to be left alone on their own land, the other encroaching on this land and complaining about the hostility of its original inhabitants. However, in reality, the settlers did have the possibility to learn to communicate with the indigenous inhabitants. In Skyrim, you can never learn to speak with giants. But on a sidenote: way back in Daggerfall, the player actually could choose knowledge of various languages as additional skills for his character; so in Daggerfall, it was possible to
speak the language of giants – or of nymphs, or several other creatures – which didn’t necessarily produce any benefits in terms of additional knowledge to be learned, but it did allow the player to avoid fighting with the creature whose language he understood.

As I make my way back, taking a few screenshots of the tundra and the giants and their mammoth herd (consisting in this case of one mammoth), I also note again the detail of the landscape. It’s not just the presence of small streams, ponds, and the like. Consider, for instance, a small, gently sloping hill; on one side, the slope is indented in a very gentle U shape leading from the top to the bottom of the hill. The bottom of the U is covered with small rocks and pebbles, precisely as would be expected. When rains fall, the soil from the bottom of the U is washed away, leaving the heavy debris behind. While playing, you do not notice these sorts of details: they’re just there, in the background, working to make the landscape more believable on a subconscious level.

When I reach the city, I’m interrupted by a different shout – a thunderous sound, an earthquake, and a tremendous voice shouting doh-vah-kin. Dovahkin, in the dragon language in which all the shouts are issues, means Dragonborn. No one has explained this to me yet, but that’s the Greybeards from the top of the Throat of the World, the tallest mountain in Skyrim, calling me for a chat. Meanwhile, on my way into the city, I chat with a guard, whose one-liners this time (it is 3 AM) include a line about a warm bed being great right about now: even the guards, though staying on duty all day and night long, react differently to the player at different times of the day. Also, the guard acknowledges that I’ve killed the dragon. The guards make a great form of feedback for the player. Interestingly, another one-liner from the same guard mentions a particular tomb – he is, of course, warning me to stay away, but the net result is that my map has been updated with a marker denoting the location of that tomb, which is nothing if not an invitation to visit.

On entering the city, I also encounter two new NPCs, dark-skinned Redguards. They are looking for a fugitive Redguard woman from the province of Hammerfell. They’re happy to pay for help finding her. This is an optional quest involving the Redguard woman, Saadia, working at the Bannered Mare. It’s an interesting quest where you’re never quite certain who is the “good” party, the fugitive or the people hunting her, and you get to learn about the political goings-on outside of Skyrim – if you want to.

The last thing I do for this session is to re-visit the palace in Whiterun. Even though it’s the middle of the night, the jarl and his advisors are waiting there, so that I can have the prescribed exchange with them – a stilted bit of scripting, but actually I guess it makes sense they waited for me, given the importance of the matter. I get a big chunk of information about the Greybeards, shouting, the way of the Voice, and the place where the Greybeards live; apparently it’s a place of pilgrimage, you must climb up 7,000 stairs
(no, I never did try counting the stairs). In terms of visuals, it’s certainly one of the most attractive places in Skyrim, because it’s the highest mountain, and provides a stupendous view. It is no accident that the player is called there so early in the game: this is not only about prodding the player to explore more, but also about ensuring the player visits the most eye-catching places early in the piece.

Somewhere during the conversation – I actually missed it, and I wonder if perhaps some bug didn’t prevent these lines from being spoken this time around – the jarl has also named me Thane, essentially making me a noble within Whiterun. There are two tangible benefits to being a Thane: firstly, I am given a housecarl, a warrior whom I can take with me as a follower on my travels and who will protect me – or, if I do not take him – well, her, in this case – she will stay in my home (if I don’t have a home? I guess she stays in the palace). My new housecarl, Lydia, is also one of the characters a male player can marry in the game. The other benefit of being a Thane is a more peculiar one. As Lydia tells me, “guards will know when to look the other way”: in other words, I can commit small crimes in the hold, and when the guards come to arrest me or make me pay a fine, I can make the matter go away by reminding them of my rank. Really? That’s a very naïve view of the middle ages as a time when nobles could do anything they wanted. It didn’t work that way in most places – especially in the Scandinavian societies that inspired the Nord culture of Skyrim.

I did want to also buy a house, but with the conversations finished, the jarl and his steward promptly ran off to bed. I’ll take care of that next session. I end session 9 after 2 hours and 25 minutes of play. That means I am now at roughly 17 and a half hours of total play and annotation time. I certainly have enough to do and to annotate for at least one more two-hour session, so it looks like I may reach the 20 hour mark ultimately.

3.3.11 Session 10 – December 2
One of the frustrations of study-play is when you know something can happen in the game, you’ve witnessed it in previous unrecorded plays, but somehow you are unable to replicate it now. Having ended the previous session in the Dragonsreach palace, I wanted to try to trigger a reaction from a guard. I had seen previously the guards accost me when I dropped an item on the floor in the palace (“you’d better pick that up”), but somehow I am not able to get that reaction now. Maybe it needs to be a specific part of the palace, or maybe it needs to be a specific type of item, I don’t know.

On my way out of the city, I decide to go into a few places that can still contribute more to this study. One such place is the Temple of Kynareth. I had previously talked to the priestess who often sits under the dried-up tree outside, but I haven’t been inside during this playthrough. First thing I notice is that when I talk to one of the people inside, an acolyte, his voice has a distinct echo to it – some interiors
have specific acoustic settings to allow for that kind of effect. The temple itself is, other than that, relatively empty. There are a few “healing altars”, which are basically beds on which sick and wounded people are lying down. The acolyte will approach them occasionally to cast a healing spell on them, to which they react with a one-liner (“thank you, the pain is lesser” etc.), and other than that when you approach them you will hear them complaining about the pain, the fever, whatever. There is also the main altar, where you can pray to Kynareth – is it just me, or does it seem to weaken the immersion that instead of actually praying, what the game interface tells you you’re doing, is: “activate shrine to Kynareth.”? I mean, activate – sure, that’s what you’re doing from a gameplay perspective, you’re simply activating a usable object. But what a way to describe an act of worship!

There is also another small shrine to Kynareth in the temple, which allows you to... remove unwanted visual effects?! I have no idea what that’s supposed to even mean. I try using it, but still – no idea what it did, if anything. Maybe it removes the arrows that you sometimes get stuck in your body (yes, you do sometimes walk around with an arrow sticking out of your head, because arrows are visualised wherever they pierced your body, and since you’re not likely to be killed by a single arrow...). There’s also a bunch of books in one of the small living areas on the sides of the temple, where the priests have their beds. I read one, called “The Alduin/Akatosh dichotomy”. This is exactly the kind of book that makes books in TES such a great joy to encounter. Firstly, it’s written in a faux-scholarly language, with a hefty dose of arrogance where the author is quite convinced he is able to get the facts straight. Secondly, it’s dealing with the main topic of the game, and reveals much critical information about the nature of the “big bad guy” in the game – the dragon, Alduin, the World-Eater, who is trying to bring about the end of the world. Thirdly... it’s actually outright wrong. You learn about Alduin from the book, because the author invokes old Nord fork tales that talk about Alduin. But then the author declares these tales to be unverifiable and unreliable and wrong, and concludes that Alduin is in fact simply the local Nord name for the deity Akatosh. Since the first part of the book deals with the way in which Akatosh is worshipped by the High Elves under the name Auri-El, but is recognised by them as the same Akatosh, and since the author of the book is a high priest to Akatosh, and therefore presumably an expert in all things Akatosh, it would not be unreasonable to assume that he must be quite right. Except that he actually isn’t, and what you can learn from this book about the game’s storyline is to be found not in the author’s argument, but in the evidence he dismisses as false. Lovely. Absolutely lovely.

I then go into the nearby Halls of the Dead, which are both a catacomb for burials, and a mini-temple to the god of life and death, Arkay. The priest there offers me a quest to go into the catacombs – his own catacombs! – to retrieve his amulet of Arkay, which he lost down there. Apparently, he’s been hearing disturbing noises from there, so he’s afraid to go himself. Ironically, it’s the amulet he lost that would
protect him. Sure, I’ll go. Meanwhile, I have a quick look around, and in his own little sleeping chamber, I come across another of my favourite TES books – “The Monomyth”. No, it’s not about Joseph Campbell’s theory of the monomyth – but it could as well be! The book is about how the world-creation legends of the different cultures across Tamriel differ in details, but are fundamentally the same. Mainly, this is a nod and a wink to players who may know of Joseph Campbell’s work, I’d say – though of course, it is also noteworthy in that it reveals something important about the mythology of the TES universe. The mythological aspect of the universe certainly remains limited, but you can find books like this about it, to reveal more, not just in terms of legends, but also scholarly analysis of legends. By contrast, elsewhere you can find a book... I think it’s called the “Children’s Anaud”, which tells the story of the creation of the world, simplified for children. Setting aside the inexplicable super-literacy of this faux-medieval world, it’s great how there are all these books that have either explicitly or implicitly different audiences and different types of authors, from scholars to novelists to travellers to bards to whatever else.

The catacombs themselves are simply a better maintained, and evidently in active use, version of the Bleak Falls Barrow catacombs. I defeat three skeletons, and quickly find the amulet. I also take note of the presence of numerous goblets scattered around the catacombs. In the main part of the Halls of the Dead, there is also a plate of cheese and a bottle of wine – is that simply the food the priest eats, or further evidence of feast-based rituals concerning the dead? Another important little titbit concerning burial rituals is the presence – here, and in places like Bleak Falls Barrow – of embalming tools. You never see them used, but merely the fact that they are there, tells you much about the Nord culture’s approach to burying the dead.

I also drop by Arcadia’s cauldron, to produce and sell more potions, and then into the Drunken Huntsman – not a pub as I thought it was, but just a hunting supplies shop. However, there is Jenessa, a mercenary, sitting there. You can hire a mercenary and have them come with you to help in a dungeon. I’m not interested, since I’ve got Lydia following me around – and in any case, I can’t afford her. Speaking of affording stuff, when I was in the palace, I did ask the steward about buying a home, and realised that shoot! I can’t afford that, either. I wrote earlier in this journal that money quickly becomes an irrelevance in Skyrim. This is true, but “quickly” means after you’ve looted a few dungeons. For the time being, my cash remains low, and still drops occasionally when I do shopping. For instance, alchemy at the moment is mostly a cash-sink, rather than a profitable venture – I buy ingredients in order to improve my skills and continue experimenting and learning their properties, but because every failed experiment means two ingredients wasted with no potion produced, most of the trial-and-error combinations you attempt to concoct mean losses. And naturally, ingredients have different prices,
depending on their rarity. Ice wraith teeth cost close to 100 gold, whereas mountain flowers cost just a couple of coins.

Currency – currency warrants a short note on its own. There is only one type of coin in Skyrim, called the septim (named after the dynasty, and carrying a visible image of the emperor on the averse, with the insignia of the Empire on the reverse), or a gold piece. This is one aspect of the game that clearly is meant to be as simple as possible, and not as evocative as possible – although interestingly, the coin also exists as a para-text, because a replica septim came with the collector’s edition of Oblivion. If you wanted to do more world-building, you’d have multiple types of coins, and some less reliable than others (due to diluted content, for example), and the different types of coins would have different weights, too. Your money does not weight anything, allowing you to carry hundreds of thousands of septims. Quite convenient, as it means you never have to leave your money in your chest or a bank or anything like that. Actually, there are no banks in Skyrim, presumably because the Nords are not a very mercantile people – Daggerfall had banks, but High Rock is a very different type of province.

Speaking of High Rock, I did remember something else worth noting, namely the way that NPC names are used to evoke particular cultures. Each of the different cultures in TES has a particular naming scheme, but these are not typically completely original. Instead, they more often than not make a conscious effort to reference real world cultures. All the Imperials have Roman or Italian sounding names (Caius, Carlotta, etc.). All the Nords have Scandinavian sounding names (Hadvar, etc.). The Bretons have French names (no examples come to mind right now). Other cultures have less easily recognisable naming schemes. The lizard-like Argonians tend to have names that resemble, and sometimes parody, English translations of Native American names: Runs-Very-Fast, to make up an example. The Khajit names are fairly original, and simply invoke culture by having lots of rolling rrs and other cat-like sounds: my Khajit character was named Rhedirr, and would have fitted right in with Khajit names. My Imperial character that I’m using for this journal playthrough? Well, he’s more of a joke, but he kinda fits the Imperial naming scheme: Scholarus. Needless to say, place names throughout the TES world also tend to follow particular naming schemes... but not quite. Many city names are inherited from the bad old days of Arena, when place names were rather random. Some of these names ended up getting a narrative explanation – Dragonbridge being an example in Skyrim, others still don’t quite fit in, or are simply very generic – there are very few cities in Skyrim that sound Nordic, though perhaps what we’re seeing are actually translations of Nordic names into English – maybe Whiterun in the Nord language actually sounds more like Hviteløp (...which is what Google tells me Whiterun would be in Norwegian)? Far better named are the dungeon locations, since these are typically new, and not
descended from *Arena* names. For example, a typical Dwarven ruin name in *Skyrim* is Arkngthamz. That is very evocative indeed.

For the rest of this session, I continue to explore Whiterun. Most of the activities I can now do tend to be repetitions of other similar tasks – one character will ask me to deliver frost salts to Arcadia, then Adrienne the swordsmith asks me to deliver a sword to her father, the steward up in the hold, and so on. I visit one of the houses, inhabited by a Redguard couple. It’s worth noting on this point that the city, although fairly small – by real standards, it would be a village or very small town – is laid out in a way that evokes a social history. There is a central marketplace area, and scattered around it are the main shops and the small houses of the poorer inhabitants. Then, up the hill, there is the Cloud District where the richer inhabitants live, and further up still is Dragonsreach – a huge structure that, according to legends, was built to contain a captured dragon (although some characters and books are sceptical about this story, it really was: you use it for that exact purpose later in the main quest line). Off to one side of Dragonsreach, there is also Jorrvaskr, the main quarters of the Companions. Another noteworthy site, in that according to local legends, it was the first building in Whiterun, around which the rest of the city grew up. It’s connected to Ysgramor, the leader of the first Nords to come to Tamriel from a different, northerly continent of Atmora – I’m noting this down to show how much depth there is to the backstories of the different cultures in *TES*, what a complex mythology has built up over the years. Supposedly, Jorrvaskr was the name of Ysgramor’s ship, and the building itself resembles an upside-down ship, with the hull forming the roof – nobody ever states, to my knowledge, whether this is just a peculiar architectural choice, or if Ysgramor’s ship is supposed to actually have formed the building (presumably, the wood would have been replaced long ago in any case), though the latter would seem improbable given the distance from the ocean. Actually, the whole story of the Companions as being led by Ysgramor seems improbable, because Whiterun is also a long, long way from the first Nord settlement in Skyrim, Sorthal – you get to visit an archaeological excavation (!) at Sorthal if you join the College of Wizards at Winterhold. But then, that wouldn’t be the first false legend in *TES*. This is a world that loves to tell tall tales.

I enter Jorrvaskr, and talk to the people in there – I also witness a fight between two of the Companions, presumably a vignette staged the first time I enter the building. I eventually find their leader Kodlak, and ask to join the Companions – who, as I think I noted before, are basically the Fighters’ Guild in *Skyrim*. I’m taken back outside to be tested, which turns out to be a huge disappointment – I half-expected to be rejected, knowing that I’ve neglected by weapon skills in this playthrough, concentrating on magic. Instead, I’m approved after whacking somebody on their shield in a mock duel a couple of times. And then I’m given my first, rather menial task of taking a sword to be sharpened up to Eorlund at the
Skyforge (which is a particularly special forge right next to Jorrvaskr), who in turn gives me a shield for Aela the Huntress, another member of the Companions. And so I’ve become a member. When I go to Aela, she takes my shield, and also asks someone else to show me to where I can sleep – they have a barracks-like room with a bunch of bunks. I’m also given the first real mission, to go take care of a group of bandits at a nearby ruin. I also overhear a conversation between Aela and another Companion, Skjor, talking about their plans to go out hunting tonight, which apparently the leader of the Companions (technically, not a leader but merely the *primus inter pares*, with the strange official title of Harbinger), disapproves of. This is a hint about a subplot that you get to explore in the Companions’ quest line – you will eventually find out that some of the Companions have been infected with lycanthropy: they’re werewolves. I don’t know the details, I’ve not played this quest line, and I’ve only read bits and pieces of it on UESP, but I believe you ultimately end up helping to cure them of the disease. And this is how the large factions work in *Skyrim*: each one offers a set of quests that provide a justification for the player to progress in rank among the faction members, to advance story-specific events within the faction, and to get more and more challenging quests. Ultimately, in all cases, you end up becoming the leader of the faction. Ironically, the only faction quest line I’ve completed in my 350 hours of *Skyrim* is that of the College of Wizards – the irony being of course that this was my main playthrough, where I played with my usual Dark Elf assassin, who barely ever touched magic. I became the Archmage while hardly even knowing how to cast a spell – I actually had to use a potion to boost my magicka points sufficiently to be able to cast the spell that I needed to use to gain entrance to the College in the first place – I guess their “entrance exam” was more demanding than that of the Companions, but once you were in, most of the quests hardly demanded magic usage at all, and so I got through just fine without learning magic. From what I’ve read, the same thing is the case with the Bards’ College – your tasks for this small faction involve dungeon-crawling to find lost musical instruments and verses. An implication of these examples – admittedly, largely untested by me, especially in this playthrough – is that most of the faction quest lines tend to be typical RPGesque tasks, what players call fetch or Fedex quests: go, find, bring back. And along the way, kill or sneak by.

By the way, the Jorrvaskr building is very full of character – each of the faction headquarters is full of character, in fact, with the Thieves Guild hiding in an underground sewer, the College of Winterhold being a massive building filled with lofty decorations and magical lights, and so on. But Jorrvaskr is full of cultural character, too. I don’t know if there was anything like an equivalent of the Companions in Scandinavian culture – groups of warriors banding together as companions for a life of combat and mercenary work – but you go in there, and it *feels* like a scene out of Valhalla, or perhaps, looking further south, a scene out of Beowulf. The hall has a huge, U-shaped table inside, laden with food for a
feast, and inside the U are the firepits that keep the revellers warm. There is also room enough between the firepits and the U table for a servant to walk around placing food on the tables – somebody did their homework, because indeed it was typical for feast arrangements in the past to be around U-shaped tables, with all the revellers on one side, and room for servants to walk around on the other.

Having joined the Companions and experienced the faction mechanics a little bit, I end the present session after 2 hours and 40 minutes – by far the longest session so far, bringing the total up to 20 hours. I’ve spent as much time now on play and annotation as I anticipated, and yet I still do not think I have done enough to end this journal just yet. I need at least one more session, where I will go through the wilderness at night. I suspect I will also remember about some other activity that would be worth performing for the present journal.

3.3.12 Session 11 – December 10

It has been more than a week since the previous session. Time to finish this. I sleep the night in the Companions’ quarters, where I’m allowed to take any of the unused beds, and then go outside. My plan is to head out into the countryside, but first I want to try some of the world interactions with NPCs. I read up a little bit about them in the game guide, to refresh my memory, and found why I was unable to elicit a response from the guard before – guards respond to weapon drops, and I was dropping armour.

Well, I do try dropping armour in the Whiterun marketplace. I don’t see NPCs fighting over it. I don’t see an NPC pick it up and hand it to me. But one of the NPCs does comment on my manners, throwing trash all over the place. I guess that’s why they didn’t fight over it, it’s not valuable enough. Also – since the armour I dropped was the one I was wearing, and since in Skyrim you’re only dressed in one main article of clothing/armour, I was rather embarrassed (yes, I did feel a mild twinge of embarrassment – possibly the first emotional response this game got from me for a long time) to hear a little girl yell out “you’re naked!” somewhere behind my back. Well, not naked, I’m wearing a loin cloth, come on.

In other news, the fine weather I’ve been having for the first couple of days except for the snowstorm in the mountains – it’s over now. Whiterun is shrouded in dreary grey rain. The NPCs make nothing of it. It’s interesting, I recall back in Morrowind that NPCs would shield their eyes with their arms during dust storms. I guess they didn’t react to rain either, though. It would be interesting to see NPCs trying to get under a roof, or wearing hoods on their heads at least. Hoods wouldn’t be hard to implement – “if rain then wear hood” – simple enough logic. Guards carry lanterns at night, a similar mechanism.

As I walk outside of the city, on a spur-of-the-moment I steal a horse, just to see how the guards will react. Unfortunately, when I do so, nobody sees me do it – so nobody reports the crime, and therefore,
when I do walk into a patrol of guards on the road to the wilderness, they don’t react. I get off the horse, and get back on it – it still counts as stealing, even though I’ve already stolen it – in front of them. Now they react. Strangely enough, the guard calls me a thieving little elf. That must be a bug, as he’s clearly trying to refer to my race, he just gets the race wrong. When he stops me, I have the option of going to jail or paying the bounty – I could of course also fight him – but I decide to go with option #1, which is to demand that he let me go, because I’m the Jarl’s Thane. Yes, it’s one of the perks that comes with the “job”. The guard says he’ll look the other way this time.

Incidentally, when I did get on the horse, it switched to third-person view. I always play with first-person view, and I really don’t like third person. That’s why I so rarely used horses even when I owned one.

I get off the horse, which – being someone else’s property – immediately turns around and heads for Whiterun. Presumably, it will return to its stable. As for me, I head back up towards Riverwood – Lydia, my housecarl, is tagging along all this time, because I’ve asked her to. As I head up the hillside, I pick up some flowers. It seems they’ve already regrown since I passed through this area – that was fast, I must have been here not more than two days ago! Err, game time.

Ooh! A world encounter – it’s the fan favourite, M’aiq the Liar. An NPC designed just for the fans. He’s been appearing in every game since Morrowind. Every time, he’s got a bunch of lines that provide the player with additional knowledge about the game in a jocular way, or provide nothing at all. This time, he tells me – speaking of the Alduin/Akatosh controversy that I’d only just read about! – that “some say Alduin is Akatosh. Some say M’aiq is a liar. Don’t you believe either of those things.” Actually, he’s right about the first, not so much about the second.

I continue wandering up the mountain. Near where I met M’aiq, the weather changes to clear skies again. I bet you if I went back down to Whiterun, it would start raining again. Different parts of the world have different weather. Meanwhile, as I head up the mountain, I notice something so perfectly natural, it would never even occur to me to take note of it in ordinary gameplay. How does a road go up a mountain? It zig-zags, of course. Because that’s what you do in real life, to extend the vertical ascend over a longer horizontal length. Nice little bit of attention to detail.

I pass by a big stump, off which I had previously collected some fungi. No fungi – different plants have different regrowth rates. Flowers are faster, evidently.

At last! After playing Skyrim for so many years, I finally encounter a stump with ants all over it. Now, this stump has been there all this time, I just didn’t notice, because frankly, it wasn’t something that important when playing the game normally. But recently, I googled where the ants can be found, so that
I can actually see them myself for this journal. Apparently, there’s like six stumps in all of Skyrim where ants can be seen. Not a lot of ants, apparently.

As I walk through Riverwood, I notice another little detail – there are tiny little puffs of fluff floating through the air. I don’t see any trees around that would have these kinds of seeds, but it clearly must be this.

My main purpose here is to see the forest at night. But while I’m wandering roughly in the direction of Helgen, I see a path go off to the side towards a mine – I know, because my radar shows it, of course. As I walk up towards it, I’m told I’ve discovered Embershard Mine. Also, Lydia chimes in: “Hey, look, a cave. Wonder what’s inside.” The followers you can take with you have all kinds of comments to say when you reach a landmark. We kill a bandit, as this mine is infested by them, and then we head inside.

In the mine, you can see some practical details – columns propping up the ceiling, a part of the corridor is covered with planks for carts. Oh, yes, and there is a cart at the top of the corridor. I push it just a little, and down the slope it goes, satisfyingly bouncing about because of the physics, and losing some of its load of logs along the way. And Lydia’s “got a bad feeling about this”, apparently. Next, there’s a tripwire in the middle of the corridor. I notice it, and of course I activate it – from a safe spot. Some rocks fall from the ceiling. Had I ran straight through, I’d have had them drop on my head. Not that that would kill me, of course.

A vignette with two bandits. You can tell this is the starting area of the game, because in many other caves or bandit lairs, you wouldn’t get quite this level of detail. Bandits would have their generic all-purpose dialogues, but this bit was written clearly for this cave in particular, as the bandit mentioned the rock trap up top. After calming down his colleague, one of the bandits heads away, while the other one lies down to get some rest. Not for long, as we attack and kill them. Sneaking… well, sneaking works to a point, but not very well, because I’m just not very stealthy with this new character.

Wandering around the mine, I find a tiny bit of environmental storytelling. There is half a skeleton sticking out of the earth in a half-collapsed tunnel. Next to the skeleton is a tattered journal; when I read it, I find out that its owner had been kept here for days, mining, and was getting frustrated because the bandits who put him here to work weren’t paying attention to his requests for more support beams. And the tunnel might collapse…

The rest of the mine is fairly typical. We find a bandit working a forge (it was interesting that we could hear him from quite a distance – if you’re sneaking about, you’re constantly given sound cues about other NPCs, hostile or friendly). We find some iron ore. I don’t see any iron on the walls, for extraction.
I’m sure there is some here somewhere, I just didn’t see it. I don’t think I have a pickaxe at this point anyway. When we kill the last bandit, there is a sound cue, and a “cleared” sign shows up on the map of the mine. Oh, and yes, there are two levels to the map – there is the world map, and then there is the location map for wherever you are. As you explore a location, more and more of it is added to the location map.

Those “cleared” signs can be somewhat misleading, as most such locations will “respawn” with fresh opponents after enough time has passed.

Meanwhile, because I’ve been looting stuff off every bandit, I’m once again full-up. I can’t carry any more, without being slowed down – actually, the only penalty for carrying too much is your inability to run. I have in the past, with my other character, actually walked all the way back from a Dwemer ruin to a city, because I was unwilling to drop my loot. I needed the money, I guess. This time I’m more relaxed about loot, and I drop most of the heaviest iron junk the bandits are using. But since I’m still on the brink, I pause to eat a bunch of food. Four cabbages, some leaks, and two big chunks of venison, each weighing 2 – hmm, I guess the unit of measurement might be pounds, as I can’t imagine me carrying 300 kilograms (even 300 pounds is incredible). I also drink about ten bottles of wine. No, I don’t get drunk. But the wine does have effects, as does food. Food gives me a few hitpoints, though some types of food (cooked food especially) give more benefits, both in quantity and type (fatigue apart from hitpoints). Wine, however, is more interesting – like all alcohols, it restores my fatigue by a significant chunk, but it also SLOWS the regeneration of fatigue. In other words, it gives you a one-off boost, at the price of a longer-term penalty. I guess that’s one way to show drunkenness. Could be better, though.

Then I remember! I can give stuff to Lydia to carry. And so I do. And I go back through the mine and recover all the previous loot I’d dropped. I also do find a pickaxe, and an iron vein, so I get some iron ore as well. Ore can be turned into ingots in a smelter. When I give stuff to Lydia, she equips the stuff that’s better than what she’s carrying already – so all of a sudden, she puts on a helmet, and a big two-handed axe shows up on her back, as well.

We get out of the mine through its other exit, further up the mountainside, just as the sun is setting. Now I can finally do what I came for, which is to experience the game at night and record this experience. We continue heading towards Helgen, though. I figure it might be interesting to revisit the ruined city.

As I walk up the slope, I notice two things about the now night-shrouded landscape. Firstly, about the only sound I now hear is trees creaking, river water flowing in the distance, and some crickets chirping
quietly... but apart from that, I’m also hearing a lot of music all of a sudden. It just keeps going. Clearly, music is more active at night. Also, an occasional owl can be heard.

Secondly, I take note of the night sky. Yes, the moons are very pretty and spectacular and all that. But also, I notice the stars. There’s a few spots in the sky where something like constellations can be identified. Would it be viable to use the sky in *Skyrim* for navigation? It’s clearly not designed for it, because there aren’t enough prominent... err, skymarks. But with a bit of modification, it could be. Actually, even as it is, you could quickly get a sense of direction with it, if you paid more attention.

Also, when looking up at the sky, I notice a bee hive up in a tree. Hmm. I can’t reach it from the ground, nor jump high enough for it. I try to hit it with a ranged weapon – well, a fireball, really – and yes, it does tumble down to the ground. Apparently, it’s a vacant hive, though, so I only find one bee and some bee hive husks inside – both useful for alchemy.

Helgen has been infested by bandits. That was fast! Other than that, the city looks like it has been attacked quite recently, as some of the timber is still glowing. We don’t stick around too long. As we leave, we encounter another interesting bit of environmental storytelling – a wolf attacks us, and when we go around the corner to where the wolf came running from, we see a little campsite, two bedrolls, an unlit fire, and two NPCs labelled as refugees. Both are dead, and there is lots of blood on the ground. Evidently we’re supposed to connect this with the wolf.

Further down the slope, we found another campsite, this one deserted, though the fire is lit. There are many such campsites throughout Skyrim, they’re there mainly for the player to use the bedrolls, really – but also to show that there are many hunters in these forests. One of the tree stumps has a dead rabbit, some blood, and a knife on top of it. Also, there is a bee hive. Nothing flying around, because it’s night. I’ve seen just about all I wanted to see today, so I figure, to finish up, let’s go to sleep and see how the hive changes in the morning. Sure enough, in the morning there are dozens of bees flying around. You can catch them in mid-air, like butterflies. I’ve never really bothered with bee hives during my main playthrough, because there’s few of them, so you rarely do encounter them. This time, I go on a bee-hunting spree. Man, I’ve never had this many bees in my inventory – dare I say, bonnet? – in all the years of *Skyrim*. When I finish, because I’m the barbarian that I am, I fireball the hive, just to see if this one will tumble to the ground as well. Then I see a magnificent elk (well, an elk identical to all other elks, actually...). Since I’m equipped with the fireball spell still, I start chucking fireballs at it.

My last segment of recorded gameplay for this final session is a gleeful chase through the forest, throwing fireball after fireball at the elk; a few hit, most miss. We pass by a house – Pinewatch, a name I recognise from my other playthrough, if I went in, there would be bandits hiding in a secret passage.
inside – then we descend towards the big lake again. At this point, suddenly three wolves join the chase, and bring the elk down for me, but I have to kill them. This is interesting – I know there is a world encounter where you see wolves chasing an elk, but does this mean that the game generated those three wolves to join the elk, or did my elk run off, and this is a different elk that got generated along with the wolves?

When I search the elk, finding some large antlers (small antlers – good for alchemy. Large antlers? Good for nothing, until you build a house, and then you can make a decorative trophy out of them), I look around the little glade we ended up in. Some big tree trunks lying on the ground, evidently freshly felled, with stumps nearby. More signs of the timber industry. It’s a good place for it, as the lake is nearby, so the lumber can be floated to the nearest lumber mill – which I know is just a bit to the west of here. I walk towards the lake, because it’s looking quite magnificent, with a small fort ruin on the other side of the coast. I’m looking for an opportunity to take one more screenshot. Suddenly, I find myself at the top of a cliff, overlooking the lake. But that’s not where I’m looking at. I look down, immediately under the cliff, where I see a circle of smallish dolmens – standing stones, I guess. In the middle of it, there is an altar, surrounded by masses of human bones. There is also a wizard, standing there, looking up at me ready to fight, and some items strewn on the altar, including a spellbook of some kind. I was not looking for this place, I came across it purely by chance. As I take a screenshot of the mage, in his combat-ready posture, wordlessly saying “one more step and I’ll blast ya”, I find myself thinking how perfect this is for an end to the journal. What could be more Skyrimesque than this unexpected encounter with a very hostile case of environmental storytelling?

I end the session after 2 hours and 30 minutes. The total play time is now 22 hours and 30 minutes, more or less. I have seen enough. But it sure was nice of Skyrim to send me off with a final bang.

There is a post-script. After saving the document, I ALT+TAB back into the game... and notice that amazingly enough, right behind the mage, on the very shore of the lake, there is a path, and on it, another world-encounter: a Thalmor patrol escorting a Nord prisoner. And I also see another elk. In a moment, chaos ensues: I choose to head over to the Thalmor. I try to avoid the mage, but attacks me anyway, conjuring up an ethereal wolf to help him. When I finally reach the Thalmor, I have the option of talking to them to find out what they’re doing out here, and I can talk to the prisoner, who is actually calling for help. If I talk to him, I can free him and give him a weapon. I do so, and naturally the Thalmor get very hostile all of a sudden. I’m still a very low level character, so they are able to quickly overcome me. But one of the last things that happens before I’m finished, is that a pack of wolves comes charging
out of the woods and attacks the Thalmor too. If I had not engaged them in combat, I would have been able to also assist the Thalmor, or just watch idly by as they shred the three wolves. As it is – I die.

It’s like Skyrim wanted to throw everything at me in the end, just for good measure. And this is worth re-iterating, because it’s such a common experience: I had reached a point when I wanted to end playing, and I was distracted from this firstly by the sight of a ruin on the other side of the lake, then by the unexpected encounter with the conjurer, and then by the Thalmor. A mixture of pre-designed encounters around landmarks and random world encounters keeps me busy, always just one more thing to do. That is the Skyrim experience in a nutshell: keep exploring, keep finding, keep doing.
4 Appendix D: TES communities online survey form

4.1 Online survey explanatory note

Hi Everyone!

I’m a long-time TES fan (but only a lurker here), and currently a PhD student at Bond University in Australia. I’m really amazed by how much TES fans do around the series, in terms of modding, compiling data in wikis, producing fan films and more. More broadly, my research is actually about what cultural heritage organisations can learn from commercial RPGs in order to produce great culture-oriented RPGs themselves. A part of that argument is looking at Skyrim and showing just how much world-building detail is involved in its world, but then I’m also arguing that it’s crucial to collaborate with fans – to give them the necessary means to produce mods and other works around a given game, in order to push it even further.

To show this, I want to document who the TES fans are, and how they work. I’m limiting myself to two particular groups – the lore-oriented folks at the UESP and the modders who publish mods on Nexus Mods (yes, yes, I know some people do both :) ). Myself being a modder (not TES, though – Wing Commander) and game developer in past lives, I have a pretty good idea about how much work is involved in fan projects of any kind, and how much effort fans put into learning all the skills needed for these projects. Not to mention the time devoted to better understanding the lore of the TES universe!

My anonymous survey asks you to help document this by answering a bunch of questions about your experience as a TES fan, particularly in regards to Skyrim. If you have fifteen minutes to spare, please, pretty please answer my survey, and let others know about it, too! The more responses I get, the more interesting the results will be. And to thank everyone for their efforts, I will later on write a report from the survey for the UESP, so that as a TES community, we all know a little bit more about what makes us tick.

tl;dr – got 15-25 minutes to spare? Please answer an anonymous survey about what you as a TES fan do with the games, particularly in regards to modding and lore-related activities on the UESP.

If you agree to take part in this survey, please click the link here. Needless to say, should you change your mind, you can close the survey any time you like. Oh, and feel free to contact me at jmajewski@bond.edu.au with any other questions or comments about the survey!

Jakub Majewski
4.2 Online survey form

Thank you for opening this survey! The survey is anonymous and no data is collected that could identify you. It consists mostly of multiple choice questions and shouldn't take more than 25 minutes! If at any point you change your mind about doing the survey, you can simply close this window.

If you have entered this survey by a direct link, it is recommended that you first read the explanatory note about this survey (link).

Test_01 What is your age group?
☑ Below 18
☑ 18-24
☑ 25-34
☑ 35-44
☑ 45-54
☑ 55 or older

Test_02 Have you ever played Skyrim?
☑ Yes
☑ No

Dem_01 What is your gender?
☑ Male
☑ Female
☑ Other / Rather not say

Dem_02 What is your country of residence?

Dem_03 What is the highest level of education you have completed?
☑ Primary
☑ High school
☑ Undergraduate
☑ Master's degree
☑ PhD degree
Dem_04 Which of these best describes you?

- School student
- Undergraduate student
- Postgraduate student
- Employed full-time
- Stay-at-home spouse
- Employed part-time
- Freelance worker
- Unemployed
- Retired

Dem_05 Are you employed in the games industry?

- Yes
- No
- No, but aim to be
- No, but used to be

Dem_06 Have you completed, or are you currently pursuing, tertiary education related to the games industry?

- Yes
- Currently pursuing
- No

Dem_07 Have you completed, or are you currently pursuing, tertiary education related to cultural heritage (history, archaeology, etc.)?

- Yes
- Currently pursuing
- No

Dem_08 How much has your interest in TES has inspired your choice of field of study?

- Very strongly
- Moderately
- A little
- Not at all
- No, it’s the other way round - I’m interested in TES because of my field of study

Dem_09 And what is your field of study?

Dem_10 Since your interest in TES has very strongly inspired your choice of study, could you explain a little bit about how exactly TES inspires you?
Skyrim and Indigenous Virtual Cultural Heritage

History 01 In a typical week, how much time do you currently spend playing Skyrim?
- None
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41+ hours

History 02 How much time have you spent playing Skyrim altogether?
- 1-10 hours
- 11-25 hours
- 26-50 hours
- 51-100 hours
- 101-200 hours
- 201-300 hours
- 301+ hours

History 03 Which one of these introduced you to The Elder Scrolls (TES) franchise?
- Arena
- Daggerfall
- Battlespire
- Redguard
- Morrowind
- TES Travels games
- Oblivion
- Skyrim
- TES Online
- Books
- Legends (Beta)
History 04 Which TES products have you ever used? Tick all that apply.

- Arena
- Daggerfall
- Battlespire
- Redguard
- Morrowind
- TES Travels games
- Oblivion
- Skyrim
- TES Online
- Books
- Legends (Beta)

History 05 Which aspect of the TES franchise do you value more - the gameplay or the world?

- Strongly gameplay
- Moderately gameplay
- Both equally
- Moderately world
- Strongly world

History 06 How many mods do you normally play TES games with?

- No mods
- Unofficial patches only
- 1-5 mods
- 6-10 mods
- 11-20 mods
- 21-50 mods
- 51+ mods
History 07 How many mods do you think you've downloaded altogether for all TES games?
○ Unofficial patches only
○ 1-5 mods
○ 6-10 mods
○ 11-20 mods
○ 20-50 mods
○ 51-100 mods
○ 101-250 mods
○ 250-500 mods
○ 500+ mods

History 08 Which sites do you use to obtain TES mods? Tick all that apply.
☐ Nexus Mods
☐ Steam Workshop
☐ Individual modder websites
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________
History 09 Which of the following mod types have you used? Tick all that apply.

- Patches, fixes & overhauls
- UI improvements & maps
- Small game revisions (item availability etc.)
- Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)
- Cheats, utilities, tutorials
- Followers/companion mods
- NPC characters (beyond companions)
- NPC character groups (factions & guilds)
- Humanoid body additions & enhancements
- Animals & other non-humanoid additions & enhancements
- Arms and armour additions & enhancements
- Clothes & misc. cultural items additions & enhancements
- Food & small natural items additions & enhancements
- Landscape additions & enhancements
- Architectural enhancements
- Books & other cultural enhancements
- New quests
- New player houses
- New locations (dungeons etc.)
- Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)
- Other (please specify) ____________________
History 10 Which one of these mod types do you most like to use?
- Patches, fixes & overhauls
- UI improvements & maps
- Small game revisions (item availability etc.)
- Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)
- Cheats, utilities, tutorials
- Followers/companion mods
- NPC characters (beyond companions)
- NPC character groups ( factions & guilds)
- Humanoid body additions & enhancements
- Animals & other non-humanoid additions & enhancements
- Arms and armour additions & enhancements
- Clothes & misc. cultural items additions & enhancements
- Food & small natural items additions & enhancements
- Landscape additions & enhancements
- Architectural enhancements
- Books & other cultural enhancements
- New quests
- New player houses
- New locations (dungeons etc.)
- Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)
- Other (please specify) ________________

History 11 How much do you care about mods being lore-friendly?
- Not at all
- A bit
- Neutral
- Strongly
- Very strongly

History 12 To what extent do you prefer either: mods that add new content, or mods that improve existing content?
- Strongly new content
- Moderately new content
- Both equally
- Moderately improvements
- Strongly improvements
History 13 How often (if at all) have you donated money to any modders for their efforts, either on Nexus or using Patreon, PayPal, or some other option provided by the modder?
- As often as possible
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Only once or twice
- Never

History 14 Do you think it would be good for TES modders to be able to charge money for their mods?
- Yes, modders should be able to get something from their work
- No, because it would cause conflicts in the community
- No, modders should work for free
- Unsure, I've never thought about it

History 15 In a typical week, how much time do you spend reading Elder Scrolls lore online, such as on the UESP or TES Wiki?
- None
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41+ hours

History 16 Which kinds of lore articles do you most often read online?
- Gameplay
- Plot summaries
- Characters
- Quests
- Creatures
- Locations
- Factions
- History
- In-game books
- Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)
- Other (please specify) __________________________
History 17 How would you assess your level of expertise in TES lore?

- Very low
- Low
- Medium
- High
- Very high

Modding 01 Have you ever worked on any TES mods?

- Yes
- No

Modding 02 Which was the first TES game that you modded?

- Arena
- Daggerfall
- Battlespire
- Redguard
- Morrowind
- Oblivion
- Skyrim
- Online
Modding 03 What was the first mod you ever developed?
- Patches, fixes & overhauls
- UI improvements & maps
- Small game revisions (item availability etc.)
- Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)
- Cheats, utilities, tutorials
- Followers/companion mods
- NPC characters (beyond companions)
- NPC character groups (factions & guilds)
- Humanoid body additions & enhancements
- Animals & other non-humanoid additions & enhancements
- Arms and armour additions & enhancements
- Clothes & misc. cultural items additions & enhancements
- Food & small natural items additions & enhancements
- Landscape additions & enhancements
- Architectural enhancements
- Books & other cultural enhancements
- New quests
- New player houses
- New locations (dungeons etc.)
- Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 04 How many mods have you worked on altogether?
- Only one
- 2-5 mods
- 6-10 mods
- 11-20 mods
- 21-30 mods
- 31+ mods

Modding 05 How long have you been modding TES?
- Less than 6 months
- 7-11 months
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16+ years
Modding 06 How would you rate your level of expertise in modding?
- Very low
- Low
- Medium
- High
- Very high

Modding 07 Have you ever tried modding Skyrim in particular?
- Yes
- No

Modding 08 In a typical week, how much time do you spend modding Skyrim?
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41+ hours

Modding 09 How many mods have you developed for Skyrim?
- Only one
- 2-5 mods
- 6-10 mods
- 11-20 mods
- 21-30 mods
- 31+ mods
Modding 10 What types of mods have you developed for Skyrim? Tick all that apply.

- Patches, fixes & overhauls
- UI improvements & maps
- Small game revisions (item availability etc.)
- Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)
- Cheats, utilities, tutorials
- Followers/companion mods
- NPC characters (beyond companions)
- NPC character groups (factions & guilds)
- Humanoid body additions & enhancements
- Animals & other non-humanoid additions & enhancements
- Arms and armour additions & enhancements
- Clothes & misc. cultural items additions & enhancements
- Food & small natural items additions & enhancements
- Landscape additions & enhancements
- Architectural enhancements
- Books & other cultural enhancements
- New quests
- New player houses
- New locations (dungeons etc.)
- Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)
- Other (please specify) ____________________
Modding 11 Name the one type of mod you most often develop for Skyrim.
- Patches, fixes & overhauls
- UI improvements & maps
- Small game revisions (item availability etc.)
- Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)
- Cheats, utilities, tutorials
- Followers/companion mods
- NPC characters (beyond companions)
- NPC character groups (factions & guilds)
- Humanoid body additions & enhancements
- Animals & other non-humanoid additions & enhancements
- Arms and armour additions & enhancements
- Clothes & misc. cultural items additions & enhancements
- Food & small natural items additions & enhancements
- Landscape additions & enhancements
- Architectural enhancements
- Books & other cultural enhancements
- New quests
- New player houses
- New locations (dungeons etc.)
- Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 12 Have any of your Skyrim mods...
- Used a script extender
- Incorporated assets or mods created by others
- Been modified by yourself to improve compatibility with other mods
- Been re-released by other modders in modified form

Modding 13 How complex are the Skyrim mods that you have worked on in the past 6 months?
- Small and simple only
- Mostly simple
- Both equally
- Mostly complex
- Large and complex only
Modding 14 What reasons motivate you to make mods? Tick all that apply.
☐ I enjoy modding
☐ I enjoy the community
☐ Improving my own skills/qualifications
☐ Fixing or improving the game
☐ Improving or expanding the game world
☐ Adding new content to the game
☐ The game is an outlet for my artistic work
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 15 Which one motivation for modding is the most important to you?
☐ I enjoy modding
☐ I enjoy the community
☐ Improving my own skills/qualifications
☐ Fixing or improving the game
☐ Improving or expanding the game world
☐ Adding new content to the game
☐ The game is an outlet for my artistic work
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 16 Where do you publish your mods? Tick all that apply.
☐ Nexus Mods
☐ Steam Workshop
☐ My own website
☐ I have not published any mods yet
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 17 Have you ever tried giving users the option of donating you money for your efforts?
☐ Yes, through Nexus
☐ Yes, through Patreon
☐ Yes, through other means (e.g. PayPal donate button on a website)
☐ No, never
Modding 18 If there was a possibility of charging money for TES mods, would you charge money for your mods?
○ Yes, wherever possible
○ Yes, but only for some of them
○ Yes, but only for new mods, not my earlier works
○ No, because my mods contain other people's content
○ No, because mods should be free
○ No, because I think the community would react badly

Modding 19 If there was a possibility of charging money for TES mods, would this affect your motivations?
○ Yes, profit would become my main motivation
○ Yes, profit would be a secondary motivation
○ No, but profit would be a welcome bonus
○ No, and I would keep my mods free

Modding 20 How many people were in the biggest modding team you ever worked with?
○ 1 (I only work alone)
○ 2-3 people
○ 4-5 people
○ 6-10 people
○ 11-20 people
○ 21+ people

Modding 21 How many people do you typically work with on mods?
○ 1 (I work alone)
○ 2-3 people
○ 4-5 people
○ 6-10 people
○ 11-20 people
○ 21+ people

Modding 22 Have you learned any new skills for modding, other than figuring out the Creation Kit?
○ No, but I already had strong modding/gamedev skills
○ No, I haven't tried to do anything beyond my skills
○ No, I tried but gave up
○ Yes - a few things
○ Yes - lots
Modding 23 What kind of skills have you picked up? Tick all that apply.
- Scripting
- Programming
- 2D graphics
- 3D graphics
- Sound
- Music
- Level design
- Game design
- Writing
- Website design to present my/our work
- Team leadership
- Project planning
- Collaborative tools (e.g. GitHub)
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 24 How do you learn new modding skills? Tick all that apply.
- Trial, error, and experience
- By example from others
- Forum discussions
- Video tutorials
- Text tutorials
- Textbooks
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 25 Have you ever investigated any of these aspects of culture for your mods? Tick all that apply.
- TES lore
- Real-world material culture (armour, clothes, architecture, etc.)
- Real-world immaterial culture (history, religion, customs, etc.)
- Other fantasy (for comparison or inspiration)

Modding 26 Do you try to make your mods lore-friendly?
- No, I just make companion mods
- Never, I like to do my own thing
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always
Modding 27 How much do you research TES lore specifically for your mods?
- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Moderately
- Extensively

Modding 28 Have you ever created mods based on another fantasy or sci-fi universe, such as Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones?
- Yes (please specify most important example) ____________________
- No

Modding 29 What features have you added from that universe? Tick all that apply.
- Humanoid races/ethnicities
- Non-humanoid (incl. animals)
- Specific characters
- Weapons & armour
- Clothes & accessories
- Books & texts
- Architecture (incl. statues)
- Landscape elements (incl. plants)
- Other material objects
- Music (songs or instrumental)
- Dances, martial arts and similar physical activities
- Customs, behaviours and rituals
- Stories and ideas, for example religious concepts
- Crafting, artistic production, and other productive activities e.g. farming
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Modding 30 Have you ever created mods that add real-world culture to the game, such as the Vikings, Native Americans, Aboriginal peoples?
- Yes (please specify most important example) ____________________
- No
Modding 31 What features have you incorporated from that culture:

- Humanoid races/ethnicities
- Non-humanoid (incl. animals)
- Specific characters
- Weapons & armour
- Clothes & accessories
- Books & texts
- Architecture (incl. statues)
- Landscape elements (incl. plants)
- Other material objects
- Music (songs or instrumental)
- Dances, martial arts and similar physical activities
- Customs, behaviours and rituals
- Stories and ideas, for example religious concepts
- Crafting, artistic production, and other productive activities e.g. farming
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 01 Have you ever visited the UESP?

- Yes
- No
- No, but I do use the TES Wikia

Lore 02 How long have you been visiting the UESP?

- Less than 6 months
- 7-11 months
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-8 years
- 9-11 years
- Since even before it became a wiki
Lore 03 How would you define your current level of involvement with the UESP?
- Infrequent visitor, not contributing directly
- Regular visitor, not contributing directly
- Somewhat active, minor tweaks to existing articles
- Reasonably active, major or numerous tweaks to existing articles
- Very active, significant modifications or large new articles
- I am an admin
- No longer active, but still visiting
- No longer even visiting

Lore 04 Can you estimate how many articles you have modified on the UESP?
- None
- 1-5 articles
- 6-10 articles
- 11-20 articles
- 21-50 articles
- 51-100 articles
- 101+ articles

Lore 05 Can you estimate how many articles you have created from scratch on the UESP?
- None
- 1-5 articles
- 6-10 articles
- 11-20 articles
- 21-50 articles
- 51-100 articles
- 101+ articles

Lore 06 How much time do you typically spend working on UESP content in an average week?
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41+ hours
Lore 07 For which TES product have you modified or created any articles?

- Arena
- Daggerfall
- Battlespire
- Redguard
- Morrowind
- Oblivion
- Skyrim
- Online
- Travels (the mobile games)
- Books
- Legends
- Non-product specific (lore)
- Non-product specific (general, like production background)
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 08 For which one of these have you modified or created the most articles?

- Arena
- Daggerfall
- Battlespire
- Redguard
- Morrowind
- Oblivion
- Skyrim
- Online
- Travels (the mobile games)
- Books
- Legends
- Non-product specific (lore)
- Non-product specific (general, like production background)
- Other (please specify) ____________________
Lore 09 Which kinds of articles have you modified or created?
- Gameplay
- Plot summaries
- Characters
- Quests
- Creatures
- Locations
- Factions
- History
- In-game books
- Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)
- Other (please specify) ________________

Lore 10 Which one kind of article do you most often work on?
- Gameplay
- Plot summaries
- Characters
- Quests
- Creatures
- Locations
- Factions
- History
- In-game books
- Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)
- Other (please specify) ________________

Lore 11 Please estimate how many articles you have modified or created on the UESP for Skyrim specifically?
- None
- 1-5 articles
- 6-10 articles
- 11-20 articles
- 21-50 articles
- 51-100 articles
- 101+ articles
Lore 12 How much time do you typically spend working on UESP content for Skyrim in an average week?
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- 16-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41+ hours

Lore 13 Which kinds of articles have you modified or created for Skyrim?
- Gameplay
- Plot summaries
- Characters
- Quests
- Creatures
- Locations
- Factions
- History
- In-game books
- Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 14 Which one of these kinds of articles do you most often modify or create for Skyrim?
- Gameplay
- Plot summaries
- Characters
- Quests
- Creatures
- Locations
- Factions
- History
- In-game books
- Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)
- Other (please specify) ____________________
Lore 15 What reasons motivate your involvement with the UESP? Tick all that apply.

- I like the TES world, and want to know more about it
- I like a particular TES game, and want to know more about that game's contents
- I like a particular TES game, and want to know how to best play it
- I enjoy the community
- I enjoy sharing my TES knowledge
- I enjoy the respect I get for my TES knowledge
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 16 Which one of these motivations is the most important for your UESP involvement?

- I like the TES world, and want to know more about it
- I like a particular TES game, and want to know more about the game's contents
- I like a particular TES game, and want to know how to best play it
- I enjoy the community
- I enjoy sharing my TES knowledge
- I enjoy the respect I get for my TES knowledge
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 17 What sources do you use to collect data for UESP articles? Tick all that apply.

- Memory only
- Take notes while playing
- Use the Creation Kit
- Use the game guides
- Read books
- Watch videos
- Consult others
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 18 How frequently do you ask for help from other UESP users either to obtain data or to verify your research?

- All the time
- Extensively
- Frequently
- Infrequently
- Rarely
- Never
Lore 19 How frequently do other UESP users ask you to help by providing data, or verifying their work?
- All the time
- Extensively
- Frequently
- Infrequently
- Rarely
- Never

Lore 20 What is the biggest number of collaborators you've had for one article on UESP?
- 1 (I only work alone)
- 2-3 people
- 4-5 people
- 6-10 people
- 11-20 people
- 21+ people

Lore 21 And how many collaborators do you usually have for one article?
- 1 (I usually work alone)
- 2-3 people
- 4-5 people
- 6-10 people
- 11-20 people
- 21+ people

Lore 22 Have you picked up new research or technical skills for editing the UESP, other than learning to use a wiki?
- No, but I already had strong scholarly skills
- No, I haven't tried to do anything beyond my skills
- No, I tried but gave up
- Yes - a few things
- Yes - lots
Lore 23 What kind of skills have you learned? Tick all that apply.

- English writing capabilities
- Referencing
- Gathering data in systematic way
- Systematic source analysis
- Advanced wiki skills (beyond the basics)
- Mastery of TES editing tools (to extract data)
- Data management
- Image processing
- Video processing
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 24 How did you pick up new skills? Tick all that apply.

- Trial, error, and experience
- By example from others
- Forum discussions
- Video tutorials
- Text tutorials
- Textbooks
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 25 Which aspects of TES lore on the UESP do you specialize in?

- Gameplay
- Plot summaries
- Characters
- Quests
- Creatures
- Locations
- Factions
- History
- In-game books
- Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)
- Other (please specify) ____________________
Lore 26 Which TES products on the UESP do you specialize in?

- Arena
- Daggerfall
- Battlespire
- Redguard
- Morrowind
- Oblivion
- Skyrim
- Online
- TES Travels
- Books
- Legends
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Lore 27 If you specialise in particular aspects of TES lore, are they connected to your interests outside of TES? If yes, please explain.

☐ Yes ____________________

☐ No
Appendix E: Survey result tables

This appendix contains tabulated output for all 87 questions of the survey.

### 5.1 Test questions

#### 5.1.1.1 Test 01: What is your age group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 18</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>84.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 or older</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.1.1.2 Test 02: Have you ever played Skyrim?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>99.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.1.2 Demography

#### 5.1.2.1 Demography 01: What is your gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other / Rather not say</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Demography 02: What is your country of residence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglosphere (non-USA)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia (South-East)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe (East)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe (North)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe (West)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demography 03: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demography 04: Which of these best describes you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School student</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate student</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-at-home spouse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>75.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freelance worker</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Demography 05: Are you employed in the games industry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No, but aim to be</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No, but used to be</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demography 06: Have you completed, or are you currently pursuing, tertiary education related to the games industry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Currently pursuing</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demography 07: Have you completed, or are you currently pursuing, tertiary education related to cultural heritage (history, archaeology, etc.)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Currently pursuing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>272</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.2.8 Demography 08: How much has your interest in TES has inspired your choice of field of study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it's the other way round -</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm interested in TES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of my field of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Demography 09: And what is your field of study?

<table>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(no response)</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising graphics, CG in general</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative literature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer electronics technician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmetology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative writing and Digital Cinematography</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural history</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts/Illustration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Design</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education, at the moment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a sailor/fisherman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphysics and comparative religion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics and Computer Science, combined Masters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish and English teacher with a focus on literature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical theatre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>used to be programming, database design, modelling (UML), but now retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to study history</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web design + Illustration + Graphic Designer + Writer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wireless Networking and Graphic Design</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.2.10 Demography 10: Since your interest in TES has very strongly inspired your choice of study, could you explain a little bit about how exactly TES inspires you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(no response)</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an aspiring game dev I look at other successful games to see where the succeeded and failed. Along the way I lost myself in the world created by the games.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am looking to go into game development and have always wanted to make games similar to TES, as TES is my favorite game series.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I first played Morrowind when I eleven years old. Though I was quite young, and a lot went over my head in my earlier years of playing it, it deeply influenced my interests in everything from fiction to theology. It spiraled out of control from there.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I needed to learn stuff for modding, I learned it and now I am making profit out of it. :-)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wondered how to make games, so I began learning how to use a game engine (Unity).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm an anthropology undergrad (final year) with a material culture focus - part of my decision to study that was so I would have a better idea of the nuances of different cultures and thus be able to worldbuild / portray fictional cultures better in mods / fanfiction / original fiction. TES was my main fictional interest at the time (and still is). I also decided to study German in high school so I could use german quest mods.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It makes me not want to kill myself lol and id like to create something that can help others in the same way tes helps me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing first hand the talented people that created such an amazing world and managed to fill it with such unique and interesting work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TES inspires me to create worlds with rich lore and complexity of my own in the future.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world and the creativeness behind it helped inspire my own high fantasy world I hope to one day create</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Zenimax began releasing trailers to promote TESO, Lawrence Schick's loremaster video series caught my attention. &quot;I want HIS job,&quot; I said to myself. So I began a new degree plan, started purchasing game dev software, reinvented my portfolio, and have been applying to become a game writer since then.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 History questions

5.2.1.1 History 01 - In a typical week, how much time do you currently spend playing Skyrim?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>23.99%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>23.62%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>21.03%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>10.33%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>9.23%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21-30 hours</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>31-40 hours</td>
<td>3.69%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>41+ hours</td>
<td>3.32%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.2 History 02 - How much time have you spent playing Skyrim altogether?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-10 hours</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11-25 hours</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26-50 hours</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>51-100 hours</td>
<td>3.69%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>101-200 hours</td>
<td>12.18%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>201-300 hours</td>
<td>8.86%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>301+ hours</td>
<td>74.17%</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### History 03 - Which one of these introduced you to The Elder Scrolls (TES) franchise?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arena</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daggerfall</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Battlespire</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redguard</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morrowind</td>
<td>30.04%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>TES Travels games</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oblivion</td>
<td>28.94%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Skyrim</td>
<td>34.43%</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>TES Online</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Legends (Beta)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### History 04 - Which TES products have you ever used? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arena</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daggerfall</td>
<td>7.85%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Battlespire</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redguard</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morrowind</td>
<td>16.54%</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>TES Travels games</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oblivion</td>
<td>19.16%</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Skyrim</td>
<td>23.04%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>TES Online</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>5.99%</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Legends (Beta)</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.1.5 History 05 - Which aspect of the TES franchise do you value more - the gameplay or the world?

<table>
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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly gameplay</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Moderately gameplay</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>39.56%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Moderately world</td>
<td>28.21%</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Strongly world</td>
<td>27.47%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.6 History 06 - How many mods do you normally play TES games with?

<table>
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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No mods</td>
<td>9.16%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unofficial patches only</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-5 mods</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6-10 mods</td>
<td>7.33%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11-20 mods</td>
<td>8.79%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21-50 mods</td>
<td>15.02%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>51+ mods</td>
<td>50.18%</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
History 07 - How many mods do you think you've downloaded altogether for all TES games?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unofficial patches only</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-5 mods</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 mods</td>
<td>2.42%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-20 mods</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20-50 mods</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>51-100 mods</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>101-250 mods</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>250-500 mods</td>
<td>17.34%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>500+ mods</td>
<td>30.24%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>248</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.7 History 08 - Which sites do you use to obtain TES mods? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nexus Mods</td>
<td>48.75%</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steam Workshop</td>
<td>18.54%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual modder websites</td>
<td>21.04%</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>11.67%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>480</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.7.1 Other (please specify)

loverslab

Also make my own

TES Alliance

Bethesda.net, AFK Mods

afkmods, tesalliance

Dark Creations

TES Alliance

ModDB, used to use PES and ElricM, Scharesoft
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morrowind Modding History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The now-defunct PlanetElder Scrolls.com and the Morrowind Modding History website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoversLab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFK, Dark Creations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda modding platform for PS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UESP (Daggerfall mods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loverslab, Hall of Torque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minion (software)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loverlabs, Modgames.Ru, all-mods.ru, tes-mods.ru, bbs.3dmgame.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOU1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dragonporn.ldblog.jp, Loverslab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance, Loverslab...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoversLab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda.net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dragon porn (it's not what it sounds like)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made my own, + several modding forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovers lab, Skycitizen...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda.net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loverslab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda.net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Console Specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoversLab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda for console</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiwiland.net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lovers lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making my own mods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ModDB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark Creations, several defunct forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loverslab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loverslab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.loverslab.com/">www.loverslab.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOUI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoversLab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loverslab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrowind Modding History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planet Elder Scrolls, ElricM, what remains of their content in Morrowind Modding History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoversLab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrowind Modding History, other sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xbox One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoversLab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.1.8 History 09 - Which of the following mod types have you used? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patches, fixes &amp; overhauls</td>
<td>6.83%</td>
<td>238</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UI improvements &amp; maps</td>
<td>6.48%</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small game revisions (item availability etc.)</td>
<td>5.31%</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)</td>
<td>5.11%</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cheats, utilities, tutorials</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Followers/companion mods</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NPC characters (beyond companions)</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NPC character groups (factions &amp; guilds)</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Humanoid body additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>4.19%</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animals &amp; other non-humanoid additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>4.19%</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arms and armour additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>5.91%</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; misc. cultural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>5.54%</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food &amp; small natural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>4.13%</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Landscape additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>5.77%</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Architectural enhancements</td>
<td>4.99%</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Books &amp; other cultural enhancements</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New quests</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New player houses</td>
<td>4.79%</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New locations (dungeons etc.)</td>
<td>5.14%</td>
<td>179</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3485</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.8.1 Other (please specify)

- Immersion stuff
- Graphics Improvement, Open Cities (gates)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immersion &amp; survival mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total conversion mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dynamic enemy spawn mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools like OBSE and SKSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total conversions, landmass/province mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to weather, sound, and lighting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified body meshes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation, Sex mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Engine for Morrowind (OpenMW)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male and female nudity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quest timing changes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphical enhancing mods with new mesh and textures, ENB.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big dicks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humor/novelty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New animations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swearing mudcrabs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new lands and new worlds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexlab ;-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graphic upgrade utils (ENB, ReShade, SweetFx)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics enhancements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally, lore friendly overhauls, ENB, en anything else to archive photorealism in Skyrim (SE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovers Lab and related mods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical weapon mods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved models</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
### 5.2.1.9 History 10 - Which one of these mod types do you most like to use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patches, fixes &amp; overhauls</td>
<td>26.83%</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UI improvements &amp; maps</td>
<td>5.28%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small game revisions (item availability etc.)</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)</td>
<td>11.38%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cheats, utilities, tutorials</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Followers/companion mods</td>
<td>2.44%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NPC characters (beyond companions)</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NPC character groups (factions &amp; guilds)</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Humanoid body additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; misc. cultural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food &amp; small natural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Landscape additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Architectural enhancements</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Books &amp; other cultural enhancements</td>
<td>1.22%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New quests</td>
<td>8.13%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New player houses</td>
<td>1.63%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New locations (dungeons etc.)</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)</td>
<td>7.72%</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.2.1.9.1 Other (please specify)

Immersion mods

Immersion & survival mods
Textures/models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graphics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>madders' resources, new meshes and textures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sexlab

| Can't choose 1 type: ENB, patches, meshes/textures, gameplay overhauls |

3D/Texture mods/overhauls

| 5.2.1.10 History 11 - How much do you care about mods being lore-friendly? |
|---|---|---|
| # | Answer | % | Count |
| 1 | Not at all | 5.24% | 13 |
| 2 | A bit | 14.11% | 35 |
| 3 | Neutral | 14.92% | 37 |
| 4 | Strongly | 40.32% | 100 |
| 5 | Very strongly | 25.40% | 63 |
| Total | 100% | 248 |

| 5.2.1.11 History 12 - To what extent do you prefer either: mods that add new content, or mods that improve existing content? |
|---|---|---|
| Answer | % | Count |
| Strongly new content | 9.68% | 24 |
| Moderately new content | 11.29% | 28 |
| Both equally | 44.76% | 111 |
| Moderately improvements | 20.56% | 51 |
| Strongly improvements | 13.71% | 34 |
| Total | 100% | 248 |
5.2.1.12 History 13 - How often (if at all) have you donated money to any modders for their efforts, either on Nexus or using Patreon, PayPal, or some other option provided by the modder?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As often as possible</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only once or twice</td>
<td>20.15%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>66.30%</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.13 History 14 - Do you think it would be good for TES modders to be able to charge money for their mods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes, modders should be able to get something from their work</td>
<td>16.54%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No, because it would cause conflicts in the community</td>
<td>38.24%</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No, modders should work for free</td>
<td>10.66%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Unsure, I've never thought about it</td>
<td>15.81%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes/No for a different reason than above (please specify)</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.13.1 Yes/No for a different reason than above (please specify)

- There should be a good framework for donations, but the mods should remain free
- No, because it would cause conflicts in the community, but I like the idea of being able to donate to mod developers.
- No. Modding, by it's very nature, has always been free -- it's a hobby. If one desires payment, they should probably develop their own game instead making content for someone else's.
- A market for mods can exist without damaging the community but Bethesda's previous attempt was, pardon my french; an absolute clusterfuck. If it's to work we need proper moderation and fair legal representation including a streamlined DMCA system to protect our intellectual property. It would also help if the general public would learn baseline information about the law in regards to property.
- Yes, but the current system is impossible to regulate; piracy is rampant and not even Bethesda's DLC has DRM
- This is a far too complex question to tackle with a simple yes or no answer. In some cases it would be justified for a modder to get paid for their work. Then there are the multitudes of mods which
are either greatly derivative of other people's previous work or use assets that others have made for free use; in this situation I say getting paid would be unethical.

No, because it would open the modding community up to lawsuits from Bethesda and create massive complications in release logistics

No, unless they are hired to produce official content

No, the mods themselves should be free but the modder should be able to promote their donation links more openly.

No! Paid mods is not a good thing at all. That doesn't mean I don't think the mod authors don't deserve payment. But taking something that has been free since the beginning and then charging money for it is NOT a good idea. I have currently 400+ mods on Skyrim and if I had to pay only 1 dollar per mod it would be 400 + dollars. No way in hell.

I believe modders should be able to get donations, but not to lock their mods behind a paywall, especially if it was previously available for free.

No, modders should make mods for free out of passion for the game, not material gain.

No, because there is no guarantee that the mod will work and wont conflict with other mods, donations are fine and if some mods i enjoyed in regular skyrim come to SE i will totally toss money at the modders

I think it would be reasonable for modders to charge a small fee for their work, but the workshop fiasco showed how poorly it could go, especially if it's left up to others.

I think active modders should be supported by Bethesda based on the quality of their content. An example of this would be ARK's developers offering monthly payments to active modders.

I beleave that modders should leave the option. If the user thinks its good work they will support the author for more mods. If not then the modder knows to try to improve. Plus some modders dont really care, thy do it for the fun of it.

I think moders should accept donation but shouldn't charge for mods

I would be okay with it if some mods made it to official DLC status, but that's about it.

I'm conflicted! I like the current culture of freely sharing fan work (mods, art, fiction), but being allowed to crowdfund would make it a lot easier to find volunteers for big modding projects.

Yes, but only as donations, much like the way Nexus currently does it. To do otherwise requires an extensive and exploitable system to protect modder IP and assets.

It would be good for modders to be able to receive compensation, however payment should not be on a per mod basis, as this would lead to outlandish costs to play the game. For example, if each mod I've ever downloaded had cost $0.10, Skyrim would have cost me well over $500.

Yes, they should get something for their work, but it should be Pay What you Want

The donation system is good enough. Forcefully having paid mode will cause people with I'll intention to exploit the system like what happened to previous Steam attempt.

Using Bethesda assets to make money would be a legal shitshow; people already were stealing mods for profit on Steam.

No, donations are sufficient. Commercialising one of the greatets aspects of TES is a no no.

I've never used mods extensively so I have no backround in this.

no, some people are not willing to pay, but some are, so accepting donations is a better option

In theory, yes; I am not convinced that anyone has ever discovered a good model for this,
however.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modders get donations from people who like their work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, Modders usually create the content they want, then share it with the world. An exception would be if someone paid a modder to create said item for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, those who wish to. Those who wish to give mods freely to the community should still be able to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinning a method would be very difficult. It's been tried one or two times already and blown up. I am all for donations/patreons/etc. You have the messy issue of mod/asset theft that will be hard to regulate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both yes and no, but there'd have to be some kind of guideline on how much different types of mods would cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure, but I'm afraid we'd lose some of the best modders who do it for personal satisfaction and replace them with &quot;marketers&quot; who focus less on features/quality and more on packaging and publicity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but I personally wouldn't charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modders shouldn't be able to charge for their work only because of the fact that it's not really work, it's a hobby. There's a donate button if people wanna do that, but forcing people to pay should not be available for doing your hobby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, though the open source culture is strong and amazing in the modding community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe modders should be able to recieve compensation for their work, but it must be implemented properly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcing people to pay upfront for mods that may or may not work is not acceptable. A person who has already purchased the full game should not have to pay to use an amateur addon which may or may not work. As a mod author, I will accept free will donations but never want to force up front payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Lack of accountability, no curation, % I receive too low, bug fixes behind a paywall, my main reason for getting the games now is because mods are free, the $50-$100 price is more like $500, puts a paywall to just learn, copy cats, undercutting, can't even warn others about a mod since a modder can delete and ban users, can't down vote, can't voice negative opinions on the main site, another win for pirates. There's just too many concerns and I don't mind forgoing my potential income for that mess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper services, tools, and policies must be modified or created to facilitate &quot;paid modding&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but it should have been easier to donate to modders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if it acts as 'early access' - no blocking mods/updates to mods behind paywalls. Also, as long as modders get the majority of the cut (no Valve/Beth taking 70%) and get more protection against thieves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no, only donation system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the donate way, yes. But not as a you HAVE TO pay to use it. Modding is a pretty open-source community, and so many assets are being used from each other. It allows to make it big and improve. Asking money for a mod is like asking money for a linux distribution. The final thing is yours, but you used so much stuff from other for free it feels kinda unfair and hypocrite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't think they should charge money to access the mod, and I think it's best if they apply as few licensing restrictions as possible. As an open-source junkie, I definitely prefer the &quot;Cathedral&quot; model to the Parlour model, as explained by Wrye. Having a Patreon/Kickstarter/whatever is fine though, I can...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
understand wanting to be paid for development, it's just that mods are better for the community if they're Free.

It really depends on the type of mod in question. The smaller the mod the less I like the idea of charging.

Yes, if done right.

No, because it's a hobby.

free mods but they could link a PayPal or Patreon

No, modding is not a job, it's a hobby, and something you want to do because you like the game. Charging money for mods makes it a job.

5.2.1.14 History 15 - In a typical week, how much time do you spend reading Elder Scrolls lore online, such as on the Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages (UESP) or TES Wiki?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>21-30 hours</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>31-40 hours</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>41+ hours</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.1.15 History 16 - Which kinds of lore articles do you most often read online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gameplay</td>
<td>7.24%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot summaries</td>
<td>2.26%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>11.31%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quests</td>
<td>7.24%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creatures</td>
<td>1.36%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>5.43%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factions</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>40.27%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-game books</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)</td>
<td>10.86%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>4.52%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.15.1 Other (please specify)

- Mostly just walkthroughs and guides
- I read the books ingame.
- Really hard to specify this one. A little bit of everything I'd say.
- Michael Kirkbride's C0DA
- I typically read the topics being discussed on r/teslore
- all
- Random
- All of these, generally combined with what I'm doing at that moment (playing game, modding, etc.)
- Items
- Everything
5.2.1.16 History 17 - How would you assess your level of expertise in TES lore?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>12.09%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>39.93%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>29.67%</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>13.55%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Modding questions

5.3.1.1 Modding 01 - Have you ever worked on any TES mods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>52.01%</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>47.99%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.2 Modding 02 - Which was the first TES game that you modded?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arena</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daggerfall</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Battlespire</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redguard</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morrowind</td>
<td>25.35%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oblivion</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Skyrim</td>
<td>52.82%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Modding 03 - What was the first mod you ever developed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patches, fixes &amp; overhauls</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UI improvements &amp; maps</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small game revisions (item availability etc.)</td>
<td>17.61%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cheats, utilities, tutorials</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Followers/companion mods</td>
<td>7.75%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NPC characters (beyond companions)</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NPC character groups (factions &amp; guilds)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Humanoid body additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animals &amp; other non-humanoid additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arms and armour additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>11.97%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; misc. cultural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food &amp; small natural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Landscape additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>3.52%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Architectural enhancements</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Books &amp; other cultural enhancements</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New quests</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New player houses</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New locations (dungeons etc.)</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)</td>
<td>5.63%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>7.04%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.3.1.3.1 Other (please specify)

Unreleased and was basically complete but I had to trash it. I am taking modding classes though to make sure that won't be necessary next time.

Small furniture change
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rearrange/renovate existing player home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altering an existing quest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture mod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweaks of other mods, nothing from scratch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomized Spawning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A change to the script governing behavior of the wood chopping block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (unreleased) mods, only released one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.1.4 Modding 04 - How many mods have you have worked on altogether?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Only one</td>
<td>16.90%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-5 mods</td>
<td>42.25%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 mods</td>
<td>14.08%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-20 mods</td>
<td>11.27%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-30 mods</td>
<td>3.52%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31+ mods</td>
<td>11.97%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.1.5 Modding 05 - How long have you been modding TES?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>20.57%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7-11 months</td>
<td>7.09%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>29.08%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>16.31%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>0.71%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.1.6 Modding 06 - How would you rate your level of expertise in modding?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>24.65%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>33.10%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>13.38%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>9.15%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.7 Modding 07 - Have you ever tried modding Skyrim in particular?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>83.80%</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.8 Modding 08 - In a typical week, how much time do you spend modding Skyrim?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0 hours</td>
<td>32.77%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>27.73%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>16.81%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>8.40%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>5.04%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-30 hours</td>
<td>6.72%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31-40 hours</td>
<td>1.68%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41+ hours</td>
<td>0.84%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5.3.1.9 Modding 09 - How many mods have you developed for Skyrim?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Only one</td>
<td>30.51%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-5 mods</td>
<td>41.53%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 mods</td>
<td>11.02%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-20 mods</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-30 mods</td>
<td>2.54%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31+ mods</td>
<td>9.32%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>118</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Modding 10 - What types of mods have you developed for Skyrim? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patches, fixes &amp; overhauls</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UI improvements &amp; maps</td>
<td>1.52%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small game revisions (item availability etc.)</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cheats, utilities, tutorials</td>
<td>3.79%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Followers/companion mods</td>
<td>8.59%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NPC characters (beyond companions)</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NPC character groups (factions &amp; guilds)</td>
<td>1.52%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Humanoid body additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>3.28%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animals &amp; other non-humanoid additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>1.52%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arms and armour additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>7.83%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; misc. cultural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>6.31%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food &amp; small natural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Landscape additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>3.79%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Architectural enhancements</td>
<td>3.28%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Books &amp; other cultural enhancements</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New quests</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New player houses</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New locations (dungeons etc.)</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3.54%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.3.1.10.1 Other (please specify)

- **Immersion mods**
- **Modders resources**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texture improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DLC-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quest alteration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENB preset, to vastly alter visuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture fixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweaks of other mods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomized Spawning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most everything is script related in one form or another. Picking specific categories for each is not possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENB preset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New spells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Worldspaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Custom patches, Custom Setups and compilations

5.3.1.11
5.3.1.12 Modding 11 - Name the one type of mod you most often develop for Skyrim.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patches, fixes &amp; overhauls</td>
<td>7.21%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UI improvements &amp; maps</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small game revisions (item availability etc.)</td>
<td>15.32%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Major game revisions (gameplay, skills, levelling etc.)</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cheats, utilities, tutorials</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Followers/companion mods</td>
<td>12.61%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NPC characters (beyond companions)</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NPC character groups (factions &amp; guilds)</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Humanoid body additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animals &amp; other non-humanoid additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arms and armour additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>11.71%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; misc. cultural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Food &amp; small natural items additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Landscape additions &amp; enhancements</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Architectural enhancements</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Books &amp; other cultural enhancements</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New quests</td>
<td>5.41%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New player houses</td>
<td>13.51%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New locations (dungeons etc.)</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complete locations (e.g. new towns/spaces with NPCs and quests)</td>
<td>7.21%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>9.01%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.12.1 Other (please specify)

- Immersion mods
- Modders resources
Textures

- ongoing work on a DLC sized mod
- Quest alteration
- ENB presets
- Texture fixes
  
  I suppose these two answers are the same :/

Randomized Spawning

Scripted modifications

### 5.3.1.13 Modding 12 - Have any of your Skyrim mods... (tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Used a script extender</td>
<td>17.22%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Incorporated assets or mods created by others</td>
<td>41.06%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Been modified by yourself to improve compatibility with other mods</td>
<td>30.46%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Been re-released by other modders in modified form</td>
<td>11.26%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.1.14 Modding 13 - How complex are the Skyrim mods that you have worked on in the past 6 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Small and simple only</td>
<td>45.30%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mostly simple</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mostly complex</td>
<td>11.97%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Large and complex only</td>
<td>5.13%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.1.15 Modding  14 - What reasons motivate you to make mods? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoy modding</td>
<td>19.46%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I enjoy the community</td>
<td>9.53%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Improving my own skills/qualifications</td>
<td>13.23%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fixing or improving the game</td>
<td>16.15%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Improving or expanding the game world</td>
<td>13.42%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adding new content to the game</td>
<td>14.01%</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The game is an outlet for my artistic work</td>
<td>10.51%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To cheat/make the game easier</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>2.92%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 100% 514

5.3.1.15.1 Other (please specify)

- To provide a platform for artist collaboration
- Kills time
- It's an addiction
- I don't have anything better to do with my life
- Sometimes the mods made by others aren't quite what I am looking for.
- A sense of duty
- Silly presents for friends (outside the modding community)
- I've always made RP friendly housing for current characters I like to play, tailored to their style
- To create a world that is one I want for me while keeping it lore friendly
- To surprise & delight my partner
- Not to make the difficulty easier but to relieve some of the tedium.
- I see games like SKyrims like an open world where I can add what I want and play how I want without the dev telling me how I should enjoy their game to a certain extent. I love the modular aspect of this.
- I enjoy the idea of Morrowind
- I'm a programmer and got some free time
- Uhmmmmmershion
5.3.1.16 Modding  15 - Which one motivation for modding is the most important to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoy modding</td>
<td>27.54%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I enjoy the community</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Improving my own skills/qualifications</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fixing or improving the game</td>
<td>23.19%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Improving or expanding the game world</td>
<td>8.70%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adding new content to the game</td>
<td>10.87%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The game is an outlet for my artistic work</td>
<td>14.49%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.16.1 Other (please specify)

Kills time

I tend to want very specific things for my player homes, such as having certain locations for the home. Also I like my layouts a certain way and tend to favor certain architecture materials like stone or marble.

A sense of duty

to enhance the game for myself

To create my own dream world

Not to make the difficulty easier but to relieve some of the tedium.

5.3.1.17 Modding  16 - Where do you publish your mods? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nexus Mods</td>
<td>43.82%</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Steam Workshop</td>
<td>6.74%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>My own website</td>
<td>3.37%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I have not published any mods yet</td>
<td>29.21%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>16.85%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5.3.1.17.1 Other (please specify)

**Currently in a prepublished state on Nexus**

- Beyond Skyrim Bruma - coming sooner than most people expect ;)
- AFK Mods
- AFK Mods, TES Alliance
- Bethesda.net, AFK Mods
- Dark Creations
- If I do end up publishing mods, they will either be on TESA or Nexus.
- Tamriel Rebuilt
- Website hosted by modding team
- The now-defunct PlanetElder Scrolls.com
- Bethesda.net
- Dark Creations
- TES Alliance
- I mod only for Private purpose, i will never release any of my mods, they are not high quality enough.
- Bethesda.net
- I had someone else publish my work for me, but I have a lot of stuff I never really released.
- Most of my mods are private, mainly follower versions of my own characters, for use by myself and select trusted friends.
- ESOUI
- bethesda.net
- bethesda.net
- shared only privately
- Bethesda.net | ModDB
- Russian TES modding sites
- I've made contributions to a few big mods, and have developed a fair number of my own for personal use. I've almost published several times, but always back down when I consider having to support them.
- Loverslab
- Several are unpublished utility mods for my own uses, though they may be released later
- Tamriel Rebuilt
I rarely publish any mods....... 

I dont publish most of the stuff...too much headache

5.3.1.18 Modding 17 - Have you ever tried giving users the option of donating you money for your efforts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes, through Nexus</td>
<td>11.43%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes, through Patreon</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes, through other means (e.g. PayPal donate button on a website)</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No, never</td>
<td>87.14%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.19 Modding 18 - If there was a possibility of charging money for TES mods, would you charge money for your mods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes, wherever possible</td>
<td>1.42%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes, but only for some of them</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes, but only for new mods, not my earlier works</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No, because my mods contain other people's content</td>
<td>13.48%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No, because mods should be free</td>
<td>48.94%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No, because I think the community would react badly</td>
<td>16.31%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.20
5.3.1.21 Modding 19 - If there was a possibility of charging money for TES mods, would this affect your motivations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes, profit would become my main motivation</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes, profit would be a secondary motivation</td>
<td>7.86%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No, but profit would be a welcome bonus</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No, and I would keep my mods free</td>
<td>60.71%</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>140</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.22 Modding 20 - How many people were in the biggest modding team you ever worked with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (I only work alone)</td>
<td>60.56%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3 people</td>
<td>14.79%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-5 people</td>
<td>3.52%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6-10 people</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11-20 people</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21+ people</td>
<td>15.49%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>142</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.23 Modding 21 - How many people do you typically work with on mods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (I work alone)</td>
<td>48.21%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3 people</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-5 people</td>
<td>1.79%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6-10 people</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11-20 people</td>
<td>5.36%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21+ people</td>
<td>16.07%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.1.24 Modding 22 - Have you learned any new skills for modding, other than figuring out the Creation Kit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No, but I already had strong modding/gamedev skills</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No, I haven’t tried to do anything beyond my skills</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No, I tried but gave up</td>
<td>11.35%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes - a few things</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes - lots</td>
<td>30.50%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.25 Modding 23 - What kind of skills have you picked up? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scripting</td>
<td>13.67%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>6.71%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2D graphics</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3D graphics</td>
<td>12.47%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>4.08%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Level design</td>
<td>12.23%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Game design</td>
<td>9.83%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7.91%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Website design to present my/our work</td>
<td>2.64%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Team leadership</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Project planning</td>
<td>7.91%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Collaborative tools (e.g. GitHub)</td>
<td>5.52%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>2.16%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.25.1 Other (please specify)

Unexpected misc. knowledge such as Forestry, Biology, and real world history through researching the real-world inspirations and counterparts to certain elements of The Elder Scroll lore.
Skyrim and Indigenous Virtual Cultural Heritage

Nifscope

Animation

Texturing

using blender to create 3D or 2D models to convert and move to skyrim creation kit

I've written and altered a number of shaders. I'm a pro developer but I've never worked on graphics before.

Models and textures.

I'm already a software engineer, but mainly how a game engine is build up. So mainly program design.

Radare2 - Disassembler - Executable Modding

5.3.1.26 Modding  24 - How do you learn new modding skills? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trial, error, and experience</td>
<td>23.90%</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>By example from others</td>
<td>18.70%</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forum discussions</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Video tutorials</td>
<td>15.84%</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Text tutorials</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>2.34%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.26.1 Other (please specify)

Candles arranged around an effigy of Todd Howard's heart taught me how to generate LOD.

The modding classes on TESA provide a walkthrough guide with screenshots and if you participate by posting your work, appropriate feedback is given

Online sites

safaribooksonline
5.3.1.27 Modding 25 - Have you ever investigated any of these aspects of culture for your mods?
Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>TES lore</td>
<td>40.96%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Real-world material culture (armour, clothes, architecture, etc.)</td>
<td>21.40%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Real-world immaterial culture (history, religion, customs, etc.)</td>
<td>15.13%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Other fantasy (for comparison or inspiration)</td>
<td>22.51%</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.28 Modding 26 - Do you try to make your mods lore-friendly?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No, I just make companion mods</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Never, I like to do my own thing</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>17.73%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>34.04%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.29 Modding 27 - How much do you research TES lore specifically for your mods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>16.31%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>12.06%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>21.28%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>24.11%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Extensively</td>
<td>26.24%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.1.30 Modding 28 - Have you ever created mods based on another fantasy or sci-fi universe, such as Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes (please specify most important example)</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>89.36%</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1.30.1 Yes (please specify most important example)

- My own headcanon
- Movie: Van Helsing
- The Fallout franchise.
- Dragon Age
- World of Warcraft (I was young and needed the attention!)
- The very first mods I made as a 14-year-old kid were inspired by and based on the Lord of the Rings
- Warhammer Fantasy
- I've created a Submod for Third Age Total War, a total conversion mod set in the Lord of the Rings Universe for Medieval Total War 2.
- Zelda
- Yes flash mod for skyrim.
- World of Warcraft
- Star Trek - Voyager: Elite Force levels, and role-playing levels. Toyed around trying to do crossover in design phases for Skyrim a few times
- Can't, this is meant to be an anonymous survey.
- Dragon Age 2
- Fallout
### 5.3.1.31 Modding  29 - What features have you added from that universe? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Humanoid races/ethnicities</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-humanoid (incl. animals)</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specific characters</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Weapons &amp; armour</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; accessories</td>
<td>11.36</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Books &amp; texts</td>
<td>11.36</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Architecture (incl. statues)</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Landscape elements (incl. plants)</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other material objects</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music (songs or instrumental)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dances, martial arts and similar physical activities</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Customs, behaviours and rituals</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Stories and ideas, for example religious concepts</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Crafting, artistic production, and other productive activities e.g. farming</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.1.32 Modding  30 - Have you ever created mods that add real-world culture to the game, such as the Vikings, Native Americans, Aboriginal peoples?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes (please specify most important example)</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>92.96</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.1.32.1 Yes (please specify most important example)

Sort of, my new mod adds ancient roman beverages and food

Question slightly unclear, as I have never directly and deliberately added "real" elements; but often deal with very close parallels that already exist inside TES lore.
Norse mythology

A Clan Armstrong Tartan

Sudanese swords

Vikings and European middle age mainly

Anonymous survey! Something like 'magical' medicine from some cultures. I did not have any particular culture in mind though.

My armor is based off real world designs but uses fictional materials

Sumerian

### 5.3.1.33 Modding 31 - What features have you incorporated from that culture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Humanoid races/ethnicities</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-humanoid (incl. animals)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specific characters</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Weapons &amp; armour</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clothes &amp; accessories</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Books &amp; texts</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Architecture (incl. statues)</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Landscape elements (incl. plants)</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other material objects</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Music (songs or instrumental)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dances, martial arts and similar physical activities</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Customs, behaviours and rituals</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Stories and ideas, for example religious concepts</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Crafting, artistic production, and other productive activities e.g. farming</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 Lore questions

5.4.1.1 Lore 01 - Have you ever visited the UESP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>90.48%</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No, but I do use the TES Wikia</td>
<td>6.23%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.2 Lore 02 - How long have you been visiting the UESP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7-11 months</td>
<td>3.64%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>14.17%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>39.68%</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
<td>10.93%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Since even before it became a wiki</td>
<td>6.88%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.3
5.4.1.4  Lore 03 - How would you define your current level of involvement with the UESP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent visitor, not contributing directly</td>
<td>30.36%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Regular visitor, not contributing directly</td>
<td>44.94%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat active, minor tweaks to existing articles</td>
<td>9.31%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reasonably active, major or numerous tweaks to existing articles</td>
<td>2.83%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very active, significant modifications or large new articles</td>
<td>4.86%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am an admin</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No longer active, but still visiting</td>
<td>4.05%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No longer even visiting</td>
<td>1.62%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.5  Lore 04 - Can you estimate how many articles you have modified on the UESP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-5 articles</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 articles</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-20 articles</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-50 articles</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>51-100 articles</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>101+ articles</td>
<td>46.81%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.1.6  Lore 05 - Can you estimate how many articles you have created from scratch on the UESP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>36.96%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-5 articles</td>
<td>26.09%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 articles</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-20 articles</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-50 articles</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>51-100 articles</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>101+ articles</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.7  Lore 06 - How much time do you typically spend working on UESP content in an average week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>57.45%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-30 hours</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31-40 hours</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41+ hours</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.1.8 Lore 07 - For which TES product have you modified or created any articles?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arena</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daggerfall</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Battlespire</td>
<td>4.71%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redguard</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morrowind</td>
<td>9.80%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oblivion</td>
<td>11.37%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Skyrim</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>12.16%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Travels (the mobile games)</td>
<td>3.14%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Legends</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Non-product specific (lore)</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Non-product specific (general, like production background)</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.8.1 Other (please specify)

- images
- Templates, site UI...pretty much everything else not covered above ;)
- Templates, Files, Userspace, Mods
### 5.4.1.9 Lore 08 - For which one of these have you modified or created the most articles?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arena</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daggerfall</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Battlespire</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redguard</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morrowind</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oblivion</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Skyrim</td>
<td>31.91%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Travels (the mobile games)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Legends</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Non-product specific (lore)</td>
<td>25.53%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Non-product specific (general, like production background)</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5.4.1.10 Lore 09 - Which kinds of articles have you modified or created?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gameplay</td>
<td>9.69%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plot summaries</td>
<td>7.36%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>12.02%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Quests</td>
<td>11.63%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creatures</td>
<td>9.69%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>11.24%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factions</td>
<td>8.53%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In-game books</td>
<td>8.91%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)</td>
<td>7.75%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3.88%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.4.110.1 Other (please specify)

- Everything that can have bugs.
- Easter Eggs
- images
- Again, anything and everything not covered by the above
- Items, general info, archives, DLC, official products such as books, technical info
- I actually don't recall which page it was.
- Any and all. I just do grammar.
- Items, Skills
- Files: images
- images
5.4.1.11 Lore 10 - Which one kind of article do you most often work on?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gameplay</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plot summaries</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>17.39%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Quests</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creatures</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>15.22%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factions</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>10.87%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In-game books</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)</td>
<td>8.70%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>13.04%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.11.1 Other (please specify)

Anything with bugs.

There is no one area that gets notably more attention than others, though Lore is notably less for me.

Characters

Items / Skills

Files: images

5.4.1.12
5.4.1.13 Lore 11 - Please estimate how many articles you have modified or created on the UESP for Skyrim specifically?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-5 articles</td>
<td>21.28%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6-10 articles</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11-20 articles</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-50 articles</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>51-100 articles</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>101+ articles</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.14 Lore 12 - How much time do you typically spend working on UESP content for Skyrim in an average week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>94.44%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-30 hours</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31-40 hours</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41+ hours</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5.4.1.15 Lore 13 - Which kinds of articles have you modified or created for Skyrim?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gameplay</td>
<td>8.86%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plot summaries</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>12.66%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Quests</td>
<td>14.56%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creatures</td>
<td>10.76%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>13.92%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factions</td>
<td>9.49%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>7.59%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In-game books</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.4.1.15.1 Other (please specify)

- Anything with bugs.
- Anything not covered above, such as Skyrim-specific templates, answering user questions, etc.
- NPCs
- Pre-release content, concept art, DLC and mods
- Files: images
5.4.1.16 Lore 14 - Which one of these kinds of articles do you most often modify or create for Skyrim?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gameplay</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plot summaries</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Quests</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creatures</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factions</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In-game books</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.16.1 Other (please specify)

- Anything with bugs.
- Again, nothing stands out above the others
- NPCs
- Files: images
5.4.1.17 Lore 15 - What reasons motivate your involvement with the UESP? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I like the TES world, and want to know more about it</td>
<td>27.33%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like a particular TES game, and want to know more about that game’s contents</td>
<td>14.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I like a particular TES game, and want to know how to best play it</td>
<td>9.33%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I enjoy the community</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I enjoy sharing my TES knowledge</td>
<td>22.00%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I enjoy the respect I get for my TES knowledge</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.17.1 Other (please specify)

- I want to correct some of the fanon that has been erroneously incorporated into lore articles.
- Editing the UESP is a highly enjoyable experience for me
- I like the technical aspects...figuring out how things work, and why things are the way they are
- I like to document facts and have them available for others to read; I also enjoy taking images

5.4.1.18
5.4.1.19  Lore 16 - Which one of these motivations is the most important for your UESP involvement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I like the TES world, and want to know more about it</td>
<td>52.17%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like a particular TES game, and want to know more about the game's contents</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I like a particular TES game, and want to know how to best play it</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I enjoy the community</td>
<td>15.22%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I enjoy sharing my TES knowledge</td>
<td>23.91%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I enjoy the respect I get for my TES knowledge</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.20  Other (please specify)

- Personal enjoyment

5.4.1.21  Lore 17 - What sources do you use to collect data for UESP articles? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Memory only</td>
<td>16.11%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Take notes while playing</td>
<td>23.49%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Use the Creation Kit</td>
<td>18.79%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Use the game guides</td>
<td>5.37%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Read books</td>
<td>12.75%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Watch videos</td>
<td>5.37%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Consult others</td>
<td>12.75%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>5.37%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1.21.1  Other (please specify)

- Research to source erroneous claims and cite to correct
- The Construction Set for Morrowind
Screenshots (doh ;))
screenshots
Read posts on /r/Teslore
Editing whilst playing
Screenshots, datamining, uespLog tool

### 5.4.1.22 Lore 18 - How frequently do you ask for help from other UESP users either to obtain data or to verify your research?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extensively</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>29.79%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Infrequently</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.4.1.23 Lore 19 - How frequently do other UESP users ask you to help by providing data, or verifying their work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extensively</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>19.15%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Infrequently</td>
<td>34.04%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>25.53%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.1.24 Lore 20 - What is the biggest number of collaborators you've had for one article on UESP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (I only work alone)</td>
<td>46.81%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>11-20 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21+ people</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>

5.4.1.25 Lore 21 - And how many collaborators do you usually have for one article?

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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>1 (I usually work alone)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2-3 people</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>6-10 people</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>21+ people</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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5.4.1.26 Lore 22 - Have you picked up new research or technical skills for editing the UESP, other than learning to use a wiki?

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<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No, but I already had strong scholarly skills</td>
<td>19.15%</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No, I haven't tried to do anything beyond my skills</td>
<td>27.66%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No, I tried but gave up</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes - a few things</td>
<td>44.68%</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes - lots</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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5.4.1.27 Lore 23 - What kind of skills have you learned? Tick all that apply.

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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Referencing</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gathering data in systematic way</td>
<td>12.75%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Systematic source analysis</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Advanced wiki skills (beyond the basics)</td>
<td>12.75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mastery of TES editing tools (to extract data)</td>
<td>8.82%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Data management</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Image processing</td>
<td>7.84%</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Video processing</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
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<td>10</td>
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Total: 100% | 102

5.4.1.27.1 Other (please specify)
- Significant improvement to programming skills, bot design, template design
- Conflict resolution, community management, consensus-building, leadership skills

5.4.1.28 Lore 24 - How did you pick up new skills? Tick all that apply.

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<td>Trial, error, and experience</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>By example from others</td>
<td>30.16%</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Forum discussions</td>
<td>15.87%</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Video tutorials</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Text tutorials</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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Total: 100% | 63

5.4.1.28.1 Other (please specify)
- Mentoring
5.4.1.29 Lore 25 - Which aspects of TES lore on the UESP do you specialize in?

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<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Plot summaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Characters</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Quests</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Creatures</td>
<td>8.64%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factions</td>
<td>8.64%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>13.58%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In-game books</td>
<td>8.02%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other lore (languages, religions, etc.)</td>
<td>8.64%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
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5.4.1.29.1 Other (please specify)

- Issues of canonicity
- Items / Skills
- Files: images
5.4.1.30 Lore 26 - Which TES products on the UESP do you specialize in?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<td>Arena</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Daggerfall</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Battlespire</td>
<td>0.89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redguard</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morrowind</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Oblivion</td>
<td>16.96%</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Online</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>TES Travels</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>8.04%</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Legends</td>
<td>5.36%</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>112</strong></td>
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</table>

5.4.1.31 Lore 27 - If you specialise in particular aspects of TES lore, are they connected to your interests outside of TES? If yes, please explain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>29.55%</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>70.45%</td>
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</table>

5.4.1.31.1 Yes

I am generally interested in RPG's and High/Fantasy settings, Michael Kirkbride's and the late Adam Adamowicz's writing/art have been a large influence on my personal projects and interests.

History is of general interest to me, in both the real world and fantasy universes.

Being a literature student in a university, literature and fictional worlds (and especially the in-universe literature of fictional worlds) interest me.

History and anthropology are sicc.

I like the lore in general, mostly because I enjoy history and real life religions, and in special I like the Nords, much because I'm a fan of the real life Norse culture.

I am interested in geography and history, which I think has influenced the fact that I focus on
locations and history in TES

The chronology, and how similar/dissimilar to our real world.

I'm very interested in TES geography, just as in the geography of the real world.

I love technology and how it developed. TES may be fantasy but you see roots of real tech buried in there.

I really enjoy real-world history, as well as mythology

I really like norse culture in real life, and that translated into a love for nords in the elder scrolls, but that is just one example

I enjoy writing, hiking, gardening, and carpentry in the real world, all of which I have in some form felt translated in TES.
Appendix F: Expert interview materials

6.1 Participant Information Kit

Dear Participant,

If at all possible, I would like to ask you to please review the following information ahead of the interview in order to ensure that our conversation will be as productive as possible.

6.1.1 About open-world RPGs and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

I realise that you may not yet have had an opportunity to play or see *Skyrim*, in which case you may not be well aware of the possibilities afforded by games of this kind.

Open-world RPGs are games in which the player is cast in a role that they themselves create – they play a character, whose appearance, characteristics and skills they determine initially, and then develop over the course of the game. There is a great deal of freedom offered to the players, as they can typically go almost anywhere within an open environment, exploring wilderness areas as well as cities, villages, and special locations like mines, caves, and of course the inevitable dungeons. It must be said that like most other game genres, RPGs can be brutal and violent; however, they also offer the most diverse range of interactions between players, the game world, and other characters. So, while the aim for the player in *Skyrim* is to go on epic quests, to save a fantasy world by performing great feats and defeat many opponents, the player also has the freedom to mine for resources, produce new items, build a house, get married, harvest plants, cook food, hunt animals for their meat and hides, talk to hundreds of characters, listen to songs, and to read books.

If you have not previously encountered *Skyrim*, I would encourage you to review the “World of Skyrim” video trailer which shows the level of diversity and detail that may be found within *Skyrim*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fn0N294NFy0

6.1.2 Virtual Aboriginal Heritage

You may also wish to familiarise yourself with the ongoing *Virtual Songlines* project in development by Australian Aboriginal researcher and developer Brett Leavy. This project seeks to re-create particular locations in Australia prior to European arrival, showcasing the lives of Aboriginal people, their culture, and their interactions with the environment. It is precisely for the benefit and further enhancement of projects such as *Virtual Songlines* that this research is being conducted.

*Virtual Warrane II* (Sydney Harbour): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9T40IU6HHM

*Virtual Tarntanya* (Adelaide): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2DiyabyN8o
6.1.3 Protocols for Collaboration with Indigenous Traditional Owners

In the past three decades in Australia significant changes have occurred in how collaboration with Indigenous peoples is approached. The government, and various industries, have developed specific protocols to ensure that Indigenous rights are not overridden, and that collaboration is conducted respectfully and appropriately. Such a protocol has also been proposed by Brett Leavy and colleagues specifically for virtual heritage in the Digital Songlines Project, an earlier iteration of Virtual Songlines. This protocol puts forward the following principles:

7. “That the stories of Traditional Owners be recognized as a ‘body of knowledge’ that may be tens of thousands of years old;

8. That the stories are sourced from the Traditional Owner who represents the country from which that story might originate;

9. That the communities make their own decision on what stories they want to have represented in Virtual Heritage;

10. That an approval process be implemented and approved by communities;

11. That the story represents the community and clan and is specifically placed geographically;

12. Ownership and copyright of the story is always held by the nominated Traditional Owner group or community council;

13. That the content of the Virtual Heritage application including artist styles is approved by the community at all key production stages;

14. That the story provided by the community is not modified unless approved and endorsed by the Traditional Owner representative of that community;

15. That the community be paid industry standard rates and receive royalties from revenue earned from any capitalisation or commercialisation;

16. That Indigenous people design and participate in the creation of the virtual Heritage application development at all stages of planning, design and production.”

6.2 Interview Consent Form

6.2.1 Open-World Role-Playing Games and Real-World Cultural Heritage

Bond University Human Ethics Approval Number: 0000015949

I consent to participation in this interview. I also give my consent for the author to quote and/or paraphrase any and all parts of this interview for research and educational purposes, including publications, presentations and exhibitions both offline and online.

I understand that no personal information, such as name or contact details or any other information that may identify me will be published in any format without additional explicit written permission on my part.

I also grant my consent to the recording of the interview either as video or as an audio-only recording. I understand that the recorded materials will only be used to produce written transcripts of the interview and will not be broadcast or otherwise published in any form.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Should I choose to withdraw, all information provided by me will be immediately destroyed.

Name: __________________________________________________________
Contact details (e-mail address): ______________________________________________________
Signature: _____________________________________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature: _______________________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________________________________________
6.3 Interview Guide [total interview time: 60-70 minutes]

6.3.1 General introduction to project [3 minutes]
- Introduce project – since project has been introduced in email exchange prior to interview, re-iterate only the most important details:
  - about the purpose of the project,
  - the questions this particular interview seeks to answer,
  - how the answers will be used afterwards.
- Re-iterate consent to...
  - Interview
  - video recording.
- Assure participants of confidentiality in final study.
- Since interviewee has been sent some information and video links for an introduction to Skyrim, check whether they are now familiar with the game.
- Explain three-part structure of interview.
  - Initial questions based on expert’s experience and background.
  - Questions about most important features needed for a successful digital heritage project showing indigenous culture.
  - Questions concerning protocol and methods for appropriate and successful project acceptable to indigenous communities.

6.3.2 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

6.3.2.1 Primer A – If interviewing cultural heritage expert [10 minutes]
1. What are the strengths of the heritage projects for showing and teaching indigenous culture that you are involved with?
2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?
3. Have you looked into the incorporation of digital games into your cultural heritage projects?
   a. If yes: briefly, what are your initial thoughts on this?
b. If no: is there any particular reason for this, or has the subject simply not come up earlier?

6.3.2.2 Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [10 minutes]
1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?
2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?
3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects?

6.3.2.3 Primer C – If interviewing games expert [10 minutes]
1. What are the strengths of RPGs when it comes to showing and teaching new cultures?
2. What does not work, or needs improving in RPGs?
3. Are you familiar with any digital heritage projects or serious games that you think do a particularly strong job of showing and teaching about real cultures?
   a. If yes: how do you think these compare to commercial RPGs?

6.3.3 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

6.3.3.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]
Note challenge of cultural loss faced by most indigenous cultures.

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?
5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?
6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

6.3.3.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]
7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?
8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?
a. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

6.3.3.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]
Note importance of connection with the land in indigenous cultures, and point out the limited depth of nature in present-day games – no seasons, winds, tides, etc., essentially a static depiction of fauna and flora. Point back to Skyrim as the current state of what RPGs can depict for nature.

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

   a. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

6.3.4 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

6.3.4.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

6.3.4.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

   a. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.
a. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

6.3.4.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]
Explain briefly limited access to technology and technological education in many indigenous communities, but also point to research exploring using games to improve technological literacy.

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

a. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

6.3.5 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]
Thank interviewee for their time.

15. Do you have any questions for me?

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

Wrap up interview, promise to keep interviewee informed on outcomes.
7 Appendix G: Interview transcripts

7.1 Respondent 1: traditional descendant of the Gudjinburra-Bundjalung

7.1.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

Primer A – If interviewing cultural heritage expert [10 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the heritage projects for showing and teaching indigenous culture that you are involved with?

   The strength is that they’re based on a cultural framework. So, that informs our process, then. So, they’re always... there’s three things and I think this might kind of the whole thing is eldership... once you have eldership, that then sets our protocol. And then after our protocols, from our protocols comes perpetuity – that comes from the protocols. So that’s the strength that I see in that.

   So, it’s rooted in the culture – it’s not you doing lectures.

   Yeah. It comes from the culture and then follows, it’s part of that cultural framework. So, the context changes for us, we’re not like in the bush learning it, we’re in the board room, but it’s the same – same framework.

   I’m going to lead you on just a bit with this, because I’ve been to your seminars. What I find interesting about them is that you have limited time, 3-4 hours, so you don’t really learn much about Aboriginal culture as such. You don’t learn about rituals, or artifacts or traditional methods of hunting or anything like that, but you learn about the mindset – you learn about the ways Aboriginal people traditionally think because of the way they’ve been raised and their society.

   Yeah. And that reason... because that informs the practice. So, where I’m coming from, why we think and the principle behind those practices, so that, for us... every method and the practices are connected to that for us.

   So you build the groundwork, and then if someone wants to learn more, they will have the right foundations for it?

   Yeah.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

   I think we can just work on the presentation side of things, and how to balance those two things, so when people are sitting in, like a board room or a conference setting, and they’re looking at
the mindset and that – but then, how we connect that to the Country walk, [where] you go out on Country and you look at the method and the practice. That connection, I think, needs to be essential, but then reinforced, like a lot of the time, we don’t get to do that all the time. That’s – I think that can be reinforced, and I think that games can help that.

3. Have you looked into the incorporation of digital games into your cultural heritage projects?

Naw, only when we talk to you [laughs].

So, the subject simply hasn’t come up before you talked to me?

Yep.

Ok. So while we’re recording [before we go on to the next section], you’ve had a look at Brett’s [Leavy’s] work recently, so just a couple of minutes about what you think about that?

Yeah, I think that’s... like, that’s amazing what he’s doing, and I think the focus on Country is important because at the heart of our cultural framework is land... and Country, and everything comes from that, so... the focus on there is good to start off, and we’ll see how that goes. And, like a lot of the small things, I think, like you know even with the animals and the things like that, I think like really great what he’s doing. How... how you integrate the intangible side, the spirituality and that into that? I think that’s going to be... like maybe he’s not that far along the track yet, but I think that side will be interesting, how that all integrates.

Yeah, I think that’s the main challenge: intangible culture and nature. Because the tangible side is incredibly easy to recreate on the computer, there’s no challenge to solve in order to achieve it.

Yeah.

7.1.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.1.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

It’s hard for me to imagine. What do you mean?

Well, think about it maybe from the perspective of what the player would be doing in a game?

It depends on... for us, coming from a cultural point of view, everyone has very specific roles. So, it depends on the identity and what that character, that person has, like what would be their role
and what would be their path to do that. Like, I think it would be important, that foundational side of things – some kind of teaching to understand that, so that the thinking, like you know, what we focus a lot on, the thinking does connect to the practice, you know? That’s my side of it, and it doesn’t have to be you know, outlined, it can be done through the practical, which is the way what we teach, you know? Through song, through dance, through that side of it, story.

So, when you say roles, would you say that it’s almost more about restricting the player rather than giving them freedom? Like, it’s about telling the player that you’re playing this role, and this is the right stuff for you to do, and this other stuff is not right for you to do?

Yeah, and so… distinct roles, like you know – men’s business and women’s business. So, that kind of thing, and then old people and young people have different roles. Different things like that, and when you get into the more senior levels of [stuff] if that’s included too, who has access to what things, that kind of thing. And that, I think, you see a bit of that in some of the games, but understanding the thinking behind that, yeah.

The reason I wanted to drill down a bit into that is because it’s very different to what Skyrim does. You can join Faction A, and then you can join Faction B even though they’re at war with one another. In Skyrim, they don’t want to restrict players, they want it to be as open as possible.

Yeah, and it’s probably interesting to look at that kind of psyche of... even our kids in Aboriginal community, when they play the NRL game on the computer, on TV, Xbox or whatever, they won’t be another team – they’ll only be their team. You know, they’ve got the freedom to be anything they want, but no, they’ll only be this team cause that’s their team. And it’s interesting, the dynamics of that.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

I don’t know, like when... it’s for me anyway, like it’s only just my perspective, the hunting and the fishing stuff for me, is the thing that connects people to country and it’s that kind of thing that it [means?]. For me even in the modern culture, even with modern [tools], we go hunting sometimes – we take guns. You know, we go in a land cruiser sometimes. I think that side of things, and the modern side for me. Modern urban kind of Aboriginal life, I think, for me personally isn’t enough. That’s not something that I think represents culture to me, yeah.
So basically what you’re saying is you would like to show how traditional culture exists still in modernity, and how it has changed – adapted to modern technologies, for example going hunting with guns, but that the culture is still there, it’s still the same?

Yeah, yeah, it’s still there.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

*I think it would have a massive impact, because that digital kind of culture now is everywhere – even in the most remote communities. The internet, you know, and the smartphones and that, all of that generation is now connected to it. There’s not much cultural content for Aboriginal people that’s specific to our communities and our culture. So, yeah – there’s not much, so I think it will have a big impact.*

Because one of the observed phenomena when it comes to culture, Aboriginal culture in particular, is that in some cases they aren’t very proud of their culture because they’re not seeing it anywhere, so it’s like, our culture is shit, it’s worthless, so we don’t want to take interest in it.

Yeah, some of them have that attitude, yeah.

So you think a game would potentially change that?

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I think it could potentially change it. And it’s just one of the things, in the last twenty years in communities we’re seeing more and more groups of people – you know, continue with cultural practice, like especially in places where it was very oppressed. So now it’s coming back more and more, but then... but also seeing those groups struggle to find applications for those practices and things, so they’re bringing... you know, they have to, I think it’s an essential thing to find an application for it. Like, you know, where we do it every day, like whether we’re in a boardroom or whether we’re anywhere. Today, whatever I’m... I go from this meeting to another meeting, I’ll be talking about cultural things, that’s my application for what I’ve been given, been taught. Now, I think that’s the essential part, even with the game, like we can give people knowledge through it, they can engage with it, and essentially it’s an education, but it is an application at the same time. I need to be able to do something with this – you know, like that for me, I hardly ever play a game, but when my kids got Primal, I thought, oh that might be one I might be interested in. And I even enjoyed it, cause I’m familiar with some of those things, but for me it’s, you know, a bit different, but culturally, walking around the bush and
hunting animals and that... that is, that’s my culture. Yeah, and it’s a different skin, but still my culture, you know?

7.1.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

I think the traditional cultural frameworks that show you the integration of everything, I think that’s the most important. That’s the foundation, it’s like the Lego block that everything else gets built out of for us, you know?

So, the relationships?

Yeah.

That’s more or less what Lexene said. At first she said basically everything, because it’s all connected...

Yeah!

And then she explained that the relationship between people and nature, and the relationship between people and other people.

Yeah, a completely integrated system and everything’s connected. So, how they connect, I think that’s the most important, that framework.

So, would you say that this is almost more important than the applied culture, by which I mean ceremonies and songs etc.?

Well, ceremony for us is what connects the tangible and the intangible. Yeah, so, like to do a corroboree, and that’s, I think that’s gonna be the thing with the game, cause you do something to get to something else, and you do something to get to something else, where the ceremonial aspect, for us is the – that is the something else. You’re connecting the physical and the intangible, so that’s what you do in that. Not so that you can go on to do another thing.

The ceremony itself has meaning, it has an effect as such.

Yeah. And so that’s what connects that, so when we do a welcome dance, it’s about showing respect, to the land, but then also to one another. And so that ceremony, the dancing, really, you can dance for any reason. You know, when the movement isn’t directly connected, like for
people, it could be – oh, that’s a nice dance – but for us, it’s no, we do that because of this intangible principle. Yeah, so that’s that side of it, connecting that part is essential.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

Like, every part of it, for us, every part of culture is sacred in a sense. So even the parts that we think are you know, insignificant, are connected to the sacred cause everything’s connected. So, especially when it comes to country, but... having eldership is the key to that process. Eldership in place, and by eldership I’m not just meaning, go find the oldest person. Like, have the person that has knowledge and has responsibility for that knowledge, and then, you know – even in your side of things, for you guys, who is developing the game, the eldership in that side of it, everyone has to see them as eldership in that place there. And then from that, our protocols would get developed out of that, those relationships, yeah. Because, and it depends, so, the sacred and the secret, all that, all rests on relationships. So if there’s no relationship, then there will be no sharing, because the concept of carrying knowledge, how we give knowledge and how we carry it, it’s only given if you can carry it in our understanding. So when you can carry it, then they’ll give it. So yeah, I don’t know – that’s the only way that I think that can be approached.

But do you think that things like secret knowledge could appear in a game at all, given that a game by definition would be available to a broader public?

I think, if done the right way, like there’s stuff that happens now in a lot of situations that people don’t know... you know, it’s your level of knowledge and your understanding of the practice that you understand what’s happening. So, there could be things that happen that you haven’t got the knowledge for, so I think you could do that with the game too, you know, like that kind of cryptic kinda message or knowledge that we can transfer, I think that could be done through a game. I think what we do, what we do in reality can be done that way. Like we do it in, we still do it, even markings and different things, symbolism, people don’t understand what that is. Not everybody understands what that is in the community, but some do, and that represents something to those people that know. Yeah, so I think it can be shared that way.

So, do you think it would be an issue to have – just going with the simplest example, men’s business and women’s business, suppose you have a male player who chooses to play in the game as a female, and then starts learning all about the women’s business, would that still be acceptable?
Nah, that would... I don’t think so. Not in community, that wouldn’t be acceptable. Where there’s
definite knowledge that’s specific for certain roles, I don’t think that would be able to happen,
yeah.

So there are definitely limits to what could be shown in a game, and the secret stuff, the stuff
that really cannot be shared except with the right kind of people, you would recommend to just
leave that out, or...?

I wouldn’t put it in there, yeah.

a. So, apart from the situation where the community allows some of these elements to be
shared, I think you could basically either ignore such matters, with the game only
indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way
outside of the game, or you could create a fictional equivalent where you show
everything exactly, but only in fictionalised versions, in the same way Skyrim does for
Nordic culture. It’s kind of Northern European culture, but it isn’t. So do you think the
same could be done for Aboriginal culture, to create a fictional community?

Yeah, yeah, I think that would be a good way to do it.

7.1.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection
indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

Yeah, I think so. And making sure, like, I think that’s one area you can connect the ceremonial
aspect to it, cause that’s connected to that for us, so you know, people that are responsible for
them things and how that happens, you could integrate that, and I think it could really help with
that message of how we’re connected to it and how we relate to it, yeah.

b. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most
important to improve for this purpose?

It’s interesting, cause the traditional side, it doesn’t... like, it’s not problems for them. But
now in that modern part, it’s problems today, you know. Like, even the floods for
example, that’s big problems for people today, for our people it wasn’t a big problem. All
it means is that we stay in one spot for a few days. And then, even then like, you know,
it’s not incrossable. The climate change, and the rising sea levels, for us in a traditional
perspective that’s part of a cycle that happens. Today, that’s a problem, and so what do
you do not to let that happen? So yeah, just depending on what approach, for me, from
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a traditional perspective, what happens in nature is not a result of what we do, but it informs what we do. Where, where the other way around, it seems like a lot of things today for environmental responses are, they’re responses to what the environment’s sort of come and given people. But you know, the central thing in that and the priority is people. Like, we’re doing this, and this what is happening, so we need to not do this, where for our people, it’s, this is what is happening so we respond to that.

So what you’re saying is that from your perspective it really doesn’t matter if we have seasons and things like this in the game, but if we did, then you would want to see the community in the game respond to this in a natural traditional way?

Yeah. And that, I think that the seasons side of it’s... a good side of it, and if you integrate the whole part of it like there’s the stars and the moon and the sun, all those elements, and the tides and that kind of stuff, if that’s all integrated.

One of the things I remember from your seminars is you told us about this friend of yours who one day just mysteriously stopped showing up to work and kept going to the beach every day, because that’s what you’d traditionally do at that time.

Yeah. Those kind of things, I think, the response to what’s happening environmentally, that’s pretty... for me I think that’s a given, you know, to represent indigenous culture, yeah.

7.1.3  Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.1.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

Yeah, I think they are good protocols. It’s just they’re consistent with traditional kind of knowledge management.

Is there anything you would want to change about this protocol, anything you would want to add?

No, I think it’s pretty... it covers... yep, I think it’s pretty good.

7.1.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?
I think it would be a dangerous thing to do with traditional knowledge, anything to do with that. So that’d probably, I think it probably wouldn’t be a good thing to open it up to a broad community. And then, just because of— you know, like you said, the nature of things. But then for the perpetuity of the knowledge, that could get distorted pretty easily that way.

So, when you say “to the broader community”, do you think it would be worthwhile to have, for example, members of that community being able to modify it, or is it better to have it fixed?

No, fixed, I think. That’s my opinion, yeah.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

Yeah, I’m probably not familiar enough with the game side of things to make an informed comment about that, because I don’t know what can be done and how they use it.

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

Yeah, I think it happens all the time in every different sector, because of assumptions that are made about a community’s culture and then people coming from that culture and understanding that viewpoint. I think that the potential for that to happen is pretty great, just for what aspect you want to present. Even in our own community there’s different viewpoints of, all right, what’s the best, what’s the best for our community at this point in time, in this transitional kind of time. Do we say, let’s express our culture in this way, this direction, or no, let’s go, let’s focus more on preservation? You know, and so that kind of conversation, there will always be that kind of conflict, I think, between groups. And it’s just the management of that, I think, we have the protocols clear, and that way then the representation of people should come from, should be informed by the people.

As an aside, I recently read an article about traditional culture in PNG, and they have this distinction between kastom and kalsa, with kastom being all the stuff from the past, like a mask made fifty years ago, while a mask made today, even if done exactly according to tradition, will only be kalsa. So there’s this very strong division between stuff we can only preserve, we cannot continue to create, and the stuff we can change.

Well, that’s an interesting conversation, and I think the Pacific community, like too the Maori, the same thing, with their arts and their culture. They’ve made that definition of, this is the
point, where we change it – [but] for our people, we haven’t had that, we haven’t defined that point. So, that discussion between traditional and contemporary arts, indigenous arts, is a current discussion. It’s been a current discussion for the last twenty years, or maybe fifty years? Where do we draw that line where I can say what’s culture? And I think the idea of, they call some people that could create stuff in the community according to traditional protocols and traditions – they call them craftsmen. People that have an expression and put things out for public critique, now they’re contemporary artists. They might be doing the exact same thing, they might be making a boomerang, but the one that does it for traditional purposes and traditional methods and things... the other one might be doing it in traditional methods, but his reason for making this is to exhibit it, or put it – make it public. Two different things for us.

Are there any controversies within the indigenous community about modern Aboriginal art, the kind of paintings you see in galleries, even when they use the same traditional styles, but they would use a huge range of colours and paint of a type that wasn’t available. Are there any controversies where someone says, that’s not our stuff?

Yeah, no, there has been in the past. Especially like, I think more and more it’s coming to, it’s coming to terms, that people are accepting that, you know, this is an expression? And yeah, that still needs to be more clearly defined.

7.1.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

I think just engaging the community in the process, like having days where the community are becoming more familiar with it. Like, one of the things that, once something is embedded, or presented to the community and they engage with it, it’s really easy to embed. People haven’t yet figured that out, I don’t think, about Aboriginal communities. Because our people are a people that were governed by Law, and story, once something is locked in, once the story is locked in, it’s locked in. So, I think, yeah, if you include the community in the process, and they engage in that process, then that will be potentially, you know, flow on into development, technological education, all that kind of thing.

You know, one of the things that’s coming out, not just from this interview – and it’s one of those things that should have been obvious, but never really is – is that we’re not even talking about Aboriginal cultures, plural, but communities. All this stuff is so incredibly local, that the
only way you can do this – and Brett, being Aboriginal, of course, he knew this instinctively, and that’s why he’s working with Aboriginal communities. But it’s great finding all this information that shows that yeah, what he’s doing is absolutely the right way to do it, and it’s the only way to do it, really. There’s no way you’re going to have a game about Aboriginal culture in Australia – it’s not going to happen.

No, no.

c. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

I think... no, either one, but I think the one that’s most accessible, like for community and for it to be valued and that, it’s probably the lower one. You know, the phones and the video games, the console kind of stuff. Being able to apply that, cause most people haven’t, most people in the community wouldn’t go towards the, you know, the more advanced.

I was going to ask whether it’s common for Aboriginal kids to have access to a console like the Xbox, but that’s an impossible question to answer because they’re so diverse, right?

Yeah, but it’s more likely than a computer.

So consoles would be the better approach?

Yeah, I think they are way more used in communities.

7.1.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

No, I’m pretty good.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

Maybe my brother in law, probably the other way, his perspective might be a good perspective. He never had a cultural background, he comes from a cultural community but he’d moved away when he was younger, and he grew up more in our community than his, but he’s always had an interest in gaming and technology. So he’s an Aboriginal person with that perspective.
Initial explanation produced a detailed response from Lexene even before questions started.

Yeah, there can be, I suppose it’s that perception of our culture which is definitely, you know, a sharing culture, but it was done in a very kind of strict and controlled way many years ago – and still is today, I think it’s just changed in the way, in how we can deliver that.

In response to quick summary of player lore-sharing activities...

I think that sort of even follows along the lines of, you know, traditionally we would share knowledge with other tribes and things like that. Like, we would learn different fishing techniques and things like that from other areas we might have visited, so therefore bringing in, you know, new ideas to our kind of cultural area, tribal area. So, it was definitely done in a traditional sense, sort of along those lines of how people share that knowledge today over the internet. Being able to harness that and use it, would be – yeah, really good.

In response to potential challenge of open internet culture and rules on cultural knowledge in Aboriginal cultures...

Yes, and that’s I think the other tricky thing with regards to our culture is, there’s so many different tribes, different clans, who all have their own protocols on how they might have passed on knowledge. Like, our rules or laws here, might not be the same as those of another tribe close by. So therefore, with that trying to share knowledge, I suppose we find in some ways if we can be sort of a bit more specific about here, and just emphasise that this is knowledge from here but it is also being taught by these particular Elders, because of course even with our Elders, they would have learned from their Elders and people way back, and it’s open... being a verbal culture, it’s open to a certain amount of corruption, how that person interprets and hears those things. So therefore, you know, even within our communities we find different people may have slight variations of a similar story or Dreaming story or those sort of things. So, I know just from with us, with our tours, it’s a very tricky fine line that you walk. And you know, we definitely have all the best intention of the knowledge we deliver, but we do try to explain to people that this is obviously the knowledge that, that I’ve received from certain Elders and other people in the community, plus the knowledge that I may have picked up life-skill-wise along the way, like I’ve worked in national parks as a ranger, so therefore learned from Elders from other areas and then spoken to my Elders, and then you kind of start meshing a little bit that knowledge. And find yeah, this is possibly how it was in our area a thousand or two thousand years ago, or forty thousand years ago. And with
that not being written, you know with not having that sort of, I suppose, concrete knowledge written down, it is open to a bit of change or misinterpretation.

On the preservation of geological knowledge (in reference to First Footprints):

Yeah, and you know, which is knowledge that may be four or five or more generations ago...

More like eight hundred generations!

That’s it! And... but still very... very, maybe not precise, but quite, you know, we would assume accurate knowledge because of that being passed down the line through generations. Yeah, so it’s quite amazing to think about, and like, I suppose, reaffirming for me, because I’m from this area, like these are my great, great grandparents and great great great great grandparents and that, so I often, you know, have moments when I stop and think that this is a particular area where my great great great great great grandparents may have walked through this area. And I’ve got knowledge of that, just because of stories passed on down.

On the way the term “Indigenous Australians” wipes out the Torres Strait Islanders as a culturally distinct entity within that group:

Yes. It does, doesn’t it? A lot of people even with NADOC Week each year, over a NADOC celebration, they will ask what it means and it involves an all-encompassing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And so even just reminding people or some people, educating them that this is not only Aboriginal people but Torres Strait Islanders as well. And that’s, I suppose, it’s such a simple basic thing, but yeah, by how you say, saying “Indigenous”, it kind of yeah, distances or separates from identifying exactly who you are talking about.

If you start talking about how Indigenous Australians lived in the desert...

Yeah! You immediately, your mind goes to Central Desert, you know? And that’s where Aboriginal people live, so therefore, you know, they might even question us around the Gold Coast, “that’s not what I’ve heard”,

“What are you doing here?”

7.2.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.2.1.1 Primer A – If interviewing cultural heritage expert [10 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the heritage projects for showing and teaching indigenous culture that you are involved with?

The strengths, I would say, are the fact that people are dealing with a person, I suppose, and in that regard we can address any questions they might have, any interest they might be particularly looking at learning about [excessive background noise] a smaller group, might be a private tour, that if they have a particular interest in learning about, say, hunting and gathering techniques, we can actually design that tour, to gear a little bit more towards what they want to know about. We will still cover other general things from this area, but we can actually adapt that tour at that moment to cater for them in particular. And that often might engage them in a way, that they look at, well, you did touch on that other stuff but I never really thought of that before, so now I want to come back and learn some more about that. Whereas this is my main focus to start with, as to why I came in to seek some knowledge and some education, but then you might find that they, it engages them in a way that you know, that personal side of things that they can seek some more knowledge, information about something else. So, hopefully we’re having that flow-on effect, that this will be just a first step, maybe, for some people, it might be a hundred steps for others. We travel in Australia, we try to go in as many cultural centres as we can, and we learn as much as we can about every area that we visit, so you find that different people have different needs and ideas when they first come into the centre. Having a base as such, like Kalwun itself, have conducted cultural tours here on the Gold Coast for about fifty years, [excessive background noise], but definitely having just a building as such that people can identify and relate to, and visit at their own pace in their own time, so having a look around as well. [A couple of sentences barely audible due to background noise, Lexene reiterating the benefits of having a centre that people can visit].

So basically the strengths are that it’s personal, much more tailored to the individual, and that you can cater to those additional interests as well...

And that we have a bit of control too, over what knowledge is given out to the public, so you know, with direction from Elders and board of directors and things like that? We have somewhat kind of guideline over what, how and what we’re going to pass on, I suppose.

When you say guidelines, is this more about restrictions, or just about doing it the proper way?
I think a bit of both, like, yeah, teaching it in the right way but also say for instance we have particular protocols about men’s knowledge and women’s knowledge, so traditionally, and even now... I’m not taught a lot about men’s business at all, I know little bits but I don’t ever delve into any of that. So therefore, being able to explain to people that we have these specific groups of knowledge and information that perhaps might not be appropriate for them to learn, as a female learning about men’s business or as a male learning about women’s business, but also different things in relation to like... the digeridoo for instance, is not something that’s a female instrument or that females would engage or touch or things like that, so we have laws about that. And so therefore being able to explain to people, that culturally it can be considered quite insensitive and inappropriate if a female were to purchase a digeridoo even, or even just engage, but in saying that as well, and this is probably more my opinion, is that this is our culture, we’ve grown up with this, and much like religion, somebody’s religion, I would not necessarily expect someone not of our culture to absolutely follow our laws and guidelines. We would like to think that they would be respectful enough to do so, but I would not expect that because of the fact that yeah, it’s not necessarily their culture, Until maybe they learn more about it, and then they go, oh, look, we didn’t know that, we won’t do that now, so we wanna be respectful and we’re pleased that you explained what it is about that particular thing.

And of course the rules themselves are a part of the culture that you are showing people.

Yeah, exactly. And there would have been many, many different laws, pertaining to daily life, also spirituality, you know, at different ages of your life, so being like a very small young child, and then being a bit of an older child, and then getting up to the point of manhood or womanhood, there would have been a lot of different laws and rules involved about different ages through your life, when you get married, who you’re allowed to interact with once you get married... yeah, lots and lots. So they were often, you know, taught, passed down, implemented, sometimes done through initiation ceremonies that those things were taught, sometimes in other settings, you know, it might be that young boys follow the men daily when they go hunting, and even though they might not participate at a younger age in those bigger duties, they might still be visually learning and receiving knowledge just by watching what’s going on. So yeah, we had quite a lot of law, involved around a lot of different things, so... and so I suppose it’s important for us to be able to control, and it is a fine line between you know, what we think, sometimes we think ok, this might be something we need to educate people about, but it might not necessarily be appropriate for us to do that. So, there is a fine line between that sort of thing.
2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

What doesn’t work... I think sometimes depending on even things like who the guide you might get, and that, on tour, you know – they might tell things in a different way even though we have like a consistent narration that we tell people, is how it’s delivered in a different way by different guides and different people doing that, that might be something that... maybe not necessarily in the negative, but might work against us sometimes. Also with regards to even things like tours and things like that, it’s a bit of a fickle type of thing, you know, often you’ll find that we get a lot of people coming, and one set of school holidays, say, we might get a lot of people coming in really eager to learn and go on tour. Then the next school holidays, you might not get many at all.

You might also face other people in the community that may see things differently with regards to cultural knowledge, information, so as I said, sometimes there is... you know, people have learned from different people, so they’re not necessarily a hundred percent exactly of the same opinion as us, or the people who have guided us. So therefore, you might get people who don’t necessarily agree, that maybe that particular bit of information maybe should not be appropriate for, to give out to the public. Then there’s Elders in our community and things like that, who will go, no, that’s fine, we want people to learn about that particular process, or ritual, or ceremony. And I think that’s a bit of a hard thing, like for instance some of the... I think some of the process from, this is just from what I’ve seen on social media and that sort of thing, was, there was a ceremony done around this area, about a didgeridoo choir being involved in the ceremony of the Commonwealth Games, and we did actually get a bit of feedback here from communities all around Australia, different communities in other areas, that they were unhappy about that. Even though... so the didgeridoo is not traditionally from this area, and that was acknowledged, but because the CommGames are being held here, people within our community sought permission from other areas where the didgeridoo is a focal point in that area... so even though they’ve gone about a certain amount of protocol to try and get as much acceptance for that particular process, obviously it did not please everybody, so there were sections or individuals within the community that were not happy about that. Still, kind of going ahead. And so, that’s something I found that we face all the time, it’s like you’ll very rarely please everybody, but we really try hard to follow those protocols and things so that we’ve done the best possible chance that we can, to get permission and to make sure that things we do are appropriate and ok.
So basically, it involves ongoing negotiations?

Yes. All the time. All the time. Sometimes, many times throughout the day, other times it might be daily, other times you might go for long periods of time. We as a centre I think have got maybe a reputation that we try to do those sort of things, so I think that’s... you know, we’ve kind of... and we don’t do a lot of marketing for the centre, so what we do rely on is word of mouth of people who have visited us. So, that’s something that’s a real focal point of us here at Jellurgal, because if we do the wrong thing, I imagine that it can have huge repercussions for us as a centre, and in our community, and we don’t want to do that, so.

3. Have you looked into the incorporation of digital games into your cultural heritage projects?

Not necessarily video games, being a small centre, you know, we don’t have a lot of funding which is often the problem. But with regards to games as such, so traditional games, we have [inaudible], programmes and things like that for little children and going out to childcare centres, where we do some traditional games with them. So, yeah, but not as far as like in the virtual world. Apart from, as I said, the Yugambeh Museum produces that language app of ours. So, it’s not so much a game as such, it’s more a technological tool to start teaching people language from here. And it has grown in itself since they first designed the app, that it only had our language to start with, now they are adding other languages which I believe they’ve sought permission from those areas to be able to put that other languages, and they state where they’re from and who the people were that spoke this language.

a. If no: is this because of the budget issue mainly?

I’d say so. I’d say so. If we had somebody walk through the door and say, look, I’ve got this amount of money to give to you to come up with some greater resources for education and cultural learning, things like this [games] would definitely be something we would jump at. But you know, it’s not something we would ever I suppose give up on, either, is that every year we build and grow and grow and grow and grow, so there might be a day... you know, it might not be when I’m here, but it might come a day when we have that kind of funding and money and ability to do that. I, working in national parks, have seen other cultural centres, around Australia, who have a lot of visual and technological interpretive type of displays. So, that interactive displays where you can press on the TV screen and things like that and it will bring up different points of interest on a map of that area and then explain different things about that sort of thing. So, I’d
say that would be something if we had funding that we would definitely look at, and be keen to do.

7.2.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]
Initial comments about cultural loss and any reconstructions having to work with incomplete data.

Yeah, exactly. And I think we find that, as a culture as well as like as individuals, I know myself, with my own family history, it’s almost like an ongoing incomplete project. And I imagine right up until the day I die I still won’t know everything I want to know about my particular family. But I think it’s something that we have a lot more individuals in the community than we might think, that are all doing that, and one of the things that I’ve always thought would be a wonderful thing, is, if all of our individuals with all this knowledge could put it all together and kind of have it as a big piece. And, you know, the platform might be something like a virtual reality game, to get that all together, which I imagine would be a massive, massive project over a very long period of time. But the idea that that could potentially happen some time in the future, whereby somebody could get onto a game, and imagine they’re working into this area of Tallebudgera Creek, and going through the whole process of what it would be to live in the daily life of a person from the Yugambeh language group, would be like, wow! It would give them so many different aspects of our culture just in that one experience, that potentially we can’t ever achieve by just taking a tour as such. We find the more interactive our tours can be, with regards to visuals and even like with smoking ceremonies, and smell and singing, and how it works, how it’s done – you know, people remember that a lot more than they might just remember someone talking to them. So, being able to have some kind of platform to bring that all together...

7.2.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]
4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

Like, after seeing that one [Brett Leavy’s Virtual Tarntanya]... oh, it would just... like even things, particularly, you know, we focus a lot on school groups, and high school groups, and students, I suppose educational institutions, whereby in trying to educate that next generation, to get off on the right foot of this is how they perceive us as a culture and as a people. So therefore, things like that, to be able to use a resource like that, and even take it to a school and say, ok, this is the resource that we recommend that you get to teach your children in this school about the area that they live in, the history of the area, the stories that belong to where that school sits on that particular mountain, a story about that mountain that the children look at every single day, is amazing, because it’s something that they could use daily as it wouldn’t necessarily require a
particular person to be there every single day to keep encouraging that engagement with the culture. Yeah, so, the uses would be endless.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community? For example, many people wouldn’t even be aware that there are any Aboriginal people at the Gold Coast.

We often find that, people come in and say, look, I haven’t seen any Aboriginal people on the Gold Coast. We say, look, you probably have, you probably passed or been interacting with quite a few, but... and you know, that’s even just explaining too about the difference in skin colour. About that it doesn’t necessarily mean the skin colour is what makes you Aboriginal. So, yeah, it’s being able to show ourselves in a modern way, too, and the adaptations we’ve had over the even history of this country since European settlement. Because, I think, you know, that there are people out there that think we were all just wiped out, and that nobody exists any more, or they only exist in just isolated or central areas of Australia. So even just showing them how we live in a modern way, and educating people on that, because I know there are still, and through no fault of their own, but many ignorant people in the [Australian] community now who will say, will we see people come out of the bush? Will they come out, and give us some bush tucker? And you kinda have to in a nice, gentle and respectful way explain to them that no, we live in houses just like you, we drive cars just like you, we have families just like you, and jobs and things like that. Yeah, I can see whether it be a traditional game or a modern type of game perceiving our culture and people, all of it would be quite helpful. As long as the whole process of the way they go about the knowledge and the information, through protocol and law and following guidelines, I believe that it could only really be quite a positive resource to have.

Aside comment about post-European-arrival Aboriginal artifacts at Queensland Museum incorporating European materials – traditional artifacts, made using new resources. That’s it, that’s it. And see, people will say – you know, we’ve got a lot of bark paintings in the room in there, and then they’ll often see all of these more modern paintings on canvas and, you know, just answering that for people is to see the adaptation we’ve made from back then and obviously that, bark was a resource we had at the time way back then, and this is the technique we’d use to preserve it, and make sure it didn’t split and things like that, as opposed to now, we’ve got this wonderful thing called canvas, that we can use, it’s readily available, and it’s quite financially cheap to get and use, but still allowing us to practice that technique of art and painting and passing on of knowledge, too, through stories, through our artwork. So, you still
kind of... like I say to people, we still try to practice our cultural traditions but sometimes we do it in a modern way, and like my father, grew up down at Fingal, so he comes from a long line of fishermen in the family, and I believe that his knowledge of that area down there, about where to fish and what to fish, what time of the year and what to go for, that sort of thing is just astounding sometimes. He’s quite a humble man, so he doesn’t often say the things he does, but you know... I think wow, just having all of that knowledge and having it passed down, is not something necessarily like, I’m not necessarily a fisherwomen, we fish and that sort of thing, but I don’t necessarily have the extent of knowledge as my father, because we haven’t necessarily practiced everything that he learned when he was a child. So, it’s something that’s been very conscious in the mind of me as a parent now, too, to try to reintroduce some of these things back to my children.

And I know there’s lots of people in our communities, like the [anonymised] and that too, always engaging daily and I think pretty much most families you would find in some way they’re passing on their culture to their children, and even adding to that, from what they may have learned as children and also with that, how you touched on before, that stolen generation gap of people. You know, a lot of those people who’ve chosen not to acknowledge culture, is done so out of fear of government policy and stuff like that at the time. So even re-engaging that back into that family line and teaching children, is a really important thing. And the way we are connected now in the world, with the web and social media, and all of that sort of thing, I think it’s something we could definitely have come full circle to start passing it... I hope to think that maybe when I’m old, my children will know more about their culture than I’ve known.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

I think, even just in the sense of, you know, communities, and particularly if it’s portrayed in a very sensitive and respectful way, about that particular area, the sense of pride in a community... like, I know that there’s a lot of pride in our community when you will go to, say, an event around the Gold Coast, a lot of organisations and corporate events and things like that and other community events, now will do a Welcome to Country, whereas when I was a child, I don’t remember any community events doing that. So knowing that they are acknowledging traditional people from that area, at the start of the event, and showing that respect, is a fantastic thing. But, in people being able to see their culture in such a modern way [games], using this type of technology, I think shows also to, not only for us as Aboriginal people but for...
non-Aboriginal people that we can move with the times, you know, we have the ability to adapt to modern things and modern techniques, and bring our culture along with that, but still keeping that sacredness about our culture, those protocols, those laws and things like that. And I often feel a great sense of pride, when we see community members even like becoming doctors and lawyers and nurses and builders, and achieving the dreams that they want to achieve, whatever that may be, and saying, you know, we have been through a lot of difficult times in history, yet we still continue to have lots and lots of prosperous people in our community, and they then often because of that cultural background, often help lift those who might still be having a difficult time. So I think in the sense of that, it could have a big flow-on effect in communities, you know, you might also find a lot of young people who are quite knowledgeable about these types of things, like with virtual games and stuff like that, and then become role models for other children in the community and people in the community to seek and follow their dreams, whatever that might be. And I see that more and more and more around the coast, here where I live, with regards to sporting people, people in managerial positions, or directors of companies or people who have their own businesses and things like that, you find that other people can be quite inspired by their achievements, and so I think it would be a really positive thing. As well as seeing something that, as I said, is very respectful and sensitive about our culture, but quite modern, I think that in itself is like, you know, wow! But it’s also connecting, by doing it in that regard, it can connect very very old traditions up with modern day, modern people. So, yeah, sounds good!

7.2.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

That’s a bit of a tricky one, because when I think about my culture, I think about stories, law, knowledge, daily life, different things we had to know, even down to what trees are good to eat the berries off and what aren’t... it’s all very intertwined. So, it’s hard to separate out what’s the most important part, because even when I’m on tour, people might ask me a question on something, and we often will get side-tracked because we will start talking about other things, and then they go, oh, now I wanted to know about this. So you will find that you will cover lots of different ideas and themes just from one little question. So, it’s hard to pinpoint down, but I think, like I often talk to our school groups about... like, we have two main concepts within our culture, and that is looking after Mother Earth and the environment around us and all that that
entails, and how we did that through songs and stories and art and customs, techniques of doing things. And so, you know, we consider the Earth our mother, and just like we would look after our mums at home, we very much were focused on that with looking after the Earth, because if we didn’t, we would probably not be here now. Then the other one is looking after each other. So all of the people within our family clan, tribes, and all of that too, right down to our babies, right up to our very old people. They all had a very important role to play, and all had different... I suppose all of the same value, but different aspects to offer and be involved with in our family clans. So, no one was necessarily a lot more important than somebody else, that’s why often you’ll find with tribes there would not necessarily have been a leader as such – there were elders, and they would have sort of elders, a group of them, that they would discuss things about law, and whether to change laws and things like that, too, and they would pretty much kind of control things in the tribe, or have a say so about how things were to operate within the tribe, and they were consulted quite regularly. So, in that regard, everybody had an importance every day.

And yeah, in saying that, those are probably the two things which I kind of try and keep it basic like that to explain to the children that we’re getting here on tour, that they’re pretty broad things, but pretty much it comes down to that – looking after the environment, and looking after our people.

Would you say that I’m representing your views correctly if I say that you want to show everything as much as you can, but the most important thing to show is these two relationships?

Yeah, definitely. Perfect.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

That’s a really hard one for me, as I’m not an elder in my community. People say I have lots of knowledge, but I don’t really consider that I have lots and lots of knowledge like what we would consider our elders having. So it’s a hard thing for me to probably answer for you... because there would definitely be sacred places or sacred customs and ceremony that would probably not be appropriate to pass on or to portray within that sort of thing, and knowing what they are would definitely be something for elders to decide on. So yeah, assuming all the other stuff is done respectfully and following protocol, in that regard there may even be some aspects about
that kind of ceremony and law around that might not be appropriate at all for them. In... especially in the fact that once it becomes a game, I imagine it’s going to be open to a wide audience of lots of different age groups, perhaps, also whether they be male or female, so therefore there would be some cultural stuff that’s not going to be appropriate for all of those kinds of interest groups to be viewing or learning about. So that would be something they would definitely have to consult elders about, and quite a cross section of elders in those particular communities, and then consult different communities, so if it was done in a more broader sense of Aboriginal culture, they would have to consult quite a lot of different cross sections of language and tribal areas, but if it was done in, say, a particular tribal area, there would still be a certain amount of elders that they would have to consult with. We sometimes find in our communities that, you know, people will know about a certain protocol that they have to go through to have someone say, ok, we’re happy for you to go and do that, but they might not necessarily consult with all of the elders or interest people within our tribe, so like, it might be different family clans of elders, those elders in those family clans. So, yeah, it would be something that would definitely have to be consulted by all of those as much as possible, before even allowing the knowledge.

So, consultation taken to the extreme, and learn to take “no” for an answer?

Yes! Good, you know exactly about that already. Yeah, and that, a lot of people find that really difficult to understand, but there always will be some aspects of our culture that we, some people, and I might even be one of those people that we just say, no, I’m sorry, I’m very sorry, but we can’t. And that, I suppose that’s the bit that I always think, you know, that’s the parts that are probably special to us, as being of Aboriginal heritage, and these are our families, kind of much like other families might have particular stories which are very close to the heart for that family, and that they might not actually let their extended family know about, or the close friends of that family know about, that we would have similar kind of stories as well.

d. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?
I think probably the first and the third options are probably the best options. The second option about a fantasy world, I suppose what sprung to mind for me then was that, if it’s more like a fantasy world, then it would not necessarily then be taken as a truthful educational resource. So, therefore it might reduce its effectiveness as an educational tool. So, with seeking [permission] a bit more of, this is real knowledge and heritage and customs and things that we’ve been given permission to incorporate into the game, therefore then still follows along that line of being able to really educate people about our culture. And then perhaps like with the first option, you know, getting to a point, it teaches people that there are aspects about our culture that we may not be willing to divulge to everybody. And then with the third option, in having restricted access or whatever to that particular thing that may be quite sacred, you know, that might be an option too, that if communities or the elders of that tribal area agree that, ok, we are going to give you this knowledge and information, but it can only be available to males of this particular age group, then we can give you that. I know it’s done in a sense, like we show a short video here at the start of our tour, which actually has some knowledge about male initiation in it, so that is actually something that was passed on to us, and when they produced the film, before my time, as of my understanding is they got permission to speak about that even though it’s not something that – and it doesn’t go into any real great detail – but it does mention that in traditional times, that would not be something that would necessarily be told to women or young girls. So my knowledge is that they got permission and sought consultation with elders and that in the community, and are allowed to have that small portion in the film. So, you know, it is possible to have things which might be quite sensitive, “okayed” upon, so I would look at the first or the third option as being the best in that regard.

I’ve also heard a controversial opinion from an Aboriginal person that, tough luck, you need to share this if you want it to survive.

And see, I know people who would say that as well. Sometimes, I suppose, people might say to us, you know, if you want the world to know about your culture, then you’ve got to be willing to share everything. But I don’t think as people we necessarily have to compromise our beliefs, and they might be long, long-standing beliefs, or they might be more modern beliefs, but I don’t think we necessarily have to do that, to have people appreciate and respect our culture and to want to learn more about it.
[On people willing to break rules of their culture to preserve it] And I think it really is then down to the individuals, and what their background is, and that sort of thing. You know, they may have had something happen within their culture which totally made them lose faith with the traditional law and things like that. So, maybe they’re in a place where they’re, ok, I’m happy to disregard everything, and just do what I like, sort of thing. I’d like to think there’s not many out there, but I’m sure there is.

7.2.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

I think it can, depending on how much interpretation... with that other one [Virtual Warrane], with the voiceover at the back explaining a lot about the different seasons and things like that. So, I think that definitely helps and lends to creating that picture of, this isn’t necessarily how it was all the time. It would be awesome if they could have that changing environment, you know, depending on season if it’s a particular time of the year, this is what that area looks like, this is what trees would be flowering, this is what fruit would be fruiting, you know, different animals might be breeding, and therefore, you know, different food sources available, or it might be the time when you don’t eat those certain food sources because of breeding and that sort of thing. So, it would be really, really cool if it could change, but I imagine it would still be a really helpful resource to have even if it really can’t sort of go to that extent. So, it’s still going to give much more of a visual idea to people than, say, not having it.

So, generally you would say that they are good enough to be useful...

Yeah, but even [Virtual Warrane], about Sydney Harbour, it gives people the perspective of what the landscape looked like prior to settlement. So, even for them to grasp that kind of concept of how beautiful the area was, how abundant it was with what sorts of food resources, and things like that that were available, and how we adapted to using those and learning about them, and teaching each other about them – I think still would be enough to give people a really good sense of how we as a culture have that connection with the land, and why. Why it’s continued and why it’s so important.

e. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?
All of that, like even like you say with things like flooding and stuff like that, that would be knowledge which I imagine elders would kind of... one thing I've mentioned the other day with the flood coming, you know, we noticed a time on the Thursday before it all happened, that where we live is quite surrounded by bushland, that all the birds and everything were already gone. And this is something I've always kind of... when I was working in national parks, seen as well, when bushfires and things were coming, the animals would go ahead, and so they kind of knew something was going to happen. And I imagine our people would have had that kind of knowledge as well, with regards to knowing maybe about floods and fire and things like that before, and having that knowledge to be able to keep families safe, or to know where to go in those particular times to keep families safe. And then also, what happens after a fire has gone through, what food – you know, we didn’t just go, oh my God, everything’s been wiped out and we’re totally helpless now! We knew what to do after a fire, and what to access after a fire, and where to access water and different things like that. So, if it [a game] was adaptable and changeable like that, that would be really cool! I can’t imagine the concept of how you’d do that, but, I can only imagine it would be a huge task, but that would be really cool.

7.2.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.2.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

Yeah, great. Sounds good. Pretty much covers all the things I would think of, I can’t really think of anything else.

Brett also recently sent me a revised version, here.

Ok, yep.

So, are there any changes you would imagine for these?

Probably the only thing I’m sort of thinking is, he writes that only knowledge that is of that community or clan be used, and therefore ownership and copyright in this is held by those traditional owners participating in that project? So, I know that in the past, I have dealt in communities whereby they had different projects or programmes happening whereby, maybe, individuals within the community were the only ones to necessarily profit from cultural information and knowledge. And this is a really tricky thing, and I have not dealt too much with
intellectual property and that sort of thing, but I think that it is something that needs to be hugely addressed in our communities and looked at how we can retain that cultural knowledge to then be of advantage to our communities. And I mean, like, communities as a whole, not necessarily individuals within the community. Acknowledging, though, that they also as individuals may have a lot of this knowledge passed down to them as an individual person. So I really don’t know the answer, but in saying that, where it says only held by those traditional owners participating in that project, I would say that... the knowledge that’s held by that community or clan, would be seen in general, not even necessarily as ownership, but kind of... like, say with the Dreaming story, we don’t allow it to be reproduced. Like, a Dreaming story about here, we don’t allow it to be reproduced or done in any other format or that sort of thing at the moment. And it’s not necessarily that, you know, if somebody came in and said, we really want these, we’re going to pay for it, I still imagine, and I would want it to have benefit to the community rather than any individual.

So, if there is cultural knowledge which is about a particular tribe or that area, it then actually comes back to the whole community as such. And this is really hard to define, like what that is, whether it’s a land council or an organisation, or whether it’s a community group, I don’t know. But...

You’re hitting one of the core issues with indigenous knowledge, that copyright laws were not designed for a community, and sometimes unscrupulous individuals have taken advantage of this to copyright knowledge that belonged to everyone.

And it might even be something like that, with the story of a mountain, they produce it, they put it in a book, the book sells a million copies, and you know, makes them quite wealthy, but it’s actually... that’s cultural knowledge of our area, and of our people for many generations, and just because other individuals may not have had the opportunity to input into that, or even you know, be – they might be really elderly, and not be able to participate physically or something like that. So, yeah, my thing is that it doesn’t necessarily benefit individuals, it benefits communities or somehow goes back into benefitting other generations of our people in those communities.

So, somehow this knowledge has to be managed in such a way that it is owned by the community, even though it is often deposited to a particular individual within that community?

Yep, definitely. Exactly that. And then you’ll get people that say, you know, it’s not even owned by the community as such, because we don’t necessarily... I suppose the word “own” is just kind
of almost a foreign word in that regard, that this is knowledge that we've had the privilege of being passed down...

It's held in trust.

Yeah, exactly! It is, and it's like, this is, you know, with what I teach people, is that I see it as, I have an obligation to deliver that in how it was delivered to me, and keep that in amongst those guidelines and laws and things, and then pass that onto whoever it is next to take over that. But never at any time necessarily owning that knowledge to be able to go, ok, I'm to write a book, or do a play, movie, or something like that, and this is where it's really hard.

The attitude towards knowledge you describe is the same as the attitude you describe towards the land.

It is, it is. Yeah, exactly. I suppose it’s kind of like if you, say, somebody came along and said, I’m gonna own Sydney Harbour, and I’m gonna own all the resources that are in it, around it, and everything like that. And just like that... which, you know, you go, what? And some kind of businessman taking over a resource like that, it would be quite shocking and everything. So I think, yeah, we don’t consider, I suppose, the knowledge that we have as belonging to us as individuals, but belonging to our culture. And we’re just kind of here, passing the baton along.

[On whom the community includes] And it also might be people who don’t live within this community any more, but are from here. But they might through marriage or work or modern day living live on the other side of the world now. Now, they still have a role to play in that knowledge, it’s still their knowledge as well, but they just might not be around at the time that this whole process is happening. So, if in some way, I don’t know how, but if there is any gain, whether it be status, monetary, whatever, that comes from any type of project, that it does go back to like a beneficial thing for community as such, and culture as such from that area, not necessarily individuals.

Within current law, about the only thing that can be done is for communities to incorporate themselves. Does that happen?

It does. I think lots of places... they set up corporations as... they try to do it as a community, sometimes it fails to encompass the whole community, sometimes it does do the best possible chance it can get. But as I said, it is open to that idea that individuals may not be involved, or may not agree, or may not want to be involved. And so, there’s some communities that have done that, and have tried in the best way possible to encompass everybody there.
The other thing with copyrights is that they are designed to protect what has been published. They don’t help in protecting things from being published.

Yeah, exactly. That’s true.

7.2.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

I’d think you’d have to have a collaboration of some kind between non-indigenous players, particularly people who are very educated in the virtual world and how things can be manipulated or changed. So therefore, in the whole process of designing it, having their opinion in, like, ok, by this particular scene, it could be corrupted to do this and this and this, so do you even kind of want to put it in there, or do you want to just avoid that, or what? I think it would be very helpful to have some kind of collaboration like that, on designing the game or designing how it’s going to run, and the types of things that you could actually change or interact with, or that sort of thing, or do.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

I don’t know how you’d actually insure that to happen. You know, I imagine every game that’s online on the internet would be open to some kind of corruption by some very clever people, but I suppose even just like even having a piece at the start of the game explaining with regards to respect of culture? And even, I don’t know, it might have something about a short history of adversity that we’ve been through in this country in particular might induce the player to be a bit more respectful within the game itself. So, like we have an acknowledgement of country, or a welcome to country, and explaining about that, and why we do it, and even going into that, you know, the reason why you might find a lot of indigenous people you come across are very hostile, and can be quite aggressive when confronted with different cultural aspects, or challenged on things. And it’s a lot of the time because of past history, of things that have [been] done, and they have had either direct experience themselves, or their family members, or somebody they know has been involved in that. So, even just a bit of education at the start of the game about us as a culture and maybe the timeline of different things that have gone through, to then, I suppose, hopefully, you kind of capture that person in a respectful way at the start of the game.
So that once they start playing the game, they’re more inclined to be more respectful, in the game, and... I’m not sure what it is that keeps them engaged, but whatever reason, it be a respectful and positive and good reason to keep them engaged, not because of destructive or disrespectful [reasons] or something like that.

Mention the story of the Uluru in Second Life controversy: this may be just a virtual representation to you [Telstra], but it’s important to us [traditional owners].

Yeah, and see, I imagine that’s what the difficulty they’re going to have even, with regards to Brett, his work is lots of landscape at the moment, but every aspect of different landscape all around Australia would possibly have some sacred significance, so even getting the ok with that, can we put this rock into our game in this area, but you know, I imagine that will all come with the consultation process and the collaboration of different people doing that. But yeah, is... I think that’s the thing is, people not understanding that just because they don’t know about it, that doesn’t necessarily give them free rein to necessarily portray... even images of people and stuff like that, in our culture, without permission, it may be highly inappropriate. Yeah, I remember that thing about Telstra now, and thinking, what? Like, really, just why would they do that? But some people just don’t know and don’t think...

To give them credit, this was the first time anyone had done this, and it didn’t occur to them that virtual Uluru would be treated similarly to real Uluru. This deep aspect of Aboriginal culture, that there is a connection between the image of a person, and the person...

Yeah. And see, like you say, that all comes under, we want people to use this as an educational tool, and this is a tool to actually do that in itself, like with that, as far as what is appropriate to portray on a screen as opposed to in real life. So, it’s a learning process, I’m sure, for both non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people in that sort of regard... and I’d like to think the world’s getting better in regards to respecting our culture. You know, majoritively the world is getting better, and much more respectful, so you don’t know where we’re gonna be in ten or twenty years. Who knows?

If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

NOT ASKED AS THIS WAS DISCUSSED IN PREVIOUS QUESTIONS.

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and
community traditions of a given community’s past. [Question expanded with introduction of hypothetical example of conflict]

Which... I can fully understand, like where I worked for national parks, was in the far western New South Wales at Mungo National Park, and they found a lot of...

Mungo Man!

Yes! And also then, the zygomaturus, the big, big animals that were there too, so there is parts and people in the community down there have different ideas and stories about the timeline of things as well as, you know, the interaction of animals and people, and also how the giant animals died out, and when Aboriginal people came along, and that sort of thing. So... and even though I would consider a lot of the archaeologists and anthropologists involved in places like Mungo are very respectful and very considerate of our culture, very much like... like you’d have with the collaboration on the game, is you have almost like experts in that area. Like, I’d say you know, our elders and things like that are kind of the experts on our culture, just like you’d say an anthropologist or an archaeologist is kind of the expert on reading old and ancient landforms and landscapes and bones and things like that. So therefore, they might have – either side – a certain focus, on what they’re seeing, on what they’re interpreting, and I imagine too, it is all up to interpretation just like maybe when you go to one doctor and he gives you a diagnosis, and then you might go to someone else and he tells you, oh no, this is what’s wrong with you. And they both seem quite plausible, but they’re different. So, I think that’s the thing with human interpretation of things, it brings about that area for difference or conflict or different ideas. So with regards to those sort of things being portrayed in movies, or in games, I would like to think that at some point you would find that things do meet up together, or to focus on the things that you can go, ok, yes, well, this bloke who’s an expert in this says this, and this person who’s an expert on that says that, and that we’re both agreeing on that, so that’s something we’d kind of put in the game. Because we can kind of pretty much have... but then again, if it is about Aboriginal culture, I would like to think that you would go the way of listening to Aboriginal elders and Aboriginal people first, over, say, an archaeologist. I think theirs is a learned art as well, and so perhaps they might not be as knowledgeable as they think.

Mention the example of changing interpretations of dinosaurs based on the same evidence.

Yeah, hey! And that’s... well, even like down at Mungo, and we’d see things uncovered, and you know, you’d have new rainfall and all sorts of things would get uncovered, I remember at one point in time, actually this was out at Lake Victoria just a bit further west of Mungo, someone
out there doing survey work had uncovered what looked like a thylacine jawbone, and so we had community people go out and look, and they were convinced that it wasn’t a thylacine. Or they... I can’t remember which was which, but they were kind of opposing opinions. And just, you know, that whole process that they had to go through, and in the end it was the elders in the community that came out to see it originally, the archaeologists swayed to their... ok, this is the tests that we had done, and we kind of agree with you. So, through a long process, they acknowledged what the elders were saying about that area. But yeah, it’s amazing how people looking at the same thing can interpret it in so many different ways.

[On the history of the Kennewick Man controversy] And that’s I suppose the thing of... you know, even in our culture, it’s like I said, it’s up to a certain amount of corruption because of that verbal passing down of knowledge, but I’d like to think that for as long as [i.e. given the time] it’s been in existence, the passing on down’s been pretty good, as far as keeping that story true and to what its original state might have been, because we don’t definitely know, but... and I suppose looking at the history of non-indigenous people and archaeology and things like that as far as how many years they’ve learned. And particularly that we’re talking about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people’s perspective, I’d like to think that we’d go the way of Aboriginal people.

7.2.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]
14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

This is a hard one, and I think this is where sometimes... well, I myself don’t have a full understanding of how... things necessarily distribute through community, and who like, who would your target groups be, and therefore, you know, if they’re non-indigenous people more so that indigenous people, or both on equal participation, or whether it’s more directed at indigenous people. I think that’s what you’d have to figure out, who they’re kinda specifically trying to target first off, and therefore, say, if it was like, ok, schoolchildren of the age between five and twelve... I’d say in the sense of, like I know my kids at school even with maths and things like that, they’re often offered to do different parts of their homework and things online and that sort of thing. So in that regard, it could be something that’s kind of directed more at the education departments, that sort of thing, to kind of have children of all ages between that age group accessing that, so of all cultures, of all nationalities – you know, if they go to school here in Australia, this is something they can have access to.

So, working through government departments to open up access?
Yeah, maybe. So, particularly if you’re looking at as an educational resource, I think that’s where you kind of, because a majority of children go to school, and that’s something that can be offered to homeschoolers as well. And then, whether it’s more geared to something that may be of an older group, so high schools or something like that. So, I’d say, looking at who you’re trying to target, and perhaps the people that are involved in whatever cultural knowledge is going in there, about the game, might be the better ones to consult on who they want it to be directed at as well.

g. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

I’d go both! Both would be a great opportunity, because then you’d have obviously schools, like if you’re looking at that school group idea of directing it to schools, is that there maybe some schools with very limited computer resources. And very small schools that might have one or two computers for the whole school. So therefore, you don’t necessarily want them disadvantaged because of their technology isn’t up to what you need it to be, particularly as an educational resource. I think if you can make it as accessible to as many of that target group as you can, the better. So, if it had to come down to either/or, it would probably be the less impressive visuals, to achieve a greater target audience.

But preferably both?

Preferably both! Just cause you know, we’re dreaming here...

And having a higher quality version for a centre like here...

Yeah, exactly! So, to have that option, you know, whereby even for big corporations and things like that who might use it as a cultural heritage educational tool for staff, and things like that, you might be looking at the better version because they might be able to afford it. So, in that regard, and centres like us, we want to put on the best show we possibly can. So yeah, but if you had to choose, I would go for the one that is less visual quality graphics, to target more people.

7.2.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?
No questions.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

*Rory O’Connor at the Yugambeh Museum.*

*Leweena Williams, president of the Tweed-Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council.*
Note: due to technical difficulties, only Michał’s side of the conversation was recorded. Where interviewer’s additional comments and questions are entered into the transcript, they are reconstructed from memory.

7.3.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.3.1.1 Primer A – If interviewing cultural heritage expert [10 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the heritage projects for showing and teaching indigenous culture that you are involved with?

   I have been heavily involved in two platforms for heritage activities. One would be tabletop roleplaying games, and the other, live-action roleplaying [LARP]. They both have one very strong quality, very strong feature for immersing into cultural heritage, that is: face-to-face live roleplaying. People get involved in character, and asked to imagine themselves and their friends, in the historical environment. So, if we played a tabletop RPGs set in the 17th century Poland, we would be immersing in the roles of 17th century noblemen. We’d try to think like them, as far as it’s possible, and we’ll be forced to operate in the economic, social, technological, historical environment that was depicted in the handbook and in our own knowledge of this historical period. If I want to compare tabletop to live-action roleplaying, I would say that, I can’t say one is definitely better than the other in transporting people to imaginary cultural landscapes, but they do have specific potentials and limitations which the other platform doesn’t have.

   So, specifically, tabletop roleplaying games are better or have the potential of transporting the player characters to any place in the world. They can travel from one city to another, the player characters can be transported from, say, Poland to Sweden, within fifteen minutes just by the means of game master’s narration. This is a feature which LARP doesn’t have, because LARP is played within a specific setting, a specific game area, and the players can’t physically wander beyond this area, because then they have streets, and cars, and normal people who don’t play the LARP. So, unless the game master can facilitate a quick change of scenery within the game area, then the players cannot explore a larger part of the world. Just the game area, so several buildings and environment, or maybe if it’s a large outdoors game, they can have a section of the forest and lakes... nevertheless, what we can present in terms of the physical part of the world is very limited in LARP, and is not limited in tabletop roleplaying games.
On the other hand, where does LARP beat tabletop roleplaying? In social interactions. A single
game master in a tabletop roleplaying game can facilitate a game to... how many, five, six
players, maybe? And interactions with the game world happen primarily through the game
master. This is a huge limitation on part of tabletop roleplaying, whereas in LARP, when we play,
we play in a group of thirty, forty people, then the player can physically and socially interact with
a whole bunch of people. And they can experience the dynamics of negotiation and rivalry and
alliances between different social groups. So, if you want to recreate the social experience, then I
would bet on LARP as the best vehicle to do that. If we want to enable players to explore the
world, then it would be tabletop.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

In a way, this is the same question, but in reverse. So, what doesn’t work in LARP? Definitely, we
can’t provide the players with large world to explore, because we’re limited by the game area.
Another limitation which I did not mention in answering the previous question, is the knowledge
of the game master and the game organisers. So, this is something in which I guess the virtual
environments would be better than live roleplaying. Because a single game master doesn’t know
everything about the world. And on the one hand, it is true that the players may ask the game
master to visit every corner of the world. They may go to the capital city and ask for a meeting
with the king. So, some interaction with the seat of power has to be provided by the game
master. Or they may get involved in criminal activities and get captured, put to jail and then put
on trial, and again, the game master should provide some information about the security forces,
about the legal system... and the game master doesn’t know all that, about the historical period.
That’s something I remember as my own limitation when I game mastered The Wild Plains –
Dzikie Pola – sometimes I felt incompetent in my historical knowledge to be able to enact a
specific scene. Because I didn’t know, for example, how the policing system worked. So, yes... a
little bit sad, because that’s the weakness of the greatest potential of roleplaying. If I said the
greatest potential of roleplaying, it’s the ability to take the players anywhere, and show them
anything they want to see, or anything the game master wants to see, it is great, but on the
other hand, the game master has to be able to deliver the information about the setting.

And of course, roleplaying is all about improvisation, so the game master can improvise, and it’s
not a problem for fantastic settings... but if we are talking specifically about cultural heritage,
and about historically accurate periods, then this improvisation, it cannot replace the knowledge
of the setting. So, Skyrim-like games, virtual environments are better in that they will be limited
in potential for interaction and exploration because the players will not be able to go beyond what has been scripted for the game. But on the other hand, if we hire a team of experts that make sure that everything there is in the game is accurate, then there is no potential for mistakes.

3. Have you looked into the incorporation of digital games into your cultural heritage projects?

I have considered that, definitely, and we didn’t do that for lack of time and funds, as far as I can remember. I am referring to the Democracy project from 2012, in which we organised a series of LARPs in junior high schools. In total we reached more than one thousand junior high school students, all of them first-time LARPers. And the whole game was set in the specific moment in time, it was 1606, the rebellion led by Zebrzydowski against the king. Each of the small fifty-two games were local assemblies of noblemen, the sejmiks. Each sejmik would then elect three members to a higher level parliamentary body, and then we’d have twenty-one students in the big national sejm, that was supposed to resolve the matter. And we did discuss the possibility of running a play-by-forum online games in-between to facilitate the exchange of opinions and negotiations and campaigning between the fifty-two schools between the three stages of the game. But like I said, it was an idea which I still think was a good one, but it would require more manpower and technology and money than we had. But yes, I definitely think it would add a lot to the experience. There would be continuity between the different levels, and the potential to make the players get deeper into character, and also to make the participants better connected to history or identity.

7.3.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.3.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

First of all, in its visuals, it would display the natural environment in which this indigenous culture lived. So we would have the landscapes, the animals, the specific weather conditions, because culture always is shaped in contact with natural environment. Or to put it in different words, human interactions with nature, become culture. The way we interact with nature, the way we teach the youngsters how to plant crops, how to hunt, et cetera, it becomes cultural. And the preservation of memory about our struggles with nature is also a cultural event. So I don’t see
these huge phenomena as a dichotomy, that there culture on one side and nature on the other, there is a lot of interconnectedness between the two.

So this was about the visuals and landscapes. Then avatars. The game would depict non-player characters, the social environment as well. So you could see people in their homes, the way they build homes, people doing different professions and tasks that were specific to the given culture. I would also like to see the division of the people into social groups. They may be professional groups, or men-women, old people and young people and children. So, no culture is a monolith. I would like to see the differences between age groups, between genders, between professions.

Now, going further. Action. If we talk about a game, a game has to provide choices and goals. So, these choices and goals should be based on... and that's now a design choice which may direct the game in two ways. We are talking about a roleplaying game, right? So, I will put aside civilisation simulations, of settlements and civilisations. If we focus on roleplaying games, then I guess it should be a journey through life that your player character, your avatar, would start as a youngster, maybe as a child, and start to learn the surrounding culture in a similar way to children, like you are born and everything is new to you. So, you have recognise family members, you have to recognise different tools and equipment. What something is used for. And then I guess it could be the story of growing up. The player character would start to experience the culture as a child and then become a teenager, a young apprentice, so the goals would change in time, when you are a youngster, then your milestone would be to reach adulthood. And maybe go through a ritual, a rite of passage to reach adulthood.

Interesting, the solution you propose seems to address one of the prime problems of RPG games: here I am with this adult character who is of this world, and should know this world, but the player does not know it and needs to be able to ask questions, though this doesn’t make sense for the character.

Yeah. So now imagine the tutorial to a game. Let’s say you want to be a hunter-gatherer tribe, you need to learn to hunt, so first you need to use weapons, and as a child within this community, you would play with toy weapons, toy bow and arrows et cetera, this could be a tutorial in the game. And you need to learn how to fish, and how to build fire et cetera. Also, as a child, you would listen to stories. Non-player characters, parents, elders, would explain things to you, generally introducing you to the culture by storytelling, and also art. I know you are mainly thinking in terms of Australia, and the Aborigines, so also painting would be an interesting element of this acculturation. Storytelling and painting, and dancing, and songs. Now when I am
talking about it, I see that it is difficult to balance the transmission of culture to gameplay. Because it can’t just be sitting there and listening to stories and watching the dances et cetera, you need choices, you need action also a child. So, it needs balancing but nevertheless I think that the transmission of culture through stories and images and dance and music, it should be interwoven with gameplay, perhaps all the time.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

In the present day, and still talking about an indigenous culture, that is a minority? Then it is the fundamental choice, whether this game should depict the live of tribal communities as they live in small settlements, or maybe it should tell the story of minority groups living in the cities, adopting the lifestyle of the dominant group. They would be completely different games. Or maybe we could try to combine the two, in that case the character must be moving between the tribal settlement and the big city. The roleplaying and the story behind it could actually be based on the problem of balancing the two worlds. So, what would change? We have probably these tribal communities in the similar way that I described previously, but you should also have the city, and normal jobs and the difficulties of learning a second language, or maybe language is not a problem in the case of Aborigines if they speak English, but different lifestyle.

So, a game that combines Skyrim and GTA [Grand Theft Auto] minus the crimes?

Mhm. This would be huge, a huge project because actually you’d need to design two different environments for the game.

Actually, what about if we were talking about a LARP game, like the Democracy project you described? Can you imagine a Democracy-like project for indigenous communities?

The kind of live-action roleplaying that we did in high schools...? Again, it’s a clash of different values, because on the one hand, the indigenous communities want their culture to be remembered and known and appreciated, and respected, and on the other hand, they don’t like to lose control over how they are represented. So, I’m watching the rising movement of cultural appropriation discourse, especially in the [United] States, and I’m a little bit worried by it. Because I don’t think that culture should have a copyright, and what I hear from people speaking against cultural appropriation, it sounds to me like a call to cultural segregation. That in order to reach for songs, and hairstyle and costume of a specific culture, you need to come from this culture. Because otherwise, you are somehow breaching the copyright. But I know that this is a sensitive issue, and my first thought would be, well, if I wanted to introduce LARP scenarios set in
an indigenous village and play it in a high school with white children, well, there would be an outrage of appropriation.

On the other hand, I don’t want to be intimidated by that, because I deeply think that reaching for other cultures and trying to understand them and even playing with elements of their culture, this is a positive thing in my view. Because in terms of racial struggles, people who didn’t want to touch the culture of coloured tribes, they were racist. Because the coloured culture was be considered inferior and dirty, so the racist white people would not imitate the hairstyle and music et cetera, because it was somehow low class and inferior. I think that now, if the dominant western white people listen to rap music, wear dreadlocks et cetera, it means that they are not ashamed of putting on tribal tattoos and costumes. They don’t find them dirty, they want to use them alongside their own culture. To me, it’s more appreciation than appropriation. However, I’m aware that my view is increasingly less popular in the social studies discourse.

But I’ve somehow drifted away from your question – or haven’t I?

Response indicating that yes, although certainly the issue is relevant to the question.

Well, because we are talking in generalisations here. And I am always reluctant to give general remarks of whether indigenous communities are like that or like that, should do this, should do that... there are different indigenous communities in the world and they have different needs and experiences. Ok, there are some things they have in common, if they are indigenous communities, probably all of them have been conquered and dominated by the western culture at some point, but nevertheless, I think that in Australia this is a much less sensitive issue than it is in the US. Am I right?

Response discussing Australian context, and in particular the issue of a break in intergenerational continuity due to lack of interest on part of youngest generations.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

From what I have observed, and also read in game education literature, is that roleplaying, especially live-action roleplaying, it does have the power to awaken an interest, in a given culture, in a given community. Because it makes people immerse in a person that lives in the given culture. It also provides them with multiple interactions with a number of people sharing the same fiction. So, at this point, your individual immersion becomes strengthened by inter-immersion. Like, there are a couple of people experiencing the same fictional reality and
communicating within this reality, so it’s not just your own imagination, it’s not just the words of the game master, it’s also myriads of interactions with other people. If everyone contributes to the same fiction, then your experience of being there gets an additional boost. And at this point, the problems you are discussing in-game, the problems of the characters, their families, their communities, become your problems. Because you are actively negotiating issues, you are actively trying to collect votes for this candidate or the other candidate, or you are trying to be selected as the new leader, or maybe you want to prevent someone else from becoming a leader. And also you are discussing religious issues, and ethical issues, and money, et cetera, et cetera. So, this is a very strong simulation of a social environment, and when it ends, people still remember that they have been there. That’s something which I’ve frequently heard from players of tabletop roleplaying games and LARPs, that if we played, for example, this Zebrzydowski’s uprising, Rokosz Zebrzydowskiiego, and then people read about Rokosz Zebrzydowskiiego in the school textbook, they had this feeling – hah, I was there. So, it makes the fictional history tangible and embodied and experienced personally. Of course it’s all fictional, it’s all fake, because you weren’t there really, but your emotions and your involvement in the matter – this was real, and it’s remembered as your own experience. So yes, it does have the power. And I can easily imagine that people coming from indigenous tribes living the 21st century lives, can get a better understanding of the lives of their ancestors by roleplaying scenarios set in historical periods. I feel it can be a very strong vehicle of transmitting culture, of deepening an understanding of a culture.

7.3.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]
7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

Another general question! What are the most important for any culture, any community, I don’t know, I wouldn’t like to generalise. So, let’s have this disclaimer, that what I’m going to say probably should work differently for different cultures and purposes. The main difference, for example, would be if this was a literate or an illiterate culture. So literate cultures, I guess, you should preserve the writing, and for illiterate cultures, oral storytelling, and songs, and music, because you asked about the intangible elements. I think songs would be the single most important element, because songs combine music and text. So you have contact with the language, with its artistic practices of using language for poetic works, and also you have music.
And music is also connected to material culture, tangible culture, because it plays on instruments.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

I’ve been thinking a lot about this issue, and yes, I could escape this question by saying I don’t know. But I will answer with the favourite answer of academics: it depends. Because I told you about my reservations about the cultural appropriation discourse, actually, I don’t buy the idea that cultural appropriation is harmful to the communities, and this is connected to my view on depictions of sacred things in culture. How is it connected? On the one hand, I will say if we want to create a roleplaying game or any other experience that is supposed to depict the perspective of the indigenous tribes, then I would say that their opinion and their views on sacred stuff should be totally respected. So if we are describing the setting and the indigenous tribes don’t want the sacred rocks to be depicted in the game, we shouldn’t do that. If the game and the whole project is supposed to represent the voice of the community. But I would also allow for the research and presentation and artistic depictions of an indigenous culture as seen through the lens of the western culture. Maybe I didn’t make it clear, but on the one hand, if the western culture meets indigenous tribes, we are also building our own experiences of meeting the other culture. We are building our own image of the other culture. And in this respect, if it’s mostly about what we experience as westerners when we look at a given culture, then we should primarily look at our own point of view. And in this way, if I am a researcher and I want to explore the world of the Aborigines, and I want to study their culture from the perspective of a western scholar, then I wouldn’t listen to the reservations about what should and shouldn’t be studied. So, I think that it depends on the purpose of the project.

Let me repeat that: if my purpose is to represent the culture from the perspective of the indigenous tribes, then they have the say of what should and shouldn’t be touched, but I would also allow for representations of indigenous tribes from the perspective of westerners meeting them.

h. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way
Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

*NOT ASKED – RESPONSE IMPLICIT IN PREVIOUS QUESTION.*

7.3.2.3 **Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]**

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

*I would give the same answer – it depends, right? It depends on the scope of the project. If the project may be narrowed down to a specific set of cultural practices, for example, what the lives of the tribe looked like in winter, and then... well, we can focus on the day-to-day activities in the settlement within the period of one month or two months. So, there would not be a drastic change in the weather condition. On the other hand, if we wanted to build a total simulation, that you could experience or you could watch the lives of a given culture all year round... well, it’s also possible, but it would cost an enormous pile of money. Well, what do the IT people say about possibilities – they say nothing is impossible, but it will cost more. Because it’s not impossible to implement the simulation of natural environment, of changing weather conditions and changing seasons. It’s possible. Is it a wise choice from the perspective of the designers or producers? I don’t know, probably not. I mean, maybe it would be better to produce several different games, several different experiences that would narrowly focus on some limited sector of the world or limited set of cultural practices rather than to build one huge environment that would have it all. Frankly, because it’s not even possible for any simulation to implement everything from a given culture. Each simulation engine is always a simplification, it always shows several phenomena, and it always simplifies or excludes others, so the simulation of a whole world in minute detail is not possible. It’s a question of calibration. How much do you want to simplify, and how many elements, how many features of a given culture do you want to put in a single project? I guess in some projects it would make sense to introduce the change of seasons. In others it probably wouldn’t. In my initial idea, the one that I started with, in this interview, I guess that seasons should be there. If you start as a child in a village, and you learn how the community lives by, how they get food, how they protect the community et cetera, you would have to see the change of seasons. Especially because I know that Aboriginal tribes, they moved to different parts of the country depending on the season.*
i. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

NOT ASKED – SUFFICIENT DETAIL IN PREVIOUS QUESTION.

7.3.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.3.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

Again, I tend to be the one sitting on middle ground. So, on the one hand yes, I am very happy that such appreciation of the authority of the culture in question has been accepted in western culture. So, if we want to understand traditional cultures, then they should be given the voice, definitely. So, the representation of a community is best executed by members of this community. Maybe I’ll try to put it in two sentences to make it short.

So, I love the fact that the traditional communities are given the attention and authority over the stories they tell, and also that they are given a share in the commercial income that is generated from these stories. So, I would totally support most of the points in the protocol, but one. I don’t think that traditional communities should be given the right to block the publication of stories they don’t like. I am thinking about point eight, for example. That the story provided by the community cannot be modified unless approved by the representatives. So this, in a way, blocks the possibilities of artistic and academic transformations of the stories. And much as I understand the fear of loss of culture, I don’t think it should be put to this extreme. I mean, I think that culture should live in a multitude of artistic transformations. And I will repeat my claim from the cultural appropriation problem: I don’t think cultures should be copyrighted. So, on the one hand, it is very good that researchers and artists are willing to consult the traditional communities, to give authenticity and to give voice to the people, but artists and academics who want to be critical of a given culture, who want to engage with the culture in a more creative manner should also be allowed to do so without the explicit consent of the traditional elders.

So you think that this protocol could stifle academic or artistic discourse?

It could, if point eight is implemented in such a way as I am afraid. That for example, no critical or no alternative account of this culture can be published without the consent of the people in question. I don’t know how this is organised in Australia, who is the traditional owner or the representative?
Nevertheless, there are some organisations, people, that have this status of traditional owners. They have to be consulted about the publication of their stories. So, in a way, they have a monopoly on truth about the given culture. And anyone who disagrees with their vision of the given culture, then would be silenced, if point eight from the protocol is actually implemented in full strength. That all publications about the culture must be given approval by the elders. So yes, I like the idea of consulting, respect, listening to the voice of the community, et cetera, but not to the point where the communities get the only say about their culture. Like I said, both for academic and for artistic reasons I don’t like monopolies and I don’t like copyrights on culture.

7.3.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

I think you can guess my answer to that: it depends. It depends on whether the project is more on the side of history or heritage. Let me elaborate on that. How do I see the difference? So, history is the past as it happened. It is the real, factual, objective past we have no access to, because it is gone. And history is also the academic discipline that studies the past and tries to describe the past as accurately as possible based on evidence. Whereas heritage, heritage is not about the past, heritage is about the present. Heritage is about how we use the memory of the past, the visions of the past for the present day and for the future. For a variety of purposes, commercial purpose, artistic, identity, et cetera. So, if we are on the side of history, then accuracy and authenticity reigns supreme. If we are supposed to depict a virtual history project, cultural heritage in its historical shape, then I would not allow any modifications on part of the users because they can do completely anachronic and ahistorical content. On the other hand, if our main purpose is not accurate history, if it’s heritage practice, then the question of misrepresentation of culture, I think, should not be a problem. Because if we take the approach of modern day heritage, then people use the heritage however they want to suit their present-day needs. So in the latter case, I would allow for any sort of artistic and academic playful activities with heritage content without worries about misrepresentation, because well, if that’s our purpose, we reach for a variety of cultural artefacts and images and phenomena, and we want people to get interested in them, we want people to interact with them... then we have to give the people the power to play with the culture.
So yes, probably I can give very specific answers, but in these two directions: if you want history, then you should not allow for modifications, if you want heritage, then go all the way in, however you please.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

Yeah, we can try to calibrate the two extremes, so to allow for some modifications of the cultural content, but limit it to for example, avatar customisation. Because I told you about the two extremes, either no modifications at all, or permit everything, of course there is a lot of middle ground in-between. So you can create virtual content, in which people can create characters, and customise their characters, give them different costumes, give them different weapons, different facial features, all of which would be kept within the historically accurate set of choices. It’s a possibility. Another thing can be moderation, that people are given the right to, let’s say, write new content, write text, paint images, and then send it to a local museum or organisation, and then they go through a process of moderation. So, in that case, you would need a culture expert that would decide, that this is within traditional culture and can be displayed on our website, and something is so way beyond the culture in question, that we reject it.

j. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

*NOT ASKED – COVERED BY PREVIOUS QUESTION.*

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

I believe this conflict will not be limited to the line between academics and the traditional culture and the tribe. I would expect even more conflict within the tribe, and within the academic team, because people have different views on culture. I would guess that even within the indigenous tribe, between the elders or between the old generation and the young generation, there would be different views of what we want to show to the outside world, and what we want to talk about. So yes, I fully expect this conflict between the community and the researchers, but I would also expect similar conflicts within the two groups. And how do we solve these conflicts, again it depends, right? It depends whether this conflict is about the content, what should, what should not be represented, or is it about the way of presentation, that something should be presented
this way or another way. Maybe it is a conflict about money, how do we share the revenue? So, tons of conflicts could arise in this project, I have no doubt about that.

k. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

NOT ASKED – COVERED BY PREVIOUS QUESTION.

7.3.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

NOT ASKED – INSTEAD, WENT DIRECTLY TO THE FOLLOW-UP.

l. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

If funds permit, I would say, do both. Because there are people who can be deeply touched and involved in the culture, if they are provided with high quality experiences. So, it is worthwhile to create top quality games that would transmit the culture to the players. And on the other hand, yes, I should not want to limit the game experience to only to people with high quality equipment. So yes, mass-scale games that reach a mass audience are also an option. And what would be the most popular technological device for gaming in the tribal communities, would it be the mobile phone? What I’ve read about Africa recently is that the most popular gaming device is most likely to be the mobile phone. The ownership of cell phones is rising much faster than the ownership of computers, especially networked computers.

Plus, there is also a technological option of a game environment with different quality, with different settings for quality. Which is, I guess, typical in heavy duty gaming. You can still play the game with lower quality settings. Probably this is the best course to balance accessibility and quality. The same game which is playable on low quality devices and rises to the top of its potentials with high quality computers

And well, there is another thing which may somehow circumvent the problem of AI engines, the introduction of live game masters. I told you about this idea when we met, I told you that I am expecting the development of virtual 3D environments in combination
with living history interpreters. I am thinking about the institution or the profession of first-person interpreters of history, who are hired by living history sites, such as colonial Williamsburg in the [United] States. And the actions of living history interpreters are not limited to face-to-face contact on site. You can also order a living history lesson online, for a school, so you’d be contacting the living history site from your own classroom, let’s say on Skype, and the students would see a costumed re-enactor, living history interpreter, for example settlers from the 17th century from a Puritan community, and they would be talking about their lives in character, and they would be answering to student questions in character. Most of the time, not all questions can be answered in character. But nevertheless, we already have the practice and the technology for living history re-enactment online, and it can obviously be also put in 3D environments. So the students would be travelling through the world like they do in Second Life, they would meet avatars, and some of these avatars would be operated by museum experts. Or the members of the local community. I don’t know if this idea has ever been considered in Australia, I wouldn’t be surprised. But if we are already including members of the traditional communities in the design and production of the virtual cultural environments, well, they can also be hired as first-person interpreters. I’m not talking about game masters who would design and describe a story, I am talking about impersonating characters that come from given culture. So, this could probably be the best combination of the virtual and the live-action components.

7.3.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

Yeah, I’d like to know what are the most problematic issues in the project we are talking about, in the virtualisation of Aboriginal cultures. The conflict between the community and the academics about the presentation of Aboriginal culture. Is there anything that the Aborigines would like to hide from the world?

Responded with some extended information about historical discourse concerning Aboriginal history, disagreements on the prevalence of certain customs such as inter-group warfare and infanticide, as well as deeper issues like questions of historical origin and age of different Aboriginal communities. Some loose conversation, including divergences onto New Zealander Maori culture, raising the question of whether the Maori are happy to discuss historical cannibalism.
But somehow, maybe a footnote to one of my previous answers, when I talked about my view that the local community should not have the ultimate say about what stories should be told about their culture, because the local, the traditional community may be strictly biased, in that they would like to present their culture in a better light than it was, like maybe if a culture would be ashamed of their cannibalistic past, they would insist that no mention of cannibalism is ever published about their culture. I don’t think that any community should be the ultimate judge, the ultimate authority of what should or should not be published. So, with this problematic point eight of the protocol, which I mentioned, I don’t want a copyright, I don’t want an ultimate authority that is always right, because of different commercial and cultural status interests, the local community will not always be interested in transmitting the truth about their past.

Another question then leads to the question of reconstructing cultural heritage and the problem of authenticity.

I thought about Druidry on the British Isles. Druidry in Wales and Scotland was actually invented in the 19th century. By a specific person, Ernest Williams [Edward Williams], if I remember well, who was a scholar of medieval culture, Celtic culture, so he knew a lot about history, but the problem was that the Druidic tradition was passed only in oral form. And then it was completely destroyed by Christianity. So, centuries after that, when Williams tried to revive the Druidic tradition, there were no records of the rituals. So, he faked them! He invented them. So, on the one hand, he is hated by some people for falsifying history, but others respect him as someone who actually brought back Druidry to Welsh culture, and he did the best he could, right? You couldn’t do better. And now, people who are still enacting Druidic rituals at Stonehenge and other sites, they claim connection to this ancient Druidry, but on the other hand, they are connectors of a movement that started in the 19th century. So it is already fairly old. It already has become Celtic tradition. Ok, it’s not authentic in terms of being transferred from the early middle ages, but nevertheless, it is a heritage, a legacy of several generations after Williams.

Well, in Australia, the Aboriginal tribes are in a better position because they still have communities with unbroken continuity of the culture.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

*ANSWER NOT RECORDED, BUT MICHAŁ POINTED TO ONE OF HIS CO-WORKERS.*
7.4 Brett Leavy
https://www.virtualsonglines.org/

7.4.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.4.1.1 Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [3 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?

   This medium of immersive heritage or virtual heritage that we’re pursuing in the shape of the program Virtual Songlines, it has a practical sense of kinaesthetically allowing users or players to walk on country and to engage with objects of significance, or sites of significance, to the culture and heritage and connection of First Nations people. So, on that basis, we feel it’s very important, and the tools we’re trying to build, are trying to authentically replicate the knowledge as accurately, and truthfully and as completely as we can, to allow that to be shared with other people.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

   Well, we’re not sure what doesn’t work. I mean, we’re finding we’re getting a lot of success with what we’re doing, and so to say something’s not working, I don’t know what that is. We’re taking an iterative approach, and in that we’re following an Agile software methodology within this virtual heritage subject matter we’re looking to record and display authentically. Now, to describe what’s not working, I don’t think there’s any problem that we’ve encountered that we haven’t been able to find a solution for. And I’m buoyant in my thoughts that everything we encounter can be represented visually. If there might be some problems, it’s about how far and how long we can engage for, so the problem we’re probably encountering I sonly time, and time costs money. So, the only problem we’ve got with the approach we’re taking is the expense of it. In terms of time, expertise, and trying to adapt our processes, to solve the research and development issues we’ve got with all the aspects that we need to represent within the virtual.

And what features or improvements would you like to add to your project in the future?

   Well, I’ll say as we go forward, and as we develop the program... we’re developing a program, a Virtual Songlines, that allows us to do projects, that is sites of cultural heritage significance to First Nations people within a region or area. [audio loss] is vitally important to enable us to do each project. That’s the two parts of this. Now, moving forward from here, we want to develop our program to rapidly allow the development of each project we do. We want it to happen
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faster. [We need?] at this point to work hard to develop this program, so that we can engage
with them thoroughly, and in a timely manner, and in accordance with protocol. That’s where we
want to go moving forward. Again, this all takes time, and we might go down a lot of cul-de-sacs
in our approach to achieve all this, but we’re making a big effort and I think we’re getting some
wins.

The other aspect is the authenticity of the assets that we’re trying to record. We’re trying to
make each one relevant and correct, and what we’re trying to then do is work out how these
assets, these objects or sites, change over time and space. And that’s the big question in Virtual
Songlines, how that can be best reflected, when a virtual experience is still about a timely
moment, and going forward, how are we going to build this into the system, so that people can
at any moment in time visit any site, and then make that work.

Another feature moving forward in the future is the multi-user aspect. We want to build
community in the virtual space. And that is a challenge, a persistent virtual heritage landscape
that changes over time when people aren’t in the world. So that anybody can come in a moment
into the virtual and then experience how that cultural heritage might have existed as completely,
as truthfully and as accurately as we can record it.

3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects?

Yes, well, lots. I like obviously any game that’s about survival. I also like the community that
comes out of those massively multiplayer games like World of Warcraft and Everquest. But they
were fantasy based. I think that anybody that’s most recently working on real serious
simulations, I quite like to look at those. I [also play?] lots of military simulations like Saving
Private Ryan or in a sense, Battlefront or Battlefield and things like that.

Those are the games that inspire me. So, I tend to look at a lot of games, I might buy a lot of
games, I don’t play all those games through to completion, I might just engage with them for a
week or so, and they give me some ideas. And I look at those games deeply, from the perspective
of the designer, the developer, the animators. Video games of the past are great, but those
games that are coming out in 2017 and 2018 are those that inspire me right now. There’s some
amazing things going on, where video games are transcending cinema, and where people can
take their own journeys, and that’s where we want to go. We want to get to that level of
realism, because I think that realism, or photorealism... people say, well, why would you bother?
Well, the truth is, those games inspire me, because the authentic nature of what we’re trying to
achieve, needs to be real, because that is the historical or cultural knowledge that we want to
display. And so, we want people to feel like they’re actually there. Those games inspire me because I feel like if we can achieve it, we will change hearts and minds.

7.4.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.4.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

Well, you’ve just described our project. So, what we’re doing is, we’re looking at what is it like to live one day in the life of a First Nations person. But then we went further, and we thought, what is it like to work through the rites of passage and initiation for a young kipper. And that’s what we thought a role-playing game of cultural heritage significance would be. So, all those aspects, all those challenges, that sort of hero’s quest, is what we want to achieve in our role-playing game. I call it a survival game, but a survival game is a role-playing game. So, we want that role-playing experience to be as accurate as we can to the cultural heritage of First Nations people. And furthermore to that point, we’re looking at it from a regionalist perspective, and on that regional perspective, we’re now exploring that where each capital city and regional town exists, so that we are authentic to those spaces. In doing that, we’re looking to those places where the most cultural destruction, the most destruction of the languages and the heritage values occurred, and doing a game of that nature, set at a time before first settlement, we’re going back to that moment when that culture was intact, and practiced and experienced, and had been for millennia. That’s the nature of Virtual Songlines, that’s what we’re trying to achieve. And I think we’re getting there, one point at a time, in our projects in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, and soon Melbourne and hopefully Canberra.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

I don’t know, that’s a hard one. What aspect of life are you trying to explore? [If] There’s a role-playing game about Indigenous people, which be different, from Acacia Ridge, a site in South Brisbane, to one that might be in the capital city itself. And what societal level are we talking about? I think I would have to say, society is far more complex than what it was back then, there’s a far greater amount of distractions than what there was back then, I think law and order is different now than what it was back then. So, there’s lots and lots of aspects about doing a serious game today in what’s transcending or happening. I would say that if we’re looking at an Aboriginal boy, he might be misfiring, he might not be doing the right thing, and there might be
boys that are really going well... there’s such a great challenge there, in such a game. But I think if we go back to a time when rules and regulations were in place, when myths and legends described the best social practice a person could engage with, is a far easier challenge than what you’ve just asked. I don’t think I want to do a game about today. Which parameter would I use, and to be honest, there’s so much in that, it’s not funny.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

There’s two parts to your question. Firstly, there’s a group that I would work with originally, to get that experience built, designed, developed and produced. And they would have known it on a step-by-step iterative basis, what to expect, so they would know. When the broader community is introduced to it, they generally are quite proud of it and quite impressed, and often, always amazed. A lot of people know about the potential of this, but don’t know how to start, and always would tell you that it needs to happen, but never know how to go about it. It is a science, a difficult science to achieve this.

So, there’s two parts. I work extensively with community champions as much as I can, so I have them on board, to negotiate what we want to achieve, it becomes quite big. Too eager champions push us further than we want to, and that we’re able to deliver. If we had unlimited time and unlimited budget, we could probably achieve everything they require, but it’s not always the case. And of course, once we do give them a result within the time and budget that we have allocated, then there’s always a challenge from the community about how we would fix this, that, and the other. But based on the fact that we’re building iterations, we have a chance to make those amendments over time, with the next project.

In some of the press interviews, you mention that particularly the elderly, they are sometimes very moved by what they are seeing?

Yeah, I think there’s a romantic aspect to what we’re doing, in terms of a bygone era, and a time lost. I mean, the psyche of First Nations people across the country, but particularly in the capital cities or regional towns is, when you reflect on it, a sense of loss, for the destruction of their culture. And all the indices that determine where we sit in the society that we live, they say that we’re not doing well on occasion. Healthwise, in life expectancy, infant mortality rates, employment rates, success through education institutions, all the like. My view is that with this project, we can deal with a sense of identity for First Nations people. To find who we are, and where we belong, and our connections to country. But I think that we’re a long way from solving
the purpose that our people need to have to move forward, to advance as a group and as a community and as a society.

So, that’s what we want to show in Virtual Songlines, that there was a connection to country. That that might have been lost, but this is what it was, this is what it may be. So, getting that right, consulting widely, being accurate, being authentic, that’s why we do it. I think that’s still to be tested, but when you see any radio about our culture, when you read a book or see a historical text, those pieces of information about our people are always up, and taken, and enjoyed and digested. So, if I can take all those forms of knowledge and take them into Virtual Songlines, I think that’s gonna go a long way to making people feel better. About themselves, about what their culture is, and that it does survive in an integral way in this medium. They do get moved, and as I’ve said, there’s been tears. People talking about paradise lost for instance, when we showcase Sydney Cove, or Warrane, as it was before first settlers arrived. And the same was said of the experience with the Botany Bay, or the Kamay project. So, we’ve got to keep doing this work, and as we adapt our techniques, we hope to get further feedback of that nature across every capital city or regional town that we’re going to produce Virtual Songlines projects for.

Have you ever had any negative experiences or reactions?

Generally speaking, I always make sure I see people coming, and I introduce my project...as much as possible, if there’s a chance that this can do well the revenue share with them if that was the case. At the moment, it’s not being able to be realised, because we’re not making money from this, it’s really a labour of love, and there’s a lot of sacrifices from my team to do this, because this sort of work we’re doing does cost money. Games... I don’t want to do a AAA game, but AAA games coming out to the market, they cost hundreds of millions of dollars to produce. Sometimes less than a hundred million, but it’s still a lot of money, and they’ve got fifty or sixty people working on this full-time, and fifty people working full-time across the span of a year costs. Then once they do the project, they try to get it out in the marketing sense.

But the question you’ve asked is if I’ve had any negative reactions to this. And I’ve not really encountered anybody negative. I’ve had a couple of people concerned about, well, I want my money. And therefore, their attitude would be negative in that, hey, if I help you, well, you gotta pay me. And that’s as negative as it gets. Because they don’t deny it should happen, they don’t
deny that I can do it. I’ve done some other projects in the past, which gives me, I suppose, a free pass to go and do this work. But I do this in consultation with First Nations people and they’re involved, so it just progresses very well.

Probably the other negative aspect of this would be if I don’t do it, I get in trouble. That’s more to the point. And if I don’t do it well. I gotta do it well. That’s when I get the negative impact of what we’re trying to achieve.

So, you’re literally driven to do this.

Yeah, driven, and pursued to do it, I suppose as well. I mean, I communicate quite widely, and I broadcast early what my intentions are. So, most people would know that we’re on the path to do it. There are other people who copy us too, I might add. So we’re getting a lot of copiers coming along, generally through universities that are much better funded in terms of their research than us. Remember, we’re not a part of the university, we’re not a grant-receiving agency, we’re all self-funded. And so, I look at this as… if anybody wants to criticise our work, you know, look at me as an artist. Do we stop our artists from painting a canvas? Do we get cranky when they do that? Or do we get cranky when a poet writes a poem about Aboriginal culture, or writing a book about Aboriginal culture? Do we say, you’re not allowed to write that book? They do permit that. The thing about our work is that it’s quite over-arching. It takes a bit of [audio loss] history writing, it takes a bit of famous old painting work, it takes a bit of work from geographers, or it takes a bit from big data, a bit from the museums, it takes a bit from people’s own oral history, recollections of their connections to country. It brings all matter of media into this new format, and to build this virtual space. So, it’s this new medium that people just haven’t gotten their head around. And then when I present it in virtual reality, then they really get blown away, so it’s quite… I suppose, confronting when they get into it, so that’s a challenge.

7.4.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

There’s a lot to that. Let me just say that I’m quite aware of the Burra Charter, and the Burra Charter is the UN principle on the protection of both intangible and tangible heritage culture. It’s specifically for First Nations people. So, we are aware of that, and we do in our work try to record intangible heritage culture. Now, I call intangible heritage culture the oral histories and
traditions that describe our connection to country, or our survival on that country. So, there are a plethora of Dreamtime stories, cultural stories, which generally are published and out there, and known. And then there’s different people who have a different way of interpreting those stories and telling them in their own country and their own space. So, we want to do that, and honour that, but rather than just simply have it as it appeared in front of the screen, we then create a virtual world around that intangible heritage yarn. So, yes, we do have that, and we do deal with that, and we do that in the way that we are presenting those stories. There’s a lot to be said in there. And the question then becomes, how do we manipulate, how do we mould that yarn into country, into the landscape, into people, into the animals, into the artefacts we need to represent. So, we’re building a repository, a virtual encyclopedia. And in that virtual encyclopedia, I really feel that those assets become part of that storytelling, when we know what that story is. So, we’re going to be partially there or halfway there on any yarn that [audio loss] that could be told. And there’d probably be a lot more work to do, but a lion’s share would be knocked off if we could build this repository as big as we can, and with each project delivered, we’d have those assets ready to put into country.

Now, let me use an example. There’s a good yarn from Western Queensland about a dingo that goes walking. The dingo’s walking and encounters all these different animals. We’ve got these animals modelled in 3D and animated, and they’re ready to be placed in accordance with that yarn to be told. We’ve got a narrator system that allows those stories to be orally transcribed and then placed within the context of the country, so that any user who walks the landscape, can then hear and see that yarn [audio loss]. But we’re nearly there, so based on that, we can do any story depending where it might be, even the cosmology story.

So, would it be right to say the most important aspect of your approach is that you’re trying to integrate those stories with the land and the people, the context?

Yes, exactly.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

With the secret stuff, we don’t go near it. We just stay with the public domain type knowledge. With the sacred, I mean, you can consider many things sacred with regards to the nature of that particular knowledge. I’ve heard someone say to me that... the old people used to propagate certain foods in a certain region, and someone would then describe that knowledge and that
propagation practice to be sacred. Everybody’s got their view about it, but I think if there’s a propagation going on, there’s a food source that we know about, it’s about sustainability. So if there’s a better food or a good food that we can actually get a hold of and know that it exists in the world, I don’t think that knowing that food is hurting anybody, by knowing that knowledge about bush tucker or bush food.

But if we’re talking about burials and aspects like that, I tend to steer away from that. We acknowledge that it went on, and there are sites of significance, but we don’t go there, and leave that for the moment. And ultimately, what we’re trying to say in our Virtual Songlines project is that there was a connection to country, there were cultural practices going on, there was propagation of landscape, there was crafting that was happening, there was hunting sites that were in place. All these things are available to prove that connection and showing that First Nations people did have a presence here, and a practical one.

But the secret stuff, I mean… well, what are we achieving by not sharing it? We want to in our virtual world present that knowledge that could be respectfully experienced and understood. And that way, by doing this, we’ll get a greater understanding of, a greater knowledge and a greater understanding of our First Nations people.

m. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

I don’t think we’re going to do that yet, the last one you mention, where we can actually have a layered aspect. It just takes a lot of work, and we’re not really resourced to do that justice. And I know that that can happen, and we need to explore it, but it just takes a whole level of security, and verification and analysis, and watchdogging, that we just aren’t set up to manage. So, I’d this point I’d steer clear of that, until such time as we’re really prepared or able, or resourced to do it justice. We want to get a result with what we’re doing. And if we get caught up or bogged down with that, we’re not gonna progress anything to the greater understanding, respect, and other missions that we hope to achieve.
7.4.2.3 **Natural heritage** [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

_**NOT ASKED, AS RESPONSE IS IMPLICIT IN VIRTUAL SONGLINES PROJECT. WENT STRAIGHT TO FOLLOW-UP.**_

n. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

_I think what’s most important is that we do our research thoroughly. And I think we’ve always got to improve the accuracy and the recording of that knowledge. So, in that effect, we want to make sure that our databases behind our system are robust enough to geospatially situate the knowledge that we’re actually identifying. If it’s a bush food or bush tucker, and we know there was a reference to that propagation site, we want to accurately represent that site where it was. Where the camps were, where the crafting sites were, where the hunting grounds were, where the crossings might have been... wherever we can find that knowledge on each one of those spaces, we want to add that, so again it comes down to our research_

[Audio loss followed by complete loss of connection, conversation restart]

Yes, I was just saying that the research we do needs to be accurate and authentic. And the next stage for us is making sure that we can geospatially place that research. So, we’re looking at the formats of how that research is collected and the systems of how that might be. Then, if we can get the communities to assist us with that, we’re working on an online type of app, a cultural heritage recording app for that requirement. Now, we can’t go too far there, but I think that there are some forms that detail how cultural heritage is generally collected in the field, by archaeologists and traditional owners, that we would like to adapt into our online form system. And if that online form system can then directly put that stuff into the country, then we’ve got an authentication process. So that’s what we’re working on as we speak. We’re not too far away from that, and that’s the key aspect in terms of where we want to go for that research and process of applying that into the virtual in each virtual heritage project we’re doing.

What about the dynamic aspects of the environment, the seasons, tides, winds, etcetera. Do you think those are important to implement?
Yes, they are. I think anything that’s relevant to the culture and the heritage, and anything that’s authentic to space, it’s important that we do it the best justice we can, so yeah, that goes without saying, doesn’t it?

It does go without saying, but even the top-of-the-line games seem to stay away from it.

Don’t forget, they’re being games. We’re in a sense doing a game, but we’re moving towards a simulation. So, gamifying is what we’re trying to do, but we’re using that term loosely. We want a role-playing simulation, an RPS in a sense, or an S-RPG, a simulated role-playing game. What I’m coming to here, is what is the genre of the work we’re doing? If we can conceive something in that regard, that’s probably where we’re headed. It’s a new genre.

7.4.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.4.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. Since I sent you the information kit, you responded with an updated version of the protocol that I had originally cited from your master’s thesis. The original was longer, had ten points, while the new one has six points. So, can you explain what changes you have made, and why? [What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?]

I think the old protocol was important, but I think it duplicated itself in stages. When I first wrote that, we weren’t sure what we could achieve with Virtual Songlines. It was called Digital Songlines back then. That was about twelve years ago, I did that protocol. And I think it was a pretty thorough plan, but it was just very, very long. What happened was that protocol became an approach to people, and I think it became a bit difficult. So, what I’ve done is I’ve brought that back to six standard points, and without going much into it, I think whatever we do, we’ve got to do it in consultation with the First Nations people, that they’re engaged with the research and the knowledge that’s contained in it, and that we don’t add anything in there that upsets their sensibilities and sense of wellbeing. Because we’re doing these projects for that particular purpose. So, that’s generally it. I mean, that’s brought those six points to three now, but effective that’s how these protocols were meant to play out.

Could you comment particularly on the removal of the 10th point, which talked about Indigenous people designing and participating in the creation of the virtual heritage application at all stages of planning, design and production?
There’s two ways to answer that one. Firstly, in a sense I follow that process. It is a contract that’s engaged with us, we in a sense follow those principles. So, why it’s not there, I’m not sure why. More to the point, at the time when I dropped that out, is I was funding the development process. So based on the fact that I was resourced to a point of... having to get them in meant that I just did not have the money to pay them. If you get them in at the research point, they generally want to be around for about six weeks, so I needed to pay them for 6 weeks’ worth of time. To get them involved in design, that’s another 12 weeks you need to have them involved. Then thirdly, there’s another phase where you get them involved in the production, and that’s another 20 weeks. And I found that with some of the projects, I needed to get between 16 and 18 people involved. Considering that, by getting them involved, you’re having to recompense them for their time and effort. So you’re needing about $18,000 a week for community engagement, for about 40 weeks, for a project to be realised.

A point that was raised in other interviews is that the indigenous community in a sense is the IP owner, and the IP owner controls the property, but doesn’t necessarily need to know how to develop games, or to be involved in their production as such.

If there’s a success to this type of work, then they should be recompensed for their time in some way, shape or form, but what we’re doing in the first place is something that might be limited to public domain information in the first instance, and then if there’s anything secret/sacred, you don’t go there, so you just tread carefully. How to get them all recompensed for a project that doesn’t make an income is a hard thing.

That’s the crux of it. I mean, when is an artwork done that depicts a cultural heritage? Say, for instance, someone like Vincent Serico, he passed away, God bless him, but he paints an image that reflects the cultural and social values of the community of Cherbourg. Does all the community partake, because it’s their knowledge, or about them and relevant to them, do they all get a cut of the money that he is paid for painting that work? Should they be recompensed because they are the subject of that work? That’s the question.

7.4.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?
Yes, we can think about that, but that’s a later stage. We’re not at that point yet. We’re building the tools as we go, so you’re asking us if we can build our tools for the community, that’s another whole stage of development. We’re not really there yet. We’ll be open to it, but that again just costs money. And again, what’s in it. We want people to create content, but it just takes time and money to make that possible.

But hypothetically, could you explain more about why you think this would be a good or bad idea?

I just think that having a modding community be involved with this, it could enhance a project, it could damage it, too. All I’m saying is, I’m a practical fellow, if I have an idea, I look at whether it’s possible, if it is possible, I pursue it. With this one, yes, it’s on the cards, but again it could be abused, bastardised, but then again you’ve got to be able and ready and capable of addressing those issues when they arise. So, we’re just not there yet. We’re only a small indie game company, so we’ve just go to be as nimble and as agile as possible. Again, we’re following agile development software framework, which allows us to be this, but to be a part of a modding community, we’re not there yet. And we’ve got to get something out, and then get that to be successful, and grow us to the next level. And I think probably in three or four iterations delivered, which will be three or four years, before we’re anywhere near capable of allowing the modding community to be supported. Maybe earlier if we succeed.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

Yeah, if we wanted to do that, we would [introduce guidelines]. I mean, we’d have a blog, we’d have a forum, we’d have a whole set of instructions through that to assist people in their modding. We’d have a display system for those modders to showcase what they’ve done with the broader community and get feedback. All that’s part of the moderation of that forum, or moderation of the activity. So yeah, it just takes time and resources, and someone’s got to be dedicated to that. And I think it needs a team for that purpose. We gotta crawl before we can walk.

o. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

NOT ASKED, RESPONSE IMPLICIT IN PREVIOUS RESPONSE.
13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

*NOT ASKED DUE TO TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES.*

a. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

*NOT ASKED.*

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

Note: due to connection difficulties, this question was asked by phone instead of Skype, and the response was annotated in shorthand. The reconstructed wording conveys the content of the interviewee’s response, but not the precise form.

*This is a loaded question, because in Australia, if we’re talking about who the program is for, the demographics, there is an assumption that we’re talking about remote communities. And those are only about ten percent of the Australian First Nations peoples. Ten percent! The rest lives in the cities. Furthermore, in remote communities, that issue of technological access has been addressed, it’s a non-issue. If you go to any of these communities, they have great connections, great access to technology, the question is do they have disposable incomes to buy an iPhone or iPad?*

*We’re building a platform that is a cultural metaphor for cultural heritage, a virtual heritage space that can use various technologies. We’re building this for iPad, PC, Mac, for the Xbox One, it is a flexible virtual heritage space, and there are many and varied ways to deploy it. I also feel that if the content is there, if it is done right, First Nations people will find a way to access it. And as I said, the vast majority of First Nations people in Australia live in cities, they have access to technology, and we want to respect their connections to country. I think Australians would like us to assimilate, to abandon our culture. And I’m trying to do the opposite, to show the culture, to show the connection to country that exists for us even in cities, to show that we do have a claim also in those areas.*

b. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec
machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

NOT ASKED, RESPONSE IMPLICIT IN PREVIOUS QUESTION.

7.4.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]
15. Do you have any questions for me?

NOT ASKED.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

NOT ASKED, AS NO LONGER LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS.
7.5 Bernadette Flynn
https://www.linkedin.com/in/bernadette-flynn-97a0761a/

7.5.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.5.1.1 Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [3 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?

The reconstruction of the temples from the archaeological evidence and the architectural interpretation was really a means to an end. Because what I was really looking at was how we can create a sense of embodiment, embodied experience within the temple environment. Now that immediately puts the project in a much more phenomenological vein rather than a reconstruction vein. However, a huge amount of research and digital labour went into reconstructing the eighteen chambers that we worked with. We actually worked in 2D, in a wrap-around space… something like a sixteen-point perspective 2D. So it was quite complex to create an environment that worked in the round, in a 10 metres space situating the user in the middle of a physical space with a 30 metres high screen wrapped all around them.

I think one of the big strengths of the research that I was doing is that it was looking at the relationship between our embodied selves today and the physical remains of that temple environment. And asking how can present embodiment provide insights into how people might have used that environment, or the kind of experiences that might have happened in that environment. Being prehistory, of course, we don’t have anything written down, so it was a very different type of interpretation project. I was looking at some translations between the past and the present through an experience of movement. Visitors are moving in the space that I created, very different from sitting down at a screen. And of course a lot of the online worlds give people that very strong experience of what’s been defined as presence or embodiment. And I think this is one of the great advantages of this type of technology, speaking very broadly here, that it can give that sense of immersion, that it can open up those doors to those experiential fields. It’s quite different from reading about how something was constructed, what its height is, what its dimensions is… or even looking at that. Actually being in a world, having the experience of being immersed in a world, opens up very different types of perception. And I was interested in exploring this as a type of cultural heritage knowledge, which I think in general has been under-researched previously.
And as I understand, one of the advantages of having these kinds of reconstruction projects, virtual or non-virtual, is being able to test out theories about how a given space could have looked and functioned in practice. Sometimes it is through reconstruction that archaeologists discover that their understanding of the given site was actually incorrect, or develop a better theory. Did you encounter anything like this in your project?

We already have extant architecture to work with at Mnajdra which I then digitally built, from the remaining blocks of stone to the roofed and open temples structures... I did explore different theories of reconstruction, but I wasn’t using it as a methodology so much as creating an attractor, for users to move across the room, to move forward. I was very happy, because I had two things happen that were delightful. One was that people had a sort of synesthetic response, so they would say things like, I can smell the temples, I can smell the caves. They felt the presence of other beings. And also, people would do things like crouch down when there was a small doorway. I didn’t give any kinds of instructions, you know, to walk towards the doorway and to crouch down. Three people came into my environment at a time, and I would take them through an orientation process, it’s good if one person moves through and the other person works with the wand, when you picked up the wand the wrap around image is a reconstruction of how the temples may have looked in prehistory I would take the users through a process which I would observe as well. But the idea was very much based on the exploration of the environment, feeling that they were immersed in that space. So, it was really much more akin to a game, in that it was a method to give the users a particular experience of presence.

Clearly, your users encountered a sort of gestalt experience, where the sum of the parts was greater than the individual parts put together.

Yeah, and this was an intention and it was part of the design. The sound, surround sound, played a big part in that. And that was a very difficult aspect, because I didn’t want anything that was going to lock it down to a culture, to a language, to a gender, so we used things like sounds from the body, the breath, water sounds, and then reprocessed those so that you couldn’t tell specifically what they were. It was more than an ambience that we were going for, it was also a spatial acoustic reference, i.e. you know you’re in an enclosed space, because it’s a roofed space, or you’re moving towards the doorway. Through infrared motion tracking the sound would change depending on where people were in the space. If they were looking towards the doorway they’d start to hear birds outside the doorway. If they were inside a closed chamber they would hear a different resonance. It was unencumbered tracking, so there was no data glove or
headset or anything like that, and that was very important for that immersive experience, the sense of presence. And sound seems to be very poorly explored as an area, for example when it comes to how sound or music affects the player’s experience of a world...

Yes, you’re quite right. From a Western point of view, we’re very visually-centric, and our analyses are very visually focused. Whereas often, the prime activator of some of those different states of perception can be the audio. In many ways, that was the hardest, because in the building up the worlds, I knew where I was going, what I was doing, working with different layers, moving between the past and present and so on, the person’s shadow, having the outline of what the building used to look like overlaid into the present-day building... so in a way, that was complex, but in many ways just a mechanical process of creating the building. Doing the sound was a lot more complex. We had to ask ourselves ‘What is actually going to work here’? You know, as soon as we start having voices that are gender-identifiable, we start to move into a particular frame of cognition, and I was trying to avoid that. So we worked a lot with bodily sounds, organic sounds, and we did a lot of experimenting.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

I was working with a very high-end, very expensive system that is not easily movable. There’s always problems working with state-of-the-art or new technologies, how is that reproducible, where can you take that work afterwards, et cetera.

Spaces of Mnajdra actually worked really well from a cultural perspective! When it was shown to a Maltese audience, their response was very strong, very visceral. That was really exciting. It’s very easy to get caught up in, the detail in that limestone isn’t as good as it could be, or the architectural structure needs to change... it’s the overall experience the users are having that works in the end. The other thing that was extremely interesting was the way the groups of three worked in the immersive environment. We invited users into the environment in groups of three. Sometimes if there was a couple and another person, the couple would start arguing about where they wanted to go, and if you had three people that didn’t know each other, sometimes that worked better, because they were more sensitive to each other’s needs. They would negotiate, and say, , for instance, what room will we explore now, shall we go through this door... if everyone just rushed at the screen at the same time, the system didn’t know what to trigger. There was some flakiness in the system I was using, from a technical perspective, you’d have to reset the system from time to time.
Because this was a project that was over and above the PhD, it started long before the PhD and continues long after the PhD, I went across to Malta five times, I worked very closely with Maltese archaeologists and the Maltese community, and I can’t overemphasize the importance of that component. It was a culturally-driven project... that may not have been specified in my PhD, but I was really interested in how the sense of being in the physical environment in Malta, could be translated into an experience for other people. That was my initial passion and impulse to follow through on. My problem was then finding a research framework and a methodology to do that. That’s where the phenomenological approach came in as the way of looking into some of those questions. A lot of the presence theory from virtual heritage, Mel Slater and people like that, only went so far. To really look at the embodied aspects in the way that I was interested in, I had to fuse a lot of different theories to build up where I wanted to go.

So, what would I have done differently? Well, I’d really like to take the work to Malta. And that possibly means working with another system, which could mean rebuilding it from scratch, because the work was purpose-built for a particular environment, which had very particular pixel dimensions, a very particular way of wrapping, a certain number of projectors that worked in a certain way, and so on. So, there are issues of making something that can be reused in different environments. To some extent, that’s a budget question. To another extent, it’s a curatorial question, about having curators in Malta who would be interested in the project, and then making an argument to bring it over. It’s also how you can market a work like that – if people have seen it and had that experience, it’s fine, but if they haven’t, it’s very difficult to explain in a way that translates at all. It’s very hard to find the language to explain in meaningful terms what the project’s about.

3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects?

Well, an early idea for the project was that it would be a video game. But when I had the opportunity to have access to the Advanced Visualisation and Interaction Environment at iCinema, University of NSW I thought this is a much better environment to test theories of presence and somatic awareness, (the multiplayer discussion, that takes it into another very interesting dimension). I was very aware of the research that was happening around multiplayer games, single player games... I actually have a small test version of the Maltese Temple done in Unreal. So, that was an interesting investigation, but very different. Of course you do not have anything like the sense of bodily immersion you’d have in a large-scale environment. Also, it was very limited at that time to what the game engine could do. For instance, here’s a pot, we want
to put it down, but we can’t put it down – we can blow it up, because that’s what the game engine allows! I was working with students, so there may have been other workarounds, but we quickly came upon the limitations of this particular shoot-‘em-up. And some of the things that I wanted to do, I wasn’t able to throw at it.

7.5.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.5.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

So, I think I will just “park” the question of the indigenous communities, because that’s very complex from a cultural perspective. I think it is helpful that I can look at it from the Maltese perspective, because as you know, I did think about using a game engine at one point. So, at the time when I made it, I was looking at a 3D naturalistic world. I’m wondering, if I did that now, whether I’d be so tied to the naturalistic world. The problem is, once you show something, that is an interpretation, people take it it’s exactly what the site or building looked like. From a cultural heritage point of view, that’s really problematic, and there’s no getting round that, because even if you show different versions of how it might have looked, if it’s not abstracted and it’s representational, people will take that as a legitimate representation. And indeed, a lot of people now know the past through 3D reconstructions of the past, many of which are highly speculative and interpreted. So, I suppose... let’s assume budget’s no problem, and having access to massive teams of people is no problem, and having access to incredible skill sets is no problem – which is often outside the virtual cultural heritage type of budget. But just for the moment let’s say that none of that is a problem. I think I would look at a multiplayer world. I would look at having participants from around the world being involved in constructing the temple environments. There might be some sort of templates, that are already in place - some representations - there might be some knowledge sets, that people would be drawing on to create ideas about how those worlds might have looked, what people might have done in those worlds, how people might have interacted. I’d also like to bring knowledge experts into those worlds. So you would have archaeological experts, you would have people who are engaging in the historical research, who would be contributing to the discussions and the building of those worlds. I would explore the historical cultural heritage on the basis of play, a kind of cultural play, an imagining and a re-imagining of what might have been. Obviously there would need to be considerable amount of
limitations put on that, for it to reflect the integrity of the cultural heritage and not become a free-for-all.

If I was working within a more realistic budget, I’d probably work with something that’s mobile-based, movement-based, that we might do on site, at the Mnajdra site, for instance. Augmented reality of some sort, still pursuing the somatic, the phenomenological, stepping up somewhere, and having some kind of feedback mechanism happening around a particular movement, bringing together the people who are in that space. If I was going to the Maltese government and I was pitching an idea using technology systems to expand the experience people are having with the environment, that’s probably the type of thing I would do.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

I’ll put it in the Maltese context, because that’s easier for me. I think an RPG would be great for working with the different histories people remember, I would use it for things like creating interactive soundscapes that relate to a place, place stories, working with recorded material from people, having users add to that as they’re moving around, having these landscapes that speak. I am thinking here of adding to the sonic realms aspects to some extent. I can see working with an RPG in the context of the Maltese communities and activating the cultural heritage aspects would add to the experience of the past very nicely.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

I think when these things are done successfully, they can be fantastic for reigniting a community’s interest in its own history. It can work for capacity building for community resilience and it can be used in all sorts of ways. You might have a particular issue that’s been looked at, which might be, say, obesity for example. RPGs can be used to facilitate engagement with the issue not in a direct way, but in an indirect way. There’s all sorts of learning and engagements that can arise when RPGs are well done. But any thing like that requires budget. And it requires people with very good skills in interaction design, interface design, and community facilitation.

One of the main conundrums for cultural heritage with using these tools, it’s not about technology solutions, it’s not about taking some technology and using it, it’s applying the latest thinking and knowledge, because we know these things work. We know they’re immersive, they’re engaging, that people laugh, cry, et cetera, they learn things. That’s been proven
And we know we can apply this stuff to cultural heritage. The question is what sort of teams can you put together to make it happen.

7.5.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

Well, it depends who the audience is. Is the audience that cultural group? You need to talk to that cultural group about what’s the most important thing for them. So, if I was working with say, parts of the Maltese community, it might be folk songs that are an important aspect of intangible heritage of that particular area One of the things that was a really big trigger in the world that I created, was in one of the scenes, you could see an island out to see, Filfla. Filfla, seen off the south coast of Malta–was such a resonant part of the landscape for many people. At another point, I showed a particular type of lizard that’s endemic to Malta, a live video overlaid on the 3D reconstruction that had that evoked a very big response. These were things that were very specific to Malta and had a particular relationship for the Maltese living in Australia, so, to answer your question, I’d say something that resonates. But that’s going to be different for each culture, each cultural group - specific to the women in that group and specific to the men the overarching question is who’s your audience?

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

The first thing with a project of this nature is that there needs to be indigenous people on the project, there must be indigenous consultants. One of the processes that’s usually recommended is to talk to the local Land Council of the area that you’re working in. In Australia there’s hundreds of different language groups, so the protocol would be working with the particular language group. Talking to the Land Council whether you have permission to do the project in the first place, and what protocols they would advise for proceeding. But the very least, as I understand, is having consultants on the project and to the project.

Regarding the issue of secret aspects of culture... again, one needs to be very specific about audience, who the material is going to be shown to. There will be certain obligations then around what’s allowable to be shown and what’s not allowable given who the audience is. Also defining the purpose of the work, for whose benefit is this work. The National Trust has written a
really good guide about working with Aboriginal cultural heritage, and it basically says there should be processes working with the local knowledge holders, and there should be a benefit going back to the local community. That should be the intrinsic nature, the purpose of the work. And then there’s questions about technology and deliverables and all the things around that.

Your indigenous consultants are the people who would answer these questions, really, rather than me or anyone else not from that community. I mean, with the Maltese community, quite early on I recognised the sensitivity, one group saying the temples were roofed, another saying they weren’t, another saying they were partially roofed. In speaking with Maltese archaeologists, what they suggested was to show all of these options so as not to prioritise a particular thing. Because my work is shown in the round, is projected, and the user is moving, there’s a different type of abstraction that happens, as compared to looking at a 3D world on a small computer screen, which is much more concrete.

Those larger questions about intangible heritage, and what might be depicted could go on forever as a discussion. At a certain point it gets to, what’s my budget, what’s the technology, and then within those constraint, what can I do? Otherwise, you can go off in all sorts of unachievable directions.

7.5.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

No, the landscape features don’t do justice to the environmental connection. The landscape is mainly a filled-in backdrop. And even in the best ones that I’ve seen, it’s still pretty hoaky. The question is, how do you create a meaningful landscape context? One of the things that was tangential to my PhD was looking at landscape archaeology. The reason I focused on the Mnajdra temples is they’re still in their landscape settings which is relatively unchanged from previous times, and that’s very important to how we understand that place. I think that’s a tricky one, because those worlds don’t deal with landscape at all.

Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

Because you’re not actually talking about representations of landscape, you’re talking about contextual ecology. The interaction between humans and the landscape. There might be something that could be done from the intangible heritage perspective. So
rather than thinking how this can be done visually, maybe it can be done sonically, acoustically, there could be tactile qualities. From what I know, those gaming environments are so wedded to the visual field, that those other elements are relatively poor.

Let’s say you were going to take people into a room, and they were blindfolded. And you create a game in that room building from scratch. You could start to build in landscape perceptions, building from a tabula rasa. If you go into a gaming environment with all its constraints and say how we do it, that’s a much harder thing, because really I suspect you can only tweak at the edges unless you have a really abstracted visual space, if people are just listening to a little speaker on their mobile. I think it’s doable, but trying to impose something into those pre-defined environments is very tricky.

7.5.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.5.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

Number six is interesting, because it says, the ownership and copyright of the story. But an interesting discussion could be had about, if for example you recreate a 3D item of a traditional implement, where should the copyright reside? Should it be with the traditional group, or with the producer?

These points look sort of fine, and relatively standard in a way. I think what’s interesting in the work that you’re doing, is what constitutes a story? Are we talking about text, are we talking about visuals, are we talking about audio? Where does that begin and end? I have a film background, and so when you’re working on a film, at different stages you’ll have a range of different agreements in place, in perpetuity, Australian rights, or international rights, so I would say this is fine as a starting point, but it probably doesn’t really go far enough because it doesn’t actually say what story means... it assumes we all know what story means, but stories may exist in many different media forms. There’s the story you record, the story you write, published documents, originals and digital versions etc. Which forms are copyright of the traditional owner? All of those things? The National Trust document that I talked about goes a lot further than this.

Basically, this would need to be like a legal document. It would need to define its terms, what story means, received royalties from revenues earned – what does that mean? So that’s just fine
as a starting point, but if you wanted a memorandum of understanding, you would need a different document. It’s good as a starting point. And also, in there, you would need to have something about dispute processes. So, two different members of the traditional owner group disagree on what story represents the community and the clan. How do you resolve that? This is not an unfamiliar situation with any community project. There are different opinions in any community. But as a set of principles, it’s a pretty good starting point. I’d say one of the big differences between this and the National Trust one was that there needed to be a benefit (specifically a cultural benefit) that accrued back to the community.

7.5.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

It depends on so many variables, I think. If anyone can go in there and modify, I don’t see how that’s going to work. Someone’s going to, for instance, put a cat on top of Uluru. Even if it was historically motivated, it would be too open, I can’t see it necessarily developing in a meaningful way from a cultural heritage and knowledge perspective. I think the only way to do it is to build it as a kind of learning application with certain constraints. The work itself would be a learning tool that allows you to do certain things, would be deeply informed by legitimated accounts – not the final truth or anything. You could establish what the agreed accounts are at the beginning. Then I think it would be possible. I can’t really see it working in pre-existing environments without big budgets.

And it depends whether you want the historical engagement by the users to be deep and meaningful, or whether you want just people operating at a fairly light level. Because I can see how with six months of workshopping, you might produce a document that says, these are the kinds of modifications which we could work with, which will allow users to enhance their knowledge by doing whatever. And then, building something around that, but it has to be coming out of that intense set of workshops.

What are the constraints, what are the reward systems, what is the definition of getting it right, the correct history, all of those things, which are quite complex. But if these can be resolved satisfactorily, a useful set of scenarios can be created. The contextual elements of each specific community will impinge on how that will work.
12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

What that question provokes in me, is that the relationship which has been theorised a lot, between play and rules. I think it’s about having that educative focus, having input from people who have experience in teaching and learning, particularly immersive teaching and learning, and how those things can be brought together with gaming techniques. So that it’s not seen purely as a set of technology questions or a set of cultural questions, but also educative ones. If the aim is to have some sort of educative benefit, then that component really needs to be in there, and there needs to be people working on the project who have those sets of knowledges and those frameworks, and who know how to run community workshops.

I think what you’re talking about in terms of the mods, is people’s own explorations of history, and interrogating the community themselves, adding to that, and really being conduits for different forms of knowledge. That’s terrifically exciting, but it does bring in the educational experts on the team. Quite different from just the story, it’s much more than working with stories.

The aim, I think, is to get people excited about a culture, because we can’t teach them all there is about the culture anyway.

It’s not about didactic information, and that’s why the worlds are so inviting, because they’re full of potential, full of possibilities, the user can step into that world and then create something from that. That’s the hook of those environments, they are learning environments, even if you’re just learning how to throw something so that the door can open. It may seem inane, but all of that can be leveraged for the learning experience.

It goes back to the traditional museum, the type with physical artefacts and labels. The museum would achieve its job if it got you interested in the culture, but if it just tried to teach you all there is – well, that’s hard!

Well, you know, museums have shifted. In the traditional museum, the curator was the subject expert, and was pushing out the knowledge to the visitor, who was privileged to be at the altar of knowledge, whereas the contemporary museum focuses a lot more around the visitor being... not a co-contributor, because it’s not that sort of relationship, but the curator is sending out provocations to the visitor which will send them off on different pathways. It’s not a closed system, it’s an open system where other ideas can come in. And it’s not just in the physical space,
it’s also in the virtual space in social media, augmented reality, blogs, et cetera, and it ripples out from there.

So, we’ve gone from an altar of knowledge to a fountain of knowledge, where it flows outwards...

Yeah! And the great thing about the mods is that you can have this infolding as well.

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

There’s different but related answers to that. I will talk about the indigenous context here, because again, we’ve seen a shift fairly recently from non-indigenous scholars being the people who have driven the conversation about Aboriginal history, to Aboriginal scholars driving that conversation or at least being a part of it. And those Aboriginal scholars will always speak from the community, they’ll always identify what language group they’re from, what country they’re from, and what knowledge perspective they’re talking from. So, there isn’t really a conflict there. The Aboriginal person who’s in the academic field will be very aware of their positionality within country, and where they speak from when they’re speaking, so if they’re talking about someone else’s country, they’ll be very aware that they are talking as an outsider about that country. If they’re talking about their country, they’ll know stories from that country. So in a way, I think it’s sort of an easier situation if you’re talking about Australian Aboriginal scholarship versus community voice, I don’t think there is that same divide as in other cultural groups.

[Talking about the criticism of Ten Canoes’ cultural stasis from a non-indigenous anthropologist perspective]

So, I think there, that’s where you do get that differentiation,

q. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

I think as a producer, you would make a decision about your knowledge source, and where you’re speaking from, and whose perspective you’re speaking from. There’s a certain point where you have to say this is what I’m doing, and this is why I’m doing it... and if you’re working with protocol, you would be adhering to what the elected elders of that language group take as the situation.
There’s one view of history that there’s a truth you can get to, and another view of history, that it’s situated and layered and there are a variety of stories from differing perspectives. In the latter perspective, if you’re going to produce something, at some point you lock down, and say – all right, well, it’s this perspective I’m working with, these are the reasons I make the case for using this perspective, because it seems to be the one that’s most useful, most valuable, whatever, and then you go ahead and do that, making it clear that that’s the perspective you’re coming from. Because there’s a point where you can’t necessarily resolve those historical debates within the work to produce a solution unless you actually take them up as the subject of the work, and then you play out some of those differences. Like, person A, said the battle happened this way, person B said it happened this way, well let’s play out those scenarios in the world.

7.5.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

It may be, finding out what technology pre-exists within that community and working with that. Let’s say, a percentage of that community has mobile phones, so that’s the platform you’re working on. Again, this is about community engagement and developing relationship with that community and seeing what the community wants, what would be enhancing to the community in terms of technological affordance. It’s a very broad question, and I would say the first thing to look at is what’s the community that I’m working with, what’s their digital literacy, and what technology are they using. You may find if their digital literacy is below a certain level, you may find that digital technology is not the answer, maybe it takes another form and not digital. Or you’re facilitating a set of workshops through the local library, where there is technology, so you’re working with maybe the museums or the galleries in that area.

What you can probably say is there won’t be a one-size-fits-all, and there probably won’t even be ten-sizes-fits-all. In my own work reporting on historical societies, what I’ve come down to is rather than talking about particular technologies, we’re talking about types of technology approaches... I’m not going down the path of linking types of technology to particular historical societies, because there’s too many variables. You might have a society that has this, this, this, but – it’s blocked because there’s a particular person running the society, who is very unwelcoming to new people. Therefore, you can throw everything at it, but it will fall over at the end because of this particular person. That’s going to be the situation working with different
communities, it’s going to come down to the groups, the individuals... you might find a group that’s got a great relationship with their local library, so great, we can run this through the technology in the library. But others, they’re not going to go into the library, for whatever reason.

7.5.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]
15. Do you have any questions for me?

None at this point.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

Sarah Kenderdine.
7.6 Kit Devine
http://kitdevine.com/

7.6.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.6.1.1 Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [3 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?

   I’m working on three different projects, the Virtual Sydney Rocks (a time-based 3D cgi virtual heritage world with a supporting online database), VR Sydney circa 1800 (a passive experiential work based on a period painting) and the Narrabeen Lakes Aboriginal Camp which is intended for multiple platforms. The main strengths of digital heritage projects are with tangible heritage but intangible heritage is a much trickier problem. In a heritage project, if it’s not populated, it’s very difficult to show a lot of what we think of as culture. You can’t show what the people are wearing, you can’t show how they talk to each other, the dynamic aspect of human culture is missing… the social aspect of human culture is missing from virtual heritage if it’s unpopulated.

   Interviewer notes the distinction between the social and cultural aspects.

   Well, you know, in my Virtual Sydney Rocks work, the way I got round the fact that it was unpopulated, was that I had a very extensive website. So, although primarily what you experienced in the game world was the architecture, you could click on a building, it opened up a webpage with a lot of extensive documentary stuff that people could read. And that was the way that I could provide some level of cultural immersion for users. But I feel that the cultural immersion that’s provided is… second-rate compared to if you do a populated world. I mean, when you look at something like Assassin’s Creed, you know, running around an empty Venice is very different to running around a Venice that’s full of people. So, I think that virtual heritage can provide cultural immersion, but it’s much easier in a populated world than an unpopulated world.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects? Would you say that having a populated world would be your next goal?

   Yes. The way I build the Rocks was so that you could add that later. I didn’t have the extensive resources needed to build a world that was populated, but having built an extensive world, if I then get more resources, I can add the population to it. I was building it in phases, for me the
first phase was the architecture, and the second phase will be the inhabitants to give it a social dimension and enable some intangible culture.

3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects? For example, did you ever think to yourself, how nice it would be if Ubisoft made an Assassin’s Creed in Australia?

Well, no, because I know that when they made Assassin’s Creed it is not 100% historically accurate as, for gameplay reasons, they moved some of the buildings around and they also scale the height of the cathedral in Acre to make it more dramatic. If you think you’re going to know your way around Venice from playing Assassin’s Creed, it will work 90% of the time. So, yes, I’m inspired by what something like Assassin’s Creed which shows that the technology can do, but in terms of a commercial game being virtual heritage, I think there’s considerations that game manufacturers have to take into account that don’t apply to heritage visualisation. They make compromises which are acceptable for the purposes of a game, but which are not acceptable for the purposes of heritage.

7.6.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.6.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

Well, it depends. If you’re doing a game that’s set up in the Northern Territories, then I think you’ve got a lot of people that you can talk to. But if you’re trying to do a game that’s telling the Aboriginal heritage of Sydney there is so much that has been lost, and there is much disagreement within local Aboriginal groups about what remains of their culture and language, that I think an inhabited virtual heritage game would contain too much speculation and not enough fact to be credible. However in parts of Australia where the Aboriginal culture is much more intact it would be very do-able.

With that in mind, would you agree with the point that’s sometimes made that even filling out those blanks with conjecture is better than nothing, or would you concentrate on accuracy?

Well, the thing is, any reconstruction has a certain amount of artistic license. And that, I think, reveals more about the time that the reconstruction was made, than about the time that the reconstruction is supposedly about. So, at the moment I’m doing something in Sydney, and I’ve got this etching that’s based on a painting. Now, the painting was somewhere around 1800, and
the painting is lost, but they made a copy of the painting as an etching in 1804. And it shows Sydney Harbour, and it shows a boat in the foreground. And if I was using that picture and thinking that that is 100% what Sydney looked like in 1800, I could be wrong, because it was very common at that time, if you were the captain of a ship, you could say to someone, paint a picture of Sydney and put my boat in it. So, you might have a picture of Sydney, and you might have a boat in there, but maybe that boat wasn’t there on the particular day of the picture. So, already, the artist in 1800 has made additions to the painting from what reality is. And I’m basing my reconstruction of Sydney on the historical record, but that record is problematic. So, you’re getting an interpretation layered on top of an artistic work which may or may not have had a degree of artistic license.

Additionally, I want to note the audible dimension available to virtual heritage and VR. If in your virtual world you have a ship sailing past there will be all the sounds associated with it but also the voices, accents and languages of people. If you leave them out the world will seem very odd but if you put them in you are making them all up. It may be an informed best guess but even so it is highly speculative!

And so any virtual heritage reconstruction that seeks to give a sense of place, both physical and social, is situated in a particular cultural moment. My VR Sydney Rocks 1800 project reveals the knowledge that was available here in 2017 when I came to do my reproduction and how I chose to interpret it. So, in fifty years’ time when somebody does another virtual Sydney and they have more historical records, more archaeological digs or whatever, maybe they’ll find more information which will change their interpretation of the data and will change the way that they build a reconstruction. Any historical reproduction is as much a product of the time that it was made as it is of the historical record that it was based on.

I am reminded of how people will sometimes ask a painter to “correct” their portrait, for example make the nose smaller.

Imagine, if you tried to make a story of someone’s life just by what they put on Facebook. People edit their lives on Facebook, they get rid of the wrinkles, you know? They only put up when they’re having a good time, not when they’re having a bad time. So, as I said, in any visualisation, there’s a bit of interpretation that takes place. And the further back in time you go, the less information you have, and the more interpretation.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?
Well, I’m actually doing one set in Sydney in 1950s. And it’s based not on the archaeological record, because there is no archaeological record, it’s actually based on an oral history of someone who recalls this particular group and this particular location. Yes, I think it’s possible to build an RPG, but you have got to closely partner with any living members of that community that you’re building the RPG around.

The group that I’m looking at were based in north Sydney, but it was on a traditional travelling route, so members of other tribal groups would drop in as they travelled up and down the coast. They spoke in language, participated in cultural activities and sat around and telling stories to the children at the Camp. We’re going to do a presentation at the 2017 Oral History Australia conference in Sydney in September, and our presentation is going to be around the fact that for this particular group, there is no written record, or very little written record and there is no archaeological record, so the only knowledge we have on the Camp is oral history. And that is the case with a lot of Aboriginal history. I would say also, if you look at other tribal groups all around the world that don’t have a written language, the only thing that you have to go on is the oral history. I mean, in parts of the world that are warm and wet, like any of the tropical areas, in fifty years’ time the archaeology has rotted away. So oral history is the only thing that you have to go on, so it comes back to the problem that you’re trying to do a complete recreation of something, but with fragmentary information. For example, as a heritage visualiser, if you don’t know what colour the wallpaper was, do you not put any wallpaper at all, or do you just make the best guess?

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

It will have tremendous impact! Because I think there’s so little content that is produced for cultural groups that are small, that anything that is reinforcing your culture is a plus. Whether it’s a book, a film, a game, anything that is focussing in on your culture when your culture is so neglected can only be a positive thing, if it’s done in collaboration with people from your own community, obviously.

The community that I’m working with, there’s only one or two people left. It was an Aboriginal site in metropolitan Sydney that existed from before colonisation and survived up until the 1950s, but then the authorities arrived with buses, put everyone on the buses, and as the buses left they saw the settlement in flames. Later builders came with bulldozers and completely remade the landscape and put a sports centre on it. So, there’s no place left, the people have
scattered, and the person who we’re talking to, [name withheld for privacy], who has the memory of it, he went there intermittently when he was around twelve to fifteen, and he is sixty now. So, most of the people whom he remembers are dead. This site and this community would be completely invisible to history apart from his oral recollections.

I see both the VSR and the Narrabeen Lake Camp as virtual heritage worlds in which many activities can take place including multiple games. This is similar to online multiplayer computer game worlds where one can play as different characters, undertake different missions or just hang about with friends. One of the things we want to do in this world we’re building is have a game where you are a 12 year old (male or female) and you have to get food to eat that day. So, it means looking closely at what time of year is it, what time of the tide, what kind of food can you get, what animals you can hunt, what fish, what birds, what eggs, what vegetation is available. What can you catch to eat or maybe what can you sell for money to buy food. So, the game would be a day in the life of this person at this particular site. The problem for virtual heritage is getting the resources to do it properly. Obviously, my feeling is, if you go to the trouble to build a 3D world that people can inhabit, you’re not going to tell just one story or have just one game. When you picture something like Assassin’s Creed, or any of these online games, you have a whole series of missions that you can do. You couldn’t play one five-hour game and learn everything there is to learn about a particular indigenous group in Australia. To capture the rich cultural heritage and the deep close connection between people and land that is at the heart of Aboriginal culture you would need to model the spiritual landscape as well as the geography, and then you would need to have multiple games. Additionally you would need to support women’s business and men’s business and you would need to have mechanisms to protect culturally sensitive ‘secret business’ data.

7.6.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

Well, I guess any intangible culture that you know is accurate. I address this issue in several papers and in my PhD – if you’re going to do a populated virtual heritage world, you will need to show some aspects intangible culture but once you go back to before recorded history, it’s impossible as there is no data. If I build a model of Stonehenge, and I have a lot of Neolithic peoples there, I don’t know their hairstyles. I don’t know if they kissed each other hello, did they kiss on one cheek, did they kiss on both cheeks, did they kiss three times like they do in some
parts of France? What were their hairstyles, what were their clothing styles? The intangible culture is so much of what you see, when you see people you see clothing styles and hairstyles, you see social interaction with each other. Now, if you’re going back two hundred years or three hundred years in British history, you can go to diaries, you can go to letters people have written to each other. And you have someone say, oh that person came to have tea with me, and they were so rude, they went to help themselves to a biscuit and they didn’t ask! You know? So you have some record of social mores etc. to build believable social interactions between people that have some basis in fact. I just think that virtual heritage that tries to recreate intangible culture for which there is very little or no documentary evidence that is more than a hundred or two hundred years old is making up so much of it, that it becomes Assassin’s Creed. It becomes entertaining, it becomes fun, but in terms of actually thinking this is what it was like in ancient Rome I don’t think it comes close enough. But specifically in terms of Aboriginal groups and intangible culture, there are parts of Australia with Aboriginal group where a lot of the culture is very intact, and it’s completely possible to do a really good recreation that includes both tangible and intangible heritage.

So, it’s a classic answer – it depends. And I think with any heritage visualisation, amongst heritage professionals, you may find one heritage professional who thinks that the visualisation is ok, and another heritage professional might think that no, there was too much artistic license. So, it’s a case-by-case basis and each case there will be judged on its merits and its failings. You can rate Assassin’s Creed on the accuracy of the tangible culture, and also the intangible culture. And you can say, well, the tangible recreation of Venice is 90% accurate, and you might say the intangible recreation of the social interactions between people is less than that. Exactly how much is hard for me to say as I’m not a scholar of that period of Italian history, so I don’t know how well social interactions are documented, the social interactions between groups of people. In Assassin’s Creed they certainly aren’t speaking in Italian or Italian dialects of the period and location! But on a meta level, when you look at any city, regardless of whether it’s five hundred years ago or whether it’s now, there is going to be a bit that’s the red light district, there’s a bit that’s sort of a slum area where you might get mugged, and more upmarket areas etc. So, if you like, there’s a meta-truth about cities regardless of time. So, I could build a recreation of a city from a thousand years ago, and I could put in a red-light district, and a nice part of town and a nasty part of town. And you could walk around, and it would feel like a real living city. But how much truth will it bear to the city you’re trying to build? The further back in time you go, the more dubious and speculative the intangible heritage becomes.
8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

Personally, I would just be upfront and say this is a restricted knowledge part. If you look at the gameplaying world, sometimes you play a game, and you’re trying to unlock some room or something, and you can’t get into that until you’ve got a certain amount of experience points or whatever. So there are mechanisms within games to restrict knowledge from players at different points in the game, and I think it’s not that much of a stretch to say that there are certain aspects of this heritage recreation that you are going to be forever locked out of. You know, if you’re a man playing this game, then there are certain bits, women’s stuff that you can’t [do]. If you’re a man playing this game, and you’re not a senior knowledge holder, there’s bits that you can’t see. That’s life! It’s like, if you’re in the army, you don’t get to see what the generals get to see, you know? In all levels of human society, there’s certain bits of knowledge that are restricted to groups of people. You can have a discussion as to whether this should or should not be the case, but if you just look at human society, it’s normal. It is also a matter of respect for a different culture.

r. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

*NOT ASKED – RESPONSE ALREADY GIVEN IN PRIOR QUESTION*

7.6.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

Ok, I think the tools are there. For $65 US I bought a plug-in that allows me control over the lighting, weather and sound that contribute so much to our phenomenological experience of place. I can put in the longitude, the latitude, the time of day, I can dial in weather. The gameplay can be designed to include important environmental aspects of traditional lifestyles
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(season of year, time of day or night, visible stars, time of tide, full moon etc. It is a design issue and the reason you rarely see them in commercial games, is because they’re not important to the tasks/missions being undertaken in commercial games. However when you’re dealing with any indigenous group that lives closely with the land then all of those things become very important. Because the lifestyle is so hand-in-hand with the natural cycles, if you’re going to create an educational virtual heritage world for and about indigenous peoples and their culture then the connection between people and land is a central and pivotal consideration.

s. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

NOT ASKED, RESPONSE ALREADY IMPLICIT IN THE PREVIOUS RESPONSE.

7.6.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.6.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

I remember reading through it, and I thought that all ten points on it were absolutely fantastic. There wasn’t anything I would add, and there wasn’t anything I would take away from it. I thought, yes, it was a very good summary of the important points.

Is this similar to how you’re working on your project?

Well, we don’t have a formal protocol or list of principles. However I’m working very closely with two people, one of whom has been working with Aboriginal peoples for many years and is very trusted by them [describes credentials of another collaborator, details withheld for privacy] and the other is the person [name withheld for privacy], who is our source for the oral history. So I feel that as I’ve been pulled into this project by someone who has worked very, very closely with indigenous groups and we’re working very closely with the Aboriginal knowledge holder, all of this stuff is just happening automatically. I’m just saying to them, what do you want me to put in and offering ideas about how we can design ways for people to interact with the content in ways that promote engagement, understanding and insight.

7.6.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?
I think you can open it up, as long as it’s not opened up completely. What you could do, is you could invite non-developers to provide extra content, but the indigenous group that own the traditional knowledge – it should be up to them to decide what is included. There’s always going to be trolls, people who come in and try to break things just to see if they can, if you make it completely open. You need to have some sort of policing, as it only takes one person to ruin it for everybody else. If it’s a chat group, and there’s one person there who’s really abusive, you put up with it, or else you remove them from the chat room. Unfortunately it’s a sensible idea to protect yourself against trolls.

So basically, a curated approach?

Yes. I think for sensitive indigenous subjects, yes, a curated approach.

But I wanted to go back to something you mentioned a little earlier, about historical accuracy. Because I was just looking at an interview with Christopher Nolan talking about the film Dunkirk. And he used a destroyer from the 1950s, which was about 10 metres longer than a historically accurate destroyer. But by using a real destroyer, he got better acting performances out of the actors than if he had said to them, oh, we’ll put in a CG ship later. So, in terms of what you want in a film or what you want in a game if you are trying to get people to connect, I think quite often, you want emotional accuracy. And sometimes strict historical accuracy, certainly in films, is not the same as the emotional accuracy that you want the film to have on people. Whenever a film comes out that’s based on something historical, you can go to Wikipedia, and you can find out which bit of it was true to the history, and which bit was Hollywood doing its Hollywood thing. Sometimes, despite the little details being wrong, the greater story being told feels right.

And sometimes, historical accuracy doesn’t feel accurate. For example, apparently, the Romans used to paint their statues, but we’re so used to them being white, that virtual reconstructions have them unpainted, because otherwise it wouldn’t feel accurate.

Yes, they’re naked stone, they’ve got no clothes on, and no paint. According to a constructivist theory of education when people learn, they’re not a blank slate. They come in with all sorts of ideas about what the past was like. For example I have been told that most Americans get their history from Hollywood – which is a bit worrying! So, in any virtual heritage recreation while you can do the best that you can do to keep it as historically accurate as possible, you’ve got no idea what’s inside the head of the person that’s going to use it. You have no idea of what their past history was. Each new user is a complete unknown, particularly if you are looking at non-indigenous people who are using a virtual world that’s designed for indigenous people. There’s
all of this base knowledge that will be completely missing. In Aboriginal groups in Australia, family groups are really, really important. So, in the English language we have the word niece and nephew for the son and daughter of my brother or my sister. But in Aboriginal cultures, I believe they have separate words for a niece from your sister versus a niece from your brother. Because family groups are really important to them the language reflects it.

You’ve seen Ten Canoes and the Making of Ten Canoes? I was amazed to learn that the roles an actor could play were constrained by their real life. If you were a medicine person today, you could play a medicine person in the film. If you weren’t, you couldn’t. An actor had to have the right background from a traditional culture perspective to be able to play a similar role in the film.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

NOT ASKED, PREVIOUS RESPONSE ALREADY LAID OUT ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES.

If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

NOT ASKED, NOT RELEVANT.

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past. For example the criticisms of Ten Canoes as presenting a static, unchanging Aboriginal culture.

Well, I am not an expert on Aboriginal or traditional cultures. However I think that that is something that the scholars cannot know. They assume that the culture changed a lot, because they’re coming from their own cultures, all of which have seen a lot of change but to make those assumptions about Australian indigenous groups is, I think, problematic. Also probably for groups in New Guinea or the Amazon - anywhere where there are tribes that are very cut off geographically and the climate means that clothing needs are minimal. I would imagine that many aspects of culture in those societies were pretty unchanging. I think if you go from ten thousand years ago to twenty thousand years ago, I would have to talk to somebody who knows a bit about how the climate had changed. Because certain Aboriginal groups have been living in areas that have seen the rise of sea levels since the end of the ice age and any great climactic
change might well be reflected in social change. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.

7.6.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]
14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

No, to me that comes down to funding at a government level. The government needs to put in the required infrastructure to reach inhabitants of remote locations. It’s putting the electricity in, the internet, community centres that have computers in them etc. and then maintaining them. It’s a huge infrastructure that would need to be rolled out across Australia.

u. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

I think it’s something you discuss with the group. Again, it’s something that we discuss with this project that we’re doing in north Sydney. Do we have a 3D game that people load onto their computers and play, or do we have something that people play on their phone? We’ve got the nub of the idea, and we’ve got the setting that we want to be in, but while there is some cross-over in data and content for a game that runs on a pc and a game that runs on a phone there is also significant differences. If we’re designing it as a phone app, we need to have somebody on the team that is knowledgeable in designing phone apps. My particular knowledge is more in 3D worldbuilding. So, I can help them with building a 3D interactive game, but it’s not going to run on the phone and use the GPS to give a locative experience. It’s a case by case decision and it is very important to discuss these issues with the stakeholders at the start of the project.

7.6.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]
15. Do you have any questions for me?

NONE.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

NOT ASKED, AS NO LONGER LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS.
7.7  Sara de Freitas

http://www.seriousgamesinstitute.co.uk/applied-research/Sara-de-Freitas.aspx

Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [3 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?

So out of the 56 projects I worked on, we had two projects in the heritage space. One was an EU-funded game called MASELTOV, which is about people coming from outside of Europe into Europe. They might have language difficulties or cultural issues and so on so it was really a game about developing cultural understanding. The other was Roma Nova (based upon the Rome Reborn model) which was an interactive space for teaching history and other curriculum subjects.

So what, in your opinion, worked especially well in the MASETOV project?

The idea behind it was to look at different individuals in terms of how they could then pathway into a life in Europe. What we did is research around different languages and different particular data sets. We worked with specialists in that field to identify what particular gaps of knowledge there might be. That’s been our methodology generally, you identify what the problem is exactly, and you break that down into particular kinds of learning outcomes you want for the participants, and then within that framework you develop a game around that. So, with this particular game, what we wanted to do was to be very accessible to people, so that a lot of people could access it and use it quite easily, so that’s why we went for mobile technologies. We went for a sort of steampunk look in terms of the design. The game design was sort of quite old school, so it was quite a simple game design. Not Pac-Man exactly, but a bit of a collecting game. The idea was really to create a full engagement between the user and that space and to help them understand what sort of information they could get access to, and we did quizzes within which they could do that. There’s quite a lot of text in the game in the form of Q&A. But it’s actually quite a beautiful looking game.

We were looking for strong design factors, looking for a real strong understanding of who the user is, and how you can actually reach that user through that mechanism. Quite a lot of market analysis goes into that, trying to understand who that person is and what their requirements are as well.
So, we’ve used the four-dimensional framework, which you’re probably familiar with. Basically, it’s one of the ways we break down our design, and we create our metrics based on that basic sort of structure. That’s about the context, about the learner, about the representation, and about pedagogies and information you’re trying to convey.

Our lab really was quite keen on looking at feedback in particular, and looking at that relationship between the player and the game environment. And that can be done at different levels, for example, the quite light-touch games that I’ve been looking at more recently offer gamification elements such as points, levelling up and narrative role plays.

You mentioned the ability to evaluate, to gather data from players, to analyse it and then to evaluate the learning success, which is different from other media – a book doesn’t measure how well its reader understood it. So would you say this is one of the strengths of creating these kinds of digital games for education?

Yes, I think feedback’s everything on this. One of the things that we found was that games can not only accelerate learning, they can also promote learning for longer periods of time, and if we can find the ways to take some of that effectiveness that we have in a game and put that in a learning environment, we can then accelerate learning as well. So the potential of games is massive, but I think the challenge of our field is to take that out to the audience and explain to people how and why it’s effective. So the research we’ve done, the most quoted work has really been around the design principles and understanding how to design games, but more inherently than that is how to evaluate that and how to understand it, for example, from an analytics point of view. Our recent work has been around giving more feedback and trying to understand that feedback, for example by closing up that feedback loop. Closing the loop of feedback is something that we can do in games very well, it’s something that teachers do very well in classrooms as well, they do that naturally, they give feedback constantly to their students, and the students give feedback to them. So it’s not an unknown concept, but in a game environment it takes on a completely different angle, because you can take that information back to the person who’s playing the game, or who’s interacting with the environment. So feedback is definitely critical for the effectiveness of learning.

You can see what the main strengths of games are in the literature. Being able to rehearse in an environment where there’s no negative impact and to rehearse in a non-threatening environment where you can control the factors does make people more relaxed and open to learning. It’s a different sort of relationship, so I guess the next pieces of work are going to be
about how we can actually feedback information more effectively within the game environment, and how we can adapt the games technologies more to meet the needs and requirements of different sectors and different problems.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects [Roma Nova]? Would you say that having a populated world would be your next goal?

In particular game, the concepts were brilliant, but we didn’t have the funding or the development team we needed to implement a really big project at that time. So, we glimpsed what it could be like to have a genuine learning environment set in a different period of time. It was very exciting, probably one of my favourite projects, anyway. So, I think one of the things we wanted to do was really around trying to take a school age curriculum and embed it into a game environment in a way that was quite natural. So, I think that was probably one of the big things we were trying to do. So, trying to come somewhere between a game and a learning management system and create something that was genuinely different and engaging. So we looked at maths in that context, STEM subjects and so on. So, I guess obviously I’d want a bigger budget and a bigger development team, but I think the concepts were really good, the concepts were right, but we just didn’t have that critical mass to move that project along. I mean, a lot of the experiences in serious games have been similar, you get some start-up funding, you do some initial work, you’ll probably get it out to a certain number of users, but you won’t then be able to really get it to market. We’ve only had a couple of games that have really been able to transcend, and even then probably not as successful as you’d want them to be. But we were quite early to the area, and I think serious games is a young sector, with a long way to go.

And that’s been a problem particularly in the heritage arena, there hasn’t been so much funding going into that space. In the UK, only 4% of our research council funding goes into the arts and humanities. So that area is relatively underfunded, there’s more funding in other areas, such as health and education.

Funding is certainly a theme that comes up in every interview.

I think there are ways around funding. What I was trying to do is to create these SGIs around the world to have a collaborative community. So that was the model I was trying to put in place, but there were so few of us across the world that it was difficult to get critical mass even on that front as well. That’s something that I would encourage people coming after us to work harder on, trying to build a serious game development community that can work on a single project. Because if everybody put all their funding together, all their development capabilities, we could
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together create a really awesome game. But obviously that would take some funding and it
would take some central leadership.

But there’s a lot going on still in the space, and I think there’s a lot to play for here, even in the
smaller sort of products you start to see quite quickly improvements in people’s understanding
and their learning. It does become an economic issue, because if you know you can get a return
on your investment you will attract funding. So I think we probably just haven’t got the right
structures ready yet, but hopefully we’ll start to see more movement in the next few years.

3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects [Roma
Nova]?

The platform we were using was Unity, so there was already a sort of look to Unity, and we were
sort of limited with the assets that we had for the project. So, we had the model, and then we did
a lot of work on the model, and then we brought in certain characters and did more
characterisation animations and AI work. So what was the game that inspired it? I mean,
obviously there’s Civilization, and there’s Rome: Total War, those were sorts of the games we
were looking at. Obviously we were also quite influenced by America’s Army in terms of the
model that they had. We wanted to do that quite strict-to-the game level feel to it. So, probably
Civilization would be the closest.

7.7.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.7.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous
community. What would that game look like?

So, I was quite fortunate that I was working in Australia. The campus at Murdoch is huge, it’s
one of the biggest campuses in the Southern Hemisphere. It is also a very special and sacred
place for the Nyungar people. It’s a very beautiful campus and part of the wider landscape. So a
Nyungar colleague agreed to take me on a tour of the whole area to show me where the
songlines were, and where the special places were, and where the educational areas were on
campus..

So, when I thought about game design, I thought about how wonderful it would be to, in that
space, to go through time, and to be able to see what it really was like in the past. What the land
would have looked like, further back. And just the idea of these quite small tribes which were
wondering through the land, and the sense of freedom they had at the time. Although it must
have been quite intense with the animals trying to kill you. But it must have been a really, quite a special period of time, because you could go where you wanted to go, and you were relatively free, and obviously there were a lot of natural resources back then. So I think what would be quite interesting was to almost do the tour that he did, but go back through time and you could actually start to connect between the present day Australia and the songlines of the Nyungar past. I think there’s a huge opportunity, in a game like that, to learn about the culture. So, I think it would be nice to have interactions with other characters, where they tell you about what they did or what they’re doing now.

But it would be nice to have more of a narrative through it, so you’re playing a character. We did a game based on the Murdoch campus, where you go back in time to save the red tailed black cockatoos. It was an augmented reality game which overlaid information about the campus as you walked around it. That one had a science fiction type of narrative, so you had to go back in time to save these red-tailed black cockatoos. Beautiful birds. So, the idea was that you’d go around the campus and see where they’re nesting, and you would get information, and you could also get information using RFID tags round the campus to show where you’ve been. So I think something a little bit like that, obviously a bit more sophisticated, where you could travel back in time, there’s sort of a narrative around it, where you actually have to interact in some way with that community, I think that would be really quite special. And we talked quite a bit about the different games that we could do in terms of conservation. I think that you could do quite a bit of work around, not just around Aboriginal culture, but also about animals around the campus. It could be an induction to that area, but also have this layering of a narrative and role-play. You could do that as an augmented reality overlay on the real environment, which I think works really well when you’re on a heritage site, or you could do that as a game which people play on their mobile phones at home, or both.

So that’s just the first idea that comes to mind. You’d need a lot of research. And actually it would be really nice, because you’d work with Aboriginal communities for example, to talk about some of their stories, because there’s some amazingly heart-warming stories in that community, that people don’t necessarily hear about that or know about that. And things like the songs, the cultural elements, the songlines, these are very interesting and I think would be very visual. You could even do the Dreamtime, say, go back to that first period, show what was happening and talk about some of those creation stories. It would be a great educational resource.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?
It’s worth looking at MASELTOV, because that’s sort of the problem that we had, you know, people don’t know about one culture, and they do know about their own culture, and how do you connect between their own culture and this new culture that they’re coming into. I still quite like the idea, that if you put somebody into a different character, it’s easier for them to understand more difficult problems and things that are complicated to understand perhaps from a different cultural perspective. So, I think it’s a little bit about playing different roles. They did that quite well in Revolution. That was a mod of Neverwinter Nights. It’s quite old now, but it was really quite nice. And what was quite good about it is that you could play different roles. You could play the role of the slave, or you could play the role of the colonial master. And from doing that, you could gain quite a bit of understanding. Because sometimes you don’t understand certain things from your own cultural perspective, until you see them from another cultural perspective. So having that space where you can try different roles yourself and have a different identity, I think is quite strong for educating people.

But the other thing is, I did a bit of research when I was there in Western Australia in the Aboriginal context, and I was quite interested in the history. I mean, there’s so many different stories in the history, that if you just stuck in the present day, I don’t know, I think you’d lose some richness of that culture, which I think you can only really understand if you take somebody back to a thousand years or more, when these people were still there. What was happening, how were they living? I’d actually quite like doing historical places, but if you had to do present day, I think maybe something where there is more information, or maybe more of an augmented reality type approach, so you’ve still got a bit of otherworldliness, but it’s more informational. You know, this happened here, and these are the interactions that occurred, these were the outcomes, and here are some stories from people.

Kam Star who runs Playgen did a really nice mixed media game, which was for teaching students about their careers. But he mixed videos with an animated type game, and he layered the information really very cleverly in that game, I haven’t really seen another game do that. But I think that would work quite well if you were going into a real modern day situation and you wanted to learn about particular artefacts or paintings, and you could hear stories. So you can sort of use the game more as an overlay mechanism onto the world they’re in. So that could be one way of doing it.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?
I think it depends on the community. Probably they would appreciate the interest in their culture, but it probably depends on how many are gamers too!

7.7.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

COVERED BY RESPONSE TO QUESTION 4.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.

v. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.

7.7.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.

w. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.

7.7.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.7.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

(DUE TO BAD TRANSMISSION QUALITY, SARA HAD DIFFICULTY READING PROTOCOL ON SCREEN)


Having protocols of any kind is going to be helpful for a designer, because even if it seems prohibitive, it’s better to have too much structure than not having any structure at all. So I think anything that puts some rules around this is going to be quite helpful.

7.7.3.2  Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

**NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.**

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

**NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.**

x. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

**NOT ASKED, NOT RELEVANT.**

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past. For example the criticisms of *Ten Canoes* as presenting a static, unchanging Aboriginal culture.

**NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.**

y. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

**NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.**

7.7.3.3  Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

**COVERED BY RESPONSE TO QUESTION 6.**

z. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec
machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

COVERED BY RESPONSE TO QUESTION 6.

7.7.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

So, what is the main outcome then, as far as you can work it out at this stage?

Relays the gist of the findings so far, noting especially the limitations on serious games projects.

The role of gamification can’t be underestimated, that’s very powerful, that’s moved forward the debate about serious games. I think we just keep building, providing models and frameworks and so on, and hopefully encouraging the move forward. I think in the creative area, in the cultural heritage area, funding is definitely more of a problem. But you know, we can work with industry, we can work with governments, there’s a lot we can do. So I feel actually quite positive about the future, and I do think that things will move forward, but we’ve still got a fair bit of work to do in terms of showing how effective games are, building an archive of past games and scaling them up to large user communities.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

I can connect you up with some of my colleagues if that would be helpful.
Elizabeth LaPensée
http://www.elizabethlapensee.com/

Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [3 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?

   I am very excited about the possibilities of showing language alongside embedding our teaching into the design of games specifically, as well as virtual reality. What makes digital games so unique is that you can combine art, design, code, and also sound, alongside of course having what is most important, is that interaction. So, in these spaces there is visual representation, there is audio, and there is feedback from the system, that gives the player a sense of accomplishment hopefully – at least in the case of the work that I do – it is very positive and very uplifting. All the design mechanics that I use, leverage not this idea that you’re necessarily losing, but there is a continuation in the play.

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

   Quite simply, personally I do not have the resources for a multi-million dollar full-on 3d game. I would love to be able to make a sandbox game, I would love to be able to make a massively-multiplayer online game, but those resources simply do not exist for me, and the kind of work that I’m doing. So, I’ve been working a lot towards 2d games, as well as games that are accessible for mobile devices, this is also a concern for me, making sure that our games are made in ways that can actually be accessed by our communities. And more often than not, most people have phones, but that’s about it. You’re not gonna find a lot of really high-end game-ready computers in classrooms or in community centres. So, there are ways that we’ve had to work around these limitations. My greatest hope is that we continue to expand our access to technology overall, and I do believe that that is under way.

3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects?

   Certainly, [Virtual] Songlines has been very inspiring in their use of place names, and the reflection of the genuineness of land, animals, and then also plants and waterways. This is also really intricately woven into the work that I do, there is always a reflection of... what has been, and what is, and what can be. This is very important to us, that we understand the relational worldview through developing this work.
7.8.1.2 Primer C – If interviewing games expert [10 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of RPGs when it comes to showing and teaching new cultures?

   With role-playing games, what’s unique about them is that you get more immersion in a place, and a sense of a long-term goal that you have for the player. So, one of the most inspiring projects that I’ve seen for language revitalisation, was that Hoopa Valley as a tribe took Dragon Age and they did a mod of it, and they stripped out English from all the audio and all the text, and they put in only their own language. And the youth there played it through the summer, and sure enough, certainly they were not fluent, but they were driven to play the game and to figure it out entirely on their own, until they were checking in with community members, and what that game did for people was that it helped make them more comfortable to ask more questions long-term so that when they got into language learning situations they didn’t have the kind of hesitance that they had had before, with being exposed to the language and feeling stressed out about not understanding potentially. That was an amazing project, and I would love to see more of that. Part of the concern again is going back to this limitation that we have, you know Dragon Age is a multi-million dollar game, and it also is very clearly a fantasy-oriented game with dragons. And so, it would be wonderful if we had an alternative of that calibre, where it is representing our own lands and people.

2. What does not work, or needs improving in RPGs?

   The types of quests in role-playing games typically tend to be very much coming from a Western world view. So, it’s all about taking and counting. So, get – go grab ten herbs of this kind. Go kill fifty of this particular kind of monster, whatever else, right? And so you go and you do, and you kill and you take, and you go back and you get your reward for having completed that quest. Rather, in an indigenous role-playing game the emphasis might instead be on listening to an elder pass on teachings to you about the plant that you are supposed to go gather. And that in fact, by sitting and listening to the audio and possibly responding to questions correctly from the elder about how you use these plants, then you would gain the ability to even gather the plant to begin with, right? In a lot of these role-playing games the idea is, it’s very point-based, or skill-based systems, where you go and you take and you take and you take, but to what end? Whereas in an approach at least from my perspective as Anishinaabeg way would be that you need to know the name of the plant, you need to remember the name of that plant, you need to honour that plant, and you need to tend or caretake that plant. You know, clear if it’s got weeds around it, you gotta clear that, or maybe if there’s some dead leaves, you gotta help
clear that, or maybe there are branches on the bottom that are preventing growth up top, you gotta help clear that, and then you get what you need from that plant to use in the game.

3. Are you familiar with any digital heritage projects or serious games that you think do a particularly strong job of showing and teaching about real cultures?

My work tends to be very expressive of the cultures in very finite ways. So, I’ve worked on the singing games Honour Water as well as Singuistics: Anishinaabemowin. In the design itself, there is no competition when you’re singing and there is no scoring system. This was what elders asked for. They did not want people to feel afraid or to feel like singing was a competition. And so in that way, our teachings are quite infused in the game design itself. The same could be said of the motion game Manoominike, which is a ricing game, that is at the Duluth Children’s Museum. When you play that, you go inside of a half-dome structure that looks like a wigwam. And because it’s a motion game, you’re physically going through all of the actions that happen during ricing, the process of gathering wild rice. One of the first motions that you make is that you have to knock the rice, so what you do is you take knockers and you gently knock the wild rice into your canoe. Well, what usually happens with youth is that they have been taught through video games that in order to gather something, what are they gonna do? Hit it really fast, or they’re going to think—you know, they have to go faster, or they have to go harder. These are the two ideas that you know, we typically get in our minds about how to win at a function like that. Well, instead, you are supposed to be gentle, because it’s a reflection of what’s happening right now with ricing, people are going out onto the lakes and they’re hitting the ricing stocks too hard, and when they do that they can damage it not just for this season but for generations. So the hope here is that as youth are playing the game, if they’re going too fast or they’re going too hard, the game tells them: be gentle. And it does not let them move forward to the next phase until they do this properly. It requires them actually to slow down and think about their motions and take those into consideration.

a. If yes: how do you think these compare to commercial RPGs?

In a lot of ways, they’re going to be very unique, because these design mechanics are very situational, especially in the work that I do. It is made for a particular community. Even the singing game Honour Water was made with Sharon Day alongside the Oshkii Giizhik Singers, and they are all located in Minnesota, so a very particular Anishinaabeg community. This could be said about a lot of the work that I do, it’s very reciprocal with a
particular community, and not intended to be as wide-reaching as perhaps commercial role-playing games are typically intended to be.

7.8.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.8.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

I have to be careful in answering this question, because in a way it really is not up to me. I would actually go to elders to have this question answered, and would want to be working very meaningfully on a game before really going forward myself with imagining what this should look like. I really answer to my elders in this work, and I look to them for their guidance, so I’m not sure that I feel that I can really answer that without… being very genuine, you know? Everything that I talk about I hope is actually going to come into form, and so in this sense I’m not sure that I can really answer that particular question.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

I understand that our youth have a lot of life experiences that they need to sort through. I also have life experiences that I need to sort through, and I think that something that is very honest about the day-to-day experiences that we endure, and then also are very resilient because of, should be in a game. Again I hesitate, I’m not sure I really want to be quoted on this, and, because there’s a lot of work that is actually being done in this area, but I don’t want to talk about anything because of non-disclosure agreements, so this is the area of this where I’m gonna get a little bit hesitant, because I’m not entirely sure how much I can really say here at this point in time.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

I know that for Never Alone, that had a great impact, not only on the Alaska native youth community, but also on... or in the Alaska native community in general, but also on a lot of indigenous communities just to even see that there was a full-fledged commercial game released with an indigenous character. There’s always going to be excitement as long as it is done in a good way, I think that’s the key piece, that the elders are involved, storytellers are involved, community members are involved, and that there is a genuineness to the approach, protocol is followed, and there is an understanding of balancing teachings with gameplay. Personally if I
were to work on a role-playing game, because I want it to be high quality, I’m currently looking
at developing a modern Fallout. Because we’re talking a lot about cultural heritage as in the
past, or in the present, but I also want to be thinking about the future. And being mindful of the
impact that oil spills are having on water right now, and reflecting through a game what we as
Anishinaabeg discuss, which is that there will come a time when the weather changes will be so
erratic and, there will be so many great changes that we really do need to gather together and
return to the teachings in order to... survive. To live. And I think that Fallout would really give a
space for language immersion, you know, you can replace all the English with Anishinaamowin.
You can also have immediately a really good environment to work with, and pick and choose
assets as well, as then do some modelling to incorporate in there. But I think that the idea of
expressing a postapocalyptic future is very reflective of a lot of the concerns of indigenous
communities and particularly my community. So if I were to work on an RPG, that’s probably
what will happen first, because of the cost-effectiveness of it, and because of access.

7.8.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]
7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous
RPG?

For me, a lot of my work is actually adapting what you’re referring to here as intangible culture
to game mechanics. I have a problem with that term, intangible culture, in general, for
Anishinaabeg nothing is considered intangible, everything is actually in action, and so I think it is
very vital for me to say that if I were to be quoted on this, I wouldn’t actually personally use the
term intangible culture. What I would say, though, is our practices, our ways of knowing, our
knowledge. For us, that’s living, so we consider thoughts to be living and in motion, and so in
that sense, there is a transference. So for example, singing as a game mechanic – it is a singing
game in that sense, you’re invoking language and certain phrases through the game. That
happens in Honour Water and then the singing game, Singuistics.

In... let’s see here, I’ve got other games that I’ve worked on this with... in Mikan, which is the
finding game, it’s inspired by the traditional game called moccasin game. That’s the core
mechanic, the idea of looking for something underneath moccasin tops, so typically that is a
competitive game played between two people, and they each are hiding and then finding which
moccasin there has been the key thing hidden underneath. Now, in this case, that’s just the more
core mechanic that’s being used, so definitely check out Mikan for that, to see, and
understanding that there are ways in which we can look back to our very own traditional games to inform our game design today. And we can adapt that to digital games of different forms.

In also then... We Sing for Healing [Ninagamomin ji-nanaandawi’iwe], I would consider that there are a lot of teachings embedded there. It’s very poetic and very flowing, and it is intended for the player to really listen, so part of that it is a choose-your-own-adventure text game, however, it’s a musical choose-your-own-adventure text game, because listening is so very important in our teachings, our knowledge involves the act of closing your eyes and opening your ears – so this idea that you can open up your ears and you listen. And in the listening, you are potentially in another space in a sense, because you are bringing forth, maybe, visuals in your mind. The visuals in this game are provided for you, but they’re very nuanced, very poetic, and in that sense it’s a journey that people can make their own meaning, they can also revisit this game. I think that games which can be revisited repeatedly and evoke new experiences, then are also reflecting an indigenous experience.

In our stories, in our storytelling there is this idea that, you gain what you were intended to, or the insights that you... have, listening in that moment, is what is intended for you right then, but that you can hear that story again at some other point in your life and you may either revisit those memories of first hearing that story, or you may hear new parts of the story that you didn’t hear before because they now apply to you in different ways. And so, this idea that the listener and the storyteller are simultaneously creating, is really reflective of how I feel as a designer. I don’t intend to come in and create an experience that I expect the players to follow, right? You know, I’m not gonna get frustrated if they don’t go down a path I had intended, because I have no intentions in that way. It is up for the player to make the meaning that they need for themselves in their life at that moment that they are playing.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

In The Gift of Food, which is a board game, there came to be so much knowledge about traditional foods, that is protected by protocol, that ultimately it is being kept within the community itself. So, that was a game developed with the North-West Indian College, with coastal communities, and ultimately, I can’t actually go around and show anyone else all of that game. I can share the core design, the mechanics, it has seasonal gameplay, you choose out scenario cards, and then you choose options from scenario cards and based on the outcome, you
get to gather tokens off the board and put them in your basket mat. And you gather foods, and then you use these foods at later points in the game, either for potluck, where everyone is sharing, or for making certain recipes, or for surviving, even simply enough. And at the end of the game, you find that you are not the winner based on how much you have gathered, you are the winner based on how diverse the range of foods that you have. Do you have a lot of wild game along with berries, along with nuts, do you have a wide range that will do well for you and for your well-being?

So, in this sense, that was a case where I went into developing a game having no idea that ultimately it would be kept within the community, and that’s appropriate! That should always be an option, that in fact an entire game can be made and kept entirely within its own community in order to protect knowledge and to follow protocol.

In the singing games, Honour Water as well as Singuistics: Anishinaabemowin, all of the songs were written specifically with the intention of understanding that they are to be shared with all people, and that they would be seen and heard publically. There are songs that we carry, which can only be shared in certain ways, and certainly should not be put in a game in a way that anyone can listen to them. And so, in this sense, it is really important in every game that I work on to ensure that we are following protocol, and also that there is a way in which we can still express ourselves, and follow protocol. So, we can sing new songs, we can be living, and in motion, with our cultural teachings.

a. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

NO ANSWER – NONE NEEDED AS PREVIOUS RESPONSE ADDRESSED THIS POINT.

7.8.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?
Hmm… I think back to… Songlines, and the way in which the player can interact with, for example, a rock, and understand the teachings of, the story of that rock. A lot of existing role-playing games certainly do not have the complexity of that feature… yes, you can go into bookshelves in a room, and you can open up books, and somewhere there is a game writer who is paid to write every single book that you can find in the game. And there are some players who will go through and will read those stories. Most don’t, but some do. And so, I feel that in order to really express indigenous relationality with land, a role-playing game would need to have the same depth that you can have with a bookshelf full of books, with everything around you in an environment. So, all of the primary place names, and… as well as grandfather rocks, for us it would be everything from the plant people to the star people to looking at the waters and understanding which direction they are flowing in. All of these have stories that are carried on, and so, if a player could pause in a sense or slow down in their gameplay and take up understanding the complex knowledge of that relationship, then that would be a great way in which you could interact with the environment as you go through a game.

a. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

NO ANSWER – NONE NEEDED AS PREVIOUS RESPONSE ADDRESSED THIS POINT.

7.8.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

Protocol overview [5 minutes]
10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

NO ANSWER – ADDITIONAL COMMENT BY EMAIL: protocol needs to be addressed very specifically and for each community and situation, so there’s no way to universally make a statement about protocol overall.

7.8.3.1 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]
11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

I’m gonna pretty much just riff on how I do feel that my greatest hesitation with a role-playing game has been allowing people to create their own indigenous person and play through them as though they are an avatar. That is particularly problematic, and largely why I have not made a game that way. I am not sure that I ever will, other than the Fallout mod, and that’s where I
have some hesitation – you know, do we really want people to feel that they can just put themselves in a position of being an indigenous person without actually having those life experiences? Now, there’s another side of it where games are shown to be able to create empathy, so in that sense it could be great, but this is why I lean more towards doing something contemporary or something in the future, because I hesitate to put people in a position of playing an indigenous person in the past, understanding that there was genocide, and that many people... and that genocide is also ongoing, you know, there are constantly attempts going on right now to eradicate indigenous cultures in terms of preventing language continuance, and food sovereignty, and access to clean water. These are all struggles that a lot of indigenous communities are going through, and so in a sense, I feel that there’s some upcoming approaches that are much safer. So for example, John Romero is working on a first-person shooter where you play as an indigenous scientist; now, that’s great, there’s a main player character and the primary emphasis with him is that he is a scientist. So, not just your sort of stereotypical warrior character, but rather someone of great intelligence – and it is very true that a lot of our people are scientists, this is very important for us to leverage.

There’s work that I’ve been doing on a game that is a part of Coyote Science [Coyote’s Crazy Smart Science Show], an indigenous science show for youth that is created by Loretta Todd, who is Cree. And, there is a game component of this called Coyote Quest, it’s a point-and-click adventure where you play through this adventure of Coyote messing up a futuristic village where he is creating imbalance, and then you as a player go through these puzzles and then also play through mini-games that pass on genuine science to you – physics, primarily understanding how physics works, so that you can correct what has happened to the village and help people along the way. So, in that sense, you never actually see yourself as the player – you are the player in the most genuine sense, you know, you never see yourself as a character, as an avatar. In fact, you’re looking at Coyote, and you’re interacting with the chief, and you’re talking to the scientist, and then the native astronaut and, you know, all these different characters – but you yourself never actually see yourself as a native person, as you filling that role as the player. And I think that that is a powerful way in which we can avoid potentially harmful stereotypes, or giving people space to potentially misunderstand and... for example, represent their characters in ways that would be problematic.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?
NO ANSWER – RESPONSE IMPLICIT IN FREEFORM ANSWER TO PREVIOUS QUESTION

a. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

NO ANSWER – RESPONSE IMPLICIT IN FREEFORM ANSWER TO PREVIOUS QUESTION

a. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

7.8.3.2 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

They need to be free! That’s the main piece. Grants need to be written in order to get technology into the hands of community members who would then be empowered to play a lot of these games even to begin with. So, you know, one of the limitations of the singing games is that they’re only available on iPads, and so for that reason there needs to be capacity building that happens along with making games for indigenous players. There needs to be some understanding especially if you’re getting grant funding for example, or you’re getting some kind of an investment funding into a project, that you find a way to give back to communities. This can be done in a couple of different ways, through game development workshops for indigenous youth to build out capacity long-term so that they too can have careers in game development, or even their own independent companies down the way as they get older. There’s also doing the same thing with current professionals who are in other fields like music, and art, and film for example, bring in script writers as your game writers – build out really genuine opportunities for indigenous community members to be a part of the development process. Hands on, not just as consultants but actually to have their hands directly on the project and the content. That’s what’s most important there. And then, uh, you know again, I really think it is an access issue. So, a lot of the work I do I try to do a mobile release as well as a web release, and that has been most helpful. And this also takes time, too, though, so there are games that still have versions that are still in the works, right? So, the singing games that are on iPads, still in the works to have them transferred over to phones as well, that’s going to happen in the next few months.
And the greatest emphasis here is that when creating games with and for indigenous communities, understanding that this is a life-long journey, this doesn’t just happen with… you jump into a community, make a game, and then say, “ok, I’m out now, bye”. You are always responsible for continuing to iterate that game and ensure that it is always the best possible that it can be, as well as continuing to expand out access. You know, this isn’t something you just get some money, and you make it, and you drop it, and you go and you don’t continue communication. You always have to continue communication, that’s the most important piece, of all this work, is making connections and retaining those for the well-being of all of our communities.

a. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

NO ANSWER – NONE NEEDED AS PREVIOUS RESPONSE ADDRESSED THIS POINT.

7.8.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

NO ANSWER – NOT POSSIBLE IN SELF-ADMINISTERED INTERVIEW.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

NO ANSWER.
Note: interview was conducted slightly differently than usual, because interviewee had a limited amount of time (30 mins, which was ultimately very generously stretched out to 50 mins). Consequently not all questions were addressed, and some were compressed.

7.9.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.9.1.1 Primer B – If interviewing virtual heritage expert [3 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of the digital heritage projects for showing and teaching culture that you are involved with?

   *I think the biggest strength of any digital media to engage individuals in culture and our values and stories is that it’s easily accessible. And when you think in particular about youth, this is where they’re at anyway. They’re spending their time in video games, on YouTube, social media, so why not put it out there and invite them back into the culture, if they’ve lost connection with the culture, or reinforce that connection, through digital media? And so for us, when we looked at it, it just seemed like the natural next step. It’s kinda like... embracing a new innovation, but using it to bring the wisdom of the past into the future. And honestly, sometimes cultural activities can be very intimidating, whether it’s traditional dance or learning the language of the Iñupiaq – a very hard language, and it can be intimidating, so having a way to for kids, to just spark their curiosity through digital media and games is a natural way to keep them connected to our community.*

2. What does not work, or needs improving with these projects?

   *You know, I think the process for Never Alone worked really well. It took a long time, it slows down the development of a video game or other digital media when you make an asset like Never Alone with an entire community. So, I think honestly, the biggest issue I see, is just making sure if more of these are to come, that you have time and funders, and the right people around the table. I think Never Alone worked really well because we were very, very careful about how we involved the community, but it did take a long time, which obviously makes it more expensive.*

3. Are there any video games that have inspired you in developing digital heritage projects?

   *You know, when as a non-profit social service agency, Cook Inlet Tribal Council didn’t know what we wanted to do. We have been doing social enterprises for a very long time, basically creating*
job opportunities in our community for basically entry-level jobs, and running coffee shops and stuff like that, but we wanted something that would connect with our youth. And when we talked about what our youth were passionate about, and what made them come together, we actually have some traditional Alaskan Native games, for instance, we call it Native Youth Olympics, we can’t use the term “Olympics” because the [International Olympics Committee] doesn’t like that, so we just call it NYO, but it’s traditional games that really taught hunting and survival skills, and we gather, we engage about 1500 youth from across the state of Alaska each year. And we saw through that gathering where they compete against each other, we saw this natural instinct for the youth to, even if they’re directly competing against someone in the competition, to give that person advice on how to reach just a little higher to reach our traditional [ball?] and stuff. And so, it was just, we saw the power of engagement, we saw how it inspired our kids to stay engaged in school, because if they’re not in school, they can’t do these amazing competitions, so we said, why not games, and why not video games? And then we worked with E-Line Media to do kind of a landscape analysis of what was out there in video games, and – what we saw, honestly we weren’t that impressed with. There was a lot of cultural appropriation, there was a lot of misrepresentation in games based on traditional stories, and the good cultural-based games are few and far between. And they weren’t very advanced. And so, what we ended up doing was taking inspiration for how we work as a people, and the Iñupiaq culture, but looking at games like Limbo and Two Brothers, to really see how, what can you do different in a game that would be interesting and exciting and a good way to engage the community and the world, but they weren’t necessarily based on a specific culture, we just liked what they were doing in the genre.

And did you also look at any role-playing games?

You know, I don’t think that we did any in-depth analysis around role-playing games, because when we started talking about the genres we wanted to do, we felt that puzzle-platformer would be a really good way to showcase our stories, and it seemed like a little easier first step for us.

And obviously, costs are also an issue.

Yeah.

Do you play games yourself, by the way?

I try to, I have two teenage boys, and I try to play with them, they usually just use me as comic relief during the video games, but you know, I like games like Limbo, I like the puzzle-platformer,
I grew up with Atari, but I really like those individual games where you try to figure out puzzles. I’ve tried to play RPGs and other games with my kids, and I just can’t keep up!

7.9.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.9.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

If we’re talking pre-Western contact for the Iñupiaq people, I think it would showcase the vast land that we lived in. And so, before Western contact, our people really followed the resources, so they would have this kind of cycle where they would go and follow the land mammals, then they would go to follow the fish in the river, they would go to where the berries were growing, and so each season they went to the place where the resources were there, so that they could store them up for the winter, and so you would see the vastness of the land and the different types of communities they lived in, like their summer camps were very different than the winter camps.

You would also see the different roles in that community, and so you would see the hunters and the lead hunters that would decide where the clan or tribe would be going that spring to follow the herds, so they would have the lead hunter anticipate where the herds would have to cross the rivers, so they didn’t miss the opportunity to fill their stores. Likewise you would have elders, you would have the women with their hide cleaning, with their food preparation and storage preparation, you’d see the men building their traditional umiak boats or repairing their various tools like the bola and arrows and stuff, and harpoons. You would see that in each of the communities there were the traditional healers. This gets a little more complicated, there’s the traditional healers in the sense of the herbs they would use, but there’s also the shamans. You have to be very careful with shamans, because after Western contact, there is a negative colour painted to the history of our shamanistic past, and so many communities don’t want to acknowledge that. So, we have to make a choice on whether or not that particular piece was appropriate.

In essence, you would see how everyone had to work together in order for their village to thrive. Because if you made a mistake, you’d have a winter where you would run out of food, and you could actually... you know, archaeologists can see the historical growth patterns of bones they find, because they can see when there were years of hunger because of the bone growth. And so
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it very much was about survival and about how well they do as a people. And I think the other thing that is very interesting, which is very similar to other indigenous cultures, is the connections with other clans and tribes that may be migrating close to them. And so you would have the opportunity to interact and trade, there would actually be warring between certain tribes, and so there’s so much of traditional life that could make for great gameplay, I can’t see how it wouldn’t work!

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

You know, that one’s actually very interesting. I mentioned before that traditionally our people followed the resources, and they were really based around natural resources and subsistence hunting and gathering. I think today we’re at this point as a people where... our people follow the resources, but the resources are opportunities. And so we cannot live a traditional subsistence lifestyle any more. I’m two generations removed from a lifestyle where my great grandmother could live a hundred percent subsistence. But now we can’t, there are restrictions that we have, we’ve kind of been assimilated into some Western aspects of life where we actually have to generate Western currency. So now, the resources aren’t the track lines, the fish wheels that they migrate to – they migrate to the different opportunities. And so imagine a youth from a village in Alaska that’s maybe three hundred people in that village. That village doesn’t have road access, you have to get to it by boat, by air, or by ATV across the land. But that community has limited opportunities – so imagine that family makes the decision to come to Anchorage, which is our largest city in Alaska, to find jobs as parents. Well, the parents are following the employment resource, the youth are going to be accessing a resource around education, but they’re gonna come from a village of 300 people to a school that’s 1200 kids or more! And so, their entire world has changed, and it could be exhilarating for them, or it could be intimidating for them, and a lot of it depends on what that family structure is around them, so what is... you know, they’ve lost their traditional support network of the village, where your neighbours and your aunties and uncles, everyone in the village was there really to help you and keep an eye on you, where you come to an urban area like Anchorage, where your neighbours don’t necessarily care what’s going on. And so that process of building a new type of support network in a new area, I think could really highlight some of the changes and challenges our youths face, and many of them are doing it really well, but some of them don’t, and there’s that gameplay aspect of what makes that individual resilient in a new area, and what makes that individual kinda struggle, making a transition from rural to urban life.
6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

I think it would give them a place to look in popular media, which is a place they look to for validation, to see themselves. And I think that’s really important for any person, is that they see themselves, or they can connect with a story even though it doesn’t physically look like them, but that they feel connected to something. And so I think, having our youth connected to the RPG game, and enjoying it, and feeling good about it, what they see and how they experience the game, is important. I think the other thing is, is any time you can progress the understanding of an indigenous culture to a broader audience, it’s a good thing. So not only are you helping the youth or the players on an individual level, but you’re elevating that indigenous community to where there’s a greater understanding. And it’s… you’re not gonna solve all of maybe the issues that face indigenous communities like discrimination and violence, but you can make steps towards that. And I think the more there is popular media that highlights the values and stories and the beauty of many indigenous cultures, the more we can say, oh, we really are very similar to you, and this is really cool, or I wish we had some amazing story like that from our past. I think it just builds more connections across cultures too, and I think we aren’t ever gonna live in isolation again, and I think recognising that and building those connections through a game like an RPG would be wonderful.

7.9.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

It’s hard to do, but I think the most important thing is values. And I think that identifying the core values of your culture and highlighting them through the game is really, really important. And I think one of the reasons why is it expands from that very interesting aspect whether it’s the way a community lives is portrayed in an RPG or the story’s told through the gameplay, and adds in values that I think kind of are worldwide. So, for the Iñupiaq accountability, interdependence, resilience and respect are very important to us, and those aren’t uncommon. And so when you can build those values and portray them in the game, you naturally make that connection point to someone who may be playing… in Russia, because they understand those values as well. And I think it’s also one of those things where if you’re dealing with a youth who’s in crisis, and this is their opportunity to really easily engage with their culture, showing them that this game is cool,
and then they see that value portrayed in the game, it’s easier for them to accept that as you continue to work with them and help them grow outside of the gameplay.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture — if at all?

*I think the most important thing is to make sure that you get the right type of permission. And in each indigenous culture it’s going to be very different, but for CITC, it was about involving the community. Traditional Alaskan native life was really anchored on interdependence and connected with each other, so in order for a community to thrive, they really had to work together. And so, we approached the forming of our inclusive development process very much like that, where we anchored it on the community connection. And we pretty much had three pillars: we started off finding an Iñupiaq writer to work directly with the video game design team, so he worked extensively with them, helping them look at stories, analyse them, talking about what’s appropriate and what’s not... but then we went a step further and said, ok, if we’re making this game in partnership with E-Line Media, we want to have a greenlight committee process where the community members are represented and the video game team is represented. And so, at every major point in the production of the game, we had an equal amount of video game designers who were teaching us about how to make video games, cause we had no idea how to do it, and then we had individuals from Cook Inlet Tribal Council on that committee helping make decisions. And because of that process, we were able to say, ok, we’re right before the first vertical slice of the video game, and we don’t know how we should portray death in a video game in a way that’s respectful of the Iñupiaq culture. And so, since we didn’t want to assume that just the CITC employees had that voice, we identified over two dozen cultural ambassadors, and those ambassadors were our third pillar for inclusive development. So, when we came up against really hard issues like how do you portray death, or how is it appropriate to even change a traditional story so that it makes for better gameplay, we went to the community members.

The other thing I would say is that, beyond the cultural ambassadors, the video game design team went to the community. That connection with the community is very important, they came up to Alaska over, I think, a dozen times during the making of the game, and they recorded hours and hours – I think over 40 hours in total – of interviews and discussions with our community
members, and they became a part of our community. And I think if they had not made that connection, it wouldn’t have been as authentic, and it wouldn’t have been as meaningful. And when you talk about rights to using certain things, Never Alone presented probably a challenge that any other game designer who’s gonna make stories on traditional stories faces, which is: how do you secure the rights to that story? We have a very Western way most video game and movie people approach it, where they secure the rights through a contract, but for the Iñupiaq people, we had to look at who held that traditional story. There is a very long tradition of oral storytelling, and so what we did was that we know that for the Inupiaq people in Alaska, the storyteller most associated with the story passes down that story through their family. And so, Robert Nasruk Cleveland was the storyteller most associated with the Kunuuksaayuka story, which we based the video game on, and he had passed away many, many years ago, so we went and found his eldest surviving child, her name is Minnie Gray, she is an elder and a storyteller in her own right, and we worked with her. And so, she really gave us the permission we needed, and we talked with her first, we had tea with her, we shared fish with her, we talked about what made her excited about the project, what concerns she had, and after we had several meetings and conversations with her, then we said, ok, now that we feel we have your traditional permission, we need to wrap it up with a more Western contract. And so we walked through the terms of the contract with her, and said, does this align with what you have given us permission for, and then throughout the game we would go back and check with her. At one point, we were going to base the video game on Kunuuksaayuka, but then we decided that it would be more interesting if we could pull other aspects that reoccur in many Alaskan native stories into the video game. And so, we went back to her permission, and said, we would like to add this to the story, and does that make sense? And she was actually – she’s very inspiring, and she was very open, and she said, every storyteller changes the story, it’s never the same thing twice! So it was a real pleasure to work through that process, but I think when someone approaches a video game like this, it’s really important to understand what those norms are in each of the communities. And you know, the Iñupiaq people of Alaska have different norms and expectations than the Tlingit individual clans in Alaska have, and so how you approach it has to be very specific to that community and you can’t paint the broad brush to it.

You mention this tension between traditional ownership and Western copyrights. One of the things that emerges when talking to Aboriginal people in Australia is that in their experience, traditional knowledge is not even so much owned by an individual storyteller, but rather held in
custody, with the individual being responsible for the knowledge holding it for the community as a whole. Is that similar in Alaska, as well?

I think in particular in the context of traditional stories, the stories are looked at... kinda like a resource, and so they may not own it outright, like in the Western sense, but they have a responsibility to use the story to teach the next generation. And I think that aspect of indigenous storytelling is really important for probably many indigenous communities but for the Iñupiaq people, storytelling was a way to teach lessons, and even if they’re very vague lessons, usually what would happen is that you would sit and be listening to it, and then like two years later, ding! That’s what she was telling me, and I didn’t listen! But it’s more about the responsibility of passing down knowledge more than anything.

aa. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

Response added post-interview: I think the choice is dependent on the culture being portrayed in the game. For instance, the storytelling tradition may allow for modifying the story to fit the audience, as it was with Minnie (mentioned in interview). However, in other cultures it might not be appropriate. So the most authentic way is to involve the indigenous group in this decision as they will know what the norms are and how to translate them into an approach. This of course takes time.

7.9.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

Response added post-interview: The power of a game like Skyrim is that you can use the environmental components to highlight the different resources, traditions, and values of an indigenous culture. For the Inupiat the tie to the land is important, and the land includes the flora and fauna, it is all connected. If the game can weave in that sense of connectedness, it can
go beyond showing physical attributes to highlighting and celebrating the value of interconnectedness.

bb. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

Response added post-interview: I might not be as familiar with Sykrim to be able to opine on what could be improved for this purpose, but I can acknowledge how tricky it can be to design game play to showcase the physical environment and a People’s connection to it.

7.9.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.9.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

NOTE: INTERVIEWEE WAS ASKED IN PARTICULAR TO COMMENT ON SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN PROCESS BETWEEN PRESENTED PROTOCOL AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEVER ALONE.

You know, there are a lot of commonalities, so I think the things that resonated with me the most is about, identifying where the story originates from, for us, we focus on the individual storyteller for the specific Kunuuksaayuka story, but when we broadened it to look for reoccurring themes in traditional stories, for instance in traditional Alaskan Native stories, there is a lot of transformation aspects in traditional stories, we looked to the entire community for how to appropriately use common themes like that. So that really resonated with me, I think the approval process and feedback process with the community was important for us. We had several layers, the cultural ambassadors, the greenlight committee members from Cook Inlet Tribal Council, but I think another thing that was really critical for us, is it wasn’t just about the stories and how we modified them, but it ended up being about how it felt to play it. And so, we had youth from Barrow, Alaska, and their high school test our game and give us feedback, and let us know, so that it wasn’t just about the traditional, say, the culture bearers, like the individuals who work at the heritage museum. They’re critical, but we also wanted to make sure we brought that fresh voice from the youth to say, now that you see this, what do you think? And then we put the youth and our culture bearers together so that they could talk through it. So that’s one thing I didn’t necessarily see, but it could also be the type of game and the age group we were aiming at, it was really high school and above, and so we really focussed on how can we
bring the youth back together with some of our culture bearers so that we can test it from a cultural appropriateness and connection [perspective], but also connection with our youth. And I think that’s the one thing I thought maybe differed just a little bit. The other thing I would say is that because we focussed on the storyteller for the Kunuuksaayuka story, when it was specific to Kunuuksaayuka, we went to Minnie Gray for permission to modify and change, but when we wanted to you know, maybe change a little bit about how reoccurring themes and stories were used, we would go talk to the community. So we really much respected the different roles based on the type of information and knowledge we were using.

So, if I were to summarise the additional recommendations you would make for the protocol, it would be to consult not just the traditional owners, but also the target group?

Yes! Yep. And the target group also may be from outside the community, depending on the project, and I think that’s ok, because I think in order for a game to be successful, it not only has to appropriately connect with the indigenous community, but it has to resonate with the players, and to have that during the development process, I think, is really critical.

7.9.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

You know, that’s a really hard one, because it depends on… you know, you don’t wanna limit the modding too much cause that makes it fun for a lot of players and it keeps them engaged and it keeps it spreading… but at the same time, there are certain aspects you don’t want them to mod. For the Iñupiaq people, I would say look for areas to modify where it would highlight our history of innovation. So, if you’re in an RPG, and you’re highlighting the pre-Western village, you know, letting them mod around the tools and improve upon the tools or around how they track the animals, that would be appropriate. But when it comes to other types of mods that could be more risky, that’s harder, you have to have the ability to respond to it quickly, so it doesn’t get out too far. So, I don’t have a really good answer to that, other than looking for areas that would highlight aspects of a community where they naturally innovated or did mods on their own in community life.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?
Response added post-interview: The limitations really are dependent on what would cause alarm/concern in the indigenous community the video game designers are working with. Those considerations should look at norms and traditional stewardship of the culture so that the limitations are geared towards those specific points.

cc. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

Response added post-interview: While a binding license is a good start, depending on legal the terminology is, it might leave the player lacking a true understanding of the limitations. Complimentary avenues to educate the players on why the limitations are there would be helpful to allow the player community to engage in the co-creation process with a more meaningful appreciation of why the limitations are necessary. Tailor these avenues based on the target market. For example could a You Tube video on the topic be done as some of the pre-launch gamer community building? Whatever is created to share the message you would have to consider what would spark their interest and give them a sense of how they will be engaging with the indigenous community through the co-creation of the game, even if it means there are some limitations.

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

Response added post-interview: This question makes me recall some of the back research done to source photos and videos for Never Alone. Growing up, I have seen old videos from the 40’s-50’s the government did to share the life of my people. I always found them condescending, but after seeing them with a new narrative around the video footage, it made me realize that the old videos were just sharing with non-community members a glimpse of who we are. So the source of the internal conflict I felt was, that it didn’t fully resonate with me.

I always appreciated being able to see my people on the screen, but working with the scholars government videos, made me realize are assets too. That video would have never been shot without the scholars going into our communities to do the filming, and what can be done through the inclusive video game development process, the knowledge and resources of the scholars can be expanded, built upon and reframed.
dd. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

Response added post-interview: With RPG’s there is more opportunity to incorporate many of a community and therefore more points of potential conflict.

7.9.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

You know, I’ll be quite honest, there are probably communities in Alaska that didn’t have the bandwidth to download the game. We did not have a CD-ROM made, so that was something we knew could be a risk. So one of the things we did, which sounds strange, but we wanted to make sure that our youth got connected to the game, so we actually wrote a curriculum and distributed it to all the schools in Alaska around the cultural insights in Never Alone. The reason why we did that is, number one, one of our funding partners felt it was really important that we give back to the entire state of Alaska, and this was our way of doing that, but we knew once people saw Nuna and the fox, that they were gonna fall in love, and kids are gonna love it, they’re gonna be curious, it’s a hard game to play for little tiny kids, but you could use those cultural insights to connect with those younger kids, and so by creating a curriculum that teachers could use in segments in their classrooms, we felt this is a way we could really expand the impact of Never Alone. And it also nicely aligns with the requirements of the State of Alaska’s Alaska studies requirements for schools.

The other thing we do is, because we know a lot of our families don’t have the means to buy a console or a computer, is that we look for ways to provide avenues for them to play the game. So, CITC runs an after-school programme, where kids come to our facility. We have twenty computers, they can then play the game, explore game-making in general, we have consoles and everything for them to use. So, we create other avenues for our kids to connect to them, so we aren’t solely relying for them connecting at their home. But we need more of that. You know, we can only serve twenty to thirty kids any given day because of our space constraints. What I honestly would like to see is that as these games continue to be developed, and there’s more of them, and this genre really takes off, is, that non-profits that serve youth look at these as assets. You know, I know a lot of people, and as a parent I’m concerned that my kids spend too much time on the computer, but if people see these as resources and a way to use that time, they’re gonna engage on the computer, no matter how much we wanna say none, it’s gonna be more
powerful than if they were just cut off from it and then they go play their own games, and then they don’t even know these exist. And so, I’d like to see agencies that work with youth really embrace these as a way to connect their youth to games that are really amazing and go beyond just the traditional exhilaration of just a shoot-‘em-up game, because those are fun, but you can have fun and incorporate the wisdom from indigenous communities in them.

Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

Response added post-interview: I don’t have an opinion on this as I think it depends on the game and if there is a profit motive to developing the game.

7.9.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]
15. Do you have any questions for me?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

NOT ASKED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS.
7.10 Ken Rolston
https://www.linkedin.com/in/ken-rolston-721787/

(note: in those cases where the word “aboriginal” is clearly used as a synonym of “indigenous” rather than as the proper name of the Aboriginal Australians, the word has not been capitalised in this transcript)

7.10.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.10.1.1 Primer C – If interviewing games expert [10 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of RPGs when it comes to showing and teaching new cultures?

    Strategy/Simulation games like King of Dragon Pass have a stronger capacity for showing and teaching about new cultures. That is, they permit user discovery and research into the ways cultures work, and provide users with a wider range of meaningful choices.

    RPGs are almost always confined primarily to narrative interactions, and then to a set of simulation interactions which are usually strongly prejudiced towards fantasy combat. RPGs don’t have many verbs that are dramatic or interesting that exist outside of resolving personal power conflicts by violence. RPGs have dialogue and trade interactions, but they tend to be underserved in terms of communications simulations, in terms of the quality of the experience and their fun factor.

    If I were to pick some examples, I would pick the King of Dragon Pass as being an example of a simulation game, that is both storytelling and simulation, but it also simulates seasons. It also has the politics of a council and the idea of sage advice. So, in terms of the modalities that it enables a game designer to use to represent culture and the development of culture, and also particularly because it begins with asking questions which allow you to determine what kind of a clan you are, I think that’s probably a stronger example of something I would pick to do something ambitious for a native or aboriginal culture.

    And what about more typical RPGs, like The Elder Scrolls?

    I think I’ll be interested in a divergent, a forking notion in pursuing what you say. I think, for example, Skyrim would be an excellent tool to use to explore how to make a game about Aboriginal cultures, because its tools are so accessible, and because you can do almost everything I can think of that you could do in a game, with the tools, without developing the software. That’s a great asset. On the other hand, if your goal is to have a commercial product, to start with I think the notion of a commercially marketable game about aboriginal cultures is
dubious. And the great counter-example is Never Alone, I would say that that is a market success in the smallest definition of market success that you might have. For example, it has received rewards and is a very high quality product. On the other hand, I would not suggest that either a native culture or a developer try to make a living by making games like that.

What you have mentioned about the limited range of verbs, this has come up in other interviews as well, the idea that in an RPG, you really need some sort of cycle in which the player slays progressively bigger and bigger monsters.

I would say, however, that that is not appreciating the degree to which the tools are shared for free, and you can make a product, where for example using a subset of the elements of Skyrim you could make a game like The Long Dark, which was simply a survival simulation. And under those circumstances, I can imagine a first-person game about survival that had in some way added to it dialogue and trade. I would be surprised if you couldn’t do something very interesting, because you can build landscapes, you can have those landscapes have resources in them in a certain way, you can create a form of trade – you have an interface for that and for dialogue. I’d be surprised if you couldn’t make a realistic exploration game, and with the survival aspect.

2. What does not work, or needs improving in RPGs?

I in fact would not prioritise mechanical changes, I would prioritise changing the goal to not producing a marketable product. In other words, if you can use Skyrim’s tools already, and simply have people who are not of the highest paygrade for making content. I think it would be a much better idea to start off doing your prototype in Skyrim, and then discovering what the game can do. Because one thing I’m a little concerned about in this whole process is that the great virtue of Never Alone is that it would be easily understood by the owners of the tradition. But I also feel that it could achieve those goals as a children’s book. In other words, the interactivity in it, or the gaming aspect of it, is almost uniquely navigation. And I think that’s wonderful, it’s a great limitation to accept, but I still think that’s a limited understanding of what a game should be.

Yes, and the gameplay in Never Alone is not strongly integrated with the content, whereas best use of a game is when the gameplay is also used to expose the culture. Would you agree with that?
I would totally agree, and I would also say, to me it feels very unwise to prioritise digital products as the output of any attempt to either educate about aboriginal cultures, or from my point of view, more importantly, to enable people who are in an aboriginal culture who are games-literate to explore the ways to communicate and the things that can be communicated there. Because the paucity of verbs will limit the quality of exploration and expression.

Certainly, it would be unwise to make games the main form of transmitting culture.

Exactly! I would be worried that because it is “sexy”, it would attract people. I am uncomfortable with the degree to which it seems “sexy” and therefore preferable, when I would prefer that the medium was chosen to fit the story, rather than the aspirations of the product production.

Right. And to be clear, the idea behind this research isn’t to suggest that games should be central to cultural transmission, but that the enthusiasm they can generate could lead to kids reconnecting with the culture of their grandparents.

Given that goal, I would see that games like Never Alone are the ideal stalking horse for the larger world of games. Partly because they are targeted to kids, who I think are more open to things, and the simplicity of the interface makes that possible. And also, I think it would be strongly and positively received by not just the players but the parents of the players, because it would feel in many cases that it was a positive model of the culture, and that compared with the violence and compulsive ascending of power ladders in conventional RPGs.

3. Are you familiar with any digital heritage projects or serious games that you think do a particularly strong job of showing and teaching about real cultures?

Absolutely not. I think I was aware of Digital Songlines a long time ago, and I only think I was aware of it as a concept. I don’t think I ever saw any visuals. And when I saw the YouTube videos of Virtual Songlines, I had absolutely no idea of whether it was a game or something like the Oblivion remake, that is a thing you could wander around but not interact with.

a. If yes: how do you think these compare to commercial RPGs?

NOT ASKED – NOT RELEVANT

7.10.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.10.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?
At the Museum of Modern Art, there is an exhibit I want to mention called Ian Cheng’s Emissary Trilogy. It’s not quite a game, but what’s interesting about it is that it does not represent things in a realistic way, the animations are very jerky, but they’re very physically interesting in terms of their emotional content. It feels very much like movement around a campfire by people, and the rules of interaction created by this artist are, I think, to generate what strikes me as an ambience very much like what an aboriginal physical space might be, that if you were watching it, you would be struck by the drama, the non-verbal drama from a distance, of interaction between people and objects, and fire, and dogs, and things like that.

On the other hand, I think Skyrim in particular, and even Fallout [4], those tools could be used to make something like The Long Dark, for example, which has a very strong simulation aspect to it. There are simulation mods for Skyrim that are very supple, and could be easily modded by someone with some background with spreadsheet game design. More importantly, it has dialogue, and it has a trade concept, and I can’t believe that you cannot make a very basic transactional, interactive experience, a narrative experience — admittedly, it would be scripted — because you’d have to create all the content. You wouldn’t be able to explore how the other actors in the world work, but you’d be able to get some kind of a sense of, for example, how far you have to go to find a person to talk to, if you have to spend a lot of time moving between people, then your ability to communicate and trade becomes significant. I think that indicates how far you can travel given a certain amount of water, or temperature, how much rest you would need. These would begin to be ways that you would begin to emerge with a model that might reveal to you what would be possible, what would be not possible, what would be plausible as a way that people could improvise their cultures.

For example, one of the cases of disappearance of culture that I am most emotionally connected to is in Corsica. They have a singing tradition for three parts, and after WWII people discovered that each village would have its own three part arrangements for different pieces, and the different parts were being lost, because there was no other person still alive who knew the part. So that you’d have a very fragmentary survival of what is a very remarkable, unique and distinctive musical tradition. That ability for them to go and then try to figure out what the high part or the base part was just using existing parts from other villages, was a way that they were able to recreate something that was in the process of disappearing. So, in a way you’re talking a little about reconstructing for example a mosaic that is partly damaged. So, I think it’s possible to not only preserve what is in the current state disappearing and decaying, but to become emotionally engaged in recreating it in ways that help you understand its essential nature. In
other words, trying to create a simulation of something that only exists partially, is a great way to understand how it comes into being, and what are the other parts of it.

So, I think that would be a great tool not as a playable game necessarily, but the important thing is to try to conceive a game, which would help you understand an aboriginal culture, through exploration, through dialogue, and through interactions.

This is sometimes discussed in archaeology, that trying to reconstruct a building from partial remains allows you to imagine how it might have looked. It doesn’t guarantee that you will reconstruct it how it originally looked, but at the very least you will be able to get an idea about how it couldn’t have looked.

I would also say that you’re enabled… I read Archaeology magazine (https://www.archaeology.org), and I would say that you can also romanticise and dramatize things by recreating them in a way that is not inconsistent with the goals of preserving an aboriginal culture. That is, to make it, as with Never Alone, emotionally compelling, perhaps out of all scale with its realism, but partly what you’re doing is artistically trying to bring it to life. And that’s where digital recreation or digital simulation is worthwhile doing just to make the game, but even more importantly, designing a game that would do that is an intellectual activity that I would love to be one of the modalities of exploration for academic explorations of cultures. In other words, inviting students not just to do research into what happened, but try to figure out what happened that has disappeared, by making simulations and imagining what the verbs were, and imagining what the currencies were, and what the exchanges were. That interactivity of games is a unique aspect, and building a model allows you to explore that.

That is an idea that comes up also in historical fiction, that trying to recreate a historical setting forces you to really start researching that setting, because knowledge of events is not knowledge of the setting.

To add on to this problem, that almost all the other media are mature media, and understood by most people that they could create them – games on the other hand are exotic, complex, and constantly evolving media with tools that almost nobody knows how to use. So therefore, there’s a virtue in finding a way to encourage people to use these tools in new ways that I think is out of proportion to trying to do it in papers or in digital reconstructions of images and things like that. I think there are a lot of verbs that are worthwhile of exploring.
And games, apart from being a new medium, also have the problem of being playful, and therefore disregarded.

Ah, great point to bring up! Among my notes, I say that I would qualify these games, traditional owner games, I think they are going to be characterised as serious games, and therefore should be judged on that basis. I can’t think of any serious games that I’d think of as having commercial potential. So, I think that I’d like to emphasise that lack of commercial potential as a deliberate virtue of development for the game.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

I would have to use as a reference my experience with films featuring Maori culture, that I have found to be commercially effective. I think that actually might have commercial potential, for example. Because those films had commercial potential. I think imagining the persistence of aboriginal cultures into the present day and the ways that affects the lives of current fiction stories, is a compelling concept. I think those elements are often integrated into existing games. You might say co-opted, but yes, that is the right and ability of any author to co-opt those settings in that way, whether it’s exploitative or not, I think usually is decided by the critical marketplace, the academic marketplace, or the communities, their vocalisations about how they those communities are represented in the films. I would assume that the same would work for modern games, for example, Shadowrun is a futuristic cyberpunk roleplaying game that uses the Aztec mythology as one of the cultures, and that’s a great example of borrowing certain native aboriginal iconographies and myths to express things that feel very particular and different in a modern and futuristic context.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

I think I have no sense at all, because I have never been immersed in an aboriginal community and the degree to which I think of myself as coming from an aboriginal community, for example Scots-Irish or people who lived before the Romans came in Scotland, I can scarcely ever do that. I may go back far enough to imagine myself in the 1700s, but in general I don’t think of myself in those terms. Oh, I am conscious for example, I sing American Gospel music, and I am very concerned about that issue of co-opting their music, and comfortable with it, and I think it’s necessary for people who borrow those aspects, to be sensitive to them and to be sensitive to the degree to which people will resent their assets are being stolen. In general, though, other than that, I have a very hard time imagining myself worrying about whether people are borrowing my
Scots-Irishmen in television shows like Outlander. I just take it for granted that everything we know about the world is grist for the mill of fiction. I also don’t have the sense of an endangered culture, so I would have a very hard time to identify how they would feel about it.

I can imagine, however, from what I’ve seen on the website of the Never Alone development process, not so much playing the game but the process of developing the game must have indeed been very gratifying, to have their stories listened to, and then shaped, and therefore valued by creating them into a game. I don’t know how they felt playing the game, that’s another question.

Conversation diverges here onto indigenous representation in media, the film Ten Canoes and its use of language, and then to the film Quest for Fire that imagined an early human language.

By the way, if you look for the film Quest for Fire, I recommend it, and get back in touch with me, I found a two-page article in a very obscure mimeographed RPG thing that talked about that language, they even had some of the subsets of the language. And that was a fascinating fragment. But that would be for example how language evolves and how the artefacts of a language tell you a lot about a culture. That would be a great thing to simulate in a game, because you can artificially limit the language that people have in a very interesting way in a game, which would, I think, affect how you feel about your ability to communicate.

7.10.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]
7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

My personal predilection is for music and lyrics and dance, because as a physical presentation of emotions, it is a fabulous expressive tool and a human tool. Touch, sex, almost anything that doesn’t leave tangible traces, dialogue generally is not tangible in a non-literate culture. Finding ways to make those meaningful, interactive currencies is very difficult. For example in RPGs I think the most poorly simulated element is dialogue, it is tragically inadequate in expressing its role in any story or any culture. So, those things I would focus on finding ways to dramatize them or emphasise them or perhaps build them as iconic currencies for simulation rather than talk about necessarily just the speech itself.

Chris Crawford did Trust & Betrayal: The Legacy of Siboot, a game about science-fictional transactions, and he just built a language of transactions. That was a fabulous way to talk about the intangible aspects of negotiations.
Extensive divergence about Chris Crawford here, not transcribed.

A language about transactions and negotiations would tell us a lot about the way a culture handles conflict and what its potential for communications and effective cohesion and trade are.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

I think, presuming [Brett Leavy’s] protocols and the ownership of the IP in the hands of the traditional owner, they would determine it first by saying what they were willing to have spoken about, but more importantly as editors during the experience they would be able to have veto over anything that they found unacceptable. I believe that would be mostly just a negotiation process between the developer and the traditional owner community as defined for each particular product.

a. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

I think the last option is crazy and very interesting, but should only be done for developers who think it is a really cool idea. I actually don’t think it’s a substantial improvement, what I would think of is that you ought to be able to infer the invisible, tacit, spiritual activity from the behaviour of people in the setting, that the absence of explicit reference to it, is a perfectly normal way to observe it in a culture, so why not observe it in a game the same way?

Yes, witnessing a ritual doesn’t mean you have necessarily gained any knowledge about that ritual.

There is also in Skyrim, and I think all of the previous products, a feature of non-player characters and the player called ‘faction’, and those factions are defined as values, positive and negative. And you could easily conceal those scores from the player, but have them affect dialogue and gameplay as they do in all [the TES games], so that you
would be having conflicts understood by the designers, as transactions which had currencies that were represented [in] relationships between you and other people and/or gods and how they could individually affect your resolution of either combats or trade, or dialogue. That’s very easy to do, so that doesn’t seem to be a problem, and then that would be your third case in that it would be possible for the users to display on the screen using an INI setting, display your current faction with the various different gods and people. That’s not too crazy, it’s just… knowing that it wasn’t necessary to do in Skyrim makes me confident that it’s not necessary to display it to the user particularly. In fact I doubt the user would appreciate it emotionally.

(post-interview, Ken noted that ‘cheat codes’ or console commands could be used to discreetly permit some users to have a different game experience.)

Extended divergence about visibility and configurability of mechanics and interfaces, not transcribed.

7.10.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

I think they are too expensive production-wise for games like Skyrim to explore them. The changes in state graphically, and then interface changes, like in The Long Dark you can see how cold it is by the breath, those are features which are not common or comfortable to most users. So, there is a limitation to RPGs like Skyrim. On the other hand, in a game like King of Dragon Pass, it is a fundamental element of the spreadsheet game, and therefore relatively easy to use in a game that isn’t a purely immersive first-person exploration game.

Yes. When researching this, I investigated player mods that add seasonal changes, and they were impressive for Morrowind, less impressive for Oblivion, and non-existent for Skyrim.

It’s because… for example, in Morrowind you were able to fly. We removed flying from the other games because we knew they broke the game. In many ways, seasons would break the game, certainly visually and immersively, although I don’t think that’s an absolute limitation of the technology at the moment, but it’s certainly a production limitation, to make a game that’s supple enough to do that, and also be immersive as a first-person game. Easy to do in a spreadsheet game.
It’s a function of graphical complexity, the amount of changes required increases with complexity.

Also, there is no tactile presence in computer games, so the ability to add that to an interface...

The Long Dark is a great example of how much they struggled whether to put a temperature gauge on the screen, and I think they’ve done some very interesting experiments with what a Skyrim-style immersive first-person game could do, but only in modelling cold, so that there’s so many other things, humidity... Dragon’s Dogma is a game that affects your performance if you’re wet. A shader is used to present that to you on screen. There are things you can do, but I think they’re currently not accepted by the user as essential elements in the simulation and presentation.

a. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

Two things. Narrative and crafting. Narrative in the sense that the drama of all stories was affected by the rise and fall of comfort in the environment. Crafting is the easiest from a simulation point of view to make people aware of the periodic scarcity in a trade situation and how trade is all about differences in seasons and protecting your storage, things decaying over time, all that stuff strongly affects the fundamental structures of a culture. It would be easy to implement in Skyrim, if you can understand. That’s why my perspective of seeing it as an opportunity, it’s very easy to do as a mod.

7.10.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.10.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

I feel that 1 through 9 are great, and 10 is flawed. I do not believe that the traditional owners ought to design or produce or to be thought of as assets as designers or producers. That tenth thing should say that the developer should facilitate collaboration with the traditional owners. It bothered me, because I thought it would be inappropriate to have the people who are paid to make the game, to not be in charge of the skills that are involved with making the game, design, production and art. Whereas the power of the traditional owners is in veto, I think if they don’t like something they have the power to say, I don’t like this, but they shouldn’t necessarily be expected to speak coherently or usefully in terms of design and production because that’s not where they’re expert. I don’t think they should design and create the application. I was really
trying to figure out why they didn’t just say that the developers should facilitate the collaboration, because the specifics of the collaboration are excellently explained in 1 through 9. That specificity is legal and moral, great stuff.

Some part of this response truncated due to repetition.

Indigenous people ought not to be designing and producing these things, unless they’re on the payroll. Traditional owners ought to be thought of in some ways as the owners of the IP. And they have very similar moral and legal statuses in that sense, and I kind of liked the way that was expressed, and then it became confusing in number 10 whether the indigenous people should be developers or creators or artists, and I don’t think that’s the case, I think they are clients the developers are trying to satisfy.

7.10.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

I think it’s possible. Whether it’s desirable or not should be determined by the traditional owners. For example, Skyrim shares their tools. If you don’t share the tools, there’s no problems. People can make other things, but if in the executable there is no capacity to make that mod run, then you don’t have a problem with curating mods. I think on the other hand if you want users to create content, the owners’ site could be the curator, and that any other thing was not approved. I think you’re really talking in a legal area here, and I think to be safe, the answer is it probably needn’t be and shouldn’t be, that the tools are shared with others. If you don’t want the tools to be abused, don’t share them. And Never Alone is a wonderful case of that, there is not a problem with misappropriation and abuse of content.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

Sure, but they couldn’t be meaningful without a curator. I believe if the traditional owners want to go to the trouble of inviting people to make content and then giving guidelines, that is a heavy burden on them, and in many ways unreasonable for the convenience of the traditional owners. So, I don’t recommend it as a practical thing. On the other hand, I’m perfectly comfortable with saying, just the wayBethsoft does it is, you know, you have curation. And it’s not official curation
in the case of Skyrim, but it’s community curation. And I think that’s acceptable as long as the community culture can accept the idea that something exists that they have not approved.

With regards to Bethesda, they’ve recently been introducing official curation.

*Steam has done a great job. It has been a great tool for doing that curation job.*

Yes, although Steam is voluntary, you can distribute PC mods outside of Steam, whereas on the consoles, if you want distribution, you must go through Bethesda.

*I think they’re two, very good, very workable models. Steam and the consoles.*

  a. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

  *NOT APPLICABLE.*

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

*I was interested in the question, I was unfamiliar with the reasons for the question existing, not inferring that there was any conflict between academic and entertainment presentations of indigenous culture. I kind of figured that comes with the territory, that there should be conflict, and who cares? I do not believe that one should necessarily inform the other. I don’t link them in any meaningful way. Academics own their analysis. They do not own the traditional owners’ IP. On the other hand a game, that’s different, a game under the protocols as you’ve described them, would explicitly [belong to] the IP owners. They would be authoritative in their own creations.*

  a. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs? (explained a bit more here, with examples)

  *I would not feel as a game designer in any way qualified or interested in weighing on those things. I believe they are in the larger cultural context handled by law or good sense.*

7.10.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?
It seems to me obvious that the traditional owners should discuss with the developers what the target specs are, if they presume they want a digital product. And I am also strongly disposed against using digital products because they are so inaccessible in so many different ways. I hope there is a children’s book version of Never Alone available, because that would have wider access in the community. And I also can even imagine a YouTube Let’s Play as being a more accessible way to experience that. So, again it’s kind of a strong prejudice against technologies that are not familiar to the community because of the challenge of bridging that gap; and from a designer’s point of view, I don’t want to do the work. I think that’s painful. If on the other hand there are members of the community who are conversant with the way digital products work and who can inform the other traditional owners within the community, that’s an ideal situation. If that doesn’t exist, then I would strongly say, why are you making a computer game? Make something else.

a. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

*NOT APPLICABLE.*

7.10.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

*No questions.*

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

*QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW – NO LONGER LOOKING FOR INTERVIEWS.*
7.11 Jesse Schell  
http://www.schellgames.com/  

7.11.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]  

7.11.1.1 Primer C – If interviewing games expert [10 minutes]  
1. What are the strengths of RPGs when it comes to showing and teaching new cultures?  
   
   Certainly RPGs are immersive, and it is expected that one is going to explore a world of social relations. That’s an expectation from an RPG. So that is a plus. So, certainly you have a visually immersive medium, and an exploration-oriented medium, and then one where you expect to meet dozens of different characters who have relationships in different ways. So, that sounds like a reasonably good match if you want to learn about a culture, arguably every RPG you are learning about a culture.  
   
   On the other hand, there has not been good success with RPGs that are about real cultures, for whatever reasons. RPGs are generally about fantasy cultures for various reasons.  
   
   Would you care to express your opinion what these reasons might be?  
   
   I think the main reason is monsters. RPGs as a structure demand monsters, they demand a world infested with monsters that you need to destroy through means that, you know, kinda grow in complexity and difficulty. And that doesn’t connect to reality very well.  

2. What does not work, or needs improving in RPGs?  
   
   Well, just to take a step back, it’s good to understand why monsters are such a central part of RPGs. And the reason, I think, is that you need an inner loop challenge that has a threat in it, that you need to do many times over. So it needs to be a threatening challenge that can grow in difficulty over time, and monsters are the easiest way to do that. There have been experiments at games, so a game you should know about, is A Tale in the Desert, are you familiar with that game?  
   
   No, actually I am not.  
   
   It was a massively multiplayer RPG about Ancient Egyptian culture, and it did not have monsters. And it was financially successful, but only because it was developed by a very small team. I’m pretty sure it’s out of commission now, I haven’t looked at it for some time. But it was very innovative in terms of the challenges and threats that it gave to the players.
3. Are you familiar with any digital heritage projects or serious games that you think do a particularly strong job of showing and teaching about real cultures?

You mentioned Never Alone, I’ve looked at it, I have not played it myself, certainly people say good things about it. Some years ago, the Entertainment Technology Center created an experience for the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, that was designed to help teenagers to better understand Mesopotamian culture. And we took an interesting approach there, that I liked a lot. The problem they had was, the museum had these various relics from an ancient Mesopotamian palace, but to just look at the relics, they’re just kinda dusty rocks and you know, they’re little slabs and little carvings, and just to look at them… they don’t leave much of an impression. So, what we did is we recreated the palace virtually, and created an experience where players were sent back in time with the quest of taking photographs of certain elements of the palace. And when they find one of these elements, they take a picture of it, and then you see the digital picture you took side by side with a photograph of the artefact as we have it today. So, the game maybe took fifteen minutes to play as you would go around, take photos of these five or six objects and see photographs of their counterparts, and get familiar with the palace. So the idea was, you would do this before you went into the museum exhibit, and then in the museum, when you actually saw these artefacts, suddenly you had a very different context for them. Because you’d actually been to the palace and explored the palace. So, I found that that notion of using a game to establish context for another experience, seemed to be a pretty good way to go about things. And also, given that it was designed to be a short experience, it meant that the budget was very low, we didn’t have to do very much to make this relatively simple game.

You’ve been working in VR for a while now, and have completed a few projects. Supposing you were now approached by a museum to do a project including VR, how would you go about doing that – if at all?

Well, I think it can be a good idea. I mean, the biggest challenge for museums and virtual reality are questions of hygiene and throughput. But if the museum is satisfied with the hygiene and throughput solutions that are available, I think it could be a great experience for a museum. Most virtual reality systems today are designed for personal use, and to have one that is shared by hundreds of people is some tricky business, because it’s all touching your face. And so, typically to manage that it requires you to have some staff who have to continually clean the unit between uses. And then, in terms of throughput, if the average experience is five or ten
minutes, that means you’re only going to have five to ten people per hour, able to use, to experience what you’ve got per unit that you have set up. And then the third part I didn’t mention but I should have, is of course the problem of isolation. Very few people attend museums alone, and when you have an experience like this that can be somewhat isolating, it often goes against people’s intent at the museum. So again, there are ways around that, or you can just choose to accept it, but those are the main museum challenges. But if you are willing to accept those, there certainly are things that can be done.

a. If yes: how do you think these compare to commercial RPGs?

NOT ASKED – NOT RELEVANT

7.11.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.11.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

Well, it all depends on what’s the purpose of it. If the purpose is largely to communicate the stories, then I’d start with the stories. And I would want to understand certainly the facts of the stories, but more importantly the mythical essence of the stories – why are the stories important? Why are these stories that have ever been passed down? Because usually stories, particularly mythical stories or historical stories that do get passed down, it’s usually because they have some psychological import, there’s an important lesson, right? And very often it’s… with the most powerful stories, they usually contain a lesson that… is not comfortable to discuss openly. Which is why the story is important, the story, I often think of the story like an oven mit around the truth. Because the truth burns us, it hurts us to face the truth, and so the story’s a comfortable way of dealing with an uncomfortable truth. So, I guess I’d want to get down to, well, what is it that we really want to keep and preserve, and then look at the question of, how can you make an experience that best leads you into and through that story experience?

Now, if we’re not talking about story, if we’re talking about something else, understanding perhaps the way, you know, the old ways of doing things, if we want to understand how was farming done, or how was astronomy done, or whatever, that’s a different story. But regardless, as always, we would begin with the question of what problem are we actually solving, and describing the problem in as much detail as possible.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?
Well, people have done it. Have you seen the game, We Are Chicago? You should definitely look at that. That is a game designed to help people understand daily life of people living in inner city Chicago. And it’s very much set in... I don’t know if I’d call it a role-playing game, it’s more of an adventure game style. But that’s a game to look at that does very much what you describe. So, it can be done, it’s not an easy game structure. It can be done, the point is to expose people to stories and situations that they would find surprising.

So you would point to this game as an example of how this could be done?

Yeah, I think it’s a great example of how to do that. It’s the only one I know. Oh, wait, that’s not true, I do know another one... we had a student group create an adventure game about what it’s like to live in North Korea today. And again, it was the same thing, it was exposing you to situations you’re likely to find surprising, [that] ended up being sort of the central concept that made it work. So that game, and We Are Chicago definitely have that in common.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

I don’t think I could judge that.

7.11.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

Well, that’s a hard question. I think stories, probably, are important. And after that, I would probably say, social relationships. One of the things I think that defines any culture is the nature of the social relationships. So that seems very important. So once you go beyond stories and social relationships, then I guess you’re at values, I think that seems like something that’s very important. And also certainly methods and techniques, so how were things done. You know, household things, and work things, cooking and farming, distribution and all of those sorts of things. I guess I feel like if you hit those four, you’ve got most of it.

So, one of the underlying themes of your response is really context.

Yeah, if we’re talking about communicating a culture, you have to communicate the things that define that culture. And a culture’s stories are a part of that, and stories shine a light on some aspects of that, but more than that, a culture is people doing things in a certain way.
8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture – if at all?

Well, I guess the question is, is the culture still active or not? If it’s not an active culture any longer, then it doesn’t matter. Right? And the things that were secret don’t need to be secrets any longer. If a culture is still active, then that’s a very different matter, in which case one needs to be respectful of what is meant to be kept secret.

a. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

I guess I’m indifferent. I mean, I think it’s going to be case-by-case, it’s a very context-sensitive decision.

7.11.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

I don’t know if I would take the same approach as something like Skyrim does. I think there are many ways to represent nature and to represent natural phenomena. I think some them could be very abstract and still be very effective, whereas some of them might require more complex simulation. But I guess I feel like, again, it comes down to the specific phenomenon that you’re trying to represent. So, as an example, the very first game I ever made was an attempt to recreate our local cultural relationship with nature. I other words, me and my friends lived on a lake and we fished all the time. So, I created a fishing game, and it was completely textual, but it was a good representation of the kinds of fish that we’d catch, the difficulty of catching different kinds of fish, et cetera, et cetera. So, all I’m getting to is that, depending on the natural phenomenon that you’re trying to represent, there are many, many ways to represent them. And sometimes simpler methods can be more effective, because they get down to the essence of the relationship with nature more than a complex simulation does.
a. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most important to improve for this purpose?

I guess it would be the elements that are most related to the day-to-day activities of that culture. If it’s a hunting and gathering culture, I would certainly think, the elements that most affect hunting and gathering. If it’s a farming culture, the elements that most affect farming, et cetera. I would focus on what are the activities affected by nature.

7.11.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

7.11.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

This certainly sounds reasonable. This sounds no different than a lot of other projects we work on. So, for example, we’re working on a couple of Star Wars games, and Star Wars is a fictional cultural heritage with individuals who have ownerships about what stories can be told from it, and which ones can’t, and of course they exact a fee, if you choose to tell stories about that culture. And so, these rules sound no different than working with a typical licensed property. But now, there’s two sides to that. One is, some game developers might be taken aback to realise that there would be this level of work that would be required to get approvals and permission. So there’s that, but once you’ve come to accept that, then you just have to use best practices that one uses when working with a licensor like this.

Because those experiences, they can be disastrous, or they can go very well. And the key to making them go very well, is always to have one individual who can answer questions about what is and isn’t allowed. And that individual may have to go and talk to a group, or a board, or the traditional owner group. So the important thing is that there is one individual who can represent for that group, so that when the developer asks a question, they get a straight answer with no contradictions. Because the worst is when you get some kind of approval, and then much later in the process, you have some vocal minority [that] suddenly appears, that either was absent before, or failed speak up before, or did not understand the situation before, and suddenly they tell you everything you’re doing is unacceptable. And that happens all the time, and there are various practices that we use to eliminate that. Anyway, that would be my thinking on what’s proposed there.

So the difficulties of working with indigenous cultures are really not that different to working with a long-running franchise like Star Wars.
The difference is, people who run a long-running successful franchise are often more organised about their decision-making process, because they’re used to answering these questions. So, for example, one of the things we’re very proud about at our studio, is the game we were working on, we realised it would be very useful for us to invent a new kind of character that would be in the game. And so, that’s a big deal. To add a new character to the Star Wars universe. But we proposed it, we ran it through channels, and with some modifications, we got it approved. And so now we’ve added something that is now going to be part of the canon. And so there is this sort of notion of managing that canon that happens with very successful franchises. Often, you have ones that are not very successful, or they’re just lesser, and they’re often poorly managed. And it leads to inconsistencies within a company, and you could have the same danger here, where some people might say yes, that practice is ok, and you might find another community in another part of the state finds what you’re presenting completely unacceptable. So, getting everybody on the same page about these things is potentially a challenge.

Yes, in terms of organisation, most indigenous groups are only starting out thinking about the need to manage their cultural property in the context of modern IP laws and regulations.

Right, and I would think, one thing... and it’s the same thing when dealing with these franchises. Often there are issues of internal politics, and an outsider unaware of these internal politics can get into a lot of trouble. Because they might be talking with someone in one part of the organisation who says, yes, we love this, you should do more of this! And it turns out, part of the reason they’re so excited about it is because they’ve been combatting the other parts of the organisation who don’t think this should be done. And you may even get shielded from those parts, because someone kind of wants to get momentum towards their personal agenda. And I have to imagine some of that may be true within these groups as well.

7.11.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]
11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

I think there are challenges to it, I think it depends on the nature of the game. The nature of the player communication. I think in some cases it will be possible, and then in some cases it won’t make much sense. The times it won’t make sense are when you’re dealing with something that... where it’s problematic for people to be disrespectful. And part of the challenge in general in creating games about sacred topics are that games are meant to be a playful space, and part of
play is pushing boundaries and breaking rules. And for any kind of cultural situation where that’s problematic, you need to tread very carefully, that’s all.

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

I think the main thing you can do is control the nature of the communication that happens. I had this experience in a very direct way when we created Toontown Online. Same thing creating Pixie Hollow. Because these were games by Disney, Disney likes to have a lot of control over the tone, and the culture, of like what happens in their experiences. So they were very nervous about open communication within these spaces. And the way we achieved it was by making all communication happen through a multiple-choice menu, that would let you kind of build out the things you wanted to say. And these were things that were relevant within the context of the game, but they did not really make it possible for you to really go outside the tone and the culture that we trying for. I’m not gonna say never, because people always find ways to subvert things, but for our case it was possible. So, I would say that’s the main way, is controlling what people can say, and then secondarily controlling what people can do because there are ways one can be disrespectful through action. Like in the case of Full Spectrum Warrior, it was less about communication and more about action there, was the concern there. So, these are solvable problems in most cases.

a. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW.

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW.

a. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

7.11.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?
a. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

Like you say, it’s all about what problem are you solving. If you’re trying to communicate within an existing culture, then you must focus on what technology is going to be most accessible to that culture. If on the other hand you’re trying to bring in people from the outside to have a wider appreciation of the culture, then it may well be that having a higher tech solution could be a good idea, in particular if you are trying to reach potential donors or people who are influential to support the culture, it might be to your benefit to create something that is large and splashy and reaches the higher echelons. So, I would say the answer is completely dependent on what audience is this trying to influence.

7.11.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

No, I don’t think so, I think we’ve covered things pretty well. It’s very interesting that you’re doing this work, and you’d mentioned that potentially there could be some development work at some point. We would certainly be willing to talk about that, contracted development is something that we do, and certainly in the realms of grants and research, all the time. And games like this are right up our alley in terms of development.

16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW.
7.12 Kurt Squire
http://www.informatics.uci.edu/explore/faculty-profiles/kurt-squire/

7.12.1 Section 1 – primer questions [10 minutes]

7.12.1.1 Primer C – If interviewing games expert [10 minutes]

1. What are the strengths of RPGs when it comes to showing and teaching new cultures?

   I think there are probably several, and we don’t know all of them entirely. But I think the most interesting one to me is the ability to build a highly stylised world that can represent things in different cultures. To provide a stylised point of view of a culture so that the person experiencing it can get something of the emotional feeling of what the author would try to be projecting. So, what I mean by that is... well, the one design we did not build was, we thought it would be interesting to have a game built around Aboriginal Dreamtime. So, the idea is that you could take a series of ideas or a system of beliefs that might be hard to get at in other ways, and to represent it in a way that a person could experience it in its totality. So, the idea that role-playing games are typically worlds, where you develop a character, or a role, an identity within in, means that you can, I think, communicate something of a total world-view or an experience at being in a different kind of place. I think for me, that is probably the most interesting capacity.

   I think there are a lot of really important questions when you’re dealing with people and culture, around the nature of representation and how stylised you want to be, how much you try to provide a feeling or an emotional resonance, in which case it’s going to be closer to art, than say, social science. You know, it would be very much in the realm of the humanities, analogous to a play or perhaps a film. But I think that, something in terms of games I don’t think we’re as comfortable with yet, is understanding what a stylised depiction means. I feel like there is something about it where, if you were to make, say, a historical drama or do a play, I feel there are a number of conceits that people make, a number of ways that it’s not a total simulation, it’s not a high-fidelity representation entirely, that we’re not quite comfortable with yet, or we don’t understand the parameters of, with games.

   When talking about stylised depiction, do you mean stylised visuals or more than that?

   It’s less the visuals, and more the totality of the experience, so... I think one of the problems with have, a problem with the ability to create relatively realistic high-fidelity visuals, but then you’re gonna have to make conceits all over the place for everything else. Whether it be the nature of conversations if you’re talking to other people, or whether it’s how probably... the lack of life in
non-playable characters, are going to be incongruous with how realistic they look. And I think that to me is the biggest thing. So it’s going to be stylised in the sense that you’re not going to be able to do everything... probably the verbs that you have as a player, too. You’re not gonna do everything that you want, it’s not going to be fully realised, but then you’re gonna have these high resolution people walking around. So when I say stylised, I guess, choosing what do depict and what not, what you can do in the world, and so on.

So, like the idea of impressionist gameplay (i.e. Liesegang’s Gamasutra blog), like when you go into a city in Skyrim, and it’s supposed to be a big city, but it’s got about seventy people altogether?

Totally! Yeah, that’s the perfect example, and impressionistic is just the word I was looking for. Where I think that you can communicate, maybe, say, some of the feelings of the Plains Native Americans, or maybe Laplanders in Scandinavia, where you can get a feeling of... some people talk about environmental storytelling, so you’re going to get a certain feeling from the material and aesthetics. You could communicate a certain feeling of time and place, I think, but the interactions within that, and as you mentioned too, even that scale, do become these issues when you scrape beneath the surface with any virtual world I’ve seen, and you realise the scale is so different. One thing that’s really cool as far as art games, I think that this is the space where we can see people experimenting... you know, ok, what would it be like to have a village of 200, let’s say 150-200 people, to have. Or, imagine like a large Native American city of 10,000, which I believe was the largest. It would be interesting just to see what would it be like to render that, to make that happen within the game. Which actually would have a huge aesthetic impact, I think, if you want to say, look how big this civilisation was prior to transcontinental contact.

2. What does not work, or needs improving in RPGs?

Well, given how hard it is to do anything like people, I think social interaction is really hard, and I think there are a bunch of things that we just don’t really know, where we’d be filling in the gaps. I think the moment you’re trying to create a fully realised world, the moment you start realising there are all these gaps you just don’t know. As an example, some former students of mine, who later became Filament Games, as a class project they tried to depict the fall of the Roman Empire. Just a day in the life in, say, modern Germany at the boundaries of the Roman Empire around 400 A.D. And at the time, I think they were using Neverwinter Nights, so in that case, the buildings – the buildings are pretty close, and basically you could build a decent mod. But just in terms of what people do all day, how you create the rules of social interaction – who
can talk to whom and who wouldn’t? Would women talk to men or not? There were so many gaps they were filling in, they realised they’re just taking a stab in the dark with most of this. And with indigenous cultures, that may actually not be true, but I think there are a lot of questions, given that you can’t represent everything with full fidelity, what you’re going to represent, what you’re going to leave out, how you’re going to code different rule sets, how you’re going to communicate to players the ambiguity between them. I think the other thing is that, it can be really hard to give the person a set of meaningful verbs, so one thing games do really well is they limit the number of things that you’re able do or even wanted to do, by the setting. And open-world games I think struggle with this the most, and succeed at expanding that boundary, but... how do you create an environment where a person is not going to be completely frustrated because they can’t really talk to people or interact in the ways that they want? But it’s an area I think is in R&D, or in the realm of art game, where you don’t really know how it’s going to try, but it would be fun to try and do some interesting things.

3. Are you familiar with any digital heritage projects or serious games that you think do a particularly strong job of showing and teaching about real cultures?

Yes and no. Never Alone is probably the most famous that I can think of. As I mention, back when I was at MIT fifteen years ago, we did a design treatment for an Aboriginal world game called Dreamtime. No more than a design doc.

I was [also] the director of [the American Revolution project at MIT] before I left. Something that was interesting about that project is that we chose that because we had the full buy-in from Colonial Williamsburg, and they had all of that research about, oh, we can tell you exactly what people ate or whatever. Something that was fun about that, was because they knew a lot about social class, it meant there was a way to instantiate that into rules in a game that was kind of fun, like oh, you can’t talk to this person or you’re allowed to do this. So we decided at the time that taking some of those rules that are typically implicit in a world, making them explicit and a part of the gameplay would be kind of fun. And then particularly as you get into race and social class, given that you’ve got slaves.

Another one, a class project I oversaw, one of my teams one semester built a Neverwinter Nights mod for Homer’s Odyssey, which was kind of interesting, just to put that in a game. They just did like maybe one level, but it was striking to the extent that you could do that. I guess God of War has done some of that, but I thought, oh, this is a game, I mean it’s an RPG, the whole book. The other game that I think is pretty interesting in terms of how you could that impressionistic kind of
work is Firewatch. It really left an impression on me. I thought they did a really nice job of the way they did some of the intro, the way they used text, I thought it was very well done.

I remember being impressed by the way Firewatch created the feeling that the player’s choices mattered. It was an illusion, but it stuck with you to the end.

Yeah, you’re totally right. Because in some ways, it’s the most linear non-choice game I can think of, but you felt like you were there, you were present and you were doing things that made it consequential.

a. If yes: how do you think [American Revolution] compare to commercial RPGs?

I would say it’s equivalent to a tech demo playable level, I mean it is a mod. Compared to most American RPGs, it was a lot more constrained. And this makes me think of one of the limitations of that genre, is that one of the fun parts of RPGs is that you can build a character of whatever sort you wanna be, keeping in mind that they typically support five or six tropes. Common design pattern there. But the idea is that they support the opportunity to be in the world in one of those ways. And ours did not allow for the same sort of character differentiation. You really weren’t going to play and say, I’m going to become, to use D&D terms, a healer or a warrior. I guess we did try to allow for some, I think we said you could become this or that profession. Although the game’s story arc, through a bunch of design decisions made that difficult, so we said you pick your class in the beginning and then you play a role in that town, and then you progress along with that, but you’re not really customising that character to a great degree.

The other thing that was fun was that because we knew we’re designing it for a [school] class scenario, is that we designed it as a multiplayer single-instance thing. So it really was best with eight to sixteen players, maybe eight. But everyone goes at the same time. Although we have squad-based games, TF2 or whatever, we don’t really have multiplayer story-driven role-playing experience games, where you get eight of your friends together to play this game for an hour, where you’re going to be developing your character through some sort of story. There’s nothing really like that. And we knew that we could do that, because if you’re in a classroom, you could do that. Like here, the classes play Oregon Trail or whatever, so you can do that. So we thought it would be fun to take advantage of that, to leverage that design. Because, there’s a lot of awesome designs I’m sure commercial game developers would want to but they can’t, because it’s
very inconvenient for all six people to have to be there, and you can’t play your game unless you have all of your friends. Like, D&D campaigns do that.

Then, within the gameplay, if I remember right, we had quests and we had objectives that look a lot like American RPGs. They did that, but the way the chapters folded and closed, each chapter was like a one hour session, and then the next would pick up.

7.12.2 Section 2 – games and culture [25-30 minutes]

7.12.2.1 Defining broad topic [10 minutes]

4. I want you to imagine an RPG exploring the historical cultural heritage of an indigenous community. What would that game look like?

One thing I would really like to do, if I were involved, I would want to make sure the authorial voice is very clear, almost like the director’s cut of Firewatch, where you could see how and why different things were chosen and represented. I haven’t really played it, but I believe there is an educational version of one of the Assassin’s Creed games, where you can get a walk through [and find out] that’s really there, that’s not there, that’s correct, that’s not correct. I would definitely want to see that, and I would want to see it foregrounded that this is a constructed interpretation. Any representation is an interpretation, I think that we are not yet comfortable with that idea, and I think that it can be really seen as this is realistic or not, or this is accurate or not, when in reality they are all interpretations that contain accuracies or inaccuracies, simplifications and so on. And so I think I would like to see the authors’ voices foregrounded in terms of doing that.

If I were also in charge, I think it would be really smart to decide what aspect of a culture you’re going to try to show. So one thing we came up in that Dreamtime idea was that maybe we can get out of a lot of problems if we say, we’re going to focus on this one thing, either like a culture’s mythology or its sum system of beliefs, its religion. Whatever you want to choose, just so you’re not responsible for doing everything, and responsible for simulating, like, so I wake up today, what do I do? Does one minute equal one minute of game time… there’s a bunch of weird design decisions, and I think having a focus so you can cut out a bunch of stuff makes sense, especially given there’s no planet on which you’re gonna have a giant budget that I can see. So you have to be really constrained, you have to make some choices there.

I would also love to see people continue to not take for granted, to challenge many of the tropes of the genre. Such as assuming it’s going to be X number of players, assuming a play session is
that long, assuming the game is that long, and so on. With this age of independent games and not having publishers that conform games to genre conventions means that you could greenlight something that could be, you know, half an hour, or an hour, or an hour and replayable. You know, just playing around with what those stereotypes are, I think we’re at a good time to do that, because there’s a lot of changes in the established distribution patterns and so on. I assume some of this will happen in VR. You know, VR is a place that lends itself to building worlds and having walkthroughs. Like, tourist kind of things. The verbs, in most VR things due to a mix of the control and the way the feedback cycles loop, the verbs still seem to be pretty limited, and the verb of looking around and exploring is one of the better ones. So it could also be that something like a VR platform might be a good thing. Speaking of which, it would also be fun to have something like VR, but you would have potentially playable actors. As I understand it, the moment you put a playable actor in a VR setting, it’s quite compelling.

5. How about an RPG that would be set in the present day of an indigenous community?

I think many of the same things apply. In theory, you should be able to get even like infinite access to information and resources, right? So you should be able to put in there anything that you want, as long as you have the time to go and look it up. I guess then there are several challenges, including whose views are in there, given that you have a nearly infinite number of points of view of what’s in there, what isn’t, so those points of view are going to be much more contested. It’s gonna have to be very clearly be authored and interpreted, someone saying this is my interpretation. I think that you run into these parsimony issues, because conceivably anyone could go and visit and compare and contrast. So you’re going to run into issues there, you know, like someone saying I went and saw, and this is literally different than it looks. I think there’s a real opportunity, I will say, in that I think people might be shocked by the living conditions and material reality of certain places right now. I know for example when I’ve visited Native American reservations... like the few that I’ve visited, and it’s eye-opening if you get off the beaten path and see what it’s like today. I think that it would be interesting to depict some. And I do know there are projects, I’ve talked to groups about doing projects like that with kids. I think it’s an interesting idea.

6. What impact do you think it might have on an indigenous community to see an RPG game developed specifically around their cultural heritage?

As I understand it, there’s a potential for it to be quite empowering. One thing I should say, one of our augmented reality games, where you are on location and you walk around and you talk to
characters... we had a Hmong character, which I believe it was an immigrant to Wisconsin from one of a couple of countries, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos... anyway, we put that character in the game so the kid playing the game saw another immigrant character, and the character was engaging in some cultural practices, fishing basically, and the kid just started jumping up and down saying, oh my gosh, this kid’s Hmong just like me. He started talking about how his family... it had a strong impact. And so I would love to see more of that, so the idea that people could play a game and see their own life experiences represented, I hypothesise it would be strong. The most important thing, I think, would be positioning people as authors, so that they’re telling a story of their people. Having out their people, their culture and history and lived experience, being who they wanted to be, I think would be very profound.

7.12.2.2 Intangible culture [10 minutes]

7. What aspects of intangible culture do you think are most important to depict in an indigenous RPG?

Well, that I have a really hard time saying. I don’t really know. For me, I think, the most important thing is process, and who’s voice is represented. Who’s getting a chance to do that interpretation. That to me is probably the most important.

8. We have not yet discussed protocols, but assuming a respectful approach that recognises indigenous ownership and control over the entire process, how would you recommend an indigenous RPG should approach sacred and secret aspects of culture — if at all?

To me that’s really up to them, I wouldn’t feel comfortable saying what they should do or not.

So basically, leave it to the community to determine?

Yes. And I think it would be the role of people like myself, to engage in a conversation, an honest conversation, oh, have you thought about this, have you thought about that? Share our experiences, things that we know, so and so. But I don’t think telling them what to do would be useful.

a. Possible follow-up: If you don’t mind me sharing my own thoughts, I see basically three possibilities. One is that any such matters be simply ignored, with the game only indicating that members of that community can learn about these things the proper way outside of the game. A second option is to create a fictional equivalent, in the same way Skyrim does for Nordic culture. And the third option would be for the community to
allow some of these elements to be shared, but perhaps limit some of the game content
to only members of that community. What do you think of these options?

NOT ASKED, RESPONSE COVERED BY PREVIOUS QUESTION.

7.12.2.3 Natural heritage [5-10 minutes]

9. Do you think the environmental features of Skyrim can do justice to the deep connection
indigenous cultures typically have with their environment?

That’s an excellent question. I agree with everything you’ve said. From there, I think the question
is a technical one, could you bend engines to do that? And I would suspect that you could, if it
were your design goal. And I think if I were leading a team, do you want to start with like a
Skyrim mod versus do you want to build something from the ground up in Unity, I don’t know... it
got me thinking, now my design hat’s on. I was working with Filament, they built a game that
eventually was for the JASON Project, basically they’re doing underwater scientific investigation
in a sub, like counting species on a reef. And they had versions where they had built simulations,
so that the world was a simulation. And it kept doing such wonky stuff that for their purposes,
they gave up. But it would be really cool to see someone tackle that. That’s been one of my
dreams as a game designer, to have something like that. Just to use a dumb example, you take a
walk in the woods, and you make a sound and alert a bird, and that bird makes a call, talks to
another bird... even if you had just that dynamic of a world, I think it would be really cool. I would
take that design problem that you mention would be an awesome thing to try to build a tech
demo level around. Like, let’s have a responsive world where you have at least a couple of layers
of plants responding to animals, different animals. Even if you had no more than six or seven,
and then things that you do have an impact on it, then I think the other questions are, well, how
much do you have to have meaning, what kind of time frame is it on? When we did Revolution,
we tried to divide it into chapters for that reason. So we basically said, at the end of this chapter,
you will make three to four major decisions that will be the basis for the next one.

There was one game that tried to do this – Ultima Online.

Oh yeah, yeah.

a. Possible follow-up: What aspects of the environment do you think are the most
important to improve for this purpose?

NOT ASKED, RESPONSE COVERED BY PREVIOUS QUESTION.
### 7.12.3 Section 3 – protocol and methods [20-25 minutes]

#### 7.12.3.1 Protocol overview [5 minutes]

10. What are your initial thoughts about this protocol?

   *It looks really good to me. I think improving on it or changing it in any way would be beyond my expertise. I think doing any better than that would be beyond my experience. To put it another way, if I was doing a project and I saw that list, I would adopt it immediately.*

#### 7.12.3.2 Protocol and the PAS [10 minutes]

11. Given the history of misappropriation of indigenous culture, do you think it is at all possible to open up indigenous digital heritage projects to any form of player participation in co-creation, including non-indigenous players?

   *I think so. I think it’s possible. I think like most things, it depends on how it’s implemented. You know, I’m having a hard time saying how to implement it. I’m not really sure, out of context.*

   In other interviews, the idea has come up of having an approval-based distribution system in place, like happens in Skyrim on consoles.

   *That makes sense. I like the idea of trying to play around with some of these things, and being a little open-minded in trying things. I know there’s a million reasons millions of things haven’t worked in the commercial space with people doing bad things, but I think it’s something worth trying.*

12. Are there any additional limitations or guidelines that you think could be used to allow player participation while ensuring it is beneficial rather than harmful?

   **QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW – RESPONSE IMPLICIT IN Q11.**

   a. If additional guidelines were identified: Would you see these guidelines as being presented to players as some sort of binding license agreement, or in some other way?

   **QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW.**

13. [if asked, adds 5 minutes to interview time] Optional question if previous questions did not raise this issue: I want to invite you to share your thoughts on conflict between scholarly views and community traditions of a given community’s past.

   *Well, I think it’s something to be aware of. I think it’s probably something to expect to happen. If I were going into a project, I would probably treat it as having a conversation, but essentially, I*
guess you have to decide as you’re going in, who is the final editorial control. Something that might be worth negotiating going in, is, are you going to take a note of those sites of contestation in the product itself, which I think hopefully you could. So at least there’s a way to find that out. But I think it feels patronising to me, to say that you would not raise these issues or bring them up.

a. If additional prompting required: How do you think this conflict might affect digital reconstructions in RPGs?

*QUESTION INCLUDED IN PREVIOUS QUESTION.*

7.12.3.3 Indigenous players [5 minutes]

14. Do you have any recommendations for how projects like this should be deployed into communities in order to maximise their potential?

*Not really, no. Other than asking the people in the native communities themselves.*

a. Possible follow-up: any game project can aim for maximum quality but potentially smaller audience by aiming for high-spec computers, or the reverse – aim for low-spec machines to reach larger audiences, but with lower quality. Would you recommend either approach?

*I think there are usually optimal places to occupy, and I think that you could probably with a Unity-type project do a lot. But to me, it’s a part of an overall strategy that you’re trying to do, there’s always a sweet spot in between, depending on your goals, your budget, your purpose. So having alignment between those, I think, is the most important.*

7.12.4 Concluding remarks [2 minutes]

15. Do you have any questions for me?

*No, other than that I’m glad you’re doing this project. It’s an important sort of thing, I hope that as we move forward we’ll see some attention... one thing I am hoping for is that there will be a renewed interest in these issues when Ready Player One comes out. I think probably a month after the release of Ready Player One, a bunch of people will be saying – oh, why don’t we have a VR environment where we travel in time? Something I might think about for you is, If that happens, being poised and able to participate in that conversation to shape them in the right ways.*
16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I also interview for this project?

*QUESTION NOT ASKED IN THIS INTERVIEW, AS NO LONGER LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS.*
8 Appendix H: A selection of games relevant to cultural heritage

Worldwide, numerous titles can be identified that deal with cultural heritage in some way or another, many more than could be addressed in any direct form in this thesis. These are listed in the table below, sorted in geographic and alphabetical order, along with key information. The data is not exhaustive:

- Timeframe: games published from 2000 onwards.
- Genre: role-playing games that allow players to explore a world through an individual character are prioritised. Other games included are action and adventure titles. Broad strategy games where players control large entities such as armies, cities, and states, are omitted.
- Commercial role: commercial games are restricted to titles the author has arbitrarily judged to involve sufficiently deep depictions of heritage to be relevant.
- Availability of information: with thousands of games being made every year around the world, the author's ignorance of many titles is to be taken for granted.
- Data collection timeframe: this list was not a part of the thesis methodology but an exploration of heritage games conducted during the literature review stage. It has not been updated in 2017-2018.

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<th>Title</th>
<th>Developer</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa (excluding North Africa)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan</em></td>
<td>Kiro'o Games (Cameroon)</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Fantasy setting inspired by West &amp; Central African traditions and myths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America, North &amp; The Pacific</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Assassin’s Creed III</em></td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada) with additional work by other Ubisoft studios in Canada, France, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Singapore</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Sci-fi fantasy action-adventure game set in the future United States of America during the lead-up to the American Revolution. Well-developed world and society, strong emphasis on architectural heritage. Has been praised for non-stereotypical depiction of Native Americans. Various historical figures encountered in the game, although their depictions are often far from historical reality, distorted to suit the political &quot;liberty vs. order&quot; theme of the series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Assassin’s Creed III: Liberation</em></td>
<td>Ubisoft Sofia (Bulgaria) &amp; Ubisoft Milan (Italy)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Sci-fi fantasy action-adventure game set around 1765 in New Orleans and, partially, in Mexico, including the Maya ancient city site of Chichen Itza. Well-developed world and society, strong emphasis on architectural heritage. Various historical figures encountered in the game, although their depictions are often far from historical reality, distorted to suit the political &quot;liberty vs. order&quot; theme of the series.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Battle Cry of Freedom**

Flying Squirrel Entertainment (Netherlands)  
TBA  | MMORPG  | Culture-Centric  
---  | ---  | ---  
A combat-centric game set in the American Civil War. Players take part in battles as either Union or Confederate soldiers. Extensive attention to material detail, including uniforms, weapons, and other equipment, as well as battlefields. Evocative music. Can be considered a virtualised form of battle re-enactment. Flying Squirrel Entertainment is a team of former modders.

---

**The History Channel: Civil War (series)**

Cauldron (Slovakia)  
2006-2008  | FPS  | Culture-Centric  
---  | ---  | ---  
A series of two first-person shooter games, *A Nation Divided* and *Secret Missions* set within the American Civil War. Player takes part in a series of historical battles for both sides. As a History Channel-branded game, its core selling point was the historical detail; the games also included a feature where the player could find original letters, photos, and other similar documents from the period, providing additional perspectives on the lives of soldiers on both sides of the war.

---

**Hysteria!**

Rochester Institute of Technology (USA)  
2012  | RPG  | Mod  
---  | ---  | ---  
This mod for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* aims to provide a game experience based on the 1892 short story *The Yellow Wall-Paper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Using the short story as a starting point, it explores the period by incorporating multiple 19th century texts and documents to inform the player about the position of women in late 19th century America.

---

**Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)**

Upper One Games (USA; Indigenous)  
2014  | Action-Puzzle  | Culture-Centric  
---  | ---  | ---  
Action-puzzle game in which the player takes on the role of an Inuit girl in a mythic narrative that explores Inuit culture and folklore. Developed by commercial game developers with participation of the indigenous Inuit. Funded by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, although it appears to have been intended from the start to be a commercial game that could viably recover its budget.

---

**Ohana**

University of Hawaii Academy of Creative Media (USA; Indigenous)  
2006  | RPG  | Culture-Centric  
---  | ---  | ---  
RPG designed to teach and explore native Hawaiian culture. Re-creates a traditional Hawaiian village community. Never released to public.

---

**Palenque**

Erik Champion initially, students subsequently (Australia)  
2004-2005  | Virtual World  | Serious Game  
---  | ---  | ---  
A group of visualisation projects developed by Erik Champion and exploring the Mayan cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, revolving around the city of Palenque. Subsequently re-developed by a group of students under Erik Champion as a mod for *Unreal Tournament 2004* (2004). Never released to public.

---

**Qalupalik**

Pinnguaq Productions (Canada; Indigenous)  
TBA  | Action-Adventure  | Culture-Centric  
---  | ---  | ---  
Set in modern-day Nunavut, this third-person action game revolves around a depiction of the qalupalik of Inuit myth - creatures that live under the ice and kidnap children. The player must rescue his brother who has been kidnapped by a qalupalik.

---

**RezWorld**

Thornton Media Inc. (USA; Indigenous)  
N/A  | Learning Tool  | Serious Game  
---  | ---  | ---  
Based on *Tactical Iraqi* application developed for US Department of Defense. A virtual world set in modern-day USA, concentrating on
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game Title</th>
<th>Developer</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Dead Redemption</td>
<td>Rockstar San Diego (USA)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Early 20th century fictionalised south-west USA and northern Mexico. Somewhat limited in cultural content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>MIT Education Arcade (USA)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Multiplayer Virtual World</td>
<td>Serious Game</td>
<td>1775, colonial America. Revolution puts the player in the role of one of several pre-defined characters, allowing players to experience daily life and politics in an American colonial town in the lead-up to the American Revolution. Essentially an art game. Set around a section of the St. Croix River, the project explores cultural-environmental interactions over several hundred years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tombeaux</td>
<td>Dave Beck (USA)</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Interactive Experience</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>Based on The Turkey Maiden, a (Latin American?) Spanish folk tale, this Neverwinter Nights (2002) mod combines a folk tale with the historical setting of Depression-era (1930s) Florida.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Turkey Maiden Educational Computer Game</td>
<td>Students under Natalie Underberg (USA)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>Based on The Turkey Maiden, a (Latin American?) Spanish folk tale, this Neverwinter Nights (2002) mod combines a folk tale with the historical setting of Depression-era (1930s) Florida.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America, South &amp; Caribbean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag</td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Sci-fi fantasy action-adventure game set in the Caribbean during the Golden Age of Piracy of the early 18th century. Well-developed world and society, strong emphasis on architectural heritage. Has been praised for accurate depictions of Caribbean plantation slavery. Various historical figures encountered in the game, although their depictions are often far from historical reality, distorted to suit the political &quot;liberty vs. order&quot; theme of the series. Based on the technology from the Mount &amp; Blade series, but is not a part of the series. Set in 17th century Caribbean. Gameplay fundamentally similar to Mount &amp; Blade, with a few additional elements incorporated in non-combat gameplay, and thus helping to build the cultural setting. Game includes not only European nations but also the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and Central America. A serious, i.e. educational game with a design based on commercial entertainment. Produced as an academic research project in Brazil. Búzios explores the late 18th century Revolt of the Tailors in colonial Bahia, present-day Brazil. Devotes considerable energy to depicting cultural and social dimensions of its setting. 19th century, Rio de Janeiro area, explores black Brazilian culture, especially the martial art Capoeira.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood &amp; Gold: Caribbean!</td>
<td>Snowbird Game Studios (Russia)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Based on The Turkey Maiden, a (Latin American?) Spanish folk tale, this Neverwinter Nights (2002) mod combines a folk tale with the historical setting of Depression-era (1930s) Florida.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Búzios: Ecos da Liberdade (Búzios: Echoes of Freedom)</td>
<td>Comunidades Virtuais (Brazil)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>A mod for Mount &amp; Blade: Warband, set in South America during the early 19th century wars of independence, and primarily concentrated around Chile. Although mostly constrained to all the usual contents of Warband mods, it even attempts to incorporate some additional cultural heritage in the form of people playing the guitar in taverns. A remake of Sid Meier's Pirates! (1987). Set in the 16-17th century Caribbean, the game revolves around naval warfare, but nonethess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
contains strong role-playing elements that enable it to depict a fair amount of cultural heritage of European colonial society and politics in the Caribbean of that period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asia: Central &amp; East Asia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gekokujo</strong></td>
<td>Marty4286 (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jade Empire</strong></td>
<td>Bioware (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journey to the West</strong></td>
<td>Students under Erik Champion (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Legend of Sword and Fairy (Chinese Paladin)</strong></td>
<td>Softstar Entertainment (Taiwan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Okami</strong></td>
<td>Clover Studio (Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sangokushi Online (Romance of the Three Kingdoms Online)</strong></td>
<td>Koei Entertainment Singapore (Singapore-Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silkroad Online</strong></td>
<td>Joymax (South Korea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Travels of Mariko Horo</strong></td>
<td>Tamiko Thiel (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Way of the Samurai</strong></td>
<td>Acquire (Japan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Developer/Publisher</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skyrim and Indigenous Virtual Cultural Heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuan-Yuan Sword (series)</td>
<td>Softstar Entertainment (Taiwan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Oroo' Adventure Game</td>
<td>Tariq Zeman et al. (Malaysia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanuman: Boy Warrior</td>
<td>Aurora Technologies (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Naresuan Online</td>
<td>Play Thai (Thailand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nusantara Online</td>
<td>Sangkuriang Studio (Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garshasp: The Monster Slayer</td>
<td>Fanafzar Sharif Game Studios (Iran), Dead Mage, Inc. (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Egyptian Temple of the Gods</td>
<td>Students under Erik Champion (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Pahlevans (Age of Heroes; Orient: A Hero's Heritage)</td>
<td>Ras Games (Iran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Developer</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Legends of Persia</em> (Siavosh)</td>
<td>Sourena Game Studio (Iran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Metamorphosis</em> (Thrateau)</td>
<td>Ras Games (Iran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mir-Mahna</em></td>
<td>ESPRIS Pouya Nama (Iran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Oblitus Artium</em></td>
<td>Rochester Institute of Technology (?) (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Prince of Persia</em> (series)</td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada) with additional work on third and fourth games by other Ubisoft studios in Morocco, Canada and Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Prince of Persia</em></td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Qalat an-Nasr (Victory Castle)</em></td>
<td>Afkar Media (Syria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Tale in the Desert</em></td>
<td>eGenesis (USA), Pluribus Games (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Unearthed: The Trail of Ibn Battuta</em></td>
<td>Semaphore (Saudi Arabia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual Meanjin</td>
<td>Virtual Songlines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual Warrane II: Sacred Tracks of the Gadigal</td>
<td>Immersive Heritage (Australia; Indigenous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arden: The World of William Shakespeare</td>
<td>Edward Castronova &amp; Indiana University (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur’s Knights series</td>
<td>Cryo Interactive Entertainment (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assassin's Creed II, Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood</td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assassin's Creed: Revelations</td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assassin’s Creed Identity</td>
<td>Ubisoft Blue Byte (Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Developer</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assassin’s Creed Syndicate</strong></td>
<td>Ubisoft Montreal (Canada) with additional work by other Ubisoft studios in Canada, France, UK, Ukraine, Bulgaria, China and Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assassin’s Creed Unity</strong></td>
<td>Ubisoft Quebec (Canada) with additional work by other Ubisoft studios in Canada, France, UK, Ukraine, Bulgaria, China and Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baśniowa Suwalszczyzna</strong></td>
<td>Calaris (Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beowulf: The Video Game</strong></td>
<td>TIWAK Studio (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brytenwalda</strong></td>
<td>Brytenwalda Team (UK?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chronicles of Mystery: The Scorpio Ritual</strong></td>
<td>City Interactive (Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chronicles of Mystery: Curse of the Ancient Temple</strong></td>
<td>Csatádi (Hungary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dante’s Inferno</strong></td>
<td>Visceral Games (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dark Age of Camelot</strong></td>
<td>Mythic Entertainment (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Echo: Secrets of the Lost Cavern</strong></td>
<td>Kheops Studio (France)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim</strong></td>
<td>Bethesda Game Studios (USA)</td>
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<td><strong>Elsinore</strong></td>
<td>Golden Gilch Studios (USA)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Skyrim and Indigenous Virtual Cultural Heritage

Eternal Sonata  tri-Crescendo (Japan)  2007  RPG  Culture-Centric  Undoubtedly one of the most bizarre and perhaps iconoclastic examples of cultural heritage in games, *Eternal Sonata* is a commercial Japanese role-playing game set in a fantasy world inside the head of 19th century Polish composer Fryderyk Chopin. The entire game takes place during Chopin’s final hours on October 17th, 1849, and ends with his death. The game design was motivated by a desire to introduce players to Chopin’s musical works. Its visuals, particularly the costume design, are also somewhat evocative of various aspects of mid-19th century Europe.

Far Cry: Primal  Ubisoft Montreal (Canada) with additional work by other Ubisoft studios in Canada, Ukraine, and China  2016  First-Person Shooter  Culture-Centric  While formally a part of the *Far Cry* series, *Primal* is an independent game that relies primarily on its cultural setting as a selling point. Set in Europe in 10,000 BC, the game attempts to realistically depict the time period in terms of fauna and flora, as well as culture. The game developers employed linguists to create new languages for the game, based on speculative reconstructions of Proto-Indo-European. The game may be considered a pseudo-archaeological reconstruction of the period, although heavily transformed through commercial concerns.

Gioventù ribelle  Gruppo di Filiera dei Produttori Italiani di Videogiochi (Italy)  2011  First-Person Shooter  Culture-Centric  FPS game set in 1870 in Italy, during the event leading to the annexation of Rome by the Kingdom of Italy. Developed in collaboration with the government and academic institutions, but regarded as substandard in quality.

God of War (series)  Sony Interactive Entertainment Santa Monica Studio (USA) with some games developed by Ready at Dawn (USA)  2005-2015  Action-Adventure  Commercial  The *God of War* series consists of seven games, of which six offer sufficient worldly detail to be considered here. The series as a whole exploits Greek mythology, with the player character combatting Greek gods and monsters. As a whole, the series exemplifies the commercial attitude towards mythology: reductionist, exploitative, and ultimately abusive.

Hellion: Mystery of the Inquisition  Flying Fish Works (Poland)  N/A  Action-Adventure  Commercial  Fantasy action game set in 13th century Europe. Several culturally-detailed settings. Never completed due to funding problems. A CryEngine virtual recreation of the Swedish cultural landscape in the Vendel/Vandal era around 500 A.D. Developed by one artist, and currently suspended as the artist in question is employed on *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. If continued, may eventually morph into an RPG game.

Iron Age Project  Daniel Westergren (Sweden)  TBA  Virtual world  Serious game  Based on the 2004 *King Arthur* film, itself inspired by the King Arthur legends but also re-interpreting these legends into a cultural context of late Roman Britain.

King Arthur  Krome Studios (Australia)  2004  Action-Adventure  Commercial  Set in 15th century Bohemia, aims at realistic re-creation of Bohemian society, including a re-creation of landscape and architecture.

Kyn  Tangrin Entertainment (Netherlands)  2015  RPG  Commercial  A fantasy action RPG set in a fictional world very loosely based on Norse mythology.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Developer</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Magicka</em></td>
<td>Arrowhead Game Studios (Sweden)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Fantasy game very loosely inspired by Norse mythology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Megalithic Maltese Temple</em></td>
<td>Students under Erik Champion &amp;</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>A prototype visualisation of a megalithic Maltese temple with embedded videos that represented ghosts. Developed as a mod for <em>Unreal Tournament 2004</em> (2004) for student assessment. The ghostly videos would depict rituals that might have taken place at the site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minotaur of the Labyrinth</em></td>
<td>Students under Erik Champion</td>
<td>2006?</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>An incomplete project intended to re-enact the legend of the Minotaur of Knossos, with the player going into the Labyrinth to slay the beast. The Labyrinth was built based on archaeological data from the excavated palace of Knossos. The project was to be augmented with a biofeedback device. Intended for two semesters, the students did not continue the project in the second semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mount &amp; Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars</em></td>
<td>Flying Squirrel Entertainment</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>A commercial expansion for <em>Mount &amp; Blade: Warband</em>, developed by the team responsible for the <em>Brytenwalda</em> mod. Very strong continuation of <em>Brytenwalda</em>. Set in the 8-9th century in a geographic area encompassing the British Isles and parts of the European continent around the North Sea. A spin-off to <em>Mount &amp; Blade</em> series, based on the classic Polish <em>With Fire and Sword</em> trilogy of novels written by Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz. Set in 17th century Eastern Europe. In spite of using culture as a core marketing point, the degree of cultural authenticity is low.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mount &amp; Blade: Warband – Viking Conquest</em></td>
<td>Brytenwalda Team (UK?)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>A commercial expansion for <em>Mount &amp; Blade: Warband</em>, developed by the team responsible for the <em>Brytenwalda</em> mod. Very strong continuation of <em>Brytenwalda</em>. Set in the 8-9th century in a geographic area encompassing the British Isles and parts of the European continent around the North Sea. In spite of using culture as a core marketing point, the degree of cultural authenticity is low.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mount &amp; Blade: With Fire and Sword</em></td>
<td>Studio Sich (Ukraine)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>Spin-off to <em>Mount &amp; Blade</em> series, based on the classic Polish <em>With Fire and Sword</em> trilogy of novels written by Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz. Set in 17th century Eastern Europe. In spite of using culture as a core marketing point, the degree of cultural authenticity is low.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Puszcza</em></td>
<td>Sylwia Szablak (Poland)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Virtual World</td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>Developed by a fine arts student, Sylwia Szablak, for assessment, <em>Puszcza</em> is a virtual online world where players wander through the Puszcza Kurpiowska (Kurpie Forest) in northern Poland. In the forest, the player encounters traditionally-dressed inhabitants of the area (real people whose appearance and voice have been digitised), who talk about various aspects of regional intangible cultural heritage. An isometric two-dimensional pixellated aesthetic is employed to minimise project costs. Although twisted almost beyond recognition, the two <em>Ragnarok Online</em> games are based around Norse mythology. The games are not a direct adaptation, however, as they are in fact an adaptation of the South Korean <em>Ragnarok</em> Online series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ragnarok Online (series)</em></td>
<td>Gravity (South Korea)</td>
<td>2002-2012</td>
<td>MMORPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Developed by a fine arts student, Sylwia Szablak, for assessment, <em>Puszcza</em> is a virtual online world where players wander through the Puszcza Kurpiowska (Kurpie Forest) in northern Poland. In the forest, the player encounters traditionally-dressed inhabitants of the area (real people whose appearance and voice have been digitised), who talk about various aspects of regional intangible cultural heritage. An isometric two-dimensional pixellated aesthetic is employed to minimise project costs. Although twisted almost beyond recognition, the two <em>Ragnarok Online</em> games are based around Norse mythology. The games are not a direct adaptation, however, as they are in fact an adaptation of the South Korean <em>Ragnarok</em> Online series.</td>
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<td>Genre</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Roma Nova</em></td>
<td>Serious Games Institute (UK)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Virtual world</td>
<td>Serious game</td>
<td>An academic-developed virtual world where players could explore a somewhat simplified reconstruction of Ancient Rome. MMORPG set in Roman-era Britain. Strong focus on economy and society as opposed to quests and combat. The game was free-to-play, relying on players buying in-game currency for revenue. Shut down in 2011, presumably never popular enough to be profitable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Roma Victor</em></td>
<td>RedBedLam (UK)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>MMORPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Fantasy action game based deeply in Norse mythology, and invoking many visual stereotypes of Norse culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rune (Rune: Viking Warlord)</em></td>
<td>Human Head Studios (USA)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Fantasy game set specifically within the context of Norse mythology. Never released. A fantasy game set in the historical Roman Empire, with settings aiming for visual accuracy, while the storyline mashed together various historical events and incorporated mythological elements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Runemaster</em></td>
<td>Paradox Interactive (Sweden)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>A mod for <em>Mount &amp; Blade: Warband</em>, set in Polish lands in the 940s, prior to Christianisation. Not enough materials have been released so far to assess the depth or accuracy of cultural depiction in the final product, but authors claim to be aiming for high accuracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ryse: Son of Rome</em></td>
<td>Crytek Frankfurt (Germany)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Free-to-play game developed as part of a tourism-oriented marketing campaign by a group of local government councils in southeastern Poland. Well integrated into broader campaign, but due to extremely low budget, dismal quality. Game set in 17th century Poland-Lithuania, and some locations are reconstructed from real objects for greater accuracy. A note-worthy aspect of the game was the manner in which it was tied into a 2014 location-based urban (rural) game. <em>Skarb Sobieskiego</em> provided clues for the urban game, although the game could be completed without these clues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sclavinia</em></td>
<td>Sclavinia team (Poland)</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td>Developed by a team headed by Bernadette Flynn. This large-scale project is the continuation of the <em>Megalithic Maltese Temple</em> prototype developed previously with Erik Champion. An immersive virtual reality exploration of the Maltese megalithic temple site of Mnajdra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Skarb Sobieskiego</em></td>
<td>Calaris (Poland)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>Free-to-play game developed as part of the same tourism-oriented marketing campaign as <em>Skarb Sobieskiego</em>. Once again funded by local government body. The game shares the same setting, but is a browser-based MMORPG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Spaces of Mnajdra</em></td>
<td>Bernadette Flynn &amp; iCinema (Australia)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Virtual World</td>
<td>Serious Game</td>
<td>Developed by a team headed by Bernadette Flynn. This large-scale project is the continuation of the <em>Megalithic Maltese Temple</em> prototype developed previously with Erik Champion. An immersive virtual reality exploration of the Maltese megalithic temple site of Mnajdra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Szlak Sobieskiego</em></td>
<td>Calaris (Poland)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>MMORPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>Free-to-play game developed as part of the same tourism-oriented marketing campaign as <em>Skarb Sobieskiego</em>. Once again funded by local government body. The game shares the same setting, but is a browser-based MMORPG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tales of Iona</em></td>
<td>University of Aberdeen &amp; Hyper Luminal Games (UK)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Educational Puzzle Game</td>
<td>Serious Game</td>
<td>Developed by a University of Aberdeen team in cooperation with commercial developer Hyper Luminal Games and the Iona Cathedral Trust. Explores the cultural heritage of the island of Iona in Scotland, and particularly its monastic features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Name</td>
<td>Developer/Editor</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teudogar and the Alliance with Rome</td>
<td>Wolf Mittag (Germany)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>Intended for primary and secondary school children. Lack of interest in social media seems to indicate difficulty reaching audience. Set in ancient Germany during the wars against the Roman Empire, includes an encyclopedia of Teutonic history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorgal: La Malédiction d’Odin (Thorgal: Curse of Atlantis)</td>
<td>Cryo Interactive Entertainment (France)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Based on Thorgal, a Belgian comic book series by Jean Van Hamme and Grzegorz Rosiński. Set in pre-Christian Scandinavia, the game (and the comic book series blends a reasonably authentic historical setting with Nordic mythology, and is fundamentally a fantasy. The game’s comic book origins, and the choice of point-and-click adventure genre, meant that a high premium was placed on visual authenticity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triade: Liberdade, Igualidade e Fraternidade (The Triad: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity)</td>
<td>Comunidades Virtuais (Brazil)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Action RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>A serious, i.e. educational game with a design based on commercial entertainment. Produced as an academic research project in Brazil. Triade depicts 18th century France in the era of the French Revolution, concentrating on an exploration of the three proclaimed values of the revolution: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Appears to celebrate the revolution in a largely uncritical way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viking: Battle for Asgard</td>
<td>The Creative Assembly (UK)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Fantasy game using Nordic mythological characters and places as the narrative setting, though most of the events are pure fantasy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Witcher (series)</td>
<td>CD Projekt (Poland)</td>
<td>2007-2015</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Fantasy medieval world with many culturally European elements, and deriving some limited inspiration from Central European (especially Slavic) history and mythology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad area (multiple continents)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam’s Venture (series)</td>
<td>Vertigo Games (Netherlands)</td>
<td>2009-2015</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td>A three-episode series of adventure games released from 2009 to 2012, bundled as a compilation, Adam’s Venture: Chronicles in 2015, and re-released as the remastered Adam’s Venture: Origins in 2016. The games fit into a broader movement of Christian games, and revolve around parts of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Appears to treat its source material in a largely superficial manner. The game narrative and its relationship with the Bible is in many ways reminiscent to the Indiana Jones film series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assassin’s Creed Rogue</td>
<td>Ubisoft Sofia (Bulgaria)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Action-Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Sci-fi fantasy action-adventure game set in the mid-18th century in various locations, including colonial North America, as well as Lisbon and Versailles in Europe, and the Arctic North. Well-developed world and society, strong emphasis on architectural heritage. Various historical figures encountered in the game, although their depictions are often far from historical reality, distorted to suit the political “liberty vs. order” theme of the series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Title</td>
<td>Developer/Publisher</td>
<td>Year(s)</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bellum Imperii</td>
<td>Gokiller (Netherlands?)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Mod</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrome of Mystery: The Tree of Life (also republished in modified form for Nintendo DS as Chronicles of Mystery: The Secret Tree of Life)</td>
<td>City Interactive (Poland)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronicles of Mystery: The Scorpio Ritual</td>
<td>City Interactive (Poland)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind</td>
<td>Bethesda Game Studios (USA)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elder Scrolls Online</td>
<td>Zenimax Online Studios (USA)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>MMORPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>The Secret Games Company (UK)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Culture-Centric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount &amp; Blade (series)</td>
<td>Taleworlds Entertainment (Turkey)</td>
<td>2008-2011</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount &amp; Blade 2: Bannerlord</td>
<td>Taleworlds Entertainment (Turkey)</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A mod for Mount & Blade: Warband, set in the Roman Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Covers parts of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Depicts visual reconstructions of cities such as Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Londinium among others.

A sequel to Chronicles of Mystery: The Scorpio Ritual. An adventure game that explores various heritage sites in Europe, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, including Venice and Cairo; the unsolved mystery of the 19th century American sailing ship Mary Celeste is also referenced. Visually evocative, but strongly constrained by its sensationalist, Dan Brownesque plot.

Set in a fantasy world, Morrowind remixes numerous cultures into its fictional setting, including elements of Ancient Babylonian, Arab, Ancient Roman, Japanese, Mongolian, and Native American cultures, as well as a setting that narratively evokes Roman-occupied Palestine at the time of Christ.

Set in the same fantasy world as Morrowind and Skyrim, The Elder Scrolls Online has a far bigger scale, featuring an entire continent built using cultural elements from most of the globe. At this scale, however, few cultural elements are more distinct than mere window-dressing.

Based on classical British writer Rudyard Kipling’s novel Kim, the game straddles two areas of cultural heritage at their meeting point in 19th century colonial India: on the one hand, the local Indian cultures, religions, and milieux; on the other hand, British heritage in the form of those aspects of British culture that could be encountered in British-ruled India, as well as the British literary heritage evoked through a relatively strong use of the original text for dialogues and for some elements of narration.

The core Mount & Blade series, consisting of two games, is set in a fictional world of Calradia, which features several nations that re-interpret a number of medieval European cultures as well as Central Asian (Mongolian) nomads, and Middle Eastern Seljuk Turks and Mameluk-era Egypt.

A forthcoming continuation of the Mount & Blade series. Once again set in the fictional Calradia; the cultures depicted in the setting appear to have been revised and extended; apart from the cultures seen in earlier parts of the series, there is now a faction that strongly evokes Byzantine Greek culture.

9 Appendix I: Game images
The visual qualities of video games play a significant role in world-building. This appendix compiles in one place the images from the main volume of the thesis along with several additional images.


*Image 2* Re-created Aboriginal landscapes of Brisbane in Virtual Meanjin *(courtesy of Brett Leavy)*
Image 3 Reimagined Scandinavian cultural landscapes of Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 4 Iñupiaq storytelling in Never Alone

1 All game images from author unless otherwise noted.
Image 5 Non-culture-specific gameplay in Never Alone

Image 6 Skyrim (original edition) reimagined as tropical landscape with Tropical Skyrim (2013) mod
Image 7 Environment and lighting over Lake Ilinalta at sunset in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 8 Mammoth herders in Skyrim (original edition)
Image 9 NPC pantomime gardening in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 10 Socially stratified NPCs in Skyrim (Special Edition)
Image 11 Tavern interior with playing bard in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 12 Whiterun's static architecture in Skyrim (Special Edition)
Image 13 Bleak Falls Barrow exterior in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 14 Bleak Falls Barrow interior in Skyrim (Special Edition)
Image 15 Crafting interface in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 16 Mapping the civil war in Skyrim (Special Edition)
Image 17 Richly cluttered interior of Jorrvaskr in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 18 Visually drawing the player towards Riverwood in Skyrim (Special Edition)
A Word Wall commemorating the dead in dragon writing in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Overlooking Whiterun in Skyrim (Special Edition)
Image 21 Forest sunrise in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Image 22 Detail of building in Skyrim (Special Edition)
Numerous books to be found in Skyrim (Special Edition)

Grandiose Nordic palace in Skyrim (Special Edition)
“The situation simply is this,” said Phaxith, his face as chiseled and resolute as any statue. “Everyone knows that the cemetery west of the city is haunted by some malevolent beings, and has been for many years now. The people have come to accept it. They bury their dead by daylight, and are away before Masseer and Secunda have risen and the evil comes forth. The only victims to fall prey to the devils within are the very stupid and the outsiders.”

“It sounds like a natural solution to filtering out the undesirables then,” laughed Nitrob, a tall, middle-aged woman with cold eyes and thin lips. “Where is the gold in saving them?”

“From the Temple. They’re re-opening a new monastery near the cemetery, and they
Image 27 Sovngarde, Skyrim’s Valhalla (Original Edition)

Image 28 Baking a pie in Skyrim (Original Edition)
Skyrim and Indigenous Virtual Cultural Heritage

Image 29 Aurora borealis over Whiterun in Skyrim (Original Edition)

Image 30 Informative loading screens in Skyrim (Special Edition)
10 Appendix J: Diegetic Sources in *The Elder Scrolls*

Beginning with *Daggerfall*, *The Elder Scrolls* series has built up a remarkable library of diegetic books. The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages (UESP) has catalogued all or most of the books for the series\(^2\). The UESP data may not be assumed to be complete or completely reliable, but it is sufficient for the purpose of providing an overview of the series' usage of diegetic books. This appendix is a quantitative summary of the UESP data about diegetic books in every TES game from *Arena* until *The Elder Scrolls Online*. Games that did not contain diegetic sources, such as *Arena* and *The Elder Scrolls Travels* games, are omitted. Where expansions or plug-ins (DLC) exist for a particular title, books added and reused in the DLC are combined into the game's overall data. The data was collected on the 26\(^{th}\) of April 2016, and as such does not account for additional books added or reused within new *Elder Scrolls Online* DLC released after this date.

10.1.1.1 Summary

Starting with *Daggerfall*, each of the main games in the series has added a very substantial amount of diegetic texts, with the spin-off games contributing in a proportionally smaller way. *The Elder Scrolls Online* is notable as a spin-off game that has contributed more sources, but this number again appears to be proportional to the overall scope of the game.

Three points can be identified where particularly strong "bursts" of world-building activity occurred: *Daggerfall*, *Morrowind*, and *The Elder Scrolls Online*. From *Morrowind* onward, a steady decline of new books as a percentage of the game’s overall book content may be observed, as it became possible to draw increasingly from the library of past sources.

Not all sources from each game are reused in subsequent releases. The reusal criteria impossible to ascertain, and almost certainly include the subjective preferences of the developers. However, world-building considerations are also a factor. Books tend to be reused if they are relevant to the themes and concerns of the game, but only if their presence can be comfortably justified diegetically, with both geography and chronology being limiting factors. Gameplay changes may also be a factor in some cases, as for instance books alluding to a form of magic unavailable in a given game may be inappropriate. Finally, some books, particularly journals and diaries, are so strongly related to a given game’s storyline, that their reuse is virtually always inappropriate.

While it is clearly preferable for a developer to recycle existing assets instead of expending resources on development of new assets, it does not appear that reusing books is ever motivated primarily or even

\(^2\) [http://en.uesp.net/wiki/Lore:Library](http://en.uesp.net/wiki/Lore:Library)
significantly by such concerns. For instance, *Oblivion*, set in Tamriel’s central province, could have comfortably justified reusing almost all books from *Daggerfall*, *Battlespire*, *Redguard*, and *Morrowind*, but did not do so, reusing only 94 out of a total of 266 books it could have used.

### 10.1.1.2 The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall

| Diegetic Sources – Total | 59 |
| Diegetic Sources – Original | 59 |
| Percentage Original | 100% |

### 10.1.1.3 An Elder Scrolls Legend: Battlespire

| Diegetic Sources – Total | 14 |
| Diegetic Sources – Original | 14 |
| Percentage Original | 100% |

### 10.1.1.4 The Elder Scrolls Adventures: Redguard

| Diegetic Sources – Total | 4 |
| Diegetic Sources – Original | 3 |
| Percentage Original | 75% |
| Diegetic Sources – Reused | 1 |
| Percentage Reused | 25% |

| Reused from Daggerfall | 1 |
| Percentage Reused from Daggerfall | 25% |
10.1.1.5 The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

Diegetic Sources – Total 206

Diegetic Sources – Original 190

Percentage Original 92.2%

Diegetic Sources – Reused 16

Percentage Reused 7.8%

Reused from Daggerfall 7

Percentage Reused from Daggerfall 3.4%

Reused from Battlespire 9

Percentage Reused from Battlespire 4.4%
10.1.1.6 The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diegetic Sources – Total</td>
<td>230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diegetic Sources – Original</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diegetic Sources – Reused</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Reused from Daggerfall: 9 (3.9%)
- Reused from Battlespire: 5 (2.2%)
- Reused from Morrowind: 80 (34.8%)
10.1.1.7 The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Diegetic Sources – Total 301

Diegetic Sources – Original 123

Percentage Original 40.9%

Diegetic Sources – Reused 178

Percentage Reused 59.1%

Reused from Daggerfall 8

Percentage Reused from Daggerfall 2.7%

Reused from Battlespire 6

Percentage Reused from Battlespire 2.0%

Reused from Morrowind 109

Percentage Reused from Morrowind 36.2%

Reused from Oblivion 55

Percentage Reused from Oblivion 18.3%
10.1.1.8 The Elder Scrolls Online: Tamriel Unlimited

Diegetic Sources – Total 719

Diegetic Sources – Original 592

Percentage Original 82.3%

Diegetic Sources – Reused 127

Percentage Reused 17.7%

- Reused from Daggerfall 10
  - Percentage Reused from Daggerfall 1.4%
- Reused from Battlespire 5
  - Percentage Reused from Battlespire 0.7%
- Reused from Morrowind 56
  - Percentage Reused from Morrowind 7.8%
- Reused from Oblivion 33
  - Percentage Reused from Oblivion 4.6%
- Reused from Skyrim 23
  - Percentage Reused from Skyrim 3.2%