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The rise of factions in games and the dynamics between them



Img 1: Warcraft Movie Poster, Blizzard Entertainment, 2016

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Abstract/Abstrakt

As politics in the world becomes all the more polarized it is important to look at how and why groups and factions are formed in today's society. In addition; one of the fastest growing medias in history, that of Digital Games, only becomes more and more influential the larger the budget and the greater the market. Therefore seeing how factions work in games and what, if any, effect it has on real life becomes just as vital as studying the phenomena in reality. It is also useful to see how we portray different kinds of factions, how the developer uses faction-related mechanics to guide the player and what a player chooses to do when interacting with groups and factions in games.

The methods we used was primarily focused on diffraction because we wished to see what the different components of factions were and how one can, perhaps, switch them up. There are many aspects of what makes factions in games tick and the best method for identifying them, separating them and then re-applying them to discover new approaches and perspectives is, we decided, diffraction.

Ultimately the conclusion we reached is that when it comes to factions in games communication is key and it is vital for any developer to know how to make use of it. Not just how to facilitate it, but also how to limit it. For while communication is, in general, good it could be detrimental to anyone wanting to create separate distinct player-driven factions. This is because a faction that has grown in a vacuum is going to be more distinct and unique than one grown together with another. When two factions can not communicate you get two separate entities, but when they can you get one entity with two different flavours to it, as World of Warcraft has quite clearly demonstrated. But even in single player games communication is vital, but this time between the developer and the player. Factions in this regard helps the player with categorizing that which they encounter in the world as well as better understanding said world in general. For instance, if a character belongs to a faction it is reasonable to assume the character supports the ideals of said faction. This helps both in assisting the player to quickly grasp the nature of the character, but also gives the potential for a bigger surprise if one chooses to undermine it later on in the narrative.

Medan världens politik blir allt mer polariserad så är det viktigt att se närmre på hur och varför grupper bildas i dagens samhälle. Samtidigt; en av de snabbast växande medierna i historien, digitala spel, blir bara mer och mer inflytelserik desto större budgeten och marknaden blir. Därför är det viktigt att se hur faktioner fungerar i spel och vilken, om någon, effekt det har på verkliga livet. Det är också användbart att se på hur vi väljer att porträttera olika sorters faktioner, hur utvecklare använder sig av olika faktionsbaserade mekaniker för att leda spelaren och hur spelaren väljer att interagera med grupper och faktioner i spel.

Metoderna vi använde var mest fokuserade på diffraktion vilka olika delar faktioner består av och hur man kanske kan om-ordna dem. Det finns många aspekter av faktioner i spel som får dem att fungera och vi kände att diffraktion var den bästa metoden för att identifiera, separera och möjligen återapplicera dem, samt även för att hitta nya perspektiv och möjligheter.

Slutsatsen vi nådde är att när det gäller faktioner i spel så handlar allt om kommunikation och det är viktigt för en spelutvecklare att bli bekant med hur man bäst utnyttjar det. Inte bara hur man uppmuntrar och förenklar kommunikation men även hur man begränsar den. Även om kommunikation, i allmänhet, är bra, så kan det vara en nackdel om man vill skapa separata och unika spelar-drivna faktioner. Detta beror på att faktioner som skapas i ett vakuum kommer att vara mer distinkt och unik än en som skapats sida-vid-sida med en annan. När två faktioner inte kan kommunicera skapas två separata entiteter, men om de kan kommunicera får du en entitet med två separata grenar, vilket World of Warcraft lyckats demonstrera ytterst bra. Men även i Single Player spel är kommunikation viktigt, fast denna gången mellan spelaren och utvecklaren. I detta fall hjälper faktioner spelaren att kategorisera det de ser och möter i spelvärlden samt att förstå världen bättre i allmänhet. Till exempel; om en karaktär tillhör en faktion så är det logiskt att anta att den karaktären står för samma värderingar och mål som den faktionen. Detta hjälper spelaren att snabbt få ett tag om de viktiga aspekterna av karaktären men hjälper även till att skapa en större förvåning om man senare väljer att underminera detta via ett förräderi eller liknande.

Keywords: Faction, tribalism, Communication, grouping, Identity

Nyckelord: Faktion, tribalism, Kommunikation, gruppindelning, Identitet

1. Background

As games evolve and grow on the global market, understanding them in general becomes more vital as well. Games, especially multiplayer and online games, reflect the real world in an unfiltered and honest way. Building from this; one of the primary societal issues today concerns tribalism and the formation of polarizing groups, as well as how we identify (or don't identify) with these groups. Since, then, computer games is such an influential and growing market it is quite valuable to investigate how factions in games function and how they are made to interact both with each other and within itself with its own members.

So what are factions in games and how do they work? To put it simply, they work more or less like sports teams, but more distinct in terms of presentation. From a practical gameplay point of view then the only true, fundamental, change for the player in the game is what colour their opponents' shirt is. But if one looks deeper there is, of course, much more to it than that. Usually at some point in the course of the game (often at the creation of their character) players are encouraged to make a choice between two or more factions and all of them are presented as separate entities with separate goals and separate ethics, methods and rules. And while certain overlap and grey areas might exist, factions are still depicted as the extreme of the ideology they represent. If they support the idea of Order then they go all out on preserving it, but if they desire chaos then they seek to invoke it by any means necessary. Games are not unique in this respect, indeed media has done this since cavemen first told tales around fires. But what *does* make games unique is that these are not factions we, as players, are shown or told about, but actively choose to personally join and fight for. We as players make the conscious choice to join the faction supporting Order and the conscious choice to oppose the faction invoking Chaos. Because of this interactivity factions become our method of expressing ourselves in the digital world of games and might even spread beyond it to affect how we behave in real life as well. Thus research on how factions function and form in games only gets more urgent the more involved we become with them.

While we initially looked closer at several games, we came to the conclusion that ultimately in most games all factions falls under one of two categories; those supporting the concept of

Order and those supporting the concept of Chaos, much like the example above. Thusly, we thought it best to limit the scope to just one pair of factions that stands out as a prime example of this, namely the Horde and the Alliance from World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). Here the Horde, in its multicultural melting pot kind of configuration, represents the “good” forces of Chaos, while the Alliance, in its primarily monocultural and religious society, represents the “good” forces of Order. Not only are these two factions great examples of their respective philosophical alignment, but because the game World of Warcraft is so popular and has been around for so long the potential pool of subjects and data is quite astounding and relevant to our research. Furthermore they also highlight one of the more unique aspects of factions in games in that player-driven factions are, by necessity, grey. At least if they are meant to be enemies within the context of the game world. Because the vast majority of players wishes to be the hero and fight for the good side the developer is, to a degree, forced to portray the available options as perhaps not good but at least with several redeeming qualities. To have a purely evil player faction in an MMOG (Massive Multiplayer Online Game) is unusual to say the least. This does perhaps limit the creative possibilities of the developer, but at the same time it forces a level of depth and complexity that other media can avoid if they so choose.

Discovering how factions work in games will further our understanding of how they are currently being used and to what effect, and how they ought to be used in order to further either the message you desire, or create the proper feeling or gameplay aspect that will appeal to the players. This fundamental part of human nature can drastically enrich a gaming experience if used correctly and/or appropriately, but one ought to take care not to misuse it, or use it lazily, lest it can turn the game into something exploitative or even insidious towards one’s player base. The best way to avoid the negative effects of factions in games is, quite simply, to understand them and their effect on playability. Hence this thesis becomes all the more relevant for our research perspective and interests in game making.

Writing Process

This bachelor thesis have been written by Fredrik Nyrell and Andreas Tobiasson. We always wrote together and discussed during the writing progress. When a person is done with a part the other person reads it, discusses possible changes and lastly, approves it. We did this for every part of the essay in order to achieve an efficient working-speed while also knowing what the other member have written so far. We were in consensus about the text's structure while also having the individual touches from each member.

1.1 Research Question

How do factions in digital games appear and what dynamic exists between them?

1.2 Aim

The reason we wanted to investigate factions in digital games stems primarily from our desire to develop games featuring these systems within them. The goal with the relevant research in this stage is to find out how factions in digital games form and also how members interact with each other within the group as well as with actors from other factions. Hopefully this will lead to a deeper understanding on how to use factions in games to create a deeper and more meaningful experience as well to improve the playability of a conflict-driven game.

Several games use factions as a means of creating conflict, for example you can introduce a player to two groups and give the player the choice of joining one of them. Then you create a point of conflict where you put these groups against each other which will create a tension-filled environment and a "we against them" scenario of emotional motivation.

Through researching the role of factions in games and understanding what they contribute with to the gameplay, we can develop a better understanding of game-development and different methods of achieving results. To research factions' dynamic with each other gives us knowledge on how to create groups that interact with each other on a deeper level in the story as well as through the mechanics of their conflict.

For visualisation of our thesis we wanted to create a game that applied what we discovered through our research. A game where you create your own faction and see how it develops and evolves the further along in the game you come. This would not only allow us to show others our research more directly, but it would also allow us to see how it is all applied in practice.

2. Previous And Current Research

In this part we go through the texts that were relevant to our research and what kind of knowledge it contributed with.

2.1 The Effect Of Communication On Digital Cultures

The text by Mark Poster, “*Virtual Ethnicity: Tribal Identity in an Age of Cybersociety*” (1998), discusses the progress of the digital media and the clash it has with real world cultures and identities. However the most important part of this text is when Poster (1998) discusses the importance of communication and how it helps the emergence of new groups, especially within digital media. When people from all over the world and from all lots of life come together in one place of open discourse their cultures mix and creates a single, common, culture shared between all. However, Poster (1998) mentions, this comes at the cost of the many original cultures that contributed to the now larger entity, as they become watered down and thin versions of their former self. Now more accurately described as branches of the super-culture than their own trees.

If one were to draw a parallel to World of Warcraft here then the lack of communication between The Horde and The Alliance in the game is the primary reason the two factions developed to be as distinct and unique as they are. Since the lack of communication meant that the two embryonic cultures that developed within the factions did not have any opportunity to mix and therefore evolved without influencing each other. Free to become their own separate entities. If, instead, as Poster (1998) discusses, open communication had existed between all players then it is likely there would not be two factions within the game, but one single super-culture with two branches.

Keeping this in mind Poster's text (1998) observes the impact of digital culture on real life and the homogenisation of culture in general. This reduction in potential factions is, perhaps, the opposite of what we wish to investigate with this thesis, but knowing what prevents or reduces factions will naturally allow a deeper understanding of what actually creates them. And, more to the point, how they work.

2.2 The Significance Of Factions In Games

The book "*Digital Culture, play and identity; A World of Warcraft Reader*" by Corneliussen and Rettberg (2008) focuses in part on the relevant history of World of Warcraft as well as the basic mechanics of the game. But more importantly also takes the time to delve into the societal structures and cultures that exists within the player base, as well as the group identities that follows. While the history and mechanics it describes is quite scarce and on an introductory level at best, it is still relevant in the sense that having an easily accessible summary can vastly simplify the rest of the writing. However, the core of the text, the societal structures, group identities and cultures within the game, is what will be in focus here.

As Corneliussen and Rettberg (2008) argues in their book a game like World of Warcraft challenges the traditional views we have of things such as game, play and society in how we see them forming and structuring themselves. In many ways games like World of Warcraft is a mini-universe where we can see the shaping of societies, cultures, groups and factions in real-time and with a omniscient observer position. The form these new entities take are both similar yet different from those we see in "the real world". Similar in that, while the parameters are different, it is still humans forming them and human aspects that drives them, but different in the sense that it takes place digitally and featuring a far more diverse group of people than what the "real" world can realistically offer.

It is here that we need to understand that this book was written eleven years ago and much has happened in the digital world since then. The idea of the digital space as a meeting ground and accepted part of our society has been widely acknowledged and is far more fact

than fiction today. As such much of the book is spent trying to assure readers that this is a good new phenomenon that should also be taken seriously, which, is not so relevant anymore. Though the relevancy might not be as high this does still provide solid historical context from the perspective of an “outsider”, or someone unfamiliar with the concept of a virtual world.

That said the book outlines the various contributing factors to the formation of group identities within the game, such as choices during character creation, goals, attitude towards the game and other, more mundane, aspects such as real-life companionship, politics and ethics.

2.3 How To Create An Appealing Faction

“*Building an MMO with mass appeal: A look at gameplay in World of Warcraft*” by Ducheneaut, Yee and Nickell (2006) delves into the specifics on how to design an appealing faction that new players wishes to join. Not just the philosophical and cultural values of the people within it, but also the mechanical aspects and what physical rewards to offer the player. With these methods in mind one can, as a developer, intentionally attract the specific kind of player-base one desires to create the type of faction one wishes. But it also provides insight in what *does* attract certain kinds of people and why. Failure in this regard will result in the collapse of the game as players do not become invested in the game itself and quit playing. On an oversaturated market games, especially MMOGs require something to engage the player and the most effective method is a faction that strongly appeals to the ideals of said player.

While it is a valuable tool for game creators to have it is also a vital concept to understand in general, lest ignorance leads to it being misused or exploited for something that might be damaging in the long run. For while the conflict between factions is an interesting and compelling part of online play, the very real hostility and animosity that can arise from such group mentality can be quite toxic unless handled correctly. Cyberbullying and online flame wars are just two potential negative outcomes if one lets this system devolve completely. The idea of mob mentality in general is also something that ought to be considered as it can irreparably damage even the most solid of systems.

However, the text also discusses specific details of how to accomplish ones goal. Things like aesthetics, colour scheme, design, language, base philosophies, how to use religion and morals, race, gender and other more common tools. All this is greatly expanded upon and explored in a way that encourages factions with a focus on cooperation and discourse within the faction itself.

2.4 The Importance Of Communication In Factions

The “*Communication, Coordination and Camaraderie in World of Warcraft, Games and Culture*” article by Mark Chen (2009) works to support the text by Mark Poster (1998) in that it emphasizes the importance and value of solid communication in the formation of groups and cultures. However while Poster (1998) looks at a broader world perspective, Chen (2009) focuses on the more intimate discourse within the groups that form in World of Warcraft that contributes to the creation of larger factions. While Posters (1998) text focused on how communication might be detrimental to the formation of factions, Chen (2009) takes a far closer look at how it might strongly benefit it. For example one needs to actually find like-minded people in order to create groups and this will not occur without proper communication, preferably between an as large and diverse amount of individuals as possible. Furthermore as it is presented in a possible negative light in Posters (1998) text Chen (2009) presents the positive part of the merging of different groups. To take an example from World of Warcraft one of the many guilds (player created groups of people who resolve to work together to overcome the challenges of the game) can form in the game is when a group of friends choose to create one. This official pseudo-faction can then attract individuals but also other groups of friends who in turn creates a “proper” faction.

Another way communication can greatly assist formation of factions is when a group of people comes together in, to take World of Warcraft as an example again, a guild without any other common ground beyond killing a common enemy. But then as they play and communicate between each other their bonds strengthen and what started as a loose gathering of individuals becomes a solid faction with dedicated, sometimes fanatic, players.

2.5 The Balance Between Innovation And Preservation

The book “*The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films*” by Wetmore Jr (2017) debates both the archetypical factions within the Star Wars universe, primarily The Empire and The Rebels, but also the various factions formed by the fans of the series. Including the creation of Fandoms. While there is an MMOG one can look at that is quite relevant to our research, Star Wars; The Old Republic, what we are after in this text is more generally what the fans of the two factions are looking for, why the factions in their very distinct style and presentation, are archetypical and how this can then, in turn, be applied to game-making. The Republic (another, more accurate, name for the Rebels in context) and The Empire both have very devout and sworn followers (to a point where real world religions has sprung up based on core tenets from each faction), and studying the cause will undoubtedly aid the development of games as well.

In addition it also touches on the risks with creating a too devoted fan base. Not only does it make for a potentially toxic and hostile environment where the followers of a certain faction starts shunning and denouncing followers of other factions, but it can have a severe effect on the development of the game itself as well. One of the more unfortunate aspects of fandom is the constant craving for more to consume. More books, more movies, more games, more of everything. But what fans want, collectively, is not change or something different, but simply more of the same. This creates a double edged sword for the developer where drastic change and development for the faction in question enrages and alienates the players, while creating nothing but a constant stream of the same eventually will get boring and cause the players to stop playing anyway. An example of this from World of Warcraft could be how every time Blizzard Entertainment releases a new expansion for the game there is one significant portion of the player base who complain about all the new changes and how they much preferred the old version, while another significant portion of the playerbase complain that even though it is a new expansion, it is essentially just the same game with a new coat of paint.

2.6 How To Create A Responsive And Tactical AI

We used the text “*Opponent modeling in real-time strategy games*” by Schadd, Bakkes and Spronck (2007) because it shares valuable information about how to create an opponent in a strategy game. Since we are researching on how factions work with each other, it is important to being able to build an enemy faction. Because if there is only one faction, then we can't research how the faction interacts with members from other groups. This text will give much needed information on how to build an enemy AI that will adapt to the player's choices, which means that the AI is not only responding, but planning its choices based on your playstyle. In games this is really important because the better the AI is at scanning the player and calculating a good tactic against them, the more of a challenge they may be for the player. It is also important to build the AI in a way that it behaves realistically and make choices that follows some kind of logic. By building an AI that behaves realistically one gives the player a chance to predict what the enemy will do and can plan accordingly. Lastly, the point of the AI is to be an opponent for you, and if it going to be an even duel the AI need to do things the player do. Something the player can do that can put them behind in the game is mistakes. So to make an even duel we need to program the AI to simulate making problems. By giving the AI the risk of committing mistakes it ends up at a more equal footing with the player. The challenge is to combine all of this, to make an AI that is both realistic but always create a conflict with the player and in turn progress the game. We need to balance the disadvantages the AI has with its advantages.

2.7 Methods On How To Analyse MMO's And Their Playerbase

In the text “*Generating cyberculture/s: The case of Star Wars galaxies*” by Squire & Steinkuehler (2006) they analyse the Star Wars MMO “*Star wars Galaxies*” and what cybercultures they gave birth to. But more specifically how they go into detail on how to analyze MMO games and the player base they have. While this does not directly contribute to our research, it helps by providing proven methodology to get the data we are looking for. In addition to this it briefly touches on how culture in games develop and evolve which is a large contributing factor to the formation of factions and a core aspect one needs to consider when making your own factions.

2.8 Summary

Out of all this there is one main thing to take away; Communication. As Poster (1998) discusses, and Chen (2009) supports, communication is the ultimate key to faction-making. Both in the real world and the digital one. Thus a developer have a very convenient and powerful tool in facilitating the faction-based gaming experience often seen in online games. When it comes to single-player focused games communication falls a bit to the wayside in favour of narrative. But the motives and ideologies of the faction still has to be communicated properly to the player. It is here the techniques and methods provided by Ducheneaut, Yee and Nickell (2006) and Schadd, Bakkes and Spronck (2007) becomes vital as the old saying “Show, don’t tell” holds true here as much as anywhere. Aesthetics, design and showing the player what the factions are all about can be far more effective than simply having a character state the obvious.

3. Methods

Here we go through the methods we used during our research. For each method we give a short explanation on why we chose that method and when we came to use it.

3.1 Diffraction

The purpose of this research project is to find out how factions are created and the dynamics between them. The reason for diffraction being our choice of research method is based on that we want to get answers to our research question and develop it further. For the latter part diffraction is perfect because the method is used for trying to creating new perspectives on existing examples. We came to use it a lot in our linked game project where we tried to innovate new ways of factioncreation.

“Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less

distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of metaphysics. Rather, diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness at the end of this rather painful Christian millennium, one committed to making a difference and not to repeating the Sacred Image of Same.” (Haraway, 1997)

Haraway (1997) states in her work about diffraction that unlike reflection, that is about creating a mirror image of something and displacing it somewhere else, diffraction is rather about creating change and opening up new ways of thinking around normative phenomenon. Haraway(1997) means that with a reflective perspective there is a big risk of not challenging the earlier examples and therefore not contributing anything new to the development of that area. A diffractive perspective tries to add to the progress of innovative thinking in that area by contributing new ways of thinking and looking at it from different angles. We wanted to, with the help of diffraction, add to the pool of knowledge in the area of faction-creation and faction-dynamics.

3.2 Project methods

For our project management we used a mix of two methods, Scrum and kanban.

3.2.1 Scrum

At the start of the project we were unsure on what to do and we used Scrum stand-up meetings. They are meeting you keep at the start of the day and you need to stand to avoid dragging out the meeting. On the meeting every person says what they did yesterday, what they work on next and if there are any future problem that may hinder their workflow. Daily we wrote everyone's task on a box on the board in the room. We did this both for letting the whole group know what everyone is working on, and as a reminder the day after. Later on in the project when we got a clearer picture of the final product we could plan ahead more. For this part we started to use Kanban.

3.2.2 Kanban

Later in the process we chose to start using Kanban in place of Scrum. The reason we changed this was because later in the process we got a clear vision of the end result and could

plan ahead with tasks. Also when everyone knows what to do, there is no need for standup meetings everyday. We still had meetings but scaled it down to meet each other two days a week instead. The meetings were primarily used to update the progress that had been done so far to the others in the group. We implemented the kanban method with the website program *HacknPlan* which is a custom-made program for game development that uses a kanban structure.

3.3 Design methods

3.3.1 Brainwriting

We chose to use the brainwriting method for when we needed to get ideas on what to research because, it is an effective method for getting a diversity of ideas quickly. Everyone in the group thought out different current subjects that we could research. The members then wrote down the subjects on a paper that was passed around. The reason we used this method instead of the more famous brainstorming method was because of the writing part. Not everyone is comfortable to present their ideas out loud and to avoid losing those ideas we wrote them down instead and read them up randomly so you do not know which ideas is whose.

3.3.2 Mindmap

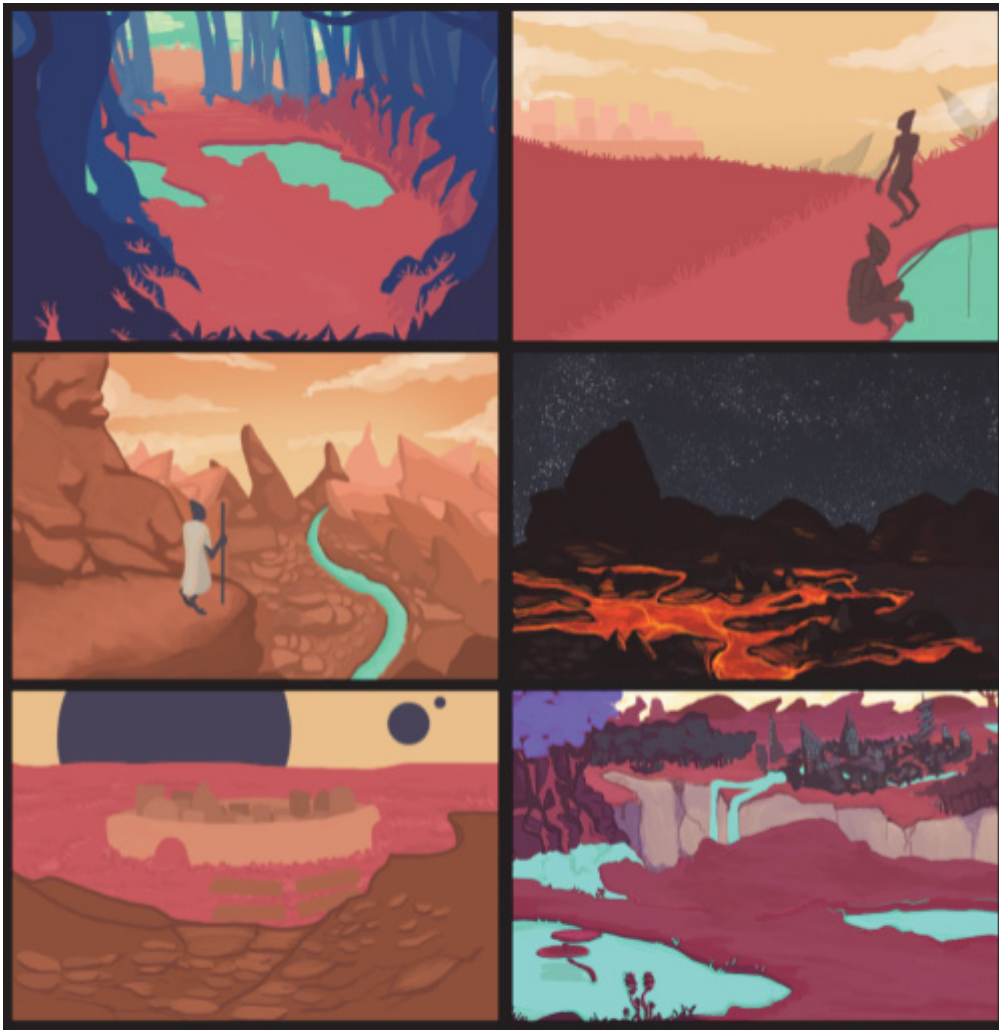
When we got the results from the brainwriting session we needed to better organize and structure the various ideas and thoughts that arose from them. For this we used mindmapping which is a fast and easy method that provides a solid structure.



Img 2: Mindmap

3.3.3 Moodboard

Moodboard is a method in which one finds several images or aesthetic designs that sets the tone and feeling of the work one wishes to create. They are then placed somewhere in the workplace where they are clearly visible. This is done for the purpose of creating a common mood for all the aesthetic design choices that are made throughout the creative process. We chose it to better coordinate between the two visual designers working on the game and in order for all group members to share the same vision. By sharing a common vision of the game it reduces the risk of any communicative misunderstanding.



Img 3: Concept Art Environment

3.3.4 Storyboard

Storyboard works in a similar fashion to Moodboarding in that it helps to create a common understanding of how the narrative will take place and the structure of specific scenes and the story overall. A storyboard can either be a set of sketches which describes exactly how a scene will play out or something more akin to a flowchart that documents what scenes will play when and how the story will progress throughout the game depending on the choices of the player. This method we chose in order to be able to better incorporate the many details of how factions arise in reality into the game and to plan the necessary features gameplay wise.

3.4 Game Engine

The choice of game engine was between the programs Gamemaker Studios and Unreal Engine 4. The biggest factor is whether the game would be in 3D or 2D. The reason for the choice being between these two engines is because our programmers has had earlier experience with both programs and they are also both capable of creating the project we had in mind. When we decided to make a 2D game the choice became clear to use Gamemaker. It is possible to use Unreal Engine for making 2D games but it is unnecessarily complicated compared to Gamemaker.

3.5 Conclusion

Throughout our project we worked with diffraction as our main method in order to discover the many aspects of factions in games and thoroughly learn as much as we can about them in order to, then, create a new take on them within our own game. In order to accomplish this we sat in our group and with the aid of things like mindmaps and brainwriting slowly identified and isolated each aspect we could find. We then proceeded with a similar approach when it came to the actual design in that we, as a group, developed the aesthetics of the world we wished to create. Through means like moodboards and storyboards we managed to establish a consensus both on the narrative and visual design. Finally, as work on the project truly began, we adopted Scrum to drive the working process and Kanban in order to organize and document it all.

4. Design process

This part discloses the design process we went through when we visualized our research into a game. It starts with a short explanation on why we chose to visualize it into a game and then goes into how we came to use the methods in the design process. Lastly we talk about the development of the linked game project.

4.1 Introduction

As insinuated above the practical purpose of our investigation was to create a game. The original idea was to make a game in the strategy genre since it usually has far more clearly defined factions. However as discussions raged on that morphed into a mix of a variety of genres such as adventure, management and point-and-click, but with strategy as the overarching one. That decided the first thing we had to do was to determine what kind of factions we wanted to have and how they would function from a gameplay perspective. Here we started to delve into our sources for both inspiration and tips on how to produce something worthwhile. Ducheneaut, Yee and Nickell and their text proved especially valuable here since it aided us in tailoring the first iterations of the game to match our desires.

However, the most significant decision we made in the early stages of our development was that the faction the player should belong to ought to not exist at the start of the game but rather be created by the player and develop as the game goes along. The idea of having the player make their own faction, we figured, ought to give them the perfect insight into how a faction can rise, as well as the benefits and risks that comes with the many decisions and choices one has to make. In addition it makes the player more personally invested if they feel as if it is truly their faction, or a faction that is as in-line with their own values and ideals as possible. Not to mention that it would allow us to implement all that we have learnt regarding the rise of factions directly into the game.

4.1.1 Diffraction

The choice of having diffraction in our work came naturally because we were researching factions in games. We also planned early that we would do a game connected to the research which means we look at other games and see how they created their factions. We took that information and diffracted it in hope of finding new ways to develop factions.

Thus the way we diffract the topic of factions can be seen in how we planned for it to be a game in which the player decides what their faction will be like. As is mentioned repeatedly,

and will be mentioned again, most games comes with factions already determined or possess a very limited number of choices for you to affect the path of the faction you join. To instead allow the player to make one that is entirely their own through a multitude of choice and options would change the normal use of factions, something that helps the player understand the world and guides them through the nuances of the story and game-play, into something entirely different. Basically what we are trying to do, or tried to do, was to find an alternate use for the concept of factions in games and expand on how they function. In addition we wished to show the player the essence of our research by placing them in the shoes of someone who is at the forefront of a new factions.

4.2 Methods

In the beginning of the project we came to use the brainwriting method. We all wanted to make a computer game as part of our research and we needed to find out a subject that we could research and make a potential game from. When everyone has been given time to think of different themes to delve deeper we read the suggestions to the whole group. For each suggestion we discussed what research questions we could get from it and what kind of potential artefact we can make. We ended up with tribalism and researching it in games. Every member were to research about tribalism and analyse the factions of a chosen game. The next day we put together everyone's research into a mind map. We could see with the mind map that all factions from all the different games could be put in either two categories, order or chaos.

4.3 The Game

4.3.1 Concept

The concept we chose to work on is a game in which you control the progenitor of a new, rising faction. You, the player, is responsible for the actions that will shape everything that this new faction is about. What it stands for, what its goals are, what type of members it attracts, how it operates, and how it converts etcetera. As the player make these decisions the game will change and adapt accordingly. Environments and character interactions will all

change to portray the path one takes. More structurally the idea was that, since the player have the position of a god in this new world, there would be several spells available that, depending on how they are used, will have different effects - both positive and negative. To show both grand and small scale factors that goes into the foundations of new factions we incorporated both a world map, where the environment itself can be affected, and a smaller city-street view where one can target individuals.

4.3.2 First Vision of the Game

The vision of the finished game changed many times during the process. We decided early that the player should take active part in creating the first faction in order to more properly visually portray the process during which factions emerge. In the beginning we planned on having skill trees for each kind of spell. The thought behind this was so that the player could customize what kind of deity they wanted to be. If the player wanted their powers to be centered around weather, then they could choose that skill tree and unlock better abilities as the game goes on. The game would also visually change as your followers adopt your image. Things like banners, colour schemes and clothing would evolve to represent the path one would choose. As an example; if the player focused on weather-focused abilities then the followers would develop an earthy culture. The society would be built around the different kinds of weather existing on the planet. Their buildings would be very simple and instead they are surrounded by the local fauna. They would make decisions based on how their shamans interpreters the omens of nature. Or the player can choose abilities that affect the mind of the people and manipulate them into doing what they want then followers would develop a sense of deceit and treachery and learn how to use propaganda to get supporters.

The state of the cities has changed as well. While initially the idea was to have many cities, perhaps spanning the whole planet, it ended up being condensed to just the one (with a second city mentioned but never travelled to). That one city, too, changed from what was originally going to be several districts and parts to just one concentrated area with one building you are able to enter. We moved away from this vision because we felt the size of this project would be too big for us to handle with the timeframe we have.

4.3.3 Final Version of the Game

The vision we decided to go with is a downscaled version of the previously mentioned one. We changed direction from sandbox mode and decided to go with a narrative focus and a small story to play through. All the core gameplay features we wished to implement are there, but in lesser versions of themselves. The map view and city view is still there, as are the spells and miracles one can use. Their effects are, in general, what we aimed for and the story tells the tale we had written.

4.3.4 Gameplay

The gameplay section we changed to from having very specific and specialised abilities where the player tailors their power to only possess a few spells. The spells now do different things based on where you use it instead of having just one singular purpose like before. In the previous vision of the game we would have a spell for neutralising a volcano and another one for filling a dried up lake with water. With the current vision we put these two together into one single water-based spell. In addition to reducing the workload it allows for the player to explore and play around much more. Test their spells and see what interesting effects



Img 4: Volcano active



Img 5: Volcano dormant

they might have when used in different circumstances. Thus we shifted the focus from knowing which spell to use to making the player think on where to use the spell. The reason we did this change was because we saw that many spells are similar and in an attempt to make the game simpler we decided to put many spells under the same name. Spells that

disturb the balance in in the game comes under the *chaos* category while spells that restore the balance are put in the *order* category.

Another change we made was to instead of having a visual representation of your faction appear in the game there would instead be pop-up windows of certain events taking place. The events will be tailored to occur when certain criteria are met. For example if there is a volcanic eruption and the player stops it by putting water in the volcano they will get an event afterwards that describes the people seeing the smoke



Img 6: Prophet Camp

change from black to white. Shortly after the volcano stopped and the people cheered. If the player picked a different approach and clog the volcano with dirt they would get a different outcome. The event would then describe the people seeing the volcano crumbling and erupting more. They become scared and start to run around in fear. Two very different scenarios depending on how the player want to tackle the problem.

This leads over to the next part we are working on. A big part of the game is how to get followers and there are many factors the player need to keep in mind. The first factor is how big of a following the player possess. If it is a very small following people are more hesitant to follow but if the player have accumulated a big following many will join out of peer pressure. Another element the player need to understand is the “wellbeing” system of the NPCs and how to use it to their own advantage. The player can by talking to the NPC to know how they are feeling, if they are happy, sick or angry. Happy citizens of the society rarely try to incite change. But people that are dissatisfied with the current ruling body often turn to alternate options. By curing a sick person of its disease or persuading the disgruntled individual that you offer the change they are looking for will increase the chances of them joining your faction. The player can even affect the system to a certain degree by making people sick and later curing them. But there are risks that comes with this because if the deity makes to many people sick then your faction will build up rumors of always bringing diseases wherever you go.

4.3.5 Game Structure

We realised that in the first vision of the game that there was a risk that our game could be seen as complicated when

introduced to it. To try and change this we divided up the game into different phases. The game is to consist of three parts, convert, establish and preserve. The first part we decided to do as the introduction part, so that the player gets accustomed to the game early.

In the beginning the player is an outcast and doesn't have access to the city until we have converted a base following. At the start the player spends most of its time in a small camp outside the city.

Visitors will come to the camp and ask for help, if the player are able and willing they can help in exchange for their devotion to the

faction. When the faction have converted enough people they can try to overthrow the current ruler of the city. If the player succeed, the ruler will escape to another city which has been undiscovered until now. When the ruler is gone the game goes into the next phase and the player need to establish their rule over the city. The goal is the same as before but on a different scale. Now the faction need to convert people and at the same time undermine supporters of the previous ruler. After a set amount of time the previous ruler will return with an army and try to retake the city. The success of the player faction in this battle will depend on how well they managed to establish themselves in the city. From how many devotees they managed to convert to if they managed to stop any sabotage-attempt made by supporters of



Img 7: The City Part 1



Img 8: The City Part 2

the old rule. There are some things in the ending that is written in stone for the sake of driving the narrative forward. The native race will find out that an external force is influencing their society and in turn force the player to leave since the mission is in jeopardy. The player's choices do affect the game however and the faction's



Img 9: Throneroom

survival depend on how well the player is doing during the game. If they did a bad job of establishing their rule then their faction will be overthrown after the war. But if they managed well then the player-faction wins the war and will continue to rule even when the player is discovered and forced to leave.

4.3.6 Alien Character Design

Many things changed during the process but one thing that didn't change was the design of the native race. We decided to analyse our creation process for them. The first stage was for the graphic artist to draw concept art of six different aliens.

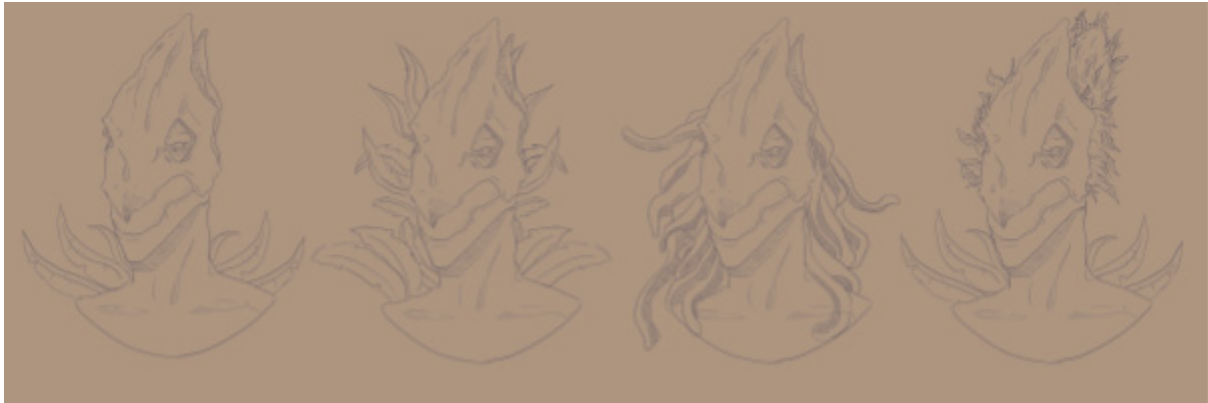
After that the whole group discussed what features we liked on each individual alien. We analysed the results and the graphic artist drew a new concept art on an alien with four different types. These aliens also included some of the features we liked the most from the previous concept art. The results were an alien that everyone in the group could find something they liked about. To get some visual variations of the alien we



Img 10: Concept Art Aliens, First Draft

decided that all four different types of the alien all existed on this planet.

Lastly we had to make the alien in pixelart to fit in with the rest of the game. Our other graphic artist made the player character and presented it to the group. We were pleased with the result as seen in image 9 and 10.



Img 11: Concept Art Aliens, Second Draft

When we examine the process afterwards some speculations arise on why this was never changed after the process was over. One speculation is that since everyone in the group was part of the creation and the final result got something that every member liked, then everyone was pleased with the results and didn't see a need for changing it. Another speculation is that since the process was planned from the start and contained many stages where we could stop and repeat if we were unsatisfied with the results. By letting us change things during the making instead of repeating the whole process at the end, it becomes easier to see when it is not going the direction we want.



Img 12: Player Character Development

4.4 Summary

Altogether the design process of our project revolved around cooperation and participation. No part was exclusively handled by one member of the group but everyone had a say in everything. While we originally had a grand vision of what our game should, or could, be, time-constraints quickly forced us to adopt more realistic and narrow scopes for what we wanted to achieve. But though we ran into several bumps along the way our inclusion of all members in each aspect of the process made us overcome them in the end.

5. Conclusions

In this chapter we discuss and reflect on the result of our research project. We start with talking about what our goal was and then what we have learned. Lastly we end with a summary of our conclusions.

5.1 Initial Thoughts

The goal of this thesis has been to study how factions, both player driven and not, are created in games and what dynamic that exists between them. As such what we have discovered is that factions in games are primarily created through communication between players and narrative. As Chen (2009) says they have the opportunity to greatly add to the player experience and enable players to identify with the characters they meet and explore the world through the lens of a native within said world. However, there are many pitfalls and potential dangers one must watch out for. One such danger is the potential negative aspects of segregation and fanaticism that arises from groupthink. For instance in the game World of Warcraft the players in the Horde faction and Alliance faction have developed a certain contempt for each other where they view the members of the other faction as inferior or “not true players”. While it rarely escalates to something serious like cyber-bullying it does foster a competitive spirit that, while required in games with player versus player content, runs the risk of creating harmful attitudes. One such example comes, again, from World of Warcraft where the players of the Horde chose to hold an in-game funeral in order to pay their respects to a well-known player who had passed away. This event was subsequently ruined by players

from the Alliance as they ran in and killed those attending (see sources for video link). As for fanaticism it is, as Wetmore (2017) mentions, a double edged sword. People deeply invested in their faction are devout followers of that faction *as it is* and changes to it will be seen as almost on par with blasphemy or iconoclasm. As a result it becomes difficult for a developer to make any needed changes without upsetting a large portion of the player base. However, on the other hand, making *no* changes will eventually mean that the player base grows bored as it is just the same content over and over again.

As for our own work we found that there are very few games that lets the player create their own faction. Almost exclusively factions already exist within the games they play and the choice is not what kind of faction one wishes to create, but rather which predetermined faction one wishes to join. Sure, there are some games that allows the player to influence the faction they join, or even take part in building a faction from scratch. But usually this is done with an already existing history of said faction or the choices are limited to different versions of the same alignment. To truly create your own faction, complete with historical connotations, ideologies, rituals, beliefs etcetera would be almost unique in gaming. But also very challenging. The number of possibilities one would have to include to at the very least create the illusion of the freedom of choice can be rather daunting for smaller development teams and not worth the effort for larger ones. It is a high risk/reward gamble that few are keen on taking. Not just because of the risk involved but also because many who create wish to tell their own story. Even Role-Playing Games that market themselves on player choice still has a “proper” story to tell that the player, at best, get to make some minor decisions that influences how their character acts. Perhaps the ending can change depending on said choices, but the overarching story remains the same.

5.2 A Guide for the player

Ultimately however the most important conclusion we came to is that factions in games serves two functions; First they help the player to understand the world they have joined. The people, the morals, the ideologies, the religions, the cultures etcetera. By condensing all of these things down into the often black/white and simplified versions usually represented by factions in games it becomes very easy to determine who the good guys are and who the bad

guys are, but also help to categorize characters and events. If we meet a character and learn they are part of a certain faction then we, as players, can very quickly establish what values this character has. Same with events. If we understand the core tenets of the available factions then we can better understand the impact and significance of what is going on in the game. While some might look at this simplification with a furrowed brow as it limits the complexity that real factions operate on it is worth to remember that while there is certainly room for this in games, often that is not the important part of gaming. As long as the narrative and the characters themselves are complex and dynamic then on a certain level it might even be preferable to have simple factions for the sake of further helping the player with categorization. If, on the other hand, the factions are complex and deep then the characters might need to be simplified in order to balance it out. Furthermore having a simplified faction with basic tenets, morality and ideologies makes it far easier to undermine that and surprise using the narrative. Plot twists tends to be most effective when the player think they know what is coming after all.

5.3 Factions affect gameplay

The second function of factions in games is focused on gameplay. In order to create the necessary conflict required for a compelling story and game-play you need a minimum of two opposing sides. You need allies and you need enemies. Furthermore, as Schadd, Bakkes and Spronck (2007) discusses, when designing an opponent it often helps to have a visual idea of what those opponents will look like, and a good way to make sure they all adhere to the same theme and philosophy is to first create the faction to which they belong. Doing so might also help you learn how they are meant to function. Like in the game Starcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010) the faction of the Zerg are a group of hive-mind insects who live to swarm and consume every world they land upon. As a result the faction, game-play wise, was designed to be relatively physically weak one with most units having a comparatively low defence and health. But on the other hand the player could produce far more of these units faster and cheaper than any other faction could, leading to a strategy of overwhelming numbers. Quantity over quality as it were.

5.4 Summary

To summarize; one could state that factions, as they are, can lend themselves to greatly improve a gaming experience while also simplifying the design process for the developer. The case of World of Warcraft most definitely symbolizes how to do it right. It possesses a devout player-base dedicated to their respective factions from a narrative standpoint while simultaneously using said factions to enhance the gaming-experience with player versus player and offering replayability with faction-specific quests and missions. Not to mention that the many sub-factions that players can interact with help guide the player along both the intended story and game-play path while also offering meaningful choices.

6. Discussion

In this last chapter we talk about the big picture of our work. We follow up we giving critical thoughts on what we did, what we could have done differently and what we have learned from it. The chapter finish on how to continue further research on this subject.

6.1 The Grand Scale

Research into the topic of factions in interactive media is vital for the development of social games. It helps to clarify why players do what they do and how a developer can use said behaviour to their benefit. Chen (2009), for example, very clearly points this out in his text about how guilds in World of Warcraft functions. Without them it is quite likely World of Warcraft would not have become as large as it is and therefore it becomes imperative to understanding them. But even for single-player games knowing what draws a player in and makes them immerse themselves into the world you have created is an incredible tool for developers. Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore (2006) mentions this in particular when they talk about the design process of factions, as does Schadd, Bakkes and Spronck (2007) when they talk about more technical things like AI behaviour. In addition Poster (1998) succeeds in tying it to a grander scope when he talks of factions and cultures on the world stage. How we all interact in a global society is very much reflected on the smaller scale that is games. Not to mention that if one fails to understand and does it wrong, Wetmore (2017)

makes it very clear what a disaster it can have. Both for the game itself and for the people involved.

6.2 A Critical View of our Project

One of the biggest missing features in our project is the aspect of multiplayer and communication within our game. While it might be represented from a narrative point-of-view one of the core parts of our discovery from our research was that communication and player-to-player interaction was one of the most important aspects of faction creation within games. Both of our main sources, Poster (1997) and Chen (2009), describe it as the fundamental part of digital faction making. However, the reason these were not included was because we lacked both time and talent to see it through. To implement that would of been a significant undertaking neither of us were prepared for. That said what we did instead was to try and create a debate around the topic using the game as a catalyst. Since we never had the opportunity to let others interact with it the results are, unfortunately, inconclusive.

We found that when designing such a procedure as a game, there are stages to the production that require backtracking and constant evaluation. A production process may seem straightforward and progressive, but we would argue that the opposite may also hold true. A game is divided into several iterations and stages with sub stages all with choices to be made. As a result planning becomes difficult and even though it might seem as if you are progressing at a rapid pace and have all the time in the world you might still find yourself at the end with barely a fraction of what you thought you would have. Fortunately one does not need a grand and complete product to test a hypothesis or convey a message.

A change that what have a big impact on the result is the game engine. We chose to work with Gamemaker Studios because it it a tailored program for making 2D games. Some problems occurred that Gamemaker is to blame for, we could maybe have avoided encountering these problems if we chose Unreal engine 4 instead. At the same time we can argue that there could have be other problems with Unreal Engine that we did not know of.

Ultimately what we have learned is that, as always, proper planning and a modest ambition helps to make a solid end-product. Perhaps it is better to focus on a small, well-designed and *finished* game rather than a grand vision of what we would like to actually play if a proper studio was behind it. In addition we also occasionally lost focus on our actual research question in our desire to work on the game itself. So a more aimed and thought-through working process would have served us well. While we still managed to tie everything together and learn a great deal about the topic we researched it is perhaps not as reflected in the actual product as we would of wanted.

6.3 Further Research:

There remains quite ample ground for further study on this topic. What this thesis accomplishes is barely scraping the surface of digital communication and how it is applied and/or used in interactive media. The medium of computer games is, perhaps, growing up but nonetheless remains new and in the early stages of its development. Especially when it comes to digital and online functionalities. The game World of Warcraft has been the source for several studies over the years due to it representing a micro-cosmos of human society as a whole and using it, and other similar games, as a means to observe our way of grouping ourselves together could quite likely have ramifications for real-life research as well. But it is also important to look closer at *how* certain factions are portrayed and *why* they are portrayed that way. What cultural allusions and messages do we find? Why are they there? Much like how movies are analyzed for how they showcase history and allusions to history, so, too, should games. Perhaps it might even be more vital that we do. After all, while movies might be immersive and engaging they are nowhere near on the same level that games are. Because in movies and other media we, as consumers, are not physically engaged. Movies may try to make us identify with characters but in games we *are* the characters. We do not see someone else do an action, it is we who actively choose to do it. Thus when we interact or join a faction in a game it reflect our own ideas and values. For example; Would you, dear reader, prefer to join a traditional, stable and monocultural faction based on religious values or a diverse and chaotic faction based on progress and meritocratic ideals? Your answer might hide a deeper meaning than one would think.

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Img 1: Blizzard Entertainment. (2016). Warcraft Movie; The Beginning[Poster] Available from: https://az616578.vo.msecnd.net/files/2016/06/12/636013142260057371-214838371_Cover.jpg

Img 2: Personal Mindmap

Img 3: Concept Art Environment, from linked gameproject

Img 4: Volcano Active, from linked gameproject

Img 5: Volcano Dormant, from linked gameproject

Img 6: Prophet Camp, from linked gameproject

Img 7: The City Part 1, from linked gameproject

Img 8: The City Part 2, from linked gameproject

Img 9: Throneroom, from linked gameproject

Img 10: Concept Art Aliens, First Draft, from linked gameproject

Img 11: Concept Art Aliens, Second Draft, from linked gameproject

Img 12: Player Character Development, from linked gameproject

List of terms used (ordlista)

2D - Two dimensional

3D - Three dimensional

Fanaticism - Strong dedication beyond the point of sense and reason.

Game engine - program that serves as the base structure for game development.

Iconoclasm - The act of destroying holy or revered items or structures.

MMO - Massive Multiplayer Online

MMOG - Massive Multiplayer Online Game

NPC - Non playable Character

RPG - Role Playing Game, A game in which players assume the role of a character in a fictional setting.

Sandbox mode - A sandbox is a style of game in which minimal character limitations are placed on the player, allowing the player to roam and change a virtual world at will.

Skill tree - A hierarchical visual representation of customization a player can make to their character.

Tribalism - Implies the possession of a strong cultural or ethnic identity that separates one member of a group from the members of another group. Based on strong relations of proximity and kinship, members of a tribe tend to possess a strong feeling of identity.