

Community Design for Large-scale Gaming Worlds



Introductions & Overview

What's a gaming community?

- The players who develop personas and build relationships within and around your game
- Communities happen whether you want them to or not—the question is their quality, and how you shape them



Introductions & Overview

What's a “gaming world?”



A “Gaming world” is

- a spatial environment
- where multiple players can interact
- which may or may not persist regardless of whether there are players present

“Persistent persona” does not equal “persistent environment.”



Introductions & Overview

Personas and Avatars

To support community, create a persistent, evolving visual representation of each player-character (e.g. avatar or object)



Character Development

“Tangible” vs “intangible” aspects of player identity

“Tangible” aspects:

- recognized by the server.
- How the game sees the character

–Examples:

- Stats
- Level
- Group membership
- Skills
- Experience points



“Intangible” aspects:

- Not seen by the server
- How players see the character

–Examples:

- how good a leader someone is
- whether they are shy, etc.

To maximize community,
turn intangibles into
tangibles

Character Development

“Tangible” vs “intangible” aspects of player identity

The screenshot shows a character development menu for a character named Elsjana, a 1st-level Druid. The menu is divided into several sections:

- Equipment Slots:** A grid of slots for various body parts: EAR, NECK, ACE, EAR, FINGER, WRIST, ARMS, WRIST, LB, FEET, PRI, SEC, RANGE, and AMMO. Each slot contains a small icon representing the equipped item.
- Skills and Stats:** A section on the right showing the character's skills and stats. Skills include HP (23/23), AC (43/1000), and ATK (10/1000). Stats include STR (65), STA (75), AGI (95), DEX (85), WIS (95), INT (80), and CHA (90). Other stats include POISON (15), MAGIC (25), DISEASE (15), FIRE (25), and COLD (25).
- Weight Allowance:** A section at the bottom right showing the character's weight allowance (9/65).
- Currency:** A section on the left showing the character's currency: PLATINUM (0), GOLD (0), SILVER (0), and COPPER (0).
- Buttons:** Buttons for "DONE" and "DESTROY" are located at the bottom of the menu.



Character Development

The Evolution of the *Ultima Online* reputation system

- Initially, small safe areas and the rest of the world was free PvP.
 - Playerkilling was rampant
 - Players could not identify the bad guys
- During beta, added “notoriety system”
 - Computer tracked your actions
 - Simple red/blue color coding for easy id
 - Bad guys gamed the system to stay “blue”
 - Good guys became “red” because they acted as vigilantes

Character Development

The Evolution of the *Ultima Online* reputation system

- Later added eBay-style reputation system
 - Each “transaction” (playerkilling incident) was judged by the victim
 - Accumulated murder reports led to punishments
- Reputation was refined
 - Added “long term” and “short term” murder counts
 - Added “ping-pong” count

Character Development

The Evolution of the *Ultima Online* reputation system

- Finally, a return to the initial model
 - The land was duplicated
 - On the safe half, playerkilling was not allowed except for guild wars
 - On the wild side, the reputation system remained intact
 - Added a faction conflict system only on the wild side
 - Simple red/blue color coding is now red, blue, green, orange, gray, light gray...
 - Wild lands badly underutilized
 - Harassment and problems increase on safe side

Character Development

Managing diversity with multiple achievement ladders

- Players will come to your gaming world with a preferred playstyle and worldview.
- Classes, races, activities, and skills offer different modes of expression
- Players often play the same archetype in game after game
- Can use class systems to segment archetypes



Character Development

Facilitating different playstyles with archetypes

Communication Tools

Types of communication

	1:1	1:many
Synchronous	IM Buddy lists Tell	Chat channels
Asynchronous	Email “Answering machines”	Message boards

Communication Tools

Benefits & Tradeoffs

	1:1	1:many
Synchronous	Required for in-game communication Harder to join the community Spamming and harassment concerns	
Asynchronous	Creates constancy in environment Required for organized communities Incurs storage costs; harder to police	

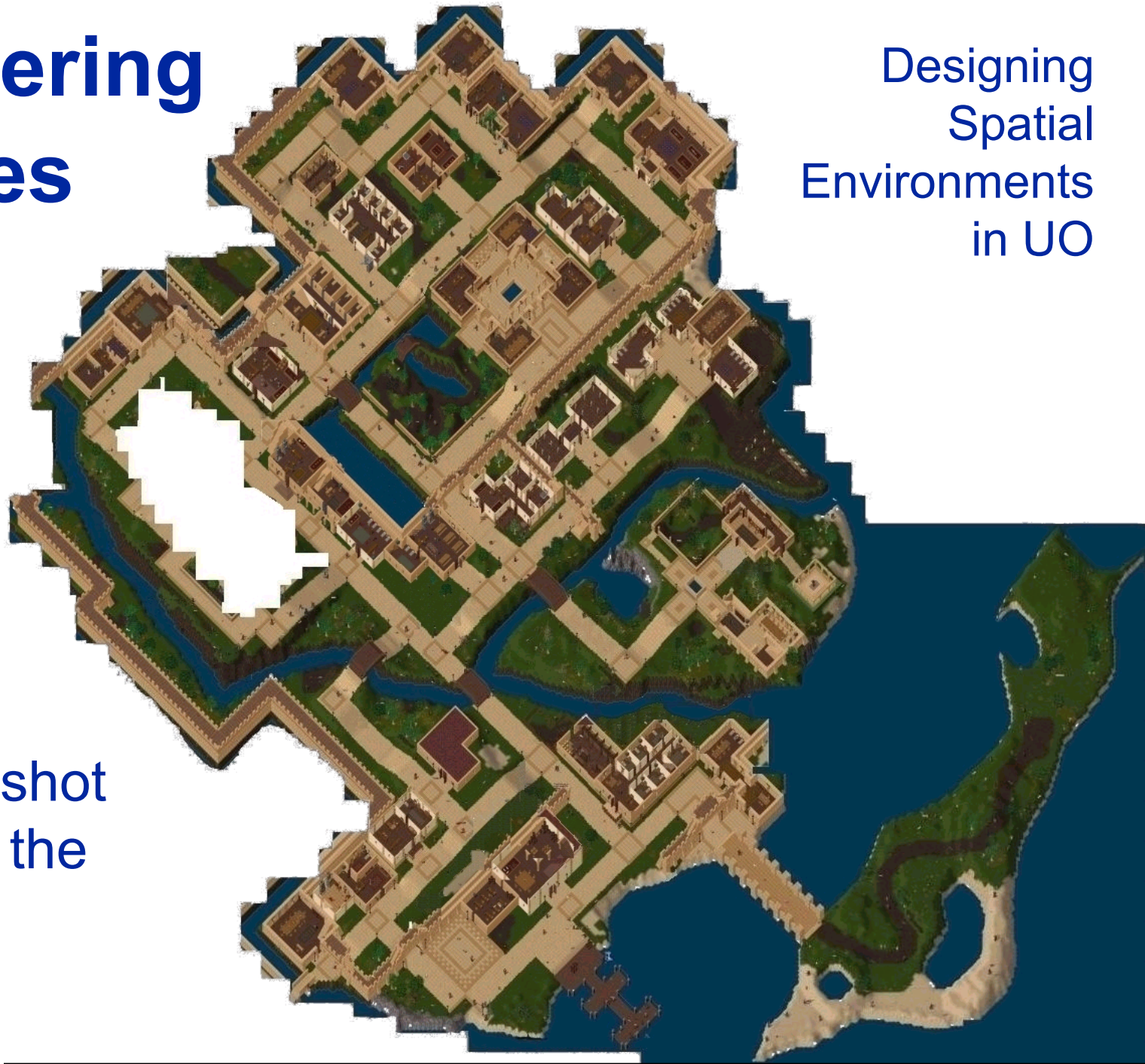
Communication Tools

Policing tactics

	1:1	1:many
Synchronous	•Circular buffers and reporting •Text filters •Ignore mechanism •Flood controls	
Asynchronous	•Moderation and banning •Pre-emptive policing if small volume	

Gathering Places

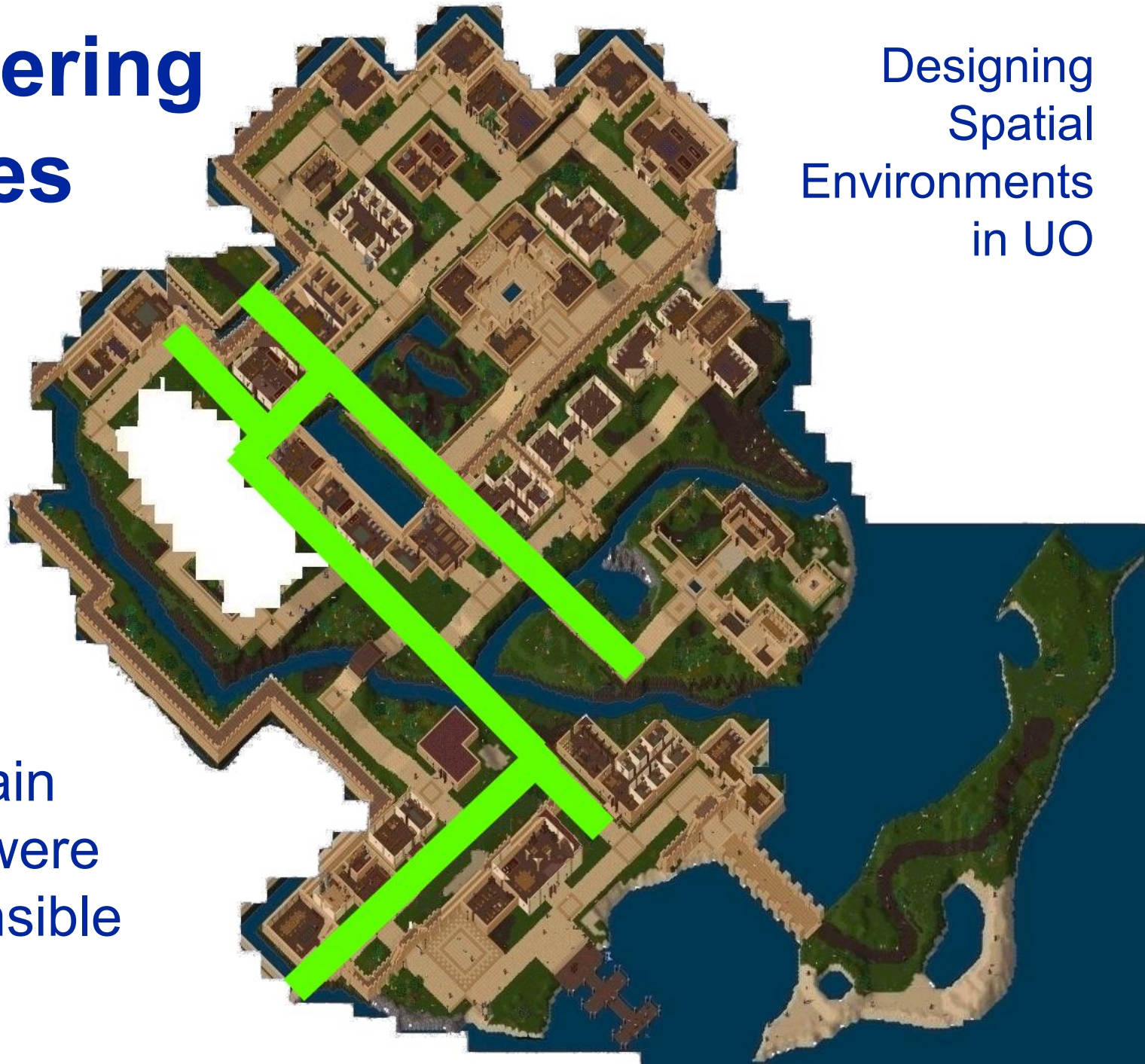
Designing
Spatial
Environments
in UO



- Screenshot map of the city of Trinsic

Gathering Places

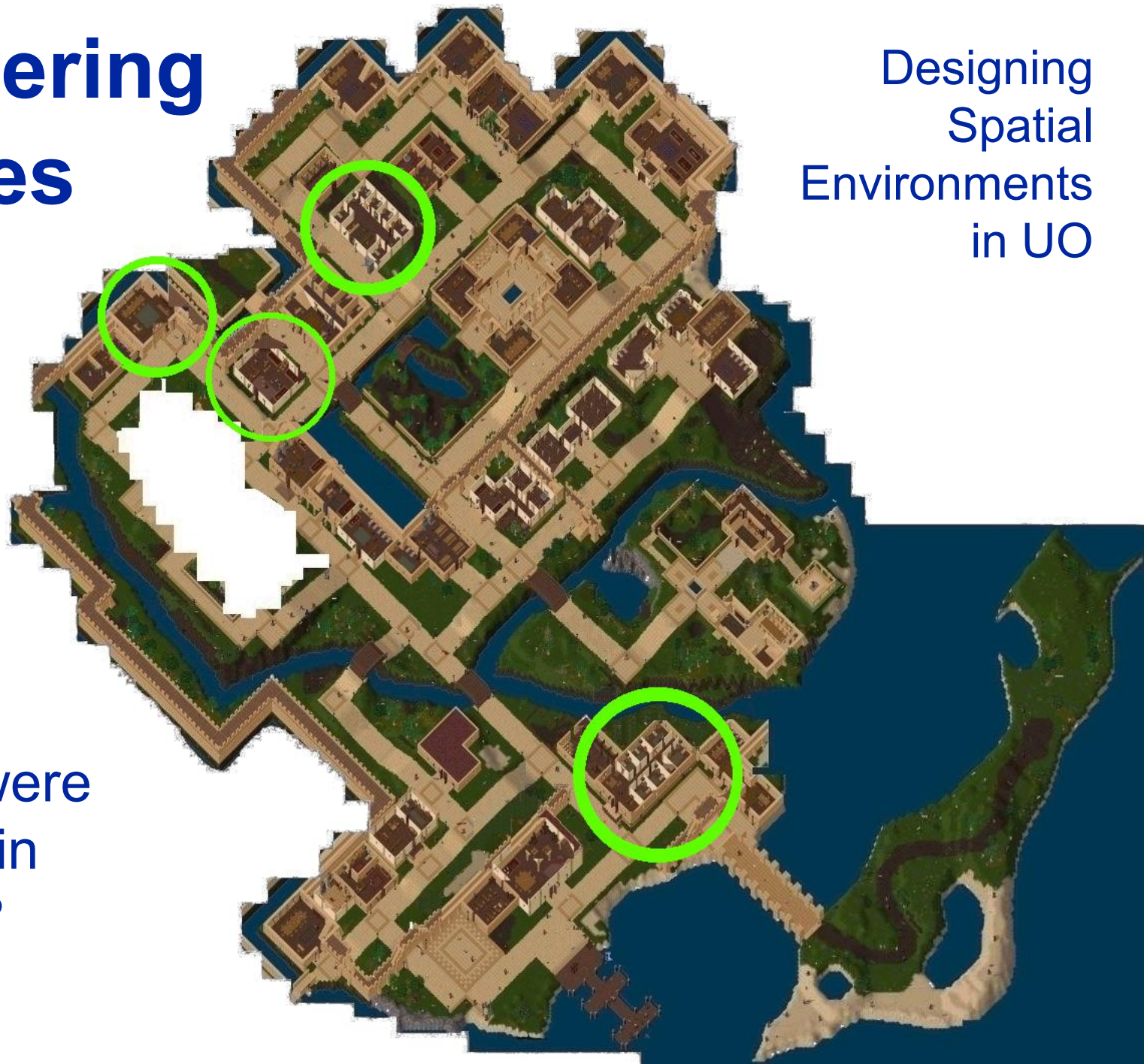
Designing
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- The main roads were not sensible

Gathering Places

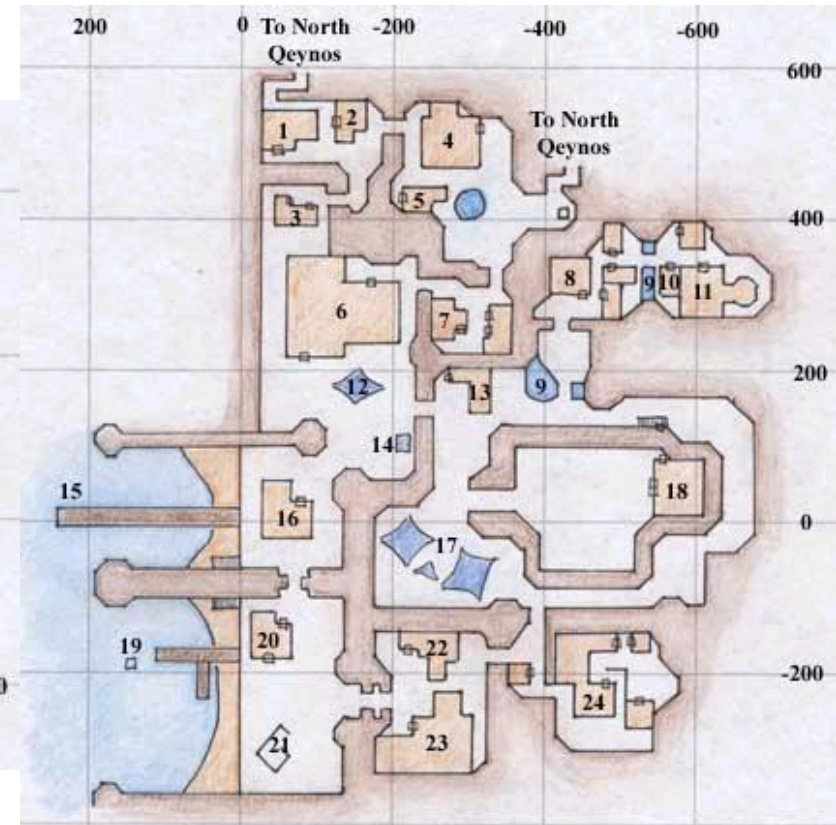
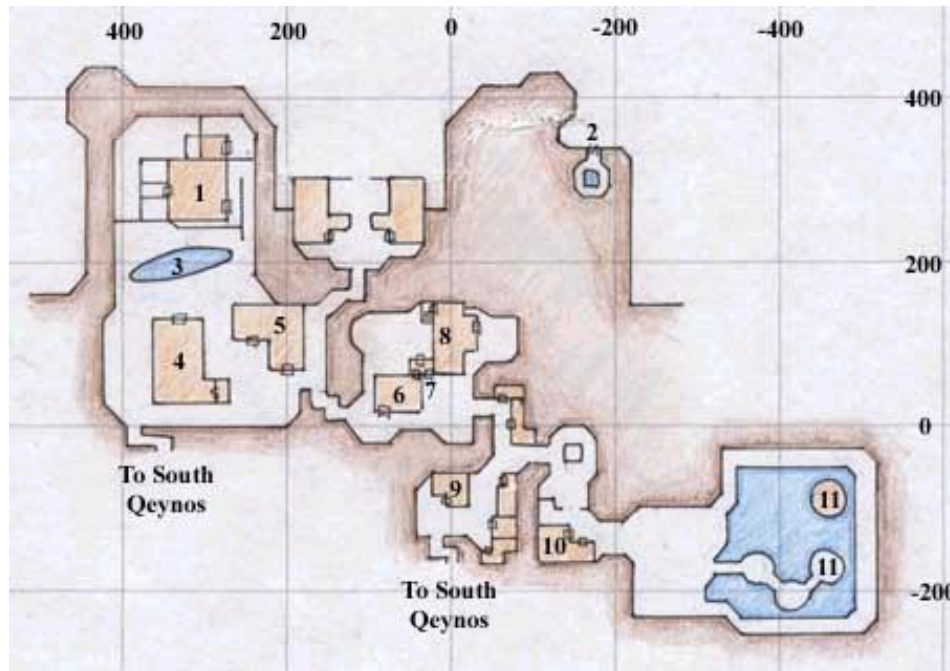
Designing
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- What were the main draws?

Gathering Places

Designing
Spatial
Environments
in EQ



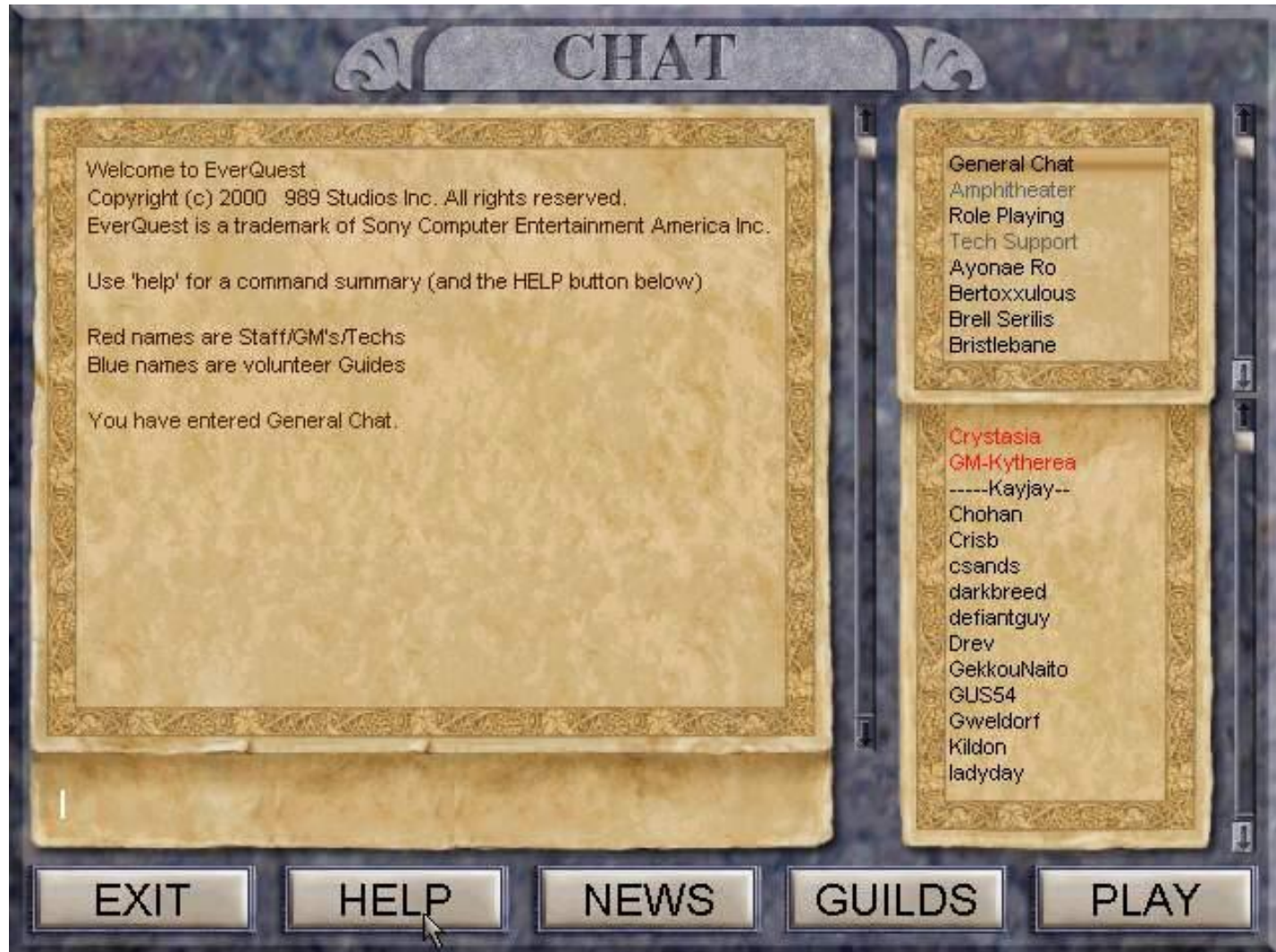
Gathering Places

Chat-based Gaming Lobbies

-- Rich is doing this slide

Gathering Places

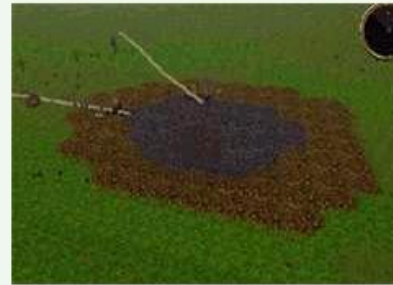
Designing Chat-based Gaming Lobbies



Tales That Bind Designer-created stories

- Some games include stories that are designed in advance.
- Let players affect the outcome of these stories – otherwise, they'll lose interest.

The new huge cat-like creatures known as Ursuin now populate Dereth.



The Shadow Spire attacked Tufa and Arwic totally destroying both towns while the Spire attack on Cragstone was thwarted by an unknown archer and mage.



New spider-like Grievvers are near immune to drain spells and most other magics.



New plants were discovered allowing the use of dyes to change to color of various clothing and armor.

Going Live:

Designing for the “Silent Majority”



- Most of your players don't know about the fan community
- This means they are missing out on much of the game!
- The fan community is your core market
- Your core market is hardcore
- Your core market is also your public image
- If you design to your hardcore, you risk losing the rest
- If you design to the rest, your hardcore will give bad word of mouth

The Ever-Evolving Game

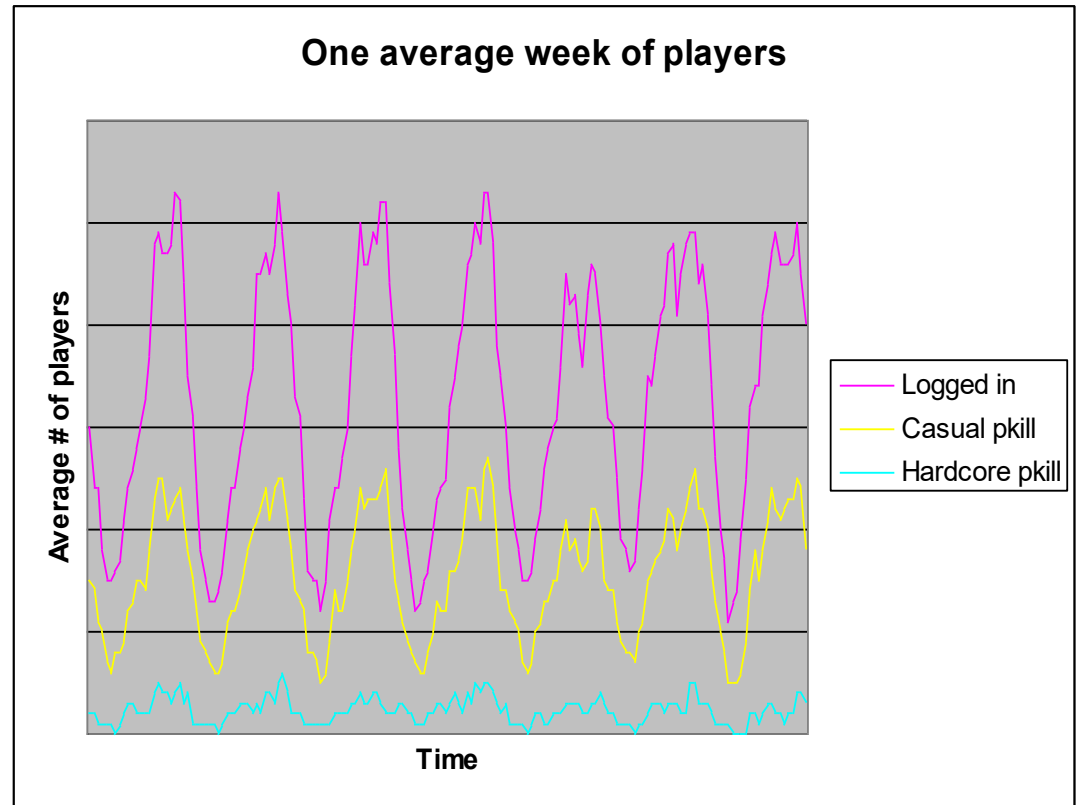
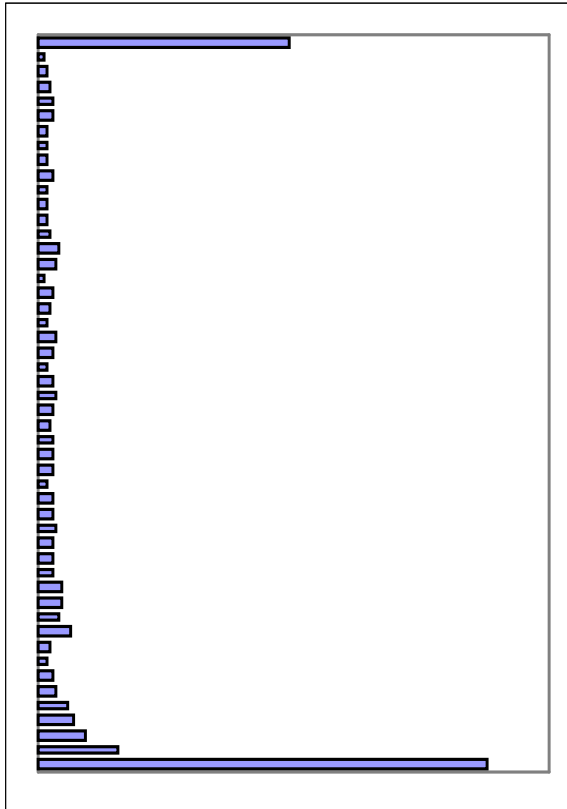
Tips for Tuning Your Gaming System

- Metrics
Track everything you can; try to graph it or assess it in a way to discover large-scale trends

VNUM	ML	AL	LSL	%S	APS	TK	Total Party Levels Versus Mob Level			
11714	13	17	4	3	1	758			+++++++	+++++
30702	1	4	1	14	1	767				++++
20910	13	15	4	4	1	919	---		++++	+++++
11711	6	30	3	5	1	973		+++++++	+++++	+++++
23001	50	36	17	2	2	1043	--		+++++	+++++
20913	26	22	7	6	1	1285	-----	--		+++++
22534	16	2	20	0	2	1565	+++++	+++++	+++++	+++++
11657	16	16	5	3	1	1874	-----			+++++
32741	31	26	12	3	1	2047	-----		+++++	+++++
7643	1	8	1	3	1	2048				+++++
11606	25	24	6	4	1	2507	-----		+++++	+++++
32739	36	26	12	3	1	2958	-----	-	++	+++++

The Ever-Evolving Game

Tips for Tuning Your Gaming System



- Metrics

Understand your player's habits and your demographic make-up.

The Ever-Evolving Game

Tips for Tuning Your Gaming System



- Player “Informants”
- Build good relationships with representatives of key areas of your playerbase (classes, etc) But don't play favorites!

The Ever-Evolving Game

Tips for Tuning Your Gaming System: Nerfing

- Why does it happen?
 - Balance evolves as players discover strategies
 - New additions unbalance existing data
- Tips for reducing the impact of nerfing:
 - Get them to buy into it or even to suggest it (manipulation)
 - Don't reduce powers—give power in other areas to restore balance (this tactic only works in isolated instances!).
 - Never announce a nerf without a commensurate gift

Keeping Your Game Fresh

Managing Player-generated Content: Design Issues

These games are about other people

We sell shared
fantasies.
Mass market
fantasies
coming soon!

The future lies
in giving
players more
ways to
express
themselves

The dilemma: providing both the fantasies and
the expressivity. When do we lose control over
the environment? And do we care?

Keeping Your Game Fresh

Managing Player-generated Content: Design Issues

These games are about other people

Contextual
building
blocks

Contextual
building
blocks

The dilemma: providing both the fantasies and the expressivity. When do we lose control over the environment? And do we care?