

Metagames, Paragames and Orthogames: A New Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

The term 'metagaming' is widely used to describe a variety of conceptually difficult activities associated with game play. This wide use has led to a conceptual overload of the term, mitigating its potential use for game studies. This paper will suggest two new terms to use, 'orthogame' and 'paragame', in conjunction with a more clearly defined notion of 'metagame'. We argue that these new terms have the potential to be highly useful for defining and understanding peripheral play activities common in modern digital games. We apply this new vocabulary to a variety of play practices in *EVE Online* to illustrate its strength for analysing and defining play practices.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.8.0 [Personal Computing]: General – Games.

General Terms

Languages, Theory.

Keywords

Metagaming, Metagame, Paragame, Orthogame, EVE Online, Starcraft, Magic: The Gathering, Magic Circle.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'metagame' is frequently used by players, game designers and academics to describe a wide variety of play activities perceived by players as being 'outside' or 'peripheral' to the game, while still being important to the overall game experience. This paper reviews the emic usage of the term 'metagame', identifying three categories of popular use; as higher strategy (such as the Starcraft metagame), as 'peripheral' considerations (such as 'metagaming' in role-play games) and as additional content (the 'achievement metagame'). We understand the emic usage of metagame as being a tool that players use to conceptualise distinctions between game and non-game activities, as well as *more-game* and *less-game* activities, which is worthy of serious analysis. We illustrate that there is a broad, conceptually muddled

use of the term that encompasses a wide variety of different play types and styles for which a single term is not useful. On the basis of this review, we argue for two new terms, orthogame and paragame, which provide a new way to define and understand the boundaries that players create when playing, negotiating and constructing game spaces.

This expansion of game studies vocabulary provides a clearer lens for classifying play activities in the context of their relationship to a socially negotiated, imagined notion of 'the game' or 'the core game'. Furthermore, these definitions hint at a new perspective for understanding the boundaries between game and non-game, challenging (or contributing to) some of the positions involved in the contemporary 'magic circle' debate in game studies [see 2, 5, 29, 30]. We illustrate the potential of these new terms by applying them to several conceptually difficult play activities in the Icelandic MMO *EVE Online* that challenge the idea of games as separable, bounded play-grounds. We understand conceptually difficult play activities as being those that are important to a player's game experience but not strictly or easily understandable as part of 'the game'. The purpose of this paper as a whole is to further the conceptual understanding of game play activities that are traditionally understood as being peripheral to the game, both by players and researchers, in order to recognise them as central to the game experience. As several other researchers have argued (for a systematic review of current empirical research see [34]), viewing these 'extra-game' activities as central to game play is essential for understanding modern digital games.

2. METAGAME & METAGAMING: THE EMIC USAGE

This review of the current emic usages of metagame is presented as a thorough rather than definitive overview of the usage of the term. Its purpose is to introduce the most common uses so that we may identify and understand what players are currently using the word 'metagame' to describe. We performed this review by first examining the uses that we were aware of through earlier research and our experience as gamers. We then examined the content on crowd sourced definition sites such as Urban Dictionary and the discussion pages on Wikipedia as an appropriate way to understand the emic usage of the term. We then turned to a more systematic process, searching for the term metagame (and variations thereof; metagaming, meta-game etc) on several academic data base searches, Google, specific games websites and games discussion forums. We have also drawn upon interviews from several other research projects into *EVE Online*, *World of Warcraft*, fabrications in game play and *Warhammer 40,000* from

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which we justify the importance of the term orthogame. Our analysis found three overlapping categories for the metagame term, which we will now discuss in turn; the higher strategy metagame, metagaming in role-play games and the achievement metagame.

2.1 METAGAME AS A HIGHER STRATEGY

Urban Dictionary is an online dictionary of slang words where users can submit definitions that are then given a thumbs 'up' or 'down' by members of the site's community. Definitions with a high number of thumbs up can be understood as largely representative of an emic understanding of the term, as the site receives over 15 million unique impressions each month [14]. The most popular definition for metagame defines it as "*the highest level of strategy in many complex games, metagame refers to any aspect of strategy that involves thinking about what your opponent is thinking you are thinking*" [9]. This definition also suggests that the metagame exists when "*no single strategy is dominant*". This definition uses two examples, the card game *Texas Hold'em Poker* and the real time strategy game *Starcraft*. The usage in *Starcraft* is consistent with participant usage we have encountered in previous studies. The usage of the term in this sense is the most popular, and has been used since at least the late 1970's to describe adaptive strategies previously deployed by Poker players to reduce risk [13].

The *Texas Hold'em Poker* metagame is the easiest to understand for those unfamiliar with digital games. Poker strategy website, ThePokerBank, describes metagaming in Poker as when a player "*makes a play or decision that has been influenced by external knowledge rather than based on fundamental strategy alone*" [33]. The 'fundamental strategy' in Poker considers the statistical probabilities associated with the cards on the table, the cards in the player's hands and the risk associated with betting in the context of these statistics. In professional Poker, the 'external knowledge' involved in the metagame is "*the sum of everything that you know about the other players, and everything they know about you*" [12]. Professional Poker player Matt Matros describes how "*meta considerations*" change his play decisions based on factors external to the hands and current bets [18]. For Matros, the poker metagame is how he considers his image to other players, the consideration of other player's habits and previous tactics and the metagame considerations that the other players make during the game. These aspects of competitive Texas Hold'em are also known as 'table image' and 'table presence' and carry between tournaments. In this usage, the metagame is the awareness of the wider context of play, with whom you are playing, over what stakes and how other players act.

The '*Starcraft* metagame' is the most popular notion of metagaming in the modern digital game context. This higher strategy metagame is a complex interplay between the game community and the game itself. *Starcraft* is a futuristic military real time strategy game developed by Blizzard Entertainment in 1998, and the first in the series is one of the best-selling games of all time. *Starcraft* is also the most successful e-Sport game. This popularity has created professional *Starcraft* players who compete for prizes worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The game allows players to battle against each other as one of three races (Terran, Zerg and Protoss), each with their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Players start each game with limited resources, building a base and units with which they attack the enemy using

complex strategies made possible due to the large number of unit types. There are many different maps which add extra elements to this complexity. Because of the wide variety of strategies, *Starcraft* players (both professional and amateur) deploy a 'metagame' to determine which strategy to play. Popular *Starcraft* wiki, Liquipedia, describes the *Starcraft* metagame as having three major branches;

1. Preparation done before a match to exploit current trends in *Starcraft*.
2. Preparation done specifically to exploit an opponent's or map's style of play.
3. Strategic decisions designed specifically to exploit a player's reaction or weakened mental state in the future. These are also known as 'mind games' or 'psychological warfare'.

In our analysis of the *Starcraft* metagame, it is necessary to understand the professional and social *Starcraft* differently to anonymous online multiplayer matches as they play the game in different contexts and with different goals, which change the role and shape of the metagame. Both the professional metagame and social LAN *Starcraft* games encompass all three branches, while single instance, anonymous, amateur metagaming is generally limited to the first two branches.

The professional *Starcraft* metagame is similar to the Poker metagame; it is the consideration of other players' habits and previous play styles in the strategy decision making process. In this way it also links the individual instances of game play to one another. Blizzard explicitly cater and design for the professional metagame, so whilst many definitions describe the metagame as being "*outside the actual game*" [11] it is problematic to consider it as something that is not an inherent part of the game or what it takes to play the game. It is a similar situation for the amateur metagame. It is part of the online multiplayer in *Starcraft* for amateur players to be aware of current metagame tactics so that they can adjust their play strategy accordingly. These popular tactics experience waves of popularity, for example in 2005 it was commonplace for Terran players to quickly build two barracks as a defensive structure, but due to changing Zerg and Protoss tactics, that opening play is now uncommon. Other metagames exploit unfavourable balance in the game mechanics which the developer adjusts in frequent patches. While the professional players have a role in creating and supporting different popular tactics, understanding the *Starcraft* metagame is a social activity for many amateur players who discuss play styles and metagaming on forums and blogs. The sociality of this activity is an integral part of what is called the *Starcraft* metagame.

Similar usage of metagame as a type of higher strategy also appears in *Magic: the Gathering* (M:TG). *Magic: The Gathering* is a strategy card game that involves constructing decks up to 120 cards to use in battle against another player with their own deck. In M:TG, the metagame is "*what everyone else is playing*" [8], the player's consideration of the context of their game (i.e., what cards other players might be using in their deck). The games creator, Wizards of the Coast, uses the term metagame to refer to this part of M:TG. This usage is very similar to how it is used in Poker and *Starcraft*. Richard Garfield, the creator of M:TG, defines a metagame differently, as "*how a game interfaces with life*" [27] while at the same time describing behaviours similar to those presented above. Within this definition, Garfield claims that (in addition to predicting the play of other players) the time a

player spends planning his/her deck is also part of the metagame, which is a process of exploring the thousands of combinations a players' deck can have. Garfield's concept of the metagame encompasses the entire context of play.

Wikipedia provides a collaboratively produced definition which can be used as an indicative source of the emic usages of the metagame term. This has been achieved through reviewing previous iterations of the page in addition to the discussions page. Wikipedia defines a metagame with a wider scope; as a "strategy, action or method used in a game that transcends a prescribed rule set, uses external factors to affect the game, or goes beyond the supposed limits of environment set by the game". This definition allows for the use of the term to describe Starcraft and Poker higher strategies (as strategy that goes beyond the supposed limit of environment set by the game) but also the metagame phenomenon in tournament gaming where it is used to refer to an adaptation to a specific gaming environment, with M:TG and tabletop war game *Warhammer 40,000* provided as examples. It is worth noting that on Wikipedia, metagame and metagaming are a disambiguation. Whilst the metagame definition also entertains the use of the term metagaming in role-playing games, a separate page exists for metagaming in role-playing games.

2.2 METAGAMING AS BREAKING THE FOURTH-WALL

The term has a very different usage in role-playing, but a common element of describing something peripheral to a notion of 'the game'. In role-playing games, metagaming is when a player breaks the fourth wall of the game immersion, an "*action made by a player's character which makes use of knowledge that the character is not meant to be aware of*" [19]. Gary Alan Fine [10] provides many examples from table-top role playing games which fall under this conception of metagame. For example, Fine [10, p.188-194] discusses how players use their contextual knowledge to create machineguns and flying-machines in a fantasy world that is meant to reflect the technological capabilities of the European medieval era.

Dungeons and Dragons is the most popular pen and paper role-playing game, going through several editions since the 1970's and can be used to provide many key examples of the role-playing usage of metagaming. Players create characters with various skills and abilities and take turns making actions for which the results are determined by the roll of dice and the decisions of a 'Dungeon Master' (DM), a player tasked with inventing and describing the game and game play to the players. In role-playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, players are often expected to remain in character, attempting to explore and understand the world around them by directing their character to perform actions which the DM will explain the results. Many players believe the proper way to play is to only make decisions as their character would; only taking into account their character's knowledge of the situations. For example, a player controlling an oafish Orc character can be in a dilemma: their brutish character is likely to charge into battle without hesitation or thought; but perhaps the player has noticed a sly look on the DM's face which indicates to them (based on their past dealings with this particular DM) that there is probably a hidden trap present. Does the player metagame by using "*out-of-character knowledge in an in-character situation?*" [24], based upon their previous encounters with this DM and their past knowledge of the devilish grins the DM is known to make when something particularly terrible is about to happen? Doing so is

generally considered to be against the rules or spirit of the game, and an example of a failure to role-play 'properly' [20].

This usage of the term provides an interesting contrast with the metagame of higher strategy discussed above. On the one hand, there is certainly the metagame associated with what a player and what a player's character does or does not know in this example. On the other hand, there is an element of higher strategy in taking into account the past playing sessions with a particular DM. However, players can't be understood as competing against the DM in the same manner as in the competitive games explored in the previous section. Fine analysed this relationship between the DM as a 'facilitator' of a fantasy world and as someone who is actively working against the players or is believed to be working against the players some of the time. So while there is some clear examples of metagaming (such as building machine guns in a fantasy world), the negotiation of the metagame concept by players is more complicated than rules and design of the game; it has to be understood in the context of how and why players play. This, along with the considerable overlap with the higher strategy metagame, highlights the need for the clearer understanding this paper attempts to achieve.

2.3 METAGAME AS SOMETHING EXTRA

The third distinct usage of the term that emerges in the emic usage of metagame is described on Urban Dictionary as a "*subcomponent of modern games which increase gameplay without actually adding gameplay*" [22]. This concept of metagaming is starkly different from the previous two notions as it is being used by players to distinguish between activities that are negotiated as legitimately considered to be part of the core game playing experience. While it is being used to describe play activities that are within a game, they are still external or beyond a more refined notion of 'the game' in an idealised sense. Popular usage of the term metagame in this way can be traced back to announcements and reporting about a feature in *Halo 3*, the third game in the hugely popular Halo trilogy developed by Bungie Studios in the United States. This feature, called the 'campaign metagame' by the developers [26] adds a social and competitive twist on the play of the campaign by adding a formal system that scores and ranks a players' performance in campaign missions. Through this addition of content the Halo metagame adds challenges beyond completing the game on its hardest difficulty, therefore increasing the potential enjoyment from the game. The developers describe campaign scoring as an "*additional way to experience Halo 3*" but warn that it "*detracts from the story and mood we (Bungie) are trying to set over the course of the game*", as players are concentrating on getting points instead of the story progression or environment design [28]. This way of defining metagame describes the consideration of something peripheral, but does not require a break in the 'fourth wall'.

Similar to campaign scoring, achievements and achievement hunting in games is also referred to as a metagame. In 2005 Microsoft made achievements a requirement for all new games on their second generation gaming console, the Xbox 360. Since then, in game achievements that link to a player profile are supported by the Sony Playstation and on Steam, a digital distribution client for PC titles. Achievements have "*changed the way many people play games*" [15] by rewarding players with 'trophies' for completing actions within a game that are tied to an account that players use across multiple games. These accounts connect individual games to being part of a player's 'gamer identity', as your 'score' is presented openly as a symbol of your

skill or persistency as a gamer. Achievements are rewarded for a wide variety of player accomplishments beyond simply finishing levels or finishing the game storyline on a specific difficulty. As well as providing replay ability to games, according to designer Mike Ellis these metagames also make games within games, or challenges within challenges. Ellis identifies the training mission in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), which uses a time trial to help players choose their game difficulty. In this way, the achievement metagame is also a tool for developers to guide and encourage players through the intended game play. Others challenge players to do something within the game faster, or in a different way. Some are just for fun, for example "fall 30,000 feet" in Valve's *Portal* (2007). These achievements provide a new way to play the game, and allow you to detach from the original or traditional objective and play the game with different goals. There are a multitude of websites dedicated towards providing guides to getting 100% of the achievements in a game.

Another example of a metagame as a subcomponent of a larger title is the economy metagame in *Assassins Creed: Brotherhood* (2010), known as 'rebuilding Rome'. This metagame involves the player "repairing and opening various commercial enterprises" [25] in the games setting of ancient Rome. This metagame is completed alongside the game's main storyline, and can be completely ignored by a player if they wish without detaching from their enjoyment of the core game. Rather than offering an entirely new way to play the game (as players are still driven to complete the storyline of the game), the *Assassins Creed* metagame is essentially a mini-game within the game, a sideline quest with no impact on the larger narrative pushing the game play. Interestingly, this part of the game also has achievements available; a metagame to the metagame.

The play acts that these definitions of metagame attempt to define are important parts of the game for the players who participate in them. For this reason alone, it is worth attempting to clarify the term. As these uses typically refer to peripheral play acts they are of particular interest to game studies researchers, who have had difficulty conceptualizing these activities. The ability to readily define and conceptualize these play acts and player boundaries has the potential to be a useful tool in understanding and conceptualizing game play. We will now introduce and develop a new set of terms that help reconcile the term metagame. These two new terms are built on the family of Greek prefixes from which meta- originates. They are *paragame* and *orthogame*.

3. A NEW VOCABULARY: META PARA ORTHO

The first of these new terms is orthogame, derived from the Greek word orthós, for which the short definition is "straight, correct". Thus the term orthogame can be utilized to refer to what players collectively consider to be the 'right and correct game'. A common theme in the emic usages of metagame was the emphasis on there being a separable idea of 'game' outside of which metagame activities occurred. While it is important to conceptualize the peripheral game activities discussed earlier as an integral part of the game, our review of the term metagame indicates that there is still a subsection within the game, which is constantly being negotiated, that players might identify as being the core or the very basic game within the entire game. In both the higher strategy notion of metagame and the role-play usage, players use metagame to refer to play acts beyond, but referential to this orthogame, while still accepting those play acts as part of

the game as a whole. With the demarcation of achievements and additional content as a metagame, players imply a 'core' space within the game with which peripheral play acts interact. We can therefore use orthogame as a tool to describe and understand these spaces.

Another positive feature of the term orthogame is that we understand it in relation to the non-orthogame and the importance we place on these non-orthogame practices. In effect, compounding its use for understanding conceptually difficult peripheral play activities. Take, for example, two notions of the *Starcraft* orthogame. In one way, the *Starcraft* orthogame can be understood as the single player campaign of *Starcraft*, as it is the 'core' idea of what *Starcraft* the game is. However, it would also be appropriate to describe the *Starcraft* orthogame as including anonymous online play where the player is not aware of popular trends. In defining the *Starcraft* orthogame in such a manner, we acknowledge the centrality of multiplayer modes to *Starcraft*, but also recognize what it is to 'play *Starcraft*', an idea negotiated by the players and designers. The orthogame concept has the potential to be a useful term for players, developers and game studies, especially regarding online games and MMOs, to define and differentiate between negotiated boundaries between different play acts *within* a game.

With this understanding of an orthogame, we can develop a conceptually clearer understanding of metagame. Meta- refers to things that are "beyond; of a higher kind; an abstraction or self-referential". We argue that the term metagaming refers to play acts that involve or consider resources that are 'beyond' the scope or control of what players consider to be the orthogame. The resources players utilize in these metagames are created and influenced by the context of play. Players often participate in metagames because it makes them more successful at the implicit goals or symbols of advancement of the orthogame. Metagaming can be viewed positively and incorporated into acceptable play practices (such as the *Starcraft* metagame) or rejected as the 'wrong' way to play (as it sometimes is in *Dungeons and Dragons*). The most popular emic usage of metagame was regarding *Starcraft*, therefore it is suitable that our new definition includes the *Starcraft* metagame. These play activities are beyond the scope of the orthogame of *Starcraft* as they are the consideration of resources beyond the orthogame of *Starcraft*. Players participate in the *Starcraft* metagame because it makes them more successful at the implicit goals of the *Starcraft* orthogame; winning the 'match'. Metagaming as breaking the 'fourth wall', such as in role-play games, can also continue to be understood as a metagame, as it is the influence of a player's context (as a player not a character) on the game.

Our third and final definition is derived from the Greek word pará. It can be easily understood via the commonly used term parallel. It describes things that are "beside, adjacent, and analogous but distinct from". Thus the term paragame refers to that which is performed peripheral to, but alongside the orthogame. We argue that the 'paragame' is distinct from the metagame by being contingent on a player's desires and motivations rather than the context of play. We do concede, however (as Jesper Juul has argued [24]), that a player's desires and motivations are also conditional on the wider context of play. The purpose of this distinction is to include the 'why' question into investigating and understanding play acts so that we might better acknowledge the importance of these paragames. We classify the emic metagame concept regarding additional content, such as campaign scoring in *Halo 3* and achievement hunting in

Xbox titles, as a paragame. This is because these activities create structured games with motivations separate from the orthogame experience, but still interact with the orthogame in a fundamental way.

Paragame and metagame offer a clear conceptual understanding of play acts in consideration of their contextual settings and player motivations. Along with orthogame, this expanded vocabulary has the potential to be highly useful for the study of digital games. The following section will illustrate this by discussing several conceptually difficult play activities in *EVE Online*, many of which are common across the MMO genre.

4. USING METAGAMES, PARAGAMES AND ORTHOGAMES TO UNDERSTAND EVE ONLINE

We understand conceptually difficult play activities as being those that are important to a player's game experience but not strictly or easily understandable as part of 'the game'. These activities are 'difficult' as many of them arise out of the unique nature of modern digital games, especially online multiplayer games. Many games studies researchers have focused on understanding these activities. For example play activities like, the market for 'virtual' currency in real money [2], cheating and grief play [4, 36] and online play communities [23].

The first of these 'conceptually difficult' play activities we will classify using our new vocabulary is the participation in formalized, persistent game communities, common in the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Play Game genre (for example Guilds in *World of Warcraft*). In *EVE*, these social groups are called Corporations. One of our previous research projects examined the role of these online communities in the experience of *EVE Online* [1] where we performed quantitative research into a specific Corporation, Dreddit, which has over 2,000 members who identify with the website, www.reddit.com. This research illustrated that Dreddit is central to the experience of *EVE Online* for its members. This conclusion is supported by many other research projects into online communities in MMOs [see 6, 7, 35]. Several interviews were conducted as part of this research project, and in one interview a player defined their membership in the group as 'metagaming', referencing its importance as a central yet peripheral aspect of *EVE*; (in response to 'Please describe why you continue to play *EVE Online*?', they responded;) *"the metagaming, I barely actually play EVE anymore, but I love the people I communicate with and I thoroughly enjoy the politics involved."*

As T. L. Taylor has previously discussed [31, 32], 'traditional' conceptualizations of game spaces often view participation in these communities as a type of 'extra-game' activity which fails to fully appreciate their importance to game play. One of the reasons for this secondary approach to Corporation-like groups is that much of this participation is done external to the game client; on forums, text chat, voice chat and even within other games. As Vili Lehdonvirta noted, participation in *EVE* Corporations *"can be a very complex and involved activity, giving rise to sub-activities, organizations and even new technologies"* [17]. If we examine the nature of this activity, it becomes clear that it can be understood as a paragame.

Membership of Corporation in *EVE* is not a requirement to the core experience of the game; many players enjoy the virtual world and rich fictional background of *EVE* without participating in the

multiplayer game play that Corporations provide. When a player participates in the game as a member of a Corporation, for example being involved in Corporation related PvP, their experience of the orthogame is changed by providing new resources for players to construct meaning, rules, desires and goals in their experience and expectation of what the orthogame is. These resources are not made available to the user through the 'time and space' context of play as such, but through player's participation in the community, opening up the possibilities of new driving forces for play. The paragame permits players to renegotiate concepts of success and advancement for the player from being based in personal goals or the fictional narrative of the game to being rooted in Corporation goals and community achievements.

Through our examination of *EVE Online* Corporations and players we observed several unique play activities that were conducted through the 'Corporation paragame' that are difficult to conceptualize without our new terms. The first of these revolves around the activity of scamming in *EVE Online*. Scamming in *EVE*, which would be considered cheating in a game like *World of Warcraft*, is a form of grief play, where players deliberately irritate, harass or ruin the play experience of others [36]. According to Check Yang Foo, for play to be considered griefing it must; be an intentional act, cause other players to enjoy the game less, and the griever must enjoy the act [see also 4, p. 104]. *EVE* allows scamming, which has the effect of creating a *"culture of mistrust"* [3] in social interactions between players.

A scam is when a player, abiding by the game mechanics, lies, cheats or steals from another player. While this is a common phenomenon in online games, *EVE Online* offers no recourse or protection for victims, and no punishment for the offenders. In this manner the developer can be seen as enabling, even encouraging, scamming by legitimising it as part of the *EVE Online* experience. Players are not allowed to use 'exploits', for example a bug in the game, but if they can manipulate another player into giving them misguided trust there are no possible repercussions. There are many examples of player scams which can encompass single play sessions or require months or years of planning. The official *EVE* wiki states; *"it will always be your responsibility to prevent yourself from being taken advantage of, and the tools you employ to that end are a level head, practicality and a healthy distrust of strangers."*

As a type of grief play, scamming in *EVE Online* can be described as a paragame, as the meaning and purpose of these play activities is constructed through player motivations found beyond what can be experienced through the orthogame or is relevant to the context of play. The manner in which the *EVE Online* developers legitimise this practice (in contrast to other games) makes it somewhat more difficult to define as something peripheral to the core experience of *EVE*, but the demarcation of an orthogame space allows for play like scamming to be separated from the 'core' game experience without reducing its importance.

A deeper look at griefing outside of *EVE* does make defining it as a paragame somewhat problematic. The nature of griefing is contingent and gains meaning from its context in the game. It is frequently play constructed in reaction and in negotiation with the 'hard coded' programmed rules and the 'soft coded' social norms of the game [21]. Paragames are games performed alongside the orthogame, the convergence of player desires and motivations with the architecture of the game. Metagames, however, are the utilization of context based resources in the pursuit of the goals

and symbols of advancement implicit in the game architecture. We argue that Grief play is a paragame because it redefines the purpose of play through the desires of the 'griever', even though those desires are born out of an astute awareness and rejection of the context of play and the implicit symbols of success of the orthogame.

To contextualise this distinction in other academic work, we can classify the 'WoW Glider' mod, discussed by Mia Consalvo's research into cheating [5], as a metagame. 'Wow Glider' was an add-on for *World of Warcraft* that levels up a player's character without them having to play. According to Consalvo, the players who use this mod do so for different reasons; to 'fast-forward' in the game, to sell for (real) currency or to earn in-game money for their 'main' character [5]. From a structuralist magic circle perspective, these acts are understood simply as a "violation of the rules" [5, p. 412] of the *World of Warcraft* magic circle. To define and conceptualize them as such fails to understand or convey their true nature as part of "the game as a contextual, meaning-making process" [5, p. 413]. When the purpose of these activities are linked to the achievement of in-game goals or symbols of advancement (skill level or wealth), the use of the WoW Glider mod can be defined and conceptualized as a metagame (especially as the utilization of a mod to play the game implies an awareness of the context of *World of Warcraft* play as a programmed game). However, the act of running WoW Glider for the sole purpose of gaining in-game wealth to sell for real currency should not be considered a metagame as this is not an act of play, as it does not interact with the orthogame experience; we therefore argue it should be conceptualized as a non-game activity.

The third 'conceptually difficult' activity we identified in *EVE Online* is the higher strategy involved in planning and organising large scale fleet battles. Unique to *EVE* (and a draw card for many players) is player versus player (PvP) fights which can involve close to a thousand players simultaneously. One of the tactics we noted Corporations using was scheduling battles at times that would be inconvenient for their opponents, due to either 'down time' (which happens for roughly 30 minutes every 24 hours) or time zones (e.g., attacking a European alliance at 4am GMT). 'Fleet Commanders' also took into account the lag from such large battles in their tactics (e.g., purposely overloading systems to cause lag).

This activity is similar to the role-play emic metagame usage, as considering things peripheral to the orthogame. It becomes difficult to conceptualise these activities as part of the game when viewing *EVE Online* as a separable virtual world, as these activities illustrate a constant awareness of the context of play. We defined the consideration of external resources as metagaming when it involves the awareness of the context of play. As in the example of the 'Wow Glider' mod, awareness of the game as a structured, programmed environment is awareness of the context of play, so actions such as timetabling battles to be interrupted by downtime or purposefully overloading star systems are metagaming. Similarly, timetabling battles at inconvenient times for their opponents is a higher strategy metagame that utilizes awareness of the characters in the game as having human-players who are limited by geography.

5. CONCLUSION

We identified these *EVE Online* game activities as 'conceptually difficult' because they are difficult to define and reconcile with notions of the game as a separable, bounded space. In performing these classifications, we have illustrated the usefulness of

conceptualization game play around a refined notion of the core experience, based upon emic usage of the term metagame and our experiences analyzing player interviews.

For what purpose? We can reasonably argue that clearer definitions are always useful. But in addition to this, the conceptual 'baggage' of the definitions we have given these terms also suggests a new way of approaching games. Rather than approaching game related phenomenon with a dichotomous classification of 'game' or 'non-game', orthogame, paragame and metagame suggest a 'more-game' and 'less-game' approach. This conceptualization seeks to clarify various game related activities in much the same way that the term paratext has been adopted from media studies to conceptualize the various resources such as cheat codes, walk-throughs and game reviews that shape and influence game experiences and play performances [4]. Our approach is supported by the emic usage of the term metagame, which illustrated how players separate play activities as being more-game and less-game, a conceptual leap in understanding game spaces. The utilization of orthogame to refer to this negotiated 'core' of a game has the potential to be highly useful for game studies researchers when trying to understand the peripheral game activities that are unique to modern digital games. By accepting them as part of the game, we acknowledge their importance to the game experience, but by identifying a 'core' experience of the game we also recognise the importance of the digital, virtual space that games occur within.

Metagame and paragame not only have the potential to be useful for game studies researchers, but also for game designers. The ability to define a phenomenon leads to a more in-depth understanding of the nuanced differences between peripheral play activities and their importance to the game experience. In consequence, both researchers and designers will be better situated to study, analyse and replicate metagames and paragames. Further applications of the terms are necessary to fully flesh out the definitions, but we believe that in their current format they already have practical applications.

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