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"Democracy" in a Virtual World: EVE Online's Council of Stellar Management and the Power of Influence

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“DEMOCRACY” IN A VIRTUAL WORLD:

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Interest in virtual worlds has grown within academia and popular culture. Virtual worlds are persistent, technologically-mediated, social spaces. Academic literature focuses on issues such as identity, sociality, economics, and governance. However studies of governance focus on internal or external modes of control; less attention has been paid to institutions of governance that operate within both the virtual and real worlds.

In EVE Online, the Council of Stellar Management (CSM) represents a joint venture between developers and users to shape the direction of EVE's virtual society. As a group of elected representatives, the CSM represents societal interests to the game's developer, Crowd Control Productions (CCP). The CSM structures the relationship between CCP and the player base, and shapes how these institutions manage the development process. At the same time, cultural and political conventions of EVE's players at times work against these structures as CCP and the CSM seek to attend to their own interests.

In this thesis, I examine the intersection of culture, power, and governance, and illustrate the consequences these negotiations of power have for the inhabitants of EVE Online. The historical circumstances that led to the CSM's creation shape its reception among the community. As a model of governance, the CSM was designed as a deliberative democracy to generate community consensus. This feedback is channeled to developers through elected representatives. However, these channels of information hindered discussions necessary for true democracy. I examine how power is generated, leveraged, and mediated by the two cultures in which the CSM is embedded: EVE and Icelandic cultures. I also illustrate the authority and legitimacy of the CSM from the standpoint of its constituents. The CSM is understood within the same cultural frameworks as in-game power structures.

Primary research was carried out during a one-year period in 2012. During this time, I joined SKULL SQUADRON, a large corporation with a neutral diplomatic mission. Snowball sampling was used to find informants. Three main methods were used to interview participants: face-to-face interviews, text-based interviews through EVE's communication channels, and voice interviews conducted over Skype, an internet-based communications program.

For Vile Rat

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possibility of fieldwork in EVE. His guidance has been invaluable to my education and fostering my growth as a scholar. Second, to my friend Lauren Niederkorn, whose good humor and sound advice has guided me through much of my adult life, as well as my graduate career. Third, to my significant other Rick Pumilia, whose kindness has buttressed this work in more ways than I am able to name. For his encouragement during the writing process, challenging the assumptions of my work, and unwavering faith in my abilities, he has my deepest gratitude.

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Perception is reality, and if a substantial part of our community feels like we are biased, whether it is true or not, it is true to them. EVE Online is not a computer game. It is an emerging nation, and we have to address it like a nation being accused of corruption… A government can't just keep saying, "We are not corrupt." No one will believe them. Instead you have to create transparency and robust institutions and oversight in order to maintain the confidence of the population.

CEO Hilmar Veigar Pétursson

Preface: Regarding Anonymity in Virtual Worlds

Conducting research in virtual communities presents unique challenges to the researcher. In traditional ethnographic field sites, anonymity is guaranteed to the subject either by the conferring of a pseudonym or by "burying individual identities in description of abstract roles."[1] Within virtual worlds, anonymity can sometimes guaranteed by the format; avatars are not necessarily linked to personal real world information, and character names can easily be created for research purposes on any number of game servers.[2]

In that regard, ensuring anonymity in the current investigation proves somewhat of a challenge. Unlike many virtual worlds, EVE Online exists on one single shard server. This means that all characters exist within the same persistent virtual space. And as some of the players, institutions, and corporations I encountered are well-known, a basic description or pseudonym would not confer the same degree of anonymity had I chosen a different site for fieldwork.

To compound the problem, the Council of Stellar Management—the governing body whose activities make up the bulk of my investigation—is the only institution of its kind within EVE. Players are elected by popular vote to serve on the CSM, and thus are known to many of EVE's player base. As part of their duties, representatives meet with EVE's game developers at Crowd Control Productions' corporate headquarters in Reykjavik, Iceland.[3] However since CCP could not guarantee the CSM's personal information would remain private during travel, representatives are required to release

[1] (Gusterson 1996:xvii)
[2] (Boellstorff et al. 2012)
[3] Initially summits with CCP were held once per six month term. This was raised to two summits when the term limits were extended from six months to one year.

their real life information to the community as part of the election process. This is considered part of their role as elected representatives. Similarly, academic research convention often makes exceptions for data gathered when politicians are carrying out the duties of their public office.

The challenge, then, is to find a way to confer some degree of anonymity to small number of subjects that are disproportionately well-known within a large virtual world, where public and private information are already intertwined. To address this difficulty, most of the subjects interviewed are referred to as "source," or "informant," or more generally "a CSM." This should not be seen as distinguishing between current or past members of the council. I do not make any attempt to make any detailed descriptions of their exploits or corporate history within EVE. There have been cases where real life player information has been dragged through international media when EVE news happens, and this vagueness is a deliberate attempt not to replicate those incidents.

Like other EVE players, some CSMs give interviews with gaming media, maintain active blogs about their political activity, etc. In these cases, the name attached to the source is used. This may be the in-game or real life name of the individual. I have made no attempt to link real life and virtual identities, even if both are known to the EVE community.

Traditional pseudonyms have been kept to a minimum, either of in-game corporations or of players themselves. When anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the virtual name has been preferred over the real life name. Where noted, real life names have been used with permission. To those players who I promised the ability to create their own pseudonyms—PAX, Buffy Summers, Furious George, and Scrotal Recall—I appreciate

your creativity, and I hope you will forgive the omission to address these methodological concerns.

Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

"I have a final, somewhat unrelated question," I asked somewhat hesitantly. "This actually comes by way of a friend…He wanted to know what the strength of the EVE ISK was compared to the Icelandic króna?"

It was early summer, and my fieldwork in EVE Online had just begun. I had been playing for six weeks, which was barely enough time to get my bearings. In lieu of a learning curve, EVE is notorious for its "learning cliff" and I was feeling a bit out of my depth.[4] EVE Online is a massively multiplayer online game, or MMO, in which thousands of players share the same persistent virtual world.[5] These virtual worlds become the forum for large groups of players to tackle large in-game challenges or simply act as a social space. This particular virtual world is set in New Eden, a large universe in deep space, inhabited by several races of immortal humans.

My first interview was a group interview with several game developers employed by the company Crowd Control Productions, or CCP, which developers and publishes EVE Online.[6] CCP is located in Iceland, which is five hour time difference from where I live in the United States. As far as interviews go, talking with game developers before I had a chance to grow accustomed to the world felt similar to EVE's harsh learning curve itself; however with so much to learn in game, I will be considered a new player for at

[4] (Space Junkie 2011)
[5] I have attempted to define game-related terms within the main text itself. However, a glossary is included as a reference for the sake of convenience.
[6] The commonly used acronym CCP is evocative of CCCP or Сою́з Сове́тских Социалисти́ческих Респу́блик. CCCP is translated into English as USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Such parallels are interesting given the more authoritarian structures of governance that have developed in EVE, which allows one to wonder how much "crowd control" that CCP can claim over its users.

least the next year, if not longer. In fieldwork, as in EVE itself, you simply jump in and hope for the best.

To prepare for the interview, I sat researching my prepared questions at my friend Alexei's apartment as we watched the European Championship football matches on television.[7] The intermittent conversation meandered through international affairs, mirroring the international sporting event. Then I mentioned my upcoming interview with Icelandic developers.

"You should ask them about the ISK," Alexei said during a commercial break.

"What do you mean?" I asked. EVE's virtual currency is called the ISK or interstellar kredit.

"The Icelandic króna. I heard a news story last month that they're thinking about adopting the euro as their national currency," he explained. Over the past few years Iceland has witnessed the collapse of its economy, toppling their government in the process. This has led some to speculate on whether Iceland with its 321,857 citizens is large enough to support its own currency.[8]

"So… Their national currency is the Icelandic króna, or ISK, and EVE's virtual currency is the interstellar kredit, or ISK?" I asked, the football match in the background momentarily forgotten.

"I wonder how one ISK compares to the other."

For a brief split second after I asked the developers my question, there was silence. Then the Skype channel filled with hearty laughter. Skype is an internet

[7] In keeping with the international nature of this thesis, preference is shown for international spellings and conventions when possible. In this case, I refer to European-style football or American soccer.
[8] (Statistics Iceland 2013). See (Planet Money 2012) for the referenced discussion on Iceland's possible adoption of the Euro. At the time of this writing, Iceland still uses the króna as its national currency.

application that allows users to communicate over voice, video, or text-based chat. Skype allowed me to connect with many international informants, such as developers in Iceland. "The basic answer to that is actually a rather scary one," described one developer. "Due to the currency controls that are in Iceland today, one cannot really talk about the value of Icelandic krónur because it is set by the Seðlabanki." Seðlabanki Íslands is Iceland's central bank, which stepped in to fix the value of the króna during Iceland's economic crisis. "It is a made-up value. It is not a real value." We talked for a few minutes about the fluctuations of the Icelandic króna compared to the stability of the interstellar kredit. The virtual ISK can be given a value relative to the PLEX, or Pilot License Extension, a virtual item that can be used to add 30 days of game time to a player's account. A PLEX can be purchased with real world money and traded on EVE's auction house; the ability to move between virtual currencies and real currencies allows comparison to be made about the relative strength of the different ISKs.

"So you can at least state that the interstellar kredit, the ISK in Eve, is more stable than the Icelandic króna, the other ISK," the developer described.

"That is a scary answer," I said. We laughed and the other developer agreed.

"If it continues like this, there will be a point in the future where the ISK in-game will be more valuable than the Icelandic króna, but the problem there is that [Seðlabanki Íslands is] putting these restrictions on exactly to avoid further devaluation of the currency."

I paused for a moment to consider the relationship between the two worlds. While there is no separation between the virtual and real worlds, virtual worlds are not often considered in terms of the real world cultures responsible for their creation. Being

so new to EVE myself, I was unsure where other parallels between Icelandic culture and EVE's culture might exist. "In the discovering that the in-game ISK is similarly named to the Iceland's currency, are there other crossovers between the Icelandic culture and Eve's culture that someone who is American and less familiar with your culture might not pick up on?"

"You are asking if there are similarities between the worlds, where there is darkness, danger, a lack of humbleness? Where there is—"

"An eye for an eye!" added the other developer.

"Yes, an eye for an eye method of judgment. Where there is a sense of democracy, a thriving economy that yet is isolated by itself? I hardly see any correlation at all."

The developers laughed. "But on answering this question realistically, there is a lot of commonality between the Eve universe as it is and the history of Iceland."

Located about 45 km east of Reykjavík lies Þingvellir or "Parliament Plains." Part of the North Atlantic Rift system, Þingvellir is a combination of rugged canyons, waterfalls, geysers, and pasture land. [9] Remnants of earlier structures are scattered among the landscape, giving it an almost nostalgic feel for earlier, simpler times. For Icelanders, Þingvellir is an important source of cultural and historical pride; it is the birthplace of the Alþing, the world's oldest parliament. The vestige of an earlier Germanic tradition, alþings were used by the early Norse settlers to Iceland to resolve local disputes.[10] Free men with perhaps some "minimal social status" would gather to

[9] (Thingvellier National Park n.d.a)
[10] (Karlsson 2000; Tomasson 1980)

debate public affairs.[11] These matters were then referred to goðar, local chieftains that undertook the administration of public affairs.[12]

While the goðar may have played a religious role as well, the authority that rested in this office was based on a goðar's "personal authority" and his ability to provide his subjects a "just and effective" rule.[13] As Iceland's small founding population grew, so did the need for a common set of laws to govern them. Without an agreed upon framework, there were no incentives for goðar from neighboring districts to work together to settle disputes. Sent to Norway to study their law and culture, a man named Úlfljót proposed a national Alþing to help institute a framework of governance for Iceland.[14] It was this Alþing that brought together disparate factions within the country to found the Commonwealth of Iceland in 930.[15]

Driven by a need for autonomy, personal freedom, and equality, Iceland's Commonwealth was characterized by the lack of a centralized executive power.[16] And while, as Karlsson argues, the founding of the Alþing was not founded "by or for a nation"—there is not necessarily evidence to ascribe the title of nation to Iceland's population that early in its history—the founding of the Alþing is wrapped up in the mythology that has come to describe the founding of that nation.[17] More likely, the Alþing brought together a community that, for the first time, began a conversation of what was desired for the newly settled land on a national scale. It was a place set aside for Icelanders to decide what it meant to be Icelanders, and created a strong sense of

[11] (Karlsson 2000:21)
[12] (Karlsson 2000:19; Magnússon 1984)
[13] (Magnússon 1984:12)
[14] (Magnússon 1984)
[15] (Magnússon 1984; Hastrup 1998)
[16] (Hastrup 1998; Karlsson 2000)
[17] (Karlsson 2000:21)

ethnic identity.[18] The Alþing has come to be seen as an integral part of the mythology about the birth of Iceland as a nation and what it means to be Icelandic, and that history is embedded within the beauty of Þingvellir.[19]

While Icelanders are rightly proud of their connection with the earliest forms of representative governance, the Alþing is not the only way Icelanders have explored new forms of governance. In June 2008, nine representatives from EVE Online flew to Reykjavik, Iceland for a different kind of Alþing: a face-to-face summit with game developers at the company headquarters of Crowd Control Productions, or CCP.[20] Dubbed the Council of Stellar Management, or CSM, elected representatives brought player concerns directly to game creators in a unique experiment in the governance of virtual worlds. There developers and players would come together to decide on the best course of action for EVE's online society for the next few months.

Emphasizing Iceland's role in the birthplace of new forms of democracy, CCP took the newly elected council to Þingvellir to underscore the importance of this experiment. As CCP economist Eyjólfur Guðmundsson would charge the council:

> You will start to function as the chieftains in Iceland in the old days. You will convey the message to Alþing, which is basically when you meet us down at CCP, and you will tell us what needs to be done. You are taking the first step. You are the first Quarter of the online environment. You are the first chieftains of the Internet.[21]

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[18] (Karlsson 2000; Anderson 2006). Anderson argues that the advent of print media and newspaper distribution helped to facilitated discussion of what it meant to be French and a French nation during the French Revolution. This created community and a sense of national identity between citizens that would never meet. Similarly, the Alþing brought together all free men of Iceland. This facilitated a forum for a public discussion of what it meant to be Icelandic and how Icelanders should behave. Perhaps the focus on individual agency in Iceland's law—as opposed to finding a new top-down method of government in France—is why, as Karlsson argues, the Alþing generated a strong ethnic identity and not a sense of nationalism (2000:199).

[19] (Hastrup 1998:32; Thingvellier National Park n.d.b)

[20] (Schiesel 2008)

[21] (van Nes & Wolting 2009). The judiciary branch of the Alþing was composed of Quarters. The country was divided into four Quarters, roughly corresponding to the cardinal directions: West, North, East, and South. Members of these courts were nominated by the goðar, which comprised the legislative branch. Spring assemblies were held in each Quarter to decide local issues. Issues that were undecided were left to the Fifth Court, held at the national Alþing. See (Karlsson 2000:20-27).

Recorded on film by a documentary film crew, the difference between the new forms of governance and the old are plain to see. Tech-savvy gamers in t-shirts and sunglasses stand in stark contrast to the rugged Icelandic landscape. The mixture of excitement and skepticism of the new "chieftains of the Internet" is plain to see, and is understandable within its cultural context.[22] EVE Online shares much in common culturally with that of Iceland's early history. Though decisions were made at the Alþing, there was no centralized state to enforce decisions; while under the purview of regional chieftains, the ultimate resolution of conflicts was up to the individual. Sanctioned vengeance was far more common than arbitration or formal adjudication.[23] Similarly, the CSM was forged from a period of intense unrest within the EVE community, and held only the capacity to advise CCP on widespread player concerns. While democratic in its elections, what the CSM lacked was the agency to enforce the will of its constituents. Both societies have been described as societies of "ultimate individual freedom, where even seats in parliament were a marketable commodity."[24] In both historical Iceland and in EVE Online, though the ultimate enforcement of the law is up to the individual, the understood democratic principles became a necessary framework that governed relationships between those individuals.

For EVE Online, however, it is important to remember that while the CSM may operate on democratic principles, the organization in which it is embedded is not a democracy. As a business, CCP's mission is to "attract and retain customers by

[22] (van Nes & Wolting 2009)
[23] (Durrenberger 1989)
[24] (Karlsson 2000:27)

providing top quality online entertainment."[25] CCP can choose to take or leave the CSM's suggestions and advice for business reasons—such as difficulty in implementation, limitations of the code, etc.—without explanation to the citizens which called for action on a given proposal. The ability for democratic action on behalf of the CSM is entirely dependent on CCP's desire to implement its proposals.

As the CSM White Paper notes, as the entire virtual society exists "within the technical framework provided by CCP, it must have also evolved in part because of CCP."[26] CCP governs the architectural and structural components that maintain the complex sociotechnical framework necessary for EVE's existence. However, CCP itself is not a neutral institution. Its employees exist within both CCP's function as a business and more generally within the real world location that brings them together. In the real world, CCP company headquarters are located in Reykjavik, Iceland.[27] And while CCP has offices in other areas, it was founded in Iceland, and the decision-making power has historically been retained by Icelandic staff. While not deterministic, this allows certain cultural and historical influences to shape CCP's decisions and thus has consequences for the virtual citizens within its care.

The embedded nature of the CSM also works to influence it from the other direction as well. While the CSM is composed of EVE players, the creation of the CSM was not driven by the players. The CSM was not designed by players as an emergent reflection of EVE's culture; it was handed to players as a tool to redress growing player concerns. The EVE community generally views democracy with a healthy dose of

[25] (Crowd Control Productions 2011a)
[26] (Óskarsson 2008:6). The White Paper is the CSM's founding document. However, it is not static in the sense that it is "finished." Updates and changes to this document have been made to reflect the most current information, and a new version was released in late March, 2013. See (Óskarsson 2013).
[27] CCP has offices located in other areas, such as Atlanta, Shanghai, Berkshire, and Newcastle.

skepticism. Most corporations, large groups of players that band together for a common goal, are run as dictatorships, and democracy is held to be an inefficient form of governance in a world that demands decisions be made quickly. And while developers acknowledge this tension by letting the CSM's elections and processes run in as EVE-like manner as possible—buying, selling, and scamming votes, for instance—many EVE players first felt the CSM to be nothing but a publicity stunt that related little to actual life in EVE.

This is not to suggest that the CSM has no function. On the contrary, I would argue that it serves a very important function for those players who choose to take advantage of it. But it is essential to keep in mind that the CSM's deeply embedded nature affects its ability to represent the wishes of the players of EVE. At different times, these influences either prohibit or facilitate the CSM's ability to develop practices of governance and push for meaningful political change. This is not to propose that a multiplicity of contexts, subjectivities, or realities fragment the democratic process. Rather it is the purpose of this thesis to examine the ways in which different structural, cultural, and historical influences shape and constrain political action within EVE Online.[28]

[28] Another possible factor that is not considered here is the international makeup of the CSM itself. Elected representatives have come from many countries, some of which are non-Western and are historically anti-democratic. However, I felt analyzing the specific makeup of the CSM's elected representatives and comparing it to the processes of the CSM over time would infringe on the confidentiality I promised my subjects. I could not determine each individual's attitudes toward their country's political structure without extensive interviewing. Since the subject pool is so small, a pseudonym could not offer anonymity if a member was the only one elected from a particular real world country. As CSM members are required to give their legal names to the EVE community as part of the election process, it is not possible to foresee all possible consequences of having players detail their attitudes toward their real life governments.

Governance in Virtual Worlds

Academic interest in the governance of virtual worlds has grown along with the interest in virtual worlds more generally. However this literature mainly focuses on modes of governance that are primarily internal or external in nature. Internal governance structures would be those that arise organically within the game world, such as guilds or clans, which serve to moderate in-world concerns. External concerns would be reflected in literature that focuses on the embedded nature of virtual worlds: architectural methods of governance like architectural code or the relationship between developers and the worlds they create. This loosely borrows from Burke's examination of MMOs as sites of sovereignty.[29] Within these virtual spaces, the "ground upon which governance acts" can be located in one of three places: with developers, within player-formed organizations, or as an artifact created within the world itself.[30] Both heuristics focus on the source from which governance arises, either as a constraint imposed from without or an emergent institution that is formed from within. Less attention has been paid to institutions of governance that operate both within the virtual community and the real world. This is, in part, due to the rarity of this strategy of governance within virtual worlds. While there are other examples of such hybrid forms of governance, EVE Online is the first to attempt it in a large, graphically-rendered world.[31]

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[29] (Burke 2004)
[30] (Burke 2004:2)
[31] While EVE Online is not the only game that has attempted this model, there are few examples to follow. Most notable are LambdaMOO and A Tale in the Desert. MOO stands for "MUD object-oriented," and MUD stands for "multi-user dungeon" or "multi-user domain." These are text-based environments which provide persistent virtual worlds in which players can interact. In MUDs, the focus is entirely text-based, and players respond to challenges that have been built into the system. In MOOs, players create persistent in-game objects as a way of setting their own challenges and shaping the world to their liking. While A Tale in the Desert is graphically rendered, it serves a smaller population and does not aspire to the same level of detail as EVE. In smaller or text-based games, changes can often be made to a game's architecture in response to player demands with a reasonable amount of development resources. In a fully-rendered game such as EVE, changes can require months of lead time for multiple departments to accommodate such changes. See (Dibbell 1993 & 1999; Mnookin 2001; Genender 2005).

The relationship between the designers of virtual worlds and those that inhabit them has attracted the most scholarly attention. While the concerns are mainly structural in nature, questions about the nature of governance range from what it means to be a virtual citizen, the obligations of designers toward those that inhabit their worlds, and the separation between real and virtual life. And while some ask if "best practices" of good virtual worlds would not already closely resemble the "best practices" of good governance, the comparison between real world governments and developers of virtual worlds is an important consideration.[32]

In his book Code: Version 2.0, Lessig examines the different constraints that regulate individual behavior in online environments: the market, cultural norms, laws, and technological architecture.[33] While the interplay between these forces work together to shape behavior into predictable and manageable patterns, the architectural constraint of software code is of primary concern. As a means to shape behavior, code becomes a source of concern due to its ability to embed particular values by what it permits or discourages within the spaces it creates. Moreover, the ability for real world governments to take advantage of these architectural means for control becomes for Lessig a matter of deep concern.

These concerns become more pressing for citizens of virtual societies. The architecture can be structured to promote certain behaviors within the virtual spaces it creates. For example, Steinkuehler describes an example from Lineage in which there was a:

> …well-known tendency for player-killers (PKers) to hang out in newcomer (newbie) territories to prey on low-level characters who are

[32] (Grimmelmann 2005:182)
[33] (Lessig 2006:123)

> easily killed. The game rules and regulations afford this sort of behavior (without necessarily condoning it) because there is really nothing to stop high-level "red" folks (avatars with red names that signify a high number of previous player kills) from hanging out in easy areas to repeatedly kill weaker ones… So, there emerges a tension between a common game practice (PKers hunting newbies), afforded by the game's own design rules, and the game company and community's needs for survival, which include bringing new players into the game.[34]

Once the practice appeared, it would have been easy to change the code to forbid such activities by high level players. And while cultural practices arose to balance game design, Nardi notes that a "world in which ganking is possible was precisely the world intended by designers, and it was that world they encoded into the rules."[35] And while ganking, or killing a player unfairly, is considered poor etiquette, the game world was architected to allow players to make such moral choices.

While the structure of Lineage's low-level areas was architected in a way to allow players to determine their ultimate use, it is easy enough to imagine a similar situation in which that choice is taken from the players. It is this capacity for control and regulation of behavior that lead some argue to that the power of developers is elevated above the level of real world governments. Bartle argues that the ability of designers to control the game world even down to the physics of the virtual environment raises their power to godhood status.[36] In addition to the ability to change the physical landscape, Bartle describes the sometimes "draconian" use of developer control that, had they been applied to real world governments, would be widely criticized for civil rights abuses: punishment or exile without due process, property destruction, privacy infringement. Further control can be gained by the mere implication of developer powers; as developers can see action

[34] (Steinkeuhler 2006:201)
[35] (Nardi 2010:71)
[36] (Bartle 2006:4)

within their creation at any time, the possibility of observation compels socially acceptable socially acceptable behavior. This is consistent with Foucault's ideas about institutions, where power relations are implicitly enforced through in-game structures.[37]

For Bartle, real qualitative differences exist between game designers as gods or governments in that developers cannot be removed by their virtual citizens and developers cannot fully relinquish their powers.[38] By virtue of maintaining their creation, the virtual world requires development companies to support their continued existence, at least if they want to continue to turn a profit. Corrupt governments can be overthrown through revolution, seized through military coup, or simply voted out of office; the same opportunity does not exist for game designers.

However, even pulling the plug on a virtual world does not necessarily mean it does not have continued existence. Virtual worlds are supported by third-party applications, websites, blogs, etc. In the absence of the world itself, the social structures generated can persist, shift to new online environments, etc.[39] EVE Online supports an elaborate metagame, in which out-of-game resources or information to affect in-game play. This involves the use of corporate espionage, sabotage, hacking of rival corporations' web sites, or deployment of effective propaganda on the official forums. It is not unheard of for EVE Online players to play only the metagame, eschewing the virtual world entirely; as one informant would tell me, "The goal is to play the game enough to where you don't have to login anymore." This generally supports Malaby's conclusion that if the ultimate expression of developer control can be attenuated in this way, then "it is possible that this position of limited control is coming to be an undeniable

[37] (Foucault 1995)
[38] (Bartle 2006)
[39] (Malaby 2006a)

feature of MMOGs, who are under pressure to relinquish some controls (or sovereignty) over their creations."[40]

Traditionally, the sovereignty that was afforded to players through the code was through in-game governance structures that allowed players to govern their own affairs.[41] These social structures have become standard features of the MMO genre, and have "acquired standard capabilities and structures."[42] Malone argues that guilds represent powerful forms of social organization within virtual worlds.[43] Through the power that is granted through the game architecture, players are afforded the ability to govern their own affairs through hierarchical structures, formal rules of behavior; these structures are legitimated and supported through social bonds that cultivate group identity and guild-specific economies.[44] Additional forms of sovereignty can be ceded to guilds in the form of allowing guilds or clans to create or control their own spaces. For instance, some MMOs allow guilds to create or own their own guild halls, structures that may be used for guild meetings, events, etc. These may be entirely guild-owned or perhaps may be instanced; this allows every guild a copy of the same space, but does not fill the useable space within the environment.

EVE Online goes one step further to allow corporations to compete and control territory within the virtual world. Corporations are large groups of players that band together for a common goal, similar to guilds. Corporations may decide to work cooperatively and form an alliance, a collective organization of several member corporations. Once a corporation has control or sovereignty over a section of the galaxy,

[40] (Malaby 2006a; Taylor 2006a)
[41] (Burke 2004)
[42] (Burke 2004)
[43] (Malone 2007; Golub 2010)
[44] (Malone 2007)

they may set up infrastructure within the system—such as outposts, star bases, research laboratories, construction arrays, etc.—and receive a variety of in-game benefits for their corporation. These confer such benefits as a measure of protection for corporate structures, a reduction in fuel costs for star bases, etc. Sovereignty can and frequently is contested by rival corporations, as different systems contain different resources within them.[45]

Such spaces are, for all intents and purposes, under control of the corporation that claims sovereignty. Players are given the tools to assert their control of a given system within the code of the virtual world, and sovereignty mechanics allow the "official control of a system, as recognized by the EVE client."[46] Sovereignty mechanics are just the structural way in which a corporation supports the cultural, political, and economic ways to define a space as "theirs."[47] Neither could CCP envision the variety of values and governance systems that arose to protect these spaces, from the libertarian to the communistic to self-proclaimed freedom fighters dedicated to "freedom from statist and imperialist tyranny."[48]

And while some of these ideologies are explicitly part of in-game roleplaying, it serves to highlight ways in which players make virtual spaces their own.[49] As developers afford more control and ownership over game areas to players, what goes on in those spaces—the cultural ideologies used to justify the seizure and possession of sovereign space, the lengths players will go to retain that control, etc.—become increasingly less

[45] Changes in the ownership of sov space are monitored by many of the larger alliances. For current sovereignty maps can be seen at http://eve.farlab.org/.
[46] (EVE University 2011)
[47] (Óskarsson 2008:6)
[48] (EVElopedia 2009)
[49] A kind of collective storytelling, roleplay in video games allows concepts to structure in-game actions. These may be individual or group backstories that determine player behavior. Instead of using the avatar as solely an extension of self or a vehicle to navigate the environment, it becomes a character in the broader narratives that are told through game events, history, and lore.

predictable. For example, one EVE event that has passed into legend involves an alliance going to extraordinary measures to destroy one of the first Titan ships in the game. One of EVE's largest ships, Titans wield extraordinary power. According to legend, the destruction of the first Titan was brought about through a coordinated real world and in-game attack in which the power to the Titan owner's house was cut. While there are conflicting accounts of what actually happened to cause the destruction of the ship, the tale of using real life measures to effect in-game change continues. In some ways, the actual truth value of the story is irrelevant. What is important for EVE is that the story is told, and whoever frames the narrative of that story—in which on alliance seems to have access to very powerful methods and one suffers very tangible losses—accrues the social and cultural capital as a result. [50] That sort of power is itself a very important weapon in EVE.

As Taylor suggests, once developers "put a product out there the players will do with it what they will, often playing in ways designers never anticipated."[51] Discussing their experience with the avatar-mediated world Habitat, Farmer and Morningstar describe:

> It was clear that we were not in control. The more people we involved with something, the less in control we were. We could influence things, we could set up interesting situations, we could provide opportunities for things to happen, but we could not predict or dictate the outcome.[52]

While contingent events that may occur once a virtual world is populated may put off some developers, the uncertain outcomes are part of what makes the EVE environment unique. EVE Online is a sandbox universe, in which the bare minimum of in-game tools

[50] (The Mittani 2009a; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Malaby 2006b)
[51] (Taylor 2006b:136)
[52] (Farmer and Morningstar 2006:742)

is given to players, which are then in turn expected to create their own adventures. There are no behavioral or cultural restrictions imposed by the developers, and players are frequently encouraged to see what new heights they can drive EVE's emergent story.

For example, one EVE event that occurred during the duration of my fieldwork involved a massive attack on EVE's busiest trade hub, Jita. Jita is located in high security space, which means it is neutral territory guarded by the non-player character, or NPC, police force known as CONCORD; this makes it a relatively safe and prosperous place to do business.[53] Several months of planning culminated in a weekend-long blockade, and effective military strategies were used to get around the NPC police. Ships moving in or out of the area were quickly destroyed, and their weapons and materials salvaged. Economic and material losses were substantial, and war profiteering was rampant while ships, weapons, minerals, etc. were replaced. As developers, CCP could have stepped in to prohibit what other games would have labeled a planned weekend of tyranny. However, as CCP senior producer Jon Lander said in an interview, "I tell you what, it's going to be fucking brilliant."[54] Not only were the developers ecstatic about the player-driven event, they made improvements to EVE's server to accommodate the increased load, and analyze the technical effects for the community afterward.[55]

This simplified accounting of a complex political, cultural, and economic event highlights the potential for emergent action that has become a source of pride for EVE's developers and community. It is what sustains a population of 500,000 subscriptions on

[53] Non-player characters (NPC) are virtual actors within game that are controlled by server-side programing. These may be friendly or hostile. CONCORD is the NPC police force that responds to non-sanctioned acts of aggression within high security systems with deadly force. This provides consequences for criminal behavior. Response time depends on the relative security rating of the individual system. The wrath of CONCORD is referred to as "concordokken" or simply being "concorded."
[54] (Yin-Poole 2012)
[55] (CCP Explorer et al. 2012)

EVE's single server, and developers do their best to architect the game to allow these indeterminate outcomes.[56] In this, we can see two different general modes of governance at work within EVE. We can see that the architectural code and the social norms that arise within that code work together to shape activity within the world; the code is architected to promote player-driven behavior and that attracts players that enjoy a more direct hand in shaping the adventures within the game universe.

As Malaby argues, we must be ready to examine how this "generates important effects, both through the artifactual nature of their code and through the emergence of shared conventions within and across their communities."[57] This roughly corresponds to Steinkuehler's "mangle of play" and Taylor's suggestion that players work within the game framework to actively construct cultures.[58] While the architecture serves as the primary method of regulation of behavior, it serves to engender the open-ended freedom that EVE players enjoy and that becomes part of the cultural logic that drives game play.

This turn toward game design to engender participation within an indeterminate system is an important one; through the application of "effort and cultural capital," players are encouraged to work within a given system for uncertain ends.[59] Malaby argues that this contrived indeterminacy is a shift from the bureaucracies of high modernity to ones that architect and cultivate spaces for uncertain outcomes; the important difference is the institutional need to "engage human imaginings of possibility."[60]

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[56] (Drain 2013). However, the accuracy of this figure is somewhat uncertain. For many reasons—including the fact that abilities in EVE train in real time, one at a time, one character at a time—players often have more than one account. Thus the number is artificially inflated by an unknown percentage.
[57] (Malaby 2006a)
[58] (Steinkuehler 2006; Taylor 2006b)
[59] (Malaby 2009:127)
[60] (Malaby 2009:128)

In the management of virtual worlds, however, there is the countervailing need to know as much about your player base as possible. Players are consumers, and thus it makes good business sense to know and meet the needs of your consumers. In discussing the shift from sovereignty to governmentality that accompanied the rise of the modern nation state, Boellstorff suggests that the fundamental difference is the movement from a more implicit form of governance—mainly through laws—to a more complex approach based on an "infinitely knowable and improvable population."[61]

Both Boellstorff and Malaby studied Second Life, in which Linden Lab was broadly assumed to have complete control over its creation.[62] As a way to encourage player creativity, Linden Lab architected a space in which the power of content creation was given to players. As a means of good business, it meets the need of Second Life consumers to create and build their world. As a means of population management, it highlights what is perhaps the only constant in an open-ended world: players will continually do what you least expect of them. As Malaby describes, virtual worlds "balance the presence of both regularity and indeterminacy."[63]

In EVE Online, CCP takes this one step further. Not only is the space architected to permit contingent events, but that code itself is somewhat open to negotiation. This is one way of meeting Taylor's challenge to afford players some responsibility and power in the governance and maintenance of their world.[64] Players approach CSM members with their concerns and suggestions for the game, and CSM representatives in turn present this feedback to CCP developers. While the CSM has no official capacity to

[61] (Boellstorff 2009:220)
[62] (Boellstorff 2009:221)
[63] (Malaby 2006a)
[64] (Taylor 2006a)

enforce these changes, they lobby CCP developers to influence the game architecture to best serve the cultural expectations of EVE players. Describes Hans Jagerblitzen, a representative of CSM7, the CSM has "an audience with CCP, and we provide an audience for player concerns. *Influence* is our greatest asset, and *it is earned, not granted*.[65] And while both the cultural and architectural constraints are at play for both users and designers, they have a fundamentally different position of agency in the change they can achieve through the mutual negotiation of the code.[66] The cultural conventions about government, governance, and expectations about what is possible within the EVE framework therefore become the starting point for the negotiations between the CSM and CCP. It is important to remember that EVE's population has a broad international base; the United States captures 36.25% of subscriptions, followed by the United Kingdom (10.28%), Russia (10.27%), Germany (9.50%), Canada (5.15%), Australia (3.71%), among a large number of others.[67] Players, CSM representatives, and designers may have wildly different perspectives on the need for and methods of representation within real life, as well as within game. The main commonality therefore becomes EVE's virtual culture and the values it engenders. These shape the expectations of governance, which in turn influence the way the code is negotiated between the CSM and CCP. And while other forms of Lessig's behavioral constraints—legal and economic—should not be undervalued, the interplay between the cultural and the architectural become the primary way of understanding how the CSM's governance exists within EVE.

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[65] Emphasis in the original. See (Jagerblitzen 2013).
[66] (Malaby 2006a)
[67] (CCP Dolan 2013h). This is based on statistics derived from the CSM8 election in 2013. However, it is important to keep in mind that each account gets one vote in the elections. There are no cultural or architectural restrictions on buying votes, selling votes, or owning multiple accounts. In order to gain more votes for a given candidate, people may increase the number of accounts they hold to gain more votes for their given candidate. This may cause the percentages from different countries to change around election time, depending on where specific bloc candidates are located.

The creation of the CSM serves to structure the relationship between CCP and the CSM, and creates the method by which the institutions can each manage their own needs through the game development process.[68] At the same time, the cultural and political conventions of EVE's players at times act counter to these routinizing actions as CCP and the CSM seek to attend to their own interests.[69] These countervailing tendencies serve as imperfect forms of control as the relationship between CCP and the CSM evolves and negotiates power behind closed doors. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the intersection of culture, power, and governance, and illustrate the consequences these negotiations of power have for the inhabitants of EVE Online.

First, I will examine the historical circumstances that led to the CSM's creation. Accusations of developer favoritism among in-game factions caused significant player outrage. As a way to quell the discontent in his community, CEO Hilmar Pétursson ordered an earlier, then discarded concept—the Council of Stellar Management—be reinstituted as a method of community oversight and to, in Pétursson's words, to "call bullshit" on CCP when necessary.[70] The distrust of CCP's ability to provide a truly open universe had important consequences for the shape and function that the CSM would take. Specifically, the CSM would serve as both an avenue for players to address concerns about the game world and as a way to effectively route these suggestions to CCP to build a better product. As a model of governance, the CSM was designed around the principles of deliberative democracy to give the community a way to reach consensus on important matters. As a method of community feedback, this feedback would be channeled to developers through elected representatives. However, these channels of

[68] (Weber 1946d)
[69] (Moore 1978)
[70] Quoted in (Thomsen 2011)

information at times became more of a hindrance than facilitating discussions necessary to true democracy. While the CSM's structures have changed to accommodate different forms of player feedback, this moves the CSM away from the principles of deliberative democracy upon which it was founded.

Second, I will look at the way power is generated and leveraged by the CSM. The ability of the CSM to influence CCP developers is central to the amount of power any given CSM holds. This power is, in part, mediated by the two cultures in which the CSM is embedded: EVE culture and Icelandic culture. As EVE players first, players operate within a framework that operates under different cultural norms; as smart battle strategy, players bring all available tools to any given engagement. Similarly, CSM6—held by many players to be the most effective incarnation of the CSM—used all available methods to leverage power within their given relationships with CCP. These take into account considerations of the real world, rather than simply EVE's own universe. For CSM6, this involved using the media to gain control over the direction of the game. This was made possible, in part, by CCP's real world concerns. CCP was one of the few companies to survive Iceland's economic collapse. Thus CCP's successes led to a self-admitted sense of hubris that some see as characteristic of the particular cultural and historical circumstances.[71] The attitude that "we must Work Hard [*sic*] to conquer the impossible" allowed CSM6 to leverage their demands with their media contacts against a threat of negative publicity.[72] This translated into concrete financial losses in the economically stressed country, and an expansion that addressed CSM concerns. This is not the only strategy CSMs have used to exert influence over CCP, and the methods were

[71] (Pétursson 2011; The Mittani 2012)
[72] (Crowd Control Productions 2011c)

not universally condoned by players; however the power of the CSM seems to be best recruited when players behave within EVE's cultural conventions. As such, the CSM has evolved into an institution that is more in line with EVE's expectations of effective organization.

Finally, I will look at the authority and legitimacy of the CSM from the standpoint of its constituents. As an imposed institution, the EVE community had not asked for self-governance. As an elected body without formally recognized power, its ability to enact meaningful change at the level of game design was met with skepticism by many players. This skepticism is bound within cultural ideas that are in part developed within a virtual society that is always at war. As an organization, the CSM is held to the same standards as in-game power structures and understood within those same cultural frameworks. Democracy is seen as a weakness in times for war, and peacekeeping processes are seen as vulnerabilities within those ideas. Thus CSM7's push to codify and operationalize "stakeholder" status—an undefined power granted by CCP to officially include the CSM in the decision-making process—is greeted with skepticism by those in the community. This hearkens back to the original incident that caused its founding as well as skepticism of less combative forms of governance. It is no coincidence that the CSM has moved from describing itself as a space parliament to more of a lobbying group that seeks to exert influence over developers. This brings the CSM more in line with EVE's own ideas about how leadership in organizations is most effective.

These conclusions should be considered only within the particular circumstances of the EVE community; the cultural mechanisms at work in EVE do not apply to all virtual communities. More broadly, however, the current study does suggest that the

emergent nature of the institution is important; cultural expectations regarding the ability of an institution to govern affect how an institution is legitimized and afforded power within the greater community. These ideas may become more relevant as virtual communities become more prevalent within everyday life, particularly as they come to serve as a resource for political action online and off.[73]

Methods

Primary research for this thesis was carried out between April 2012 and April 2013. During this time, I joined SKULL SQUADRON, a corporation with roughly 1,700 active players and an alumni network of 14,000.[74] SKULL SQUARDON is a well-regarded corporation with a relatively neutral diplomatic mission within EVE. While it considers itself a more-or-less neutral entity, this can be something of an implicit challenge to other corporations; we were at war with at least one alliance constantly during primary fieldwork.[75] These wars as well as the charter of my corporation served to determine the areas of the universe that were safe for me to travel.[76] It also limited the players I could speak with or what and where I could post on the official forums; SKULL SQUARDON, like many other EVE corporations, is not a democracy.[77]

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[73] (Kellner 2003). Kellner argues that cyberspace can be used in new ways to promote radical change and revolution. However, much of the potential he describes is utilizing the Internet as a common forum for discussion. This allows for political change offline. However, these are communities that seem to develop around common offline interests, rather than a community with a sense of identity rooted primarily online that comes together to promote online or offline change. The CSM is more akin to the latter—an online community seeking change in that online world, mediated in part through real life action.

[74] SKULL SQAUDRON is a pseudonym.

[75] In EVE, war is both an organized conflict and a game mechanic. Declarations of war or "war decs" can be purchased by CEOs. War deccing another corporation or alliance flags enemy players in the game as hostile; you may then attack them without security status penalty or retaliation from CONCORD, the NPC police force.

[76] In addition to being unsafe to travel through enemy territory, wandering into the wrong sections of space might precipitate a diplomatic incident which could lead to other wars. Some EVE corporations will shoot on sight if you unwittingly fly through their territory or gate.

[77] I could not, for example, post as an official representative of SKULL SQUADRON on the forums and speak on their behalf. I was also discouraged from speaking to unknown pilots in local chat channels.

My status as a researcher served as a way around some of these constraints. I was able to talk freely with players who might otherwise treat a verbal or mailed exchange as an act of hostility. In reference to my informed consent document, one player was amused at all the "qualifiers about how that you are not going to be horrible" because the community prides itself on such sparring as part of the game.[78] By providing an informed consent document with university information, the document vouched for me outside of EVE's power relations and I was given access to information that might otherwise have been politically charged. Some players remarked that it was a nice change of pace to talk without worrying about political consequences.

I used two main methods to interview participants: voice or video interviews conducted over Skype, text-based chat through Skype or EVE's in game channels. A small number of interviews were conducted face-to-face. Follow up questions were sent to a few players through EVE mail or over email. Skype calls were recorded through IMCapture, an application which records such calls, which were then later transcribed through voice recognition software. Text-based interviews were saved through the EVE client. A handheld digital recorder was used for face-to-face interviews. In addition, field notes were typed on a secondary laptop during gameplay. All activities were done in real time.

As this study primarily focuses on the Council of Stellar Management, this served as my sample population. Interviews were solicited through in-game mail, just as if I was any other EVE player. Responses were followed up to the best of my ability. Normal

[78] Indeed, many players looked to the informed consent form as a kind of alternate corporate history. The history of organizations a character has been in is public information within the game, and is often checked to see if a pilot is who they claim to be.

EVE players were solicited for interviews through snowball sampling. I also interviewed a small number of CCP developers, and I received official permission to do so.

It should be noted that CSMs and developers both sign standard non-disclosure agreements. This limited the information I could discuss with past and present CSMs. For instance, I was not given insider information about upcoming game content, features, or other such sensitive data. I also did not have access to official CSM communication tools, such as the Skype channel that facilitates their real time communication with the CCP development team. While real-world politics is rarely transparent, many CSMs published extensive minutes of meetings and development summits; the recent trend is moving toward full transcriptions with attributed quotes. Forum petitions submitted through the Jita Park Speakers Corner are also up for public scrutiny. Some CSMs also keep detailed blogs of their activities. While this lack of access somewhat limits my findings, the wealth of publically available knowledge serves to offset some of the information to which I did not have access.

My own personal experience with virtual worlds is relevant to my ability to conduct research within these environments. Before logging into EVE Online for the first time, I had extensive experience in MMOs. I played Final Fantasy XI for roughly one year. I have played World of Warcraft since its release in 2004, at times with intensive raiding guilds. I have had other passing experience with Guild Wars, Star Wars: The Old Republic, Rift, Second Life, and Champions Online; each of these was played for at least a month. These experiences gave me a wealth of knowledge of

internet culture, memes, and internet slang, as well as a general understanding of accepted game mechanics.[79]

I quickly learned, however, that my perhaps decade long experience with MMOs had given me few transferrable skills to apply to EVE Online. EVE has a reputation for being hard to learn, and I found that EVE lived up to that reputation. Space ship navigation and fitting involves a great degree of math, and I spent a long time learning the game mechanics. While there are a few tutorials built into the game through AURA, the onboard ship computer, the information I found most helpful was through community-resources.

[79] Internet culture could be defined as the emergent culture that has arisen on the internet as a result of computer networks. This includes, but is not limited to, online communities, virtual worlds, MMOs, internet-based games, forum communities, social networking, and texting. Internet memes, then, are concepts that are shared from person to person. Tracing back the concept to Richard Dawkins's The Selfish Gene, these image or text-based ideas spread cultural information via transmission. Internet slang could be broadly defined as the wide variety of slang languages that arise to support internet cultures. These include a wide variety of practices, such as particular acronyms ("OMG" for "oh my god"), leetspeak ("n00b" for "noob"), disemvoweling ("srs" for "serious"), intentional misspellings ("teh" for "the"), etc. See (Kim 2010).

Chapter II: Governance

Introduction

Moving between stations in Gallente space, I listened to idle chatter in the corporation recruitment channel.[80] My Vexor—a cruiser spaceship outfitted for PvE combat—navigated between planetary systems as I moved toward my next mission objective.[81] The game itself is beautiful: iridescent planets, glowing nebulas, and lush gas clouds, set on a background of distant stars. In many systems, what are missing are players. To the casual observer, one might assume that New Eden's space is largely empty.[82] A player can move between multiple systems without seeing another pilot, and then contact is discouraged. Unknown players regard each other with caution or outright hostility, speed and stealth are valuable assets, and the unwritten rule forbids talking in local chat.[83] As one player would later tell me, "It's not designed to *look* like cold, dark space. It's designed to *be* cold, dark space."

Without the luxury of true virtual cities, much of EVE's casual socializing is hidden, segregated into a variety of concealed spaces.[84] Players speak to each other over third-party software such as Mumble or TeamSpeak, and type over many chat channels built into EVE's software. These are often password protected to keep out rival corporation spies.[85] Corporate recruitment channels are something of an exception; while

[80] The Gallente are one of EVE's four available player races.
[81] In PvE or player versus environment gameplay, players battle virtual opponents that are generated by the game. A mission is a task given to a player by an NPC to earn a reward. This may include reputation, money, or in-game items.
[82] New Eden is the name given to EVE Online's universe. Within the game lore, it is also the name of the first star system settled by humans after traveling to the area.
[83] The local chat channel is viewable to anyone who may be passing through. Unguarded talk may inadvertently pass along sensitive information, such as ship position, fleet movement, etc.
[84] Players can congregate in stations, structures that orbit moons in different systems. However, this only gives them access to common chat channels. Avatar-to-avatar interaction does not exist within EVE at this time.
[85] Corporate espionage is commonplace within EVE. Player corporations may freely engage in such activities as planting spies within the ranks of its rivals as a means of gathering information. This information can be used for military strategy, personal gain, corporate takeover, etc. These types of activities are often referred to as part of the

it is a good assumption that these are compromised by enemy players, these are safe places where new players can ask questions of the old with relatively few political consequences. It also provides an ideal place for grizzled veterans to regale new pilots with tales of EVE's past wars and scandals.

"I'm sorry... I keep forgetting...Who's BoB?" asked Tanner Firestorm, a newer pilot like myself.

"Band of Brothers. Huge guild that had a stranglehold on the EVE economy, and a very between the sheets relationship with CCP," answered Desmond Ninebones. EVE Online is marketed as an open-ended universe. Players themselves design in-game content, and the capacity for the individual impact on the virtual world is part of what makes EVE unique among MMOs. The incident between Band of Brothers, one of EVE's most powerful alliances**,** and CCP called into question a player's ability to affect change within that allegedly open-ended universe. If the game was fixed in some way, what value could be said of the narratives players worked so hard to create? I settled in to hear the older pilots retell the story, as one might relax into the comfort of a familiar favorite. It has become part of EVE's rich mythology, and storytelling also breaks up the sometimes monotonous quality of mission running.

"There was a bit of shadiness with T20 giving someone in BoB a Sabre BPO and a couple other things," explained Booster Raydon, one of a number veteran EVE players in the corporate recruitment channel. Blue print originals (BPO) are used in the manufacturing of in-game goods, such as ships or ammunition, and can be worth a fortune in interstellar kredits or ISK, the in-game currency. The idea that T20, a player

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metagame. The metagame can be broadly defined as the use of out-of-game resources, activity, or information to affect in-game play. Corporate espionage is not built into the mechanics of EVE Online as it was originally written, but emerged as a style of play to support the in-game war for territory and power. See (Wes 2008 and PIR 2012).

discovered to be a CCP developer, would hand such a profitable commodity to an alliance undermines the value EVE players place on their efforts. “Really the issue wasn't so much the BPO, it was more with how CCP handled it. The infraction itself wasn't a huge deal in the larger scheme of things. There were larger concerns about [developer] impartiality, and the whole T20 thing mostly was a symbol for it all.”

“It was the thin end of the wedge,” agreed Silas Burnray.

“So this was actually proven?” asked Firestorm.

“It's ultimately why the CSM exists today,” said Raydon. “CCP formed the CSM as a reaction to all the T20 stuff for player oversight of CCP… [You] can argue whether or not it accomplishes that goal, but that's why it was initially formed.”

As conversation turned to other tales of old, I looked out over the galaxy. The impartiality of a virtual world is something that I often take for granted: the capabilities and defenses of my ship, the tools I needed to eke out a living within virtual space, or even the virtual space itself. When both the environment and your ability to act within it are governed by unseen lines of code, developer impartiality becomes a very salient concern. Player action is embedded within the game, and that behavior is primarily regulated through the game’s code.[86] Though the sociotechnical framework that supports a virtual world is not neutral, the opportunity for developers to undermine player actions exists in every aspect of the game.[87] Suddenly, New Eden seems like very cold, dark space indeed.

[86] (Lessig 2006)
[87] (Winner 1986)

History

This short exchange I witnessed during my fieldwork highlights the continued importance of the Council of Stellar Management's founding for EVE players. While some of the details have perhaps been embellished over time, the story continues to be told for good reason. It has become a cautionary tale of developer corruption, and the seed for continued skepticism of CCP's motivations in a culture that thrives on such distrust. The circumstances in which the CSM was developed are crucial to understanding the way in which it was structured and how it is perceived by the community.

Rumors of that "between the sheets" relationship between Band of Brothers and CCP had been emerging at the edge of public discourse for some time. Among the charges was that Band of Brothers was run by EVE's senior developers and members of their volunteer staff.[88] During a routine bit of forum espionage, one player realized that there was substantial truth to the rumors.[89] After rifling through archived private forums of Reikoku—a corporation within the larger Band of Brothers alliance—a spy named Kugutsumen felt it was his duty to share the extent of that relationship with the EVE community. In a series of public exposés entitled "Reikoku Makes Its Own Luck," Kugutsumen presented evidence that Band of Brothers was aware of developers in its ranks, a blatant violation of CCP policy.[90]

Although community manager CCP Kieron attempted to assure the community that CCP was investigating the allegations and hopefully that would "put this issue behind us once and for all and allow us to continue moving forward," it was already too

[88] (Blancato 2007)
[89] (Blancato 2007)
[90] (Kugutsumen 2007; Blodgett 2009)

late.[91] Immediate condemnation of CCP's actions spread throughout the forums. As one player described:

> …[W]hy has it taken this many days (and angry posts) of "investigation" including at least one "I hope we can now put this behind us" before the truth came out? If this is indeed the whole truth and not someone drawing the short straw and throwing themselves off the sledge to try to placate the wolves? And yes, that is cynical. But when we've been this betrayed, both in the original sin, in its policing, and in the time and pressure this "truth" has taken to be dragged out, kicking and screaming, why should we have any trust left? We who love this game have been betrayed.[92]

The community outcry brought with it further allegations of wrongdoing. Among them included a charge that T20 had given blue print originals (BPOs) to Reikoku before being forced to delete his account.[93] More damaging was the charge that the incident had been known to CCP since June 2006, and yet the leaked BPOs remained in the game for eight months rather than admit misconduct on behalf of its staff.[94] According to some, the revenue generated from the illicit BPOs was used in part to fund a large scale war that brought the destruction of the alliance Ascendant Frontier.[95] As one player put it, "T20 had a direct and intentionally malicious hand in the dismantling of one of the largest corporations in the game."[96]

The confidence in EVE's ability to provide emergent gameplay had been shaken. In EVE, the ability to have a direct hand in the grander narratives of the game is part of the attraction. The rewards of a flawlessly executed scam, military engagement, mining operation, or trading partnership are tangible. In a single shard server, the prestige and

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[91] (CCP Kieron 2007a). When a person becomes employed by CCP, they take a pseudonym for interacting with the community. The title "CCP" before a name denotes that a person is an official employee. Players often omit such titles as the community comes to know the employee. For example while CCP T20 is this developer's official title, his reputation within the community makes the "CCP" title unnecessary.
[92] (Lucre 2007)
[93] (Schiesel 2007)
[94] (Cyvok 2007)
[95] (Cyvok 2007)
[96] (FnkyTwn 2007)

power attained by such actions are known to *every* EVE player. Reaching these rewards takes a tremendous amount of effort and patience. Skills, the talents that allow your character to become more powerful and handle more complex tasks, are trained one at a time in real time; becoming proficient at a certain skill can take months. Veteran players plan their characters more than a year in advance. A similarly determined mindset is cultivated in becoming a leader in the larger narratives that make EVE compelling. Nothing in EVE is free; if you want to make a mark in the universe, you have to be willing to put in the time and effort to make that happen.[97]

Leaking valuable BPOs and giving a decisive hand to Band of Brothers, then, circumvents traditional ways of gaining wealth and power in the game. T20's actions invalidated the extraordinary lengths players go to create meaningful narratives. The game was rigged from the development side, calling into question open nature of EVE's sandbox environment. Players cultivate power through the application of time and effort, and changing the virtual world itself to change the balance of that power illustrated the corruption players felt was rampant within CCP. The company's response only reinforced feelings of player powerlessness: banning the player who brought the allegations to light, deletion of forum threads, locking and censoring community reactions.[98] "The whitewashing, crowd control and censorship would have made Stalin proud," described the spy Kugutsumen. "I was shocked to find that CCP's response was much more vindictive than concerned, and as far as was possible they swept it under the rug instead of being forthcoming."[99] As far as CCP was concerned, the creation of an

[97] (Constantine 2009)
[98] (CCP Kieron 2007b)
[99] Quoted in (Stormer 2007)

internal affairs bureau settled the matter and the specifics should not be open to public scrutiny.[100]

After months of unrest over feelings of player powerlessness, CEO Hilmar Pétursson decided to give the players a formal say in the shape of their world with the reintroduction of the Council of Stellar Management (CSM). Envisioned as an elected player council, the CSM would serve as a formal communication channel between the community and CCP. Pétursson hoped that the CSM would help provide independent oversight and restore some measure of consumer confidence. As Pétursson would describe:

> Perception is reality, and if a substantial part of our community feels like we are biased, whether it is true or not, it is true to them. EVE Online is not a computer game. It is an emerging nation, and we have to address it like a nation being accused of corruption… A government can't just keep saying, "We are not corrupt." No one will believe them. Instead you have to create transparency and robust institutions and oversight in order to maintain the confidence of the population.[101]

While Pétursson knew that there was "not so much that CCP can do in controlling their world," he foresaw the role of CCP and other companies that maintain virtual worlds as "more like governments than gods."[102] By changing the narrative to speak of EVE not as a computer game but as an "emerging nation," Pétursson put forth the image that CCP was ready to take player concerns seriously and answer those concerns on the terms set by the players themselves.[103] Not only was he looking to create an independent body to help address future concerns of corruption, but to form an institution to serve as a buffer to actively manage the concerns of his growing population. A player governance

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[100] (Pétursson 2007)
[101] Quoted in (Schiesel 2007)
[102] Quoted in (Albano 2007). Such arguments have been echoed by other theorists who suggest that centralized management of virtual worlds is impossible, and a more hands-off approach offers the best experience for both developers and players. See (Farmer & Morningstar 2006).
[103] Quoted in (Schiesel 2007)

structure would provide direct product feedback on CCP's actions to the company, allowing developers to "really [drill] down to the root of any issues that arise."[104] This served the twin goals of allowing players to express their concerns and to potentially incorporate them into a higher quality product.

The Council of Stellar Management was announced to players in November 2007 at Fanfest, EVE Online's annual fan convention, amid great company fanfare. Well-known industry designers Richard Bartle and Jessica Mulligan were invited to give talks on the prospect of democracy in EVE Online to the player base and designers alike.[105] The CSM's design was outlined to players in a 25-page founding document, the CSM White Paper, and distributed to players. This outlined its structure and the urgent call for citizen action.[106] Player and designer feedback was incorporated into the final structure, and the first elections were held in May 2008.[107]

The council was originally composed of nine members and a number of alternates elected by popular vote. Representatives were elected for a six month term, which contained one trip to Iceland, where CCP Headquarters is located, for a face-to-face summit with CCP developers. A limit of two consecutive terms per person was imposed. Some of these structural considerations were changed during CSM4 and implemented with the election of CSM5 and CSM8. 14 players are now elected, and alternates are not distinguished from regular candidates. CSMs now serve for one year, without term limits, and seven candidates—the two top vote recipients, as well as five candidates

[104] Quoted in (Thomsen 2011)
[105] (Albano 2007). Richard Bartle created MUD1, the first MUD or Multi User Dungeon. He is considered a pioneer of virtual worlds. Jessica Mulligan worked with Turbine Entertainment to develop Asheron's Call, one of the early MMOs.
[106] See (Óskarsson 2008)
[107] (CCP Xhagen 2008)

selected internally for their efforts on the council and expertise in particular game features—are flown to Iceland twice a year.[108]

Candidates were initially selected through simple popular vote. However, due to concerns of disenfranchisement, the CSM is now elected through a Single Transferable Vote system as of CSM8.[109] In order to make the general election ballot, players must receive 200 endorsements in a special pre-election. During the actual election, voters select 14 candidates in order of preference out of all possible candidates. After the ballots have been cast, the information is then processed to determine the candidates. Extra votes are "transferred" to where they can be of best use.[110] For example, should a candidate receive more than a sufficient number of votes to secure a council seat, the extra votes are transferred from that candidate to the next candidate on a voter's preference list. The same logic is followed if a candidate receives too few votes to be elected.

While elections may be promoted through the game login screen, online videos, or blog posts by developers, the mechanisms of the CSM are kept separate from the game itself. While this limits the visibility of the CSM, it is by deliberate design and is in keeping with the sandbox mentality that drives EVE's gameplay. Players are provided with the tools for governance, and effort is required to put those tools to best use. This allows players the maximum amount of freedom with the minimum amount of required participation. Those individuals that put forth the additional effort are rewarded with the influence and access that a seat on the CSM confers.

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[108] (Óskarsson 2013:8)
[109] (CCP Dolan 2013f). According to CCP Dolan, disenfranchisement is not only denying suffrage to a particular individual or group, but also "rendering a person's vote less effective, or ineffective" (CCP Dolan 2013f). From this perspective, the individuals who voted for candidates that received too many or too few votes to secure a seat would be considered disenfranchised, since the power of their vote is reduced.
[110] (CCP Dolan 2013a)

Theoretical Underpinnings

To help build the framework needed for a player government that would meet the needs of EVE's player base, Pétursson approached Pétur Jóhannes Óskarsson, also known as CCP Xhagen, to helm the project.[111] Among the many challenges facing CCP Xhagen was getting the player base to accept the tool that it had been given. The community had not asked for a player government; rather it was established to restore consumer confidence after the T20 incident. Genuine democracy relied upon engaged citizenry to make informed decisions about the institutions that play a role in their lives.[112] This is difficult to achieve if your citizens believe your government to be corrupt or have no relevance to their lives. Therefore it was crucial for EVE players to see the CSM as a logical way to prevent further developer misconduct and make the desires of player base known to CCP management, while encouraging the values EVE's society had been built upon.

In the CSM White Paper, CCP Xhagen discusses the evolution of EVE's social structures as one might discuss the development of offline civilizations. Modeling his analysis after Rousseau's "state of nature," CCP Xhagen argues that individuals are motivated by the "pursuit of value, the core of which is driven by their instinct of survival."[113] The general development of EVE's society progressed from disconnected individuals banding together for survival to the larger and more complex social structures necessary to pursue the greatest resources within the game.

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[111] Real name used with permission.
[112] (Hagen 1992)
[113] (Óskarsson 2008:4-6). While the state of nature concept traces back to Thomas Hobbes, it is Rousseau's deployment of this concept from which CCP Xhagen draws primary inspiration. One difference between the two is the lack of selfishness in Rousseau's state of nature. See (Óskarsson 2010:18-24).

In order to continue to progress beyond the competition imposed by smaller, regional governance structures, CCP Xhagen asserts that EVE's population must participate in the governance of that society.[114] While Rousseau uses his imagined ideal society to argue that a republic is the best form of governance, CCP Xhagen argues that to achieve "continued success, EVE's society must be granted a larger role in exerting influence on the legislative powers of CCP."[115] Since EVE's entire society is contained within the infrastructure provided by CCP, decisions at the development level—such as those that came into question in the T20 scandal—become the fetters that hold back EVE's society from further growth. The interplay between the architecture and the social relationships that maintain that architecture becomes the place from which this new government must develop. To preserve the nature of that sociotechnical framework, EVE's citizens must be afforded freedom from external influence, unlimited interaction with individuals, and participation in game legislation.

The idea of a player-elected government had been around since 2001, and the first incarnation of the idea was implemented by acting-community manager Valery Massey shortly after EVE's release in 2003.[116] The original CSM was deemed unsuccessful due to the homogeneity of candidates, lack of formal negotiation processes, and insufficient time on behalf of CCP.[117] As one developer would tell me, what the original version of the CSM lacked was a framework of action. "There was a lot of talking and ideas going back and forth, but what do you do then? There was no real structure, no real framework and hence no accountability." The challenge for CCP Xhagen was to find such a

[114] (Óskarsson 2008)
[115] (Rousseau 1987; Óskarsson 2008:7)
[116] (Onlinewelten.com 2008; Óskarsson 2008:11; Óskarsson 2010:29)
[117] (Óskarsson 2010:29)

framework for a legislative body that could ensure the freedoms demanded by the player base, meet the needs of a virtual society, and be adapted into CCP's current business model.

There are few examples to follow when bringing democracy to virtual worlds; the most notable exception, other than the first iteration of the CSM, is LambdaMOO. In this case, players were granted a system of limited democracy to address player grievances after the previous autocratic system proved inadequate to deal with virtual crime.[118] While the developers eventually reclaimed their powers of control from players, they left in the election system in place as a way of polling community opinion.[119]

What was missing from LambdaMOO's failed democracy was a way of reaching community consensus before issues were raised to the development team.[120] Fostering discussion among community members would provide direction for player suggestions and discontent, focus consensus, and provide the methodological framework that the previous iteration of the CSM lacked. This would foster democratic discussion and preserve the freedoms necessary for EVE's thriving sandbox universe. For CCP Xhagen, the answer was deliberative democracy.

Built around the ideas of classical theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill, CCP Xhagen defines deliberative democracy as:

> …a hybrid governance solution which combines consensus decree with representative authority. In this system, every individual is considered equal and has the right to voice an opinion whose relevance carries just as much weight as every other voice in society.[121]

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[118] See (Dibbell 1993 & 1999)
[119] (Mnookin 2001; Óskarsson 2010)
[120] (Óskarsson 2010:28)
[121] (Óskarsson 2010:77). Many definitions of deliberative democracy have been posed in the literature. Scholars such as Rousseau and Mill suggest that it is the emphasis on participation that drives democracy; representative institutions are not enough, and participation in decision-making of all spheres of society socializes citizens into democratic processes. Others, such as Habermas, focus more on the ability of deliberation to focus dialogue; this discourse-

Deliberative democracy is founded on the idea that the "individual is rational, able and willing to spend time to reach an enlightened conclusion."[122] Multiple views are seen as a strength as the interplay of rational actors that generates political reason through discussion.[123] This focus on intense discussion illustrates the hope that "the final conclusion of a deliberation should be that all participants leave the table in agreement."[124] The model hinges on open and informed discussion on behalf of the citizenry, and a "general agreement about the Deweyan belief in social intelligence and the hope that we 'think best when we think together.'"[125] As CCP Xhagen describes, "the consensus of deliberative minds and the open discourse of issues will be the primary vehicle of political change within society."[126]

However, a true deliberative democracy is not possible due to the technical limitations of working within a virtual environment. As such, the implementation of the "concept will rest more upon representative individuals to steer a common voice."[127] Proposals are submitted over the official EVE forums, and debated within the community. Theoretically, consensus is reached by the player base through rational discourse. These proposals are then voted on by the CSM, and passed along to the development team at CCP. While this model has evolved as the CSM has grown as an institution, these two ideas—deliberative discourse between players and the ability of

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centered approach relies on rational debate within the public sphere to create consensus. For our purposes here, it is CCP Xhagen's view of deliberative democracy that is important as it is his vision and management that guides the CSM. See (Hagen 1992; Cavalier 2011) for a theoretical overview.

[122] (Óskarsson 2010:11)
[123] (Cavalier 2011:10)
[124] (Óskarsson 2010:11)
[125] (Cavalier 2011:11)
[126] (Óskarsson 2010:77)
[127] (Óskarsson 2010:77)

elected officials to communicate effectively—fundamentally underpin the CSM concept.[128]

Consensus-building discourse and representing player ideas to CCP also answered the challenges that arose from the T20 scandal. The CSM was "intended to have more of an oversight role," described one informant, "…making sure CCP stays transparent and communicative during 'scandals.'" Delivering the voice of the player base to CCP when it was most needed would help include that voice within CCP's discussions, and function to keep CCP's operations transparent. This aimed to keep the corruption that was at the heart of the T20 scandal from repeating itself; in the words of CEO Hilmar Pétursson, the CSM was to "call bullshit" on CCP when necessary.[129] As CCP Xhagen described, the CSM can:

> …look at every nook and cranny and get to see that we are here to run this company on a professional basis…They can see that we did not make this game to win it.[130]

From the development side, consensus building serves to concentrate player feedback. Forums and other traditional forms of feedback have "poor signal-to-noise ratio," making it hard to understand the player perspective and assess problems.[131] By reaching a general agreement on game-related problems, this allows the CSM to relay the most critical information to CCP. The CSM becomes an outlet and a direction for player feedback and discontent. According to one informant, players often seek out the CSM when "something that *really* pisses them off!" As the first point of contact, the CSM

[128] As of CSM6, weekly meetings were discontinued in favor for more constant communication. Voting on proposals was abolished and decisions are now made by common consensus.
[129] Quoted in (Thomsen 2011)
[130] Quoted in (Schiesel 2007)
[131] Quoted in (Thomsen 2011)

often gets the "invariably thankless task" of acting as a filter between the players and CCP. This allows only the most constructive feedback to reach developers.

Deliberative Democracy in Practice

"The CSM is not an effective democracy at all."

It was late fall, and I was gathering information from EVE's wide satellite network of forums, blogs, podcasts, radio stations, and websites. I had left Skype open on my laptop as I worked. Several interested informants had given me their Skype IDs along with the open invitation to send them a message should I see them online. Skype has a tendency to crash my laptop, necessitating fieldwork on two computers at once; focused on another monitor, I almost missed one such informant login over the industrial music that was playing on EVE Radio.[132]

"You have democratic masturbation of the parliamentary paradigm of voting on this and that, and then having that go nowhere," described my informant. This is a sentiment I have heard many times from different CSMs. Citing ineffectiveness in procedure, CSM6 abolished weekly meetings and voting on proposals; a Skype channel facilitated constant communication and directives were passed by common consensus. I am reminded of the frustration felt by many of the early CSMs in their seeming inability to affect change within CCP; as one CSM3 representative famously begged CCP, "Please use us!"[133]

"One of the things that I would actually worry about with your thesis is…buying too much into the company line," cautioned my informant. "[CCP has] marketing people

[132] EVE Radio is one of the internet radio stations that cater to EVE pilots. Run by players, it serves as a way to deliver both music and occasional news to the community. New Eden Radio is another such station. See (Gaming Radio Network Media 2011; Hijak 2011).
[133] (CCP Xhagen 2009b)

who spend their time constantly talking up the CSM, and it is this big amazing space parliament. It is part of their marketing spiel." I sipped my coffee and carefully considered what my informant said. Many people I talked to about the CSM had indeed repeated company rhetoric. They are proud of EVE's ability to push the boundaries of what is possible within virtual worlds.

"I think that it is very dangerous to buy into that uncritically which is what I was worried about when you first mentioned this project, because it is like studying democracy and councils in space," advised my informant. "It is not really a democracy. It is not a very effective council, and most of what people say about it is not borne out by the facts."

My informant is right to be cautious. There has always been a great divide between what the CSM actually accomplishes and how it is perceived by the community. Much of the crisis of legitimacy the CSM faces can be traced back to the fact that what is said of the CSM and what is done by the CSM do not always match up.[134] Part of this is due to the non-disclosure act (NDA) under which the CSM operates.[135] "We are NDA not allowed to preempt CCP [by] announcing features," describes Gregory Russo. "If we come out after CCP has announced something and say we contributed heavily to this or were a driving force behind it, then we're engaging is sleazy politics or trying to claim credit for CCP's work."[136] With unprecedented access to features that are still in-development, such an agreement is understandable; however as Scaurus notes, "the restrictiveness of the NDA that the CSM is subject to also limits the ability for them to

[134] Another major reason is the amount of perceived power the CSM retains. The CSM has no direct power to command CCP to make the changes it desires. These ideas will be addressed in Chapter Three.
[135] A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) is a legal contract between parties that outlines confidential information that is to be shared between the parties, but restrict its access by third parties. These may protect confidential or proprietary information.
[136] (Russo 2012)

communicate with the player base."[137] These help to maintain the disconnect between what is said about the CSM and its capabilities by CCP, the CSM itself, and the expectations of the player base.

While this is consistent in a sandbox universe where the onus is on the player base to seek out information and make best use of the tools it is given, there is a fundamental disconnect of a theoretical sort as well. The underpinnings of the CSM lay with deliberative democracy and the ability for the community to reach a consensus through rational discourse. The way actual consensus is generated and used within the EVE community is not always so reasoned. In speaking of the elections process, one informant describes:

> There is a huge segment of people in Eve who believe wholeheartedly in the Enlightenment, and have never heard of cognitive flaws. They think that people are programmed by reason, like they read the candidate thread, and they think through the issues, and what have you, and people come to a rational, unemotional decision as to who is the correct person to vote for.

Similar objections could be applied to the method of generating community discussion. As originally designed, players were encouraged to submit petitions to the Assembly Hall, a special CSM section of EVE's official forums. This allows players to open discussion on areas of the game they feel need developer attention. These petitions were then voted on by the CSM and passed on to CCP.

Voting on these petitions was abolished by later CSMs, as measures passed by the CSM were merely added to the development backlog. Bluntly described one player, "the Assembly Hall is a shithole."[138] As it functions now, the Assembly Hall serves to

[137] (Scaurus 2012)
[138] (Crowd Control Productions 2012b)

perpetuate the idea that the CSM has the ability to force CCP to make changes it demands:

> [Players] think that if they if they propose the right Assembly Hall proposal, people will vote on it. And then there will be magic, and CCP will do whatever is in there. In practice, the Assembly Hall should be shut down. It should be merged with the Features and Ideas forum, which is already basically the same thing, but the Features and Ideas forum doesn't have this illusion that you can have a CSM vote and then CCP will just do what you say.[139]

Good ideas got buried in favor of ideas that may be unfeasible or unworkable within the confines of EVE's current architecture. Many of the CSMs I spoke with had simply stopped reading the forums. While this was not universally the case, many CSMs made the distinction between getting feedback and getting *good* feedback. Screening through hundreds of forum threads of questionable value takes a tremendous amount of time. Instead, many CSMs suggested that a concerned player should email them directly with their ideas, or send a link to a good proposal. CSMs would then discuss matters in which players took the extra effort to bring their ideas to the CSMs attention.

While this cuts down on the work of a CSM—which is a significant time investment now that communication with CCP and other CSMs is done in real time—it also stifles the discussion that is necessary to the function of a true deliberative democracy. The consensus of the community is less often examined than individuals who take the time and effort to make their ideas heard. Sending ideas directly to the CSM leaves the rest of the community out of the discussion entirely. Other CSMs took an even more informal approach, taking their cues from informal discussions over Jabber or Mumble; while any community discussions are those a CSM should indeed be listening to, these discussions generally occur within an alliance with similar ideas about

[139] (Crowd Control Productions 2012b)

what is important in the game rather than true discussions that span the whole of the EVE community. These informal chat channels are often made up of the constituents that elected the representative in the first place. As one player describes, "If the mandate is to do what the constituents ask, but you have told the constituents what to ask for, then the society as a whole is no longer served."[140]

Forum submissions as the primary vehicle for discussion also have additional weaknesses. Within EVE, forums are a powerful way of manipulating public opinion, which prove as a subtle means of control by individual actors rather than actual discussion that generates community consensus. Threadnoughts are one such tool of persuasion for shaping public discussions. A threadnought is a forum post with many replies. In general, topics that generate the most discussion are controversial and serve as outlets for player rage, dismay, aggression, etc., to which a CSM would be likely to take cues from. The name is a play on words between a forum "thread" and a "dreadnought," one of the largest ships in EVE. While slow and cumbersome to navigate, dreadnoughts have immense firepower that can lay siege to the largest player structures in the game, the player-owned starbase or POS.[141] With effective use, a dreadnought can change the course of a war. Similarly, the slow but successful change of public opinion over the forums can be as formidable of a weapon as the largest ships. Actual substantive discussion can get lost amid hundreds of replies, but critical debate is not the goal. Readers see the number of replies, read the initial post, and reply. Forum mechanics dictate that posts are sequential, and newer posts are added to the back of the discussion.

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[140] (Paritybit 2011)

[141] A player-owned starbase or POS is a semi-permanent, anchorable structure that can be placed around a moon. These allow corporations a wide range of benefits such as research opportunities, manufacturing facilities, moon mining, infrastructure, staging locations for fleet operations, etc. These can be placed in systems with a security rating of 0.7 or lower.

A thorough reading of hundreds of responses is time consuming and often skipped. Public opinion relies on social interaction for its proof, and the initial post provides the social cue that defines most individuals' view on the topic.[142] One recent threadnought on player-owned starbases shows frequent edits to the first post, as the CSM poster tries vainly to steer the discussion back on a productive course. This also reasserts the authority of the CSM to drive the discussion of POSes and use their own version of the truth to shape the discussion.[143]

This moves the CSM farther away from incorporating the opinions of a wide cross section of the player base. While there are wide discrepancies between the implementation and the theoretical ideas behind the CSM, the reality seems to be that "consensus of deliberative minds and the open discourse of issues" is less often the primary vehicle of political change within EVE's society.[144] While this makes the CSM a less-than-perfect deliberative democracy, the CSM is often seen as an invaluable sounding board for development ideas due to their shared breadth of in-game knowledge. This is reinforced by their experience as well as the broad networks of players that generally help them come into power. Described one developer, CSM representatives are:

> …super users. They have gone through much of the game before they actually come to the position…Their knowledge of the game, and their view, and their understanding of the whole of EVE is a much stronger one rather than just the casual player.

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[142] (Edelman 2001)
[143] (Two Step 2013). Notice also ISD Dorrim Barstorlode's insertion between EDIT2 and EDIT3 to direct to a CCP response that tries to head off some of the negative community feedback. The Interstellar Service Department is a volunteer group that assists CCP on a variety of tasks, one of which is monitoring the official forums. This is an easy way for CCP to try to reframe the discussion in their favor when the discussion turns negative. While Two Step does link to CCP responses, the use of the ISD allows CCP to assert their picture of events without relying on the original poster to do so. Historically, the ISD has been very effective in censoring of the public forums. See (Quinn 2007) for an example of the casual *snips* that indicate player discontent has been censored from the T20 threadnought.
[144] (Óskarsson 2013:6)

These experiences and networks of players help to inform depth of knowledge in a few key areas, which in turn the CSM as they lobby for game changes. In a universe as broad as EVE, this helps to keep the advice given by the CSM to developers grounded in game experience rather than speculation. This grounding in action and time served will do much to generate a sense of legitimacy for the CSM, as it finds the limits of its architected powers and strives to work around those limitations.

While a "participatory democracy relies on the ability of citizens to make informed decisions rather than to choose between elites to make decisions for them," reaching out to that broad player base is more difficult.[145] Asks one player, "if some players care too much, other players don't care at all and some players haven't even started playing yet, what is the way forward? How do we represent players who don't care to be represented?"[146]

Conclusion

For EVE, the answer is unclear. Voter turnout peaked at an all-time high of 16.63% during the CSM7 election; only 12.12% of the eligible voters cast ballots during the election for CSM8.[147] Low efficacy and impact of the CSM can be attributed to a variety of factors. From a design standpoint, the CSM is considered merely another tool of many provided to players in a sandbox environment. To most players, EVE is a game; justifying the need for an elected council to more casual players who only login a few hours a week can be difficult. Understanding elections detracts from time that could be spent engaging in EVE activities that are a good deal more fun. For now, the ability of

[145] (Hagen 1992:25)
[146] (Paritybit 2011)
[147] (CCP Diagoras 2012; Stanziel 2013)

the CSM to influence CCP generally rests with those players that are more fully invested in the game and its virtual society. And while this circumvents the original design of the CSM's democratic processes, it also allows the EVE players willing to put in the effort access to the tools of governance within the world.

While these rationalizations become ways to explain the continued existence of the CSM despite a low voter turnout, it becomes important to consider what value the CSM offers to CCP. In CCP's newest game, *DUST 514*, a similar institution is already being created; the Council of Planetary Management is being formed from early active players to design a player-elected institution that will function similar to the CSM.[148] If the CSM does not represent the opinions of the *entire* player base, what is the value of such an institution? Why go the extra step to include it in other CCP products?

"They want to have their cake and eat it too," continued my informant. "They want to have the esteem of having a [virtual] democracy, because Iceland is very proud of having the first democracy." EVE Radio droned low in the background as my informant extolled his skepticism of the CSM's democratic purpose.

"In practice what is actually going on there is that the budget for the CSM project is very low. Flying people in [to Iceland] is expensive, but they do not really have any coding resources. So they cannot do very simple [things]," he described. "That is often the case of companies and with humans in general. When you want to do something that you cannot do, you concoct a reasonable-sounding excuse out of principle for why we are not doing it."

[148] (CCP Dolan 2013b; CCP Dolan 2013e; CCP Cmdr Wang 2013)

I sipped my coffee and grimaced. It had long grown cold during the hours of intense discussion. From this perspective, being able to *say* that the CSM exists as a way to codify the wishes of the player base becomes more important than its actual effectiveness. It was a sentiment I had heard before during the opening remarks of the CSM panel at Fanfest 2011. Ágúst Ingþórsson, a CCP moderator who worked with the early CSM, described the CSM as a "unique corporate strategy for a unique 'product.'"[149] While he admitted that he is not a player and players do not often think of their world as a venue for marketing, "after all, CCP is a corporation."[150] CCP must attend to its own needs, as well as those of EVE's citizens.

"I also see it has a strong resonance in democratic theory and democratic evolutionary practices," Ingþórsson continued, "where the subjects, you guys, get more and more power and are empowered to be on an equal footing with the creator."[151] The company highlighted how EVE is challenging the idea of what is possible within virtual worlds. This is in stark contrast to the mood within the outgoing CSM5; relationships with CCP were beginning to break down, even as CCP was actively promoting the CSM in their marketing releases. "[CSM5 had] an entire hour-long session…on things the CSM could do at Fanfest to be 'rock stars of the community.' That was their term," described another informant. "They wanted us to be seen as rock stars, put us on stage, and make a big deal… We turned around and said no. We are just players…The community will hate us for it."

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[149] (Crowd Control Productions 2011d). Ingþórsson was hired by CCP to moderate the first meetings with the CSM. The director of the research liaison office at the University of Iceland, Ingþórsson described his early experiences with the CSM: "I have to tell you that I have been involved in [European Union] meetings where the participants were not as prepared and professional as what we've seen here." Quoted in (Schiesel 2008).
[150] (Crowd Control Productions 2011d)
[151] (Crowd Control Productions 2011d)

These corporate messages allow the *myth* of democracy to persist within the EVE community. Though the influence of the CSM is growing within CCP through its new corporate stakeholder status—a role granted by CCP to officially include the CSM in the decision-making process—the actual power of the CSM is poorly understood within the community. The sharing and telling of these corporate narratives foster the illusion that players are indeed "empowered to be on an equal footing with the creator."[152]

The introduction of a player-elected council could be taken as little more than a public relations stunt, a panacea to prevent further financial losses from occurring after the T20 incident. As one player described:

> "[In my opinion,] the CSM is a marketing stunt, its [*sic*] primary value is in CCP being able to place a series of 'look, democratic player representation in our MMO' interviews in the gaming press once per year and actual feedback gathering from players could be done far more efficiently in private, hand-selected focus groups.[153]

While it is hard to know CCP's true intentions behind such a move, the *effect* is that the idea of governance becomes commodified as another feature in a cutting edge MMO. This is consistent with EVE's sandbox design—where the fewest number of tools are offered to players and they create their own adventures—but it also reinforces the power that CCP has over its subscribers. The creation of an apparent public sphere for the discussion and rational debate sells players on the idea of the contributions they could make to EVE's virtual society.

The question the becomes what power the CSM actually confers within EVE's society, and the way EVE's culture shapes and constrains the form that power might take. In the next chapter, we will discuss EVE's cultural ideas about democracy, which can

[152] (Crowd Control Productions 2011d)
[153] (Saraki 2013)

help us understand the resistance to democratic processes, and why players may willingly allow the broad discourse necessary for a deliberative democracy to be silenced. These cultural ideas will illustrate the some routes to power within EVE, and what happens when CCP must contend with the institution it has created on their own terms.

Chapter III: Power

Introduction

"Democracy? In *my EVE?* LOL! The CSM is [like the] democracy of ancient Greece, where every senator had a dozen of slaves in their garden."

Logged into the EVE client, I chatted with one of the many informants I interviewed over the course of my fieldwork. In the real world, I sat in the teaching assistant office of my university where the internet connection is strong. It was an early fall evening and the sun has already set. I had the communal office to myself. The vague feeling of disquiet that accompanies staying late and alone on campus was for once warranted. In game, I was docked in a station in a quiet corner of New Eden far from the station I had been using as home base. My informant requested that we use the EVE client for the interview in case CCP would want to question what was said between us. I had been caught somewhat unawares and docked in the closest station. Outside my home territory, chatting with a bountied pilot, alone on campus after hours, I wondered if CCP was listening.[154]

"EVE plays democracy on a top level in CSM, but if you would [look] at the in-game politics, there is no democracy. It's a feudal life."

"How is EVE like a feudal society, rather than a democracy?" I asked. Skepticism of democratic processes is widespread in EVE, and larger alliances tend to operate as dictatorships. It was a sentiment I heard repeated by many players.

[154] Bounties may be placed on a pilot, corporation, or alliance to pay a reward to a pilot that destroys the target's ship. This may be done for any number of reasons, and has been recently revamped in an attempt to entice players to see bounty hunting as a viable in-game profession. See (CCP SoniClover 2012).

"Democracy is not [an] effective tool during the war. This is a time for generals and dictators. If any member would have to vote for any decision, the alliance would react too slowly," my informant explained. "If alliance resources would be managed by [the] public, spies would know your possibilities. So any alliance that tries to build a democratic community would have a disadvantage and tend to fall apart during the war… The game design itself supports the tyranny."

"If EVE supports tyranny among player alliances, does that mean a democracy like the CSM isn't appropriate for EVE?" I asked.

"That's the thing that still [has] no clear answer. Feudal kingdoms send their representatives to the democratic CSM to decide the game evolution. This is natural for any of them to save the power they have. But on the other hand, they have to work on a game design that would probably try to destroy them," my informant explained. "CSM is a democracy for the large alliance leaders, not for players."

Looking out the window of my office, I wondered for a moment what CCP might think. When I had broached the subject with developers earlier in my fieldwork, they echoed my informant's remarks. "The CSM is filled with super users," one remarked. "Because they are super users, they have gone through much of the game before they actually come to the position… Their understanding of the whole of Eve is a much stronger one rather than just the casual player." This almost implies that those who can take power on the CSM should do so, for EVE is best served by their passion, organization, and experience. As the interview moves to other things, I wonder if, as my informant had implied, CCP was indeed listening to our conversation. As another former developer would later confirm, "That old phrase of 'the logs show nothing?' That is

bullshit. They can see everything that happens in this game. Every single thing in this game."[155]

For the EVE community, power and authority are deeply interrelated. The ability to deliver results translates serves to legitimate authority, regardless of the means used to produce particular ends. The power to command such action is, in part, what confers the authority on which that action is dependent. Following Weber, power can be defined as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."[156] As within Weber's work, this hinges on the cultivation of power-oriented prestige, which confers power gains for the CSM as a political entity in the eyes of the community.[157]

The striving for power and the authority that is conferred by that power are bound within EVE's cultural and behavioral norms. These have emerged over the last decade as a consequence of many of the in-game power structures being at a constant state of war. A cultural preference for authoritarian power structures, for example, arises due to the lack of responsiveness of democratic organizations; alliances with hundreds of voices to take into account cannot respond swiftly to changing in-game conditions. A reliance on rule-governed processes—such as voting on petitions—allows too many inputs into decisions; this leaves an organization open to attack from the inside through espionage. These ideas are further shaped by EVE's status as a game that is supposed to provide the maximum amount of fun to its players.

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[155] (Seleene 2013)
[156] (Weber 1946a:180)
[157] (Weber 1946b:160)

These same logics shape how the CSM is perceived and accepted by the community. To the casual observer, the power that the CSM placed in the community's hands sounded very much like what they had demanded after the T20 incident: a place where the voice of the people could be heard, community expectations defined, and have those desires acknowledged by CCP. However, as originally designed, the Council of Stellar Management served only as a sounding board for community opinion.[158] The CSM lacks the ability to enforce those changes from CCP. As CCP Xhagen describes:

> Currently the players, of course, don't have a direct say…CCP is a company, and a company that needs money to survive… We cannot actually allow the players to take that control out of our hands, but the power of suggestion, and the refined ideas, and the concerns players have are of course important to us. So in a way they control although they don't have an actual vote on the matter.[159]

The CSM's lack of actual power was lost neither on players nor on industry speaker Richard Bartle, whom CCP had invited to speak at Fanfest about the possibilities of virtual governance:

> It doesn't matter how much you try and tell the players that they have the power, they don't. You have the power. And they have the power just so long as they do exactly what you want, but the truth is that the minute they do something that you don't want, they don't have the power anymore.[160]

For some players, this gave the CSM the feeling of high school elections where the only criteria was student popularity; one player described it as a "Galactic United Nations," which was a "step down from student council level, since at least the student council had the power to choose the themes for the homecoming dance and the prom."[161]

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[158] This has changed somewhat with the introduction of stakeholder status. This will be discussed in Chapter IV.
[159] (Onlinewelten.com 2008)
[160] Quoted in (Albano 2007)
[161] (Arcturus 2008)

The skepticism of the EVE community is a two-fold problem. Without the tools to affect community-desired changes in the game, lack of perceivable results weakens the CSM's authority to speak for the player base. While these two subjects—power and authority—are deeply interrelated for EVE's players, the CSM's lack of institutionalized power is a serious barrier to gaining any recognition within the community. As such, we will first examine how power is organized and conceptualized within the EVE community. These emergent gameplay mechanics become the grounding for how the CSM works around this lack of official power. The authority conferred by these methods and how they are understood within cultural skepticism of democratic processes is examined in Chapter IV.

Power Centers within EVE Online

According to the official wiki, the ultimate goal of EVE Online "is power. It can be power over the market, military dominance, financial power, or political power."[162] After a decade of game play, much of this power is concentrated within older alliances. "There are established powers out there," described one player. "There are very, very large power blocs. There are whole businesses with insulate responsibilities and profit functions that have existed for years."[163] Corporations may band together into formal alliances that work together to control vast sections of space; these are generally out in null security or 0.0 space, lawless areas in which corporations are allowed to maintain in-game sovereignty over their territory. Alliances may contain thousands of individual players working together for a common goal. These influential power blocs are often

[162] (EVElopedia 2012)
[163] (Constantine 2009)

organized around particular styles of gameplay, and these common objectives serve to orient alliance behavior within the game's larger narratives.

"Breaking up many of those coalitions has been the largest player generated content in the game," suggested one player. "In the end, EVE is all about war, be it economic or military. It's not surprising that an elected council for a game like EVE also mirrors the most active content generators in the game."[164] With large amounts of territory and resources, alliances go to great lengths to protect their in-game interests. The CSM is seen as one way to serve those interests, by maintaining or enhancing gameplay mechanics that best serve an alliance's needs.[165] As such, larger alliances often put forward a particular CSM candidate to represent their voice to CCP. Often these candidates are well-known members of the community, where their in-game exploits give them credibility, prestige, and depth of knowledge that will be useful in shaping the direction of the game.

While this is not to imply that the CSM is made up entirely of large alliance candidates, getting elected without the high degree of organization and coordination an alliance can provide is sometimes difficult. Players have tried to organize themselves into political parties—the Rational Party and the Take Care party that represented high security players have been the most active—to varying degrees of success, taking cues from real life politics to build voter support.[166] Other CSMs I spoke to ran as independent candidates; one CSM was intrigued by the concept of a "more structured

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[164] (Seleene 2012)

[165] However, several CSMs said that these opposing political interests are set aside when there is work to be done. "About 95 to 98% of the things that are going on in the game, you agree on all of them," described one informant. "It is that other 2 to 5% you might have a disagreement on. For the most part you have a chance to start on common ground."

[166] The Rational Party was previously known as the Voice of Reason party. See (Dainze 2012). For information on the Take Care party, see (Jobse 2008).

group that would gather player feedback." Another sought to spread world values into EVE Online through the CSM's contact with players. At least one CSM member is regarded to have scammed his way onto the council solely for a trip to Iceland.[167] These players considered their time on the CSM with varying degrees of satisfaction; however, others were skeptical of "random bloggers, high sec care bears, people who do not really have much of a following" running for the CSM.[168]

While these movements did attract players, the problem comes in recruiting those that are less connected to the grander narratives within the EVE community. These players may not read the official forums where much of the information gets disseminated, and illustrating how political representation affects their daily life in EVE is less clear.[169] For casual players that only log in a few hours a week, EVE is only a game; those casual players I spoke with considered the effort required to get elected or vote for the CSM to be taking the game too seriously. This leaves out additional perspectives when CCP is looking for feedback on the direction the game should take.

For developers, however, the fact that some EVE players' voices are left out of the CSM representation is not a huge concern. In discussing the new voting system that went into effect with CSM8, one developer argued that "what I want is not actually fair representation of ALL EVE players, but of THOSE WHO VOTE (it follows from there

[167] Originally, all elected members of the CSM were flown to Iceland for the summits. A recent revision of the CSM White Paper has changed this to a "2+5" system. The two CSMs who received the most votes are automatically selected to fly to Iceland. The other five are selected "based on their activity on the CSM and their expertise as it relates to the expected topics of discussion" (Óskarsson 2013). This is thought to help prevent CSMs who get elected but perform no work from receiving a free trip to Iceland. This change will go into effect with the election of CSM8.
[168] Care bear is the colloquial term for a pilot that plays predominantly in high security or Empire space. These areas carry stronger penalties for player-versus-player actions, and are policed by CONCORD. This makes high sec a relatively safer place to exist for those that do not enjoy PvP, though no area in EVE is truly safe.
[169] The Take Care party had an in-game chat channel to help unaffiliated players connect and chat with representatives. This helped to allow representatives to understand issues that were of concern to high sec players.

that the more people that vote, the better representation we get.)"[170] In keeping with EVE's sandbox design which places few restrictions on player action, he also argued that if "large numbers of people organize themselves, they will get better results than those who do not."[171] As one developer would tell me, the democracy within EVE is kept "as Eve-ish as possible," and no actions are forbidden to attain seats on the CSM. The CSM becomes another tool which may be sought if players desire it. Those power blocs that are able to organize and seek the CSM as a way shape the game in their favorable are welcome to do so.

According to one informant, the "CSM tends to only have player focus when the blocs pay attention to it." As the large power blocs drive EVE's emergent game play, so too does the CSM provide a venue for those power dynamics. In EVE, power comes to those that can command action and results, and maintain that power across alliances of thousands of individuals. A seat on the CSM would seem to be a logical choice. Larger alliances have more at stake as they have greater resources to protect, and shaping gameplay mechanics could ensure profitable outcomes. It may be a beneficial strategy to encourage stagnation of gameplay mechanics, since these mechanics are what brought about their rise to power in the first place.[172] Such charges have indeed been leveled at the CSM; as one pilot angrily described, the "CSM has no problem with lack of gameplay, as long as it furthers their own goals."[173]

[170] (CCP Xhagen 2012)
[171] (CCP Xhagen 2012)
[172] (Edelman 2001:71)
[173] (Jade 2012)

The Power of Persuasion

However, the CSM does not have power to enforce CCP to make changes desired by the player base, regardless of the size of the collective interest.[174] Up until the structural changes that were implemented with CSM5, the CSM was run under a parliamentary paradigm. As one informant would cynically describe, "They have these meetings. They vote on proposals from the Assembly Hall section on the forums, and then that gets added to a bucket list that CCP ignores." If there is only an "intrinsic source of power" in the CSM, as another source would suggest, then what is gained by a seat on the CSM? What does the CSM offer to large alliances that battle over the small number of seats?

Without formal power to command such changes, the CSM evolved different methods to work around these challenges. When CSMs talk about the power they have, they speak about access. Describes Hans Jagerblitzen:

> We can't force CCP to do anything. We don't have hard power. We don't "manage" the players, and we don't "manage" CCP's messaging… But we do have an audience with CCP, and we provide an audience for player concerns. *Influence* is our greatest asset, and *it is earned, not granted*.[175]

The ability to persuade CCP development staff becomes the primary way in which the CSM can work around the constraints placed by the CSM's framework. The CSM is now referred to as a "conduit between CCP and the EVE Online player base," and a Skype channel allows for "constant deliberation" between developers and CSM

[174] One could make the argument that the lack of actual power is the reason why in-game political rivalries are set aside once the real work begins, since the stakes are lower. As one informant would quip, running for CSM reminded him 'of the Henry Kissinger quote, 'University politics are vicious precisely because the stakes are so small.'" However, many CSMs also talked to me about the disconnect between political elections and the occasionally tedious nature of game development. This no doubt plays a role as well.

[175] Emphasis in the original. See (Jagerblitzen 2013).

representatives.[176] This has been further enhanced by making the CSM a stakeholder in the design process, which allows for access with a wider variety of actors within the development staff.[177] As CSM7 Chairman Seleene would describe of the stakeholder status, "if the CSM itself doesn't have any real power or sway or ability to interact with CCP closer than it has in the past, then none of that was going to matter."[178]

Persuasion has a long been a part of EVE's political machinations. When the rise and fall of large corporations drives EVE's emergent game play, confidence tricks and espionage are some of the most common ways to engineer their downfall. Both of these rely on the ability of an individual to influence and persuade others that they are who they claim to be. "Trust is the most valuable commodity in EVE, because it is literally priceless," describes one player.[179] "You are taking a chance when you trust someone in EVE…in that you have to be prepared on that trust being betrayed." Convincing others that you are trustworthy enough to be given access to corporation secrets, your operations are legitimate, your information is credible is always a gamble. The deeper that you allow other people into your corporation, the more access they have to the operations, fortunes, and resources; the further you trust others with access, the greater the opportunity for a betrayal.

Many examples of such betrayals have passed into EVE legend. For example, the assassination of Mirial, the CEO of Ubiqua Seraph, took ten months to set up, and resulted in the seizure of assets of $16,500 US worth of virtual goods.[180] The assassination was carried out by the Guiding Hand Social Club, one of EVE's most

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[176] (McDermott 2012)
[177] Within CCP's development methodology, stakeholders are consulted to help shape the course of product development. The push for stakeholder status will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.
[178] (Council of Stellar Management 2013)
[179] (Reiisha 2011)
[180] (Francis 2008)

notorious mercenary corporations. Mirial was persuaded to fly a Navy Apocalypse, worth billions of ISK, into remote space, and was in turn assassinated by her closest lieutenant; the only prize that the client requested was Mirial's frozen corpse, and the rest of the take was kept by the Guiding Hand Social Club.[181] In another of EVE's famous scandals, a simple Ponzi scheme run by Eddie Lampert and Mordor Exuel netted $51,677.50 US worth of ISK.[182] These types of treachery have become a routine part of daily life.

Persuasion within EVE can also be used to involve other corporations and players within the emergent gameplay. "It's a single server. That's the big thing. It's a shared universe," described CSM1 Chairman Jade Constantine:

> We are playing space games. We play imaginary characters in a far future setting, but the imagery in this game is very rich…If you can somehow tie your own political struggles into that mythology, you can get a very impressive competitive advantage… [Our corporation was] able to sell the mythology of conflict to the broader server by using public relations, by involving third party corporations, and just by making it an exciting fight.[183]

Since all of EVE exists within the same virtual space, larger conflicts can involve all of the players within the game. A large war affects the supply and demand of resources and technology, allows for war profiteering, involves large numbers of people, and can perhaps allow for other smaller corporations to seize territory while attentions are

[181] When a player's ship is destroyed, the pilot may have the opportunity to flee by an escape pod. However, enemy players may choose to destroy the pilot's capsule. This practice is known as podding. While the game lore itself describes that pilots are immortal and upon death will wake up in a newly cloned body, the actual penalties for pod death may be severe. A clone must be kept current with the player's number of skill points, which is how players gain access to new abilities. Should a player not be current on their clone, they lose a percentage of their skill points upon pod death. As skills train in real time, one at a time, this may set a player back months of real life time. In practice, podding is looked as adding insult to injury. When a player is podded, their body is ejected into space and freezes. These space-frozen corpses may then be sold at auction, kept as trophies, etc.

[182] (Drain 2011a)

[183] (Constantine 2009)

directed elsewhere. By selling a convincing account, corporations can persuade others to rally to their cause, rise against them, or even diffuse the conflict altogether.

"A lot of the game revolves around propaganda and the skillful deployment of that propaganda. Controlling the narrative" can be a powerful advantage, describes CSM6 Chairman The Mittani.[184] The power to frame the interpretation of public events is part of what drives EVE's politics. Public opinion is a social construction, and opinions are framed by the "interpretations of those who can most consistently get their claims and manufactured cues publicized widely."[185] Because of EVE's single server, the ability to shape that discussion can change the course of events for EVE's entire population. Getting your alliance's version of events publicized is crucial to shaping outcomes in your favor; alternatively, restricting discussion on an issue can be similarly powerful.

According to Cialdini, relying on such social cues "provides a convenient shortcut for determining how to behave but, at the same time, makes one who uses the shortcut vulnerable to profiteers who lie in wait along its path."[186] These profiteers are those who best know how to use players' reliance on socially validated truths, and the specific areas social cues that might be influenced for greatest effect. This helps to illustrated some of the cultural skepticism of democratic process that persists in EVE; the greater input and

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[184] (The Mittani 2009b)
[185] (Edelman 2001: 53)
[186] (Cialdini 1993:116). One of the two books on human behavior often passed around EVE pilots, Cialdini's Influence: The Weapons of Persuasion is covers the deliberate social cues that can be manipulated to persuade another. Written for a popular audience, Cialdini outlines six principles of persuasion: reciprocation, commitment and consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity. However, behavior is not always rational. Also widely shared, Ariely's Predictably Irrational discusses why humans act counter to their best interests. Ariely argues that these counterintuitive choices tend to fall in predictable patterns. Both can be applied to situations that arise in EVE: commanding authority from a corporation, the perception of scarcity to scam a pilot out of their ISK, decisions made in the heat of battle, etc. See (Cialdini 1993; Ariely 2008).

transparency involved in the mechanisms and governance of an institution, the more obvious the weaknesses in that system become.

"This is the sort of game where you have to bring everything that you can to a conflict or engagement or situation," describes The Mittani. "If you are holding yourself back you might be that guy who has a lot of e-honor, but you will still be a loser and e-honor is a cold comfort."[187] While this comment relates to the necessity of espionage, the point applies more broadly to the political machinations of EVE. Those alliances and corporations that are the most effective, respected, and feared are those that bring all tools to the table in any given situation. Effective leadership uses all available methods to deliver results, and the ability to persuade others to use those skills is what makes EVE leaders truly powerful.

It is important to remember that there is no moral code or rules built into EVE's cultural landscape. "The only rules that are there are those that can be broken," described The Mittani.[188] In keeping with EVE's sandbox universe, the only limits are those players place on themselves. Actions that are kept within the confines of the game are seen as morally neutral, and it is only when the methods begin to blur the boundaries between the game world and the real that they become questionable.[189] According to the developers I spoke with, this is a conscious design choice. Described one developer, if EVE relied on real world rules to govern the behavior within it:

> …you no longer have a different experience when you come into it. What is a virtual universe other than a different experience for you to have? What would be enticing about our universe to come into?

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[187] (The Mittani 2009b)
[188] (The Mittani 2009b)
[189] (Mildenberger 2013). Examples of actions that cross this boundary might include forum and account hacking, real money trading or gambling, or actions carried out in the real world. Allegations of incidents that cross that line—such as cutting the power to a person's real life residence for in-game gains or threatening to assault an alliance leader at Fanfest—can and do occur in EVE. See (The Mittani 2009a; Augustine 2012).

The ability of the CSM to influence developers falls directly into that ambiguous area between the real world and the virtual. While a true separation between the real and the virtual in practice does not exist, the CSM is expected to abide by the cultural expectations of both realms.[190] While is crucial for CSM representatives to be able to find common ground with the development teams, it is important to understand "that player perspective and [developer] perspective are two very different things… The CSM has to reconcile both points of view."[191] CSM representatives are elected with the expressed purpose of representing player concerns, and operate from this perspective first and foremost when dealing with CCP developers. As EVE players first, players operate within a framework that operates under different cultural norms; as smart battle strategy, players bring all available tools to any given engagement. Should a CSM fail to deliver results or fail to lobby CCP using all available methods, the CSM is again called a marketing ploy within the public discourse. For example, one player cynically described the CSM's history to me as:

> …bullshit PR tool, and then bull shit PR tool finds a gun and a weak point. Oh god. Oh god. And then they dropped the gun and it goes back to being a bullshit PR tool.

While not all players would describe the CSM as such, its effectiveness is judged by EVE's cultural ideas to command results through persuasion at points of vulnerability. Should this persuasion be insufficient to alter CCP's course and the situation develop into a full-fledged crisis, then the CSM becomes an even more important in representing

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[190] The idea that the real world and the virtual world are separate traces back to Huizinga's concept of the magic circle. Huizinga argues that there is a fixed, impermeable boundary between the game and the real world that allows it to operate apart from the rules and norms that govern normal behavior (Huizinga 1955). However, current discussion among game scholars shows that this concept is losing traction within the academic community. See (Zimmerman 2012).

[191] (Council of Stellar Management 2011:14)

player interests in extreme times that are more akin to EVE's constant uncertainty. While this same player would go on to suggest that the power to force CCP to change comes from the media, I would argue that the CSM's greatest strength is in its representatives acting in ways that truly embody the cultural tendencies of EVE's player base. [192] Effective CSMs are expected to act like alliance leaders and navigate that crisis in true EVE fashion: it is time to go to war.[193]

Case Study: CSM6 and the Methods of Influence[194]

Consistent with the attitude to bring all tools to a conflict is the CSM's willingness to take real life considerations into their calculus when deciding how to influence CCP. The "weak point" described by the above player was not virtual, but one tied to the particular cultural and historical moment in which CCP found themselves during the term of CSM6. The ability and willingness to use weaknesses beyond the virtual into the real world is part of why CSM6 is regarded as one of the most successful since its inception; the players involved acted as was expected of alliance leaders under constant threat. According to CEO Hilmar Pétursson describes, "Ultimately democracies were either from monarchs that built a parliament or it was people revolting to build a parliament. I think these institutions were born out of dictatorship or they were disrupted from dictatorships, and I would say we are giving the power back before it is taken."[195]

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[192] This does not imply these behaviors confer the same legitimacy for those at CCP. Describes Hans Jagerblitzen: "…regardless of how that influence is obtained *it can also be lost in a heartbeat through the representative's behavior* – whether through gross misconduct, violation of our legal responsibilities, or even something as subtle as trying to wage war against CCP during a time they are genuinely trying to be cooperative" (Jagerblitzen 2013). For the purposes of this paper, however, it is the legitimacy that is conferred by EVE's player base that is important.

[193] (Zirse 2011)

[194] This analysis borrows heavily from The Mittani's blog post "69: Memento Mori" (2012). As the Chairman of CSM6, he experienced these events first hand. The observations are consistent other sources, and with information I obtained through interviews. I have no reason to doubt the veracity of the claims made in this article, despite The Mittani's reputation as EVE's resident Spymaster.

[195] (van Nes & Wolting 2009)

From the perspective of the players, CSM6 provided a moment when it seemed possible for the CSM to take a measure of real power back on behalf of the players.

As a way to illustrate how the CSM can influence CCP, I will examine the methods used by CSM6 to influence CCP to hear player concerns.[196] While I did not find universal acceptance of CSM6's methods, most of the players I spoke to indicated it had been the most productive council regardless of their opinion on the manner in which those results were achieved. The extreme measures taken over the course of CSM6 are not the only road to power. CSM7 has taken the more conservative approach of codifying and institutionalizing the connections between CCP and the CSM through their stakeholder position. These will be discussed in Chapter IV. However, a different sense of authority is conferred by a community skeptical of results not immediately delivered, transparent process that leaves institutions open to attack, and the accountability of numerous individuals. For our purposes, CSM6 serves to highlight the ability of a CSM to command results, despite a lack of official power.

The Incarna Expansion and the Summer of Rage

The summer of 2011 proved to be a watershed moment in terms of communication with CCP. In what was dubbed the "Summer of Rage" by players, internal CCP documents were leaked to the public that detailed company discussions over the implementation of microtransactions. Microtransactions refer to the sale of in-game virtual goods; ccording to the CSM, CCP had been preparing to institute microtransactions as part of its upcoming Incarna expansion.

[196] This does not mean that earlier iterations of the CSM were ineffective. The concept has evolved greatly in the five years since its inception. However my fieldwork took place between April and November 2012, just after CSM6 had left office. Therefore these two CSMs loomed large in the memory of the community and were the subject of many hours of discussion.

The Incarna expansion had been five years in development and had been heavily marketed to the player base. The new expansion primarily focused on vanity content, rather than generating new forms of game play. Vanity content provides social prestige rather than offering benefits to game play. Central to this approach was the introduction of avatars; avatars are graphical representations of the user within a game universe. Unlike most MMOs, EVE did not feature avatars. Instead, a player's ship was the representation within the game universe. EVE's new highly-customizable avatars and a new environment, the Captain's Quarters, for the avatars to explore led to the expansion being nicknamed "Walking in Stations" by the player base. However when EVE's primary focus had always been "Flying in Space," these cosmetic upgrades were seen by the player base as nothing more than a vehicle for to sell the new vanity content through microtransactions, while increasing demands on computer graphics hardware.[197]

Moreover, there was a large discrepancy over the price points of the introduced items. A monocle for one's avatar—which could only be seen by others over forum profile pictures—could be purchased for the sum of $68 US.[198] These were a hard sell to players that had up until recently had no virtual bodies at all.

The leaked company newsletter carried an article entitled "Greed is Good?", which proposed to expand the microtransaction model to the rest of the game; players could possibly spend real world money for a competitive edge in combat.[199] For EVE players that invest tremendous amounts of time and effort to train their combat skills, build alliances and corporations, and amass power and resources, being able to buy a competitive advantage circumvents that investment. For players drawn to EVE's

[197] (Drain 2011c)
[198] (Daniel 2011)
[199] (Drain 2011c)

spaceship combat and the ability to take part in the larger emergent adventures through effort, CCP was moving farther and farther away from what players felt to be the core of EVE's gameplay.

While many of these features would normally have been prevented by the CSM's oversight, the CSM had been increasingly left out of the process. At their winter summit, CSM5 had raised significant concerns over the shape Incarna was taking. These concerns went unaddressed, leading CSM5 to issue an open letter to the community detailing the growing rift between the CSM and CCP.[200] This took place at the end of CSM5, immediately before Fanfest, where the results of CSM6's election would be announced. Due to increased community ire and in-game protests, the decision was made to fly the newly-elected CSM6 to Iceland for an emergency summit. According to one informant, telling the developers that the combination of microtransactions, vanity content, and avatars was not what the player base wanted was "like we were telling children that there was no Santa Claus."

Elected as the apprehensions about Incarna were beginning to emerge, CSM6 was a fundamentally different kind of CSM in composition and demeanor. By the time stakeholder status became codified in CSM5, many of the candidates on the CSM were career politicians with less experience in null sec. Null security or 0.0 spaces are lawless areas outside of the purview of the NPC police force. These spaces are the source for some of EVE's most active player-driven content. When CCP began to look at changing game mechanics that governed EVE's most compelling gameplay, CSM members did not have experience to adequately advise CCP on how the community would react to such

[200] (Mynxee 2011)

changes.[201] For example, jump bridges allow travel between two starbases; this can facilitate safe, fast travel in dangerous territory and are seen as an integral part of life in null sec. CCP had proposed to change the mechanics behind jump bridges; changing the way that fundamental piece of technology works changes how major alliances exist within that territory.[202] Without experience in those spaces, the CSM's suggestions did not offer practical solutions from the community's point of view. According to one source, "the CSM was no longer merely unhelpful but had become an active detriment to the game."

Thus the stronger player alliances banded together to take control of the council; those elected tended to be those with strong political ties and experienced leadership within the stronger alliances. "We decided from day one…We are going to run this like we run things in the game," described Seleene of CSM6 and CSM7, "and the results speak for themselves."[203] For much of the null sec community, the new CSM6 had already demonstrated its ability to deliver results to the player base through time served. It was the interest of the core null sec alliances drove the shift in public opinion. "It was purely the power blocs, and that's all. Its people will not shift unless they are led in a *particular* way," described one informant.

With the controversy that surrounded the Incarna release, the CSM6 behaved much like a 0.0 alliance under wartime conditions. The swift decision-making approach that served CSM6's member within their alliances was applied to the council. Voting on user-submitted forum posts was abolished. Feedback from players was primarily through direct EVE mail, in addition to more informal chats over third-party applications such as

[201] (Jarjadian 2011)
[202] (CCP Soundwave 2011)
[203] (Seleene 2013)

Jabber, Skype, or Mumble.[204] Weekly meetings were forgone in favor of constant communication over a Skype channel with the developers. While the channel is admittedly not entirely business, "a lot of things happen over the Skype channel that sort of elude a formal process."[205] This more informal approach allows ideas to be pitched directly to the developers who can make that happen, rather than going through official channels.

CSM6 also worked to close their functioning from public view rather than to make their methods transparent. A united front was presented to the public, and any dissent was hidden behind official statements from the CSM. According to one informant, the Chairman was:

> …basically puppeteering the rest of the CSM. No one spoke unless it was through his mouth. Nothing was transparent. No one knew what the other CSM members were thinking, because everything that came out was "The CSM thinks this," and "The CSM thinks that."

The alliances of the respective CSMs were used to propagate these messages throughout the community, lending an air of legitimacy for members who trusted their leaders implicitly. These tactics were so effective that according to one informant:

> …living in the shadow of CSM6, which had the incredible message machine of [the Chairman and his alliance] and a full blown crisis to use it on, it is a bit difficult. A common complaint is that "The CSM isn't doing anything" or "The CSM is silent."

These unified ideological messages tapped into the cultural expectations EVE players had for leadership; strong unified messages helped to guide player understanding for what they could expect from the CSM as their advocates at CCP. These ideological messages often focused on results. As one source describes, "Once we had an accomplishment we

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[204] Jabber and Skype facilitate voice, text, or video communication. Mumble allows players to communicate over voice and text chat. Mumble also offers encryption, which keeps corporations' communications secure.
[205] (Crowd Control Productions 2012b)

would raise it up in front of everyone and the media." Even though the methods of achieving these outcomes were not open to public scrutiny, by presenting such propagandistic tales of their accomplishments could drive the discourse in which they were talked about in the community and in the gaming media. "We must take stern control of the narrative there to ensure that the badposters in [the official forums] are not heeded by anyone of consequence," described one player.[206]

A Moment of Cultural Weakness

To understand the true effect of media leverage at this moment, it is necessary to understand the other culture which shapes both EVE Online and CCP: Iceland. As EVE Online's culture is embedded within the technological framework of CCP, so too is CCP embedded within its home country of Iceland. While the primary focus of this paper is not a comparison of EVE and Icelandic cultures, the relationship between the two comes into play through CCP as a company. The cultural similarities seep in through the manner in which EVE is constructed, and EVE has historically been designed and managed by largely Icelandic staff. [207] The Summer of Rage that culminated in the lay off 20% of CCP staff worldwide staff does not have their antecedents solely in the divide

[206] The Mittani, quoted by (Jarjadian 2011).

[207] There are many more parallels between EVE culture and that of ancient Iceland than can be discussed here. For example, ancient Iceland was characterized by a lack of centralized executive power. Should a party be wronged, it was up to the individual to pursue the matter and enforce penalty (Karlsson 2000). Penalties were generally either monetary or outlawry. Argues Byock, a "dependence on outlawry exempted Iceland from the need to maintain a policing body to oversee the imposition of corporal punishment, execution, or incarceration" (1988:29). A person could be declared an outlaw for a period of three years (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) or indefinitely (*skóggangr*). Byock further describes that a full outlaw was "denied all assistance in Iceland; he was not to be harbored by anyone, nor could he be helped out of the country. In effect, this punishment was tantamount to a death sentence, for a *skóggangr* could be killed with impunity" (1988:29). This bears many similarities to the system of kill rights in EVE. While EVE does maintain an NPC police force, performing an act of aggression on you or your property in high security space (or your capsule in low security space) will generate a kill right (EVElopedia 2013). Once activated, you may pursue and kill the party with impunity and with full sanction of CONCORD. These rights may be sold to other players; this makes traveling in space tremendously more difficult. Kill rights are active for 30 days within the game. This is only one such similarity. While many players jokingly described EVE as "Spreadsheets in Space" due to the amount of math, I often countered it was more like "Iceland in Space" due to significant cultural similarities.

that grew between CCP and its player base. It is this unique situation which allowed CSM6 to press its advantage.

The unique circumstances in Iceland that preceded CSM6's election in March 2011 have become well known. After an incredible expansion of its banking system, Iceland's three largest banks collapsed in late September 2008. According to Lewis, "The exact dollar amount of Iceland's financial hole was essentially unknowable, as it depended on the value of the generally stable Icelandic krona, which had also crashed and was removed from the market by the Icelandic government."[208] The estimated $100 billion dollars in losses were borne largely by Iceland's population of 300,000, which translated into roughly $330,000 for each citizen.[209]

Analysis of the financial collapse is one that is deeply intertwined with Icelandic culture and history itself. Until quite recently, much of Iceland's economy has been based on its rich fishing industry. However, after a several years of variable fishing yields, the government privatized their fishing industry. In 1984, the individual transferable quota was instituted; fishing quotas were allotted to fisherman based on historical yield.[210] While this meant a "serious restriction of freedom," it created a system of sustainable wealth that could be traded, borrowed against, or sold.[211] As Lewis describes, "The new wealth transformed Iceland—and turned it from the backwater it had been for 1,100 years to the place that spawned Björk."[212] This newfound freedom from traditional occupations of fishing or aluminum smelting allowed Icelanders the ability to

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[208] (Lewis 2009:2). This piece is often shared among EVE pilots as a primer to Icelandic culture, as a way to explain some of the hubris that is seen by CCP development staff.
[209] (Lewis 2009:2). Note that EVE's current server population has broken 500,000 accounts, a possible 200,000 more virtual citizen than the real world country which maintains it (Drain 2013).
[210] (Pálsson & Helgason 1995)
[211] (Karlsson 2000:360; Lewis 2009)
[212] (Lewis 2009:14). Björk Guðmundsdóttir, more commonly known as Björk, is a popular Icelandic singer-songwriter.

become highly educated population. However, there was a problem. As Lewis describes:

> Back away from the Icelandic economy and you can't help but notice something really strange about it: the people have cultivated themselves to the point where they are unsuited for the work available to them. All these exquisitely schooled, sophisticated people, each and every one of whom feels special, are presented with two mainly horrible ways to earn a living: trawler fishing and aluminum smelting… At the dawn of the 21st century, Icelanders were still waiting for some task more suited to their filigreed minds to turn up inside their economy so they might do it. Enter investment banking.[213]

This new period of prosperity was regarded, in part, as Icelanders finally getting the recognition from the outside world that it had been long due. The period of intense financial expansion has been referred to as the "New Viking" period because "the dozen businessmen behind the growth have been likened to the Vikings given their attitude for conquest."[214] These tales of Iceland's newfound financial successes became part of the myth that the insular country told itself:

> The old Vikings were not just marauding pirates—they were modernizers… The New Vikings, Iceland's advance-guard entrepreneurs, were also concerned with global influence, intelligence, and profit…[and] contributed to a new national self-regard.[215]

This sense of newfound ethnic pride is, in part, what contributed to its downfall.[216] An insular population that has been historically self-reliant, they began educating former fisherman at the University of Iceland, in essence teaching themselves the art of

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[213] (Lewis 2009:15)
[214] (Chartier 2010:11)
[215] (Boyes 2009:10)
[216] This pride is bound up in a sense of ethnic superiority, and should not be mistaken for nationalism. As Karlsson argues, Icelanders developed a clear ethnic identity much earlier than a national identity (2000:198-199). While Iceland developed a national identity, this strong connection to cultural roots seen through the Icelandic Sagas is how Icelanders primarily connect to their ethnic identity. This separation of ethnicity from nationality can be seen throughout the dialogues on the financial crisis. The myth of Iceland as "the essence of Cool, a successful nation where people couldn't stop partying" became more about the Icelandic temperament than about a strong financial sector (Boyes 2009:2). This can also be seen in the resignation of Iceland's coalition government citing pressures of the financial crisis; the government simply resigned and a new government was elected (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2009).

investment from Icelanders that had been educated overseas.[217] Icelanders speculated using their own currency; as one former banker described, "borrow yen at 3 percent, use them to buy Icelandic kronur, and then invest those kronur at 16 percent."[218] They "created fake capital by trading assets amongst themselves at inflated values," described one hedge-fund manager.[219] This was then reinvested in status purchases and businesses abroad, such as a well-known toy company or London football team.[220] Financial advice that suggested Iceland's new strategies would prove insolvent went unheeded as it came from non-Icelanders.

When the bubble burst in late September 2008 and Iceland's three largest banks—Landsbankinn, Kaupþing, and Glitnir—were nationalized, unemployment rose from under 2% to 10% sparking widespread protests in a country not accustomed to political discontent.[221] For CCP, however, it was relatively business as usual; EVE's reliance on a global customer base kept CCP immune from much of the economic turbulence seen by other Icelandic businesses. Described CEO Hilmar Pétursson:

> The effects of this manmade financial storm have hit Iceland pretty hard, but don't worry about us. Icelanders are sturdy and tenacious by nature. There will still be fun times in Reykjavik regardless. Tough times never last, tough people do. Iceland is full of tough people, the rest died off centuries ago. While the world's bank bubble deflates (hopefully in a more orderly fashion than we have seen so far), we here at CCP focus on our own economy…we are now quite focused on strengthening the core value propositions of EVE Online. [222]

Insulated from the crisis by the diversity of its customer base, CCP became one of a handful of businesses still delivering profitable exports. In 2010, CCP received the

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[217] (Lewis 2009)
[218] Quoted in (Lewis 2009:15)
[219] Quoted in (Lewis 2009:8)
[220] (Scott 2009; Booth 2012)
[221] (Boyes 2009:187)
[222] (CCP Hellmar 2008)

President of Iceland's Export Award for "for remarkable contribution to export trade and the procurement of foreign currency for the Icelandic Nation."[223] As The Mittani suggests, "One could jest that post-crisis Iceland has four export products—fish, aluminium, Bjork [*sic*], and internet spaceships—and be alarmingly accurate."[224]

Whatever the company rhetoric, the similarity between the behaviors of Iceland's financiers and the stewards of CCP is striking. In 2006, CCP acquired White Wolf Publishing, a financially-struggling company that made tabletop roleplaying games such as *World of Darkness*.[225] The reaction from the pen-and-paper RPG community was that of confusion; with no real connection to virtual MMOs, the takeover of a small company that produced niche tabletop games that were past their prime seemed strange.[226] CCP began developing two additional games: *World of Darkness* and *DUST514*. There was little conceptual overlap between the three games, which would stretch development resources thin. However due in part to its continued success through the Icelandic financial crisis, the company was convinced it could achieve "three impossible things at the same time."[227] Impossible things were, after all, what CCP did best according to their literature. As one player describes:

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[223] (Crowd Control Productions 2012a)
[224] (The Mittani 2012)
[225] (Carless 2006)
[226] (The Mittani 2012; RPGPundit 2006). Of the many topics I discussed over the course of my fieldwork, the state of White Wolf publishing was one of the more controversial. Like other Icelandic investors that bought struggling companies in unfamiliar industries and dictated their management, CCP scaled back production at the Atlanta-based company. It became, according CCP marketing officer Ryan S. Dancy, only an "imprint... White Wolf used to have a fairly large staff. It doesn't anymore. It's focusing primarily on the World of Darkness RPG products. It's not doing some of the things it used to do; board games and other card games and things. The focus of the company [CCP] is on making MMOs and our legacy table top business is a legacy business" (Nutt 2009). When the Incarna riots led CEO Hilmar Pétursson to reframe company focus back on EVE, the *World of Darkness* MMORPG was one of the first targeted; of the 20% of CCP staff that was laid off, many were from the Atlanta office working on *World of Darkness* (Drain 2011b; Orland 2011). While the writers of the original White Wolf games have since formed Onyx Path Publishing and purchased the rights to some of their products from CCP, the state of the World of Darkness MMORPG is as yet unclear (RPGG News 2012). This is what led one informant to implore me to "Give CCP hell for White Wolf!!"
[227] CEO Hilmar Pétursson, quoted in (Nutt 2011)

> CCP is known for the daring potential of EVE and the travails of trying to bring that potential into actuality; eyebrows were raised when CCP proclaimed themselves to be icons of 'Excellence.' While expansions dropped features midstream, CCP proclaimed their ability to 'Deliver.'[228]

CCP developers began to tell each other how amazing EVE's new content would be, regardless of the fact that it moved farther and farther away from the spaceship combat that had made EVE a success. When the CSM5 repeatedly said the Incarna expansion, which was more about avatar development than gameplay, those complaints went unheeded by the CCP staff.

While one could suggest CCP's growing isolationism is reflective of every game company's faith in their creations, I argue that the particular historical and cultural circumstances contributed to CCP's self-admitted hubris.[229] For example, the parallels between the tendency to purchase status items with Iceland's new wealth and the "Walking in Stations" content developed for Incarna are striking. Describes Lewis:

> …when [Icelanders] lent money they didn't simply facilitate enterprise but bankrolled friends and family, so that they might buy and own things, like real investment bankers: Beverly Hills condos, British soccer teams and department stores, Danish airlines and media companies, Norwegian banks, Indian power plants.[230]

While the real Icelanders purchased homes and cars of increasing value, the newly-created avatars of New Eden also needed status items. Among the vanity items released during Incarna was virtual clothing designed by Nicola Formichetti, the fashion director

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[228] (The Mittani 2012)

[229] See (CCP Hellmar 2011). As CEO Hilmar Pétursson describes in a letter to EVE's players, "my zeal for pushing EVE to her true potential made me lose sight of doing the simple things right. I was impatient when I should have been cautious, defiant when I should have been conciliatory and arrogant when I should have been humble… Somewhere along the way, I began taking success for granted. As hubris set in, I became less inclined to listen to pleas for caution. Red flags raised by very smart people both at CCP and in the community went unheeded because of my stubborn refusal to allow adversity to gain purchase on our plans…I was wrong and I admit it" (CCP Hellmar 2011).

[230] (Lewis: 2009:7)

of Lady Gaga.[231] Likening designer virtual pants to real world clothing that might retail for $1000, CCP Senior Producer Arnar Hrafn Gylfason asked the players:

> Why would you want to wear a pair of $1,000 jeans when you can get perfectly similar jeans for under $50? What do other people think about you when they see you wearing them? For some you will look like the sad culmination of vainness while others will admire you and think you are the coolest thing since sliced bread.[232]

The case could be made that the sense of cool that Gylfason referred to was Icelanders' new identity as "the essence of Cool, a successful nation where people couldn't stop partying," rather than something reflective of EVE culture at all.[233]

When the reaction of the player base to the Incarna content and the leaked microtransactions documents proved to be as incendiary as CSM5 had warned, the newly-elected CSM6 was flown to Iceland for an emergency summit with CCP developers. After days of negotiations, CCP and the CSM6 reached an accord. Described as a "wall of unity" that was cemented around the singular opinion that CCP was off course, and CCP vowed to listen to the player base.[234] Describes one player, the CSM:

> …stepped up and became the voice of the protests. It was prepared to bite the hand that created it even as CCP was flying the council out for an emergency summit….It appeared that CSM6 emergency summit was an instrumental part of the effort to talk CCP off the ledge, though there was still a gap between CCP and the CSM… And the Council of Stellar Management came out of it looking like a major force in the game.[235]

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[231] (Kuo 2011; McWhertor 2011)
[232] (Plunkett 2011)
[233] (Boyes 2009:2). Further illustration of the temperament inside CCP can be shown through the song "HTFU." Like many game companies CCP has its own in-house band, Permaband. A play on words, Permaband is evocative of a "permanent ban" within the game. Banning a player permanently bars access from a game. Permaband's main song, "HTFU," suggests that if you want to follow CCP on a course for excellence you must "htfu," or "harden the fuck up" (Permaband 2009). Released during the Icelandic financial crisis, the lyrics illustrate the mood within the company: "United we stand never ever growing weary. We cannot fall 'cause gravity is just a theory. We reach higher than the giants in operations. Patience soon well be crip walking in stations. We're more agile than a president dodging a shoe. We need three continents for our massive crew. From Atlanta to Shanghai to the Icelandic nation, throw your hands up for World Domination!" (Permaband 2009).
[234] (Crowd Control Productions 2011b)
[235] (Arcturus 2012)

The community's awareness and perception of the CSM had grown, and their ability to deliver results on behalf of the player base assuaged many earlier doubts of the CSM's legitimacy.

However, there was significant time between the emergency summit and the release of the next expansion, Crucible, in November 2011. While some of the delay can be explained by lead time necessary to for game development to change course, more was needed to persuade CCP to change their ways. After every summit, CCP and the CSM release minutes of the discussions that take place to the community; generally, this is simply a matter of course. However, CCP developers continued to tell each other how amazing their content was as outsider, non-Icelandic input did not carry the same weight.[236] When reviewing the minutes, CCP staff tried to insert some of their marketing words into the minutes. At this point, CCP desperately needed the buy in of the player base, and the CSM's word that CCP could "Deliver" "Excellence" would do much to turn public opinion back into their favor.

The solution was simple, and the CSM refused to sign off on the altered minutes. Described one informant:

> After that as pressure mounted on [CCP] from the relatively small number of people who were interested in minutes—because minutes are such a relatively trivial thing overall—but after certain time it stops becoming something that a tiny interested demographic…cares about and starts to become a news story.

[236] One CSM representative described interacting with a particular development team that had no real desire to interact with the CSM. Forced to deal with them through summits, most of their dialogues consisted of developers telling CSMs how awesome their content would be. The team earned the nickname Team Awesome among the community. The rhetoric became so repetitive that "awesome" became used as a synonym for anything but by later CSMs. This helps to illustrate how insular opinions had become for some of the CCP developers, which many of the informants I talked to paralleled with the same cultural tendencies that were highlighted in the banking crisis. See (Bartlem 2011), which references a post on a now-defunct site, and (Teg 2011).

As the CSM is under standard non-disclosure agreements, the only thing that CSM representatives could say is that they were "very unhappy with how CCP is behaving." As the members of CSM6 had access to a wide variety of media contacts, and the denial of interviews with the gaming media becomes a source of serious contention within the community.[237] As CCP Xhagen describes, "These things might sound trivial and many people might call it a battle of semantics, but the content of these minutes are far from trivial."[238] By the time the mounting pressure delivers the minutes much later than desired, there is again widespread discontent among the players. Describes the CSM1 Chairman Jade Constantine:

> I have trouble believing there was any significant controversy whatsoever over the content there…The entire thing reads like CSM saying the player base is unhappy about X, Y, Z and CCP saying "oh well its [*sic*] our strategy to press on regardless and ignore you". It is disappointing that the emergency summit appears so meaningless in retrospect and I guess it does explain why no real changes have been declared 4 months after incarna-release...I stood there at Thingvellir listening to this company describing us as "internet chieftains" responsible for a grand new experiment in virtual politics as stakeholders in the virtual world of New Eden and I thought "this is pretty loopy, but its good loopy, its visionary madness, its [*sic*] exciting and its bold." But what I read in these emergency minutes is not anything approaching a partnership of respect its [*sic*] simply a cash-greedy corporate buzzword addiction riding roughshod over the opinions of the Eve player base and deciding to ignore all feedback, council, advise [*sic*] and suggestion from the CSM representatives.[239]

CCP's attempt to alter the emergency summit to something more favorable to their current development path proved to be the final straw for many players. The move was

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[237] As has been previously stated, many of the representatives of CSM6 were representatives in large alliances. Many of the activities of these alliances become news stories within the gaming media. This is in part due to EVE's single server, where events affect the entire population. This particular constellation of representatives had developed personal contacts within the gaming media as a result of these in-game activities, as well as a large following within the player community. Being "space famous," the word of the CSM had a particular authority to it especially in the eyes of the gaming media.

[238] (CCP Xhagen 2011)

[239] (Constantine 2011)

seen as yet another example of how CCP was simply going to do whatever they thought was "awesome" regardless of what the player base desired in their virtual world.

Barely three weeks after the release of the minutes, CCP lost approximately 8% of its account volume as players unsubscribed, or "unsubbed" in masse.[240] Unsubbing, or cancelling a player's paid subscription to a game, is generally seen as an empty threat; time invested in building characters, communities, and worlds can generally not be taken with players should they choose to move to a different game. However after months of being misled about the direction of the company, many players had simply had enough. The drop in account subscriptions and mounting media pressure was enough to finally persuade CCP to change; CEO Hilmar Pétursson released a letter of apology to the EVE community, stating that "I was impatient when I should have been cautious, defiant when I should have been conciliatory and arrogant when I should have been humble."[241] Admitting his fault in steering EVE awry, he pledged a refocus on EVE's core spaceship content. As part of this refocus back to "Flying in Space," and the drop in account subscriptions, 20% of CCP's worldwide staff was laid off.[242]

Discussion

While the players got what they wanted and the CSM looked like a "major force in the game," the CSM's ability to leverage power as an institution is still an open question for many in the community.[243] The CSM undoubtedly played a very important role in advocating for change from the point of view of the players. Both CSM5 and CSM6 can point to repeated attempts to advise CCP against making content that would

[240] (Drain 2011b)
[241] (CCP Hellmar 2011)
[242] (Drain 2011b; The Mittani 2012)
[243] (Arcturus 2012)

not appeal to their core, subscribing player base. CSM6 were portrayed as strong negotiators after the emergency summit that followed the Incarna debacle. After the controversial attempt at white-washing the emergency summit minutes, players received an apology from the CEO, corporate refocusing on EVE's core content, and an expansion that catered to CSM demands.

However, as several informants were quick to point out, it was not the pressure of the CSM that caused CCP to change its course. It was the media that spread awareness of the growing disconnect between CCP and its player base, which in turn caused a drop in subscriber sales. Described one informant:

> CCP only pays attention to the media. CCP had ignored the CSM when it came to pressure for years, as was obvious. CSM5 had issued an open letter about Incarna [stating their disagreements with CCP], and precisely who gave a fuck. The big difference was in CSM6…They used these media contacts…to be able to focus a spotlight from the press on to CCP. The press loves a good company fucks up story, especially in the MMO environment. I think if CCP had not come under pressure, if there had not been sort of a media angle, and if there had not been people actively working to act out against what they were doing in Incarna and the monocle situation, then I think there would have been much less impetus to change within CCP.

Other CSMs have certainly interacted with the media. The CSM was created to placate the T20 scandal, which had tremendous media coverage. The CSM itself is unusual within MMOs, and that uniqueness leads to occasionally making the industry news. Even CSM5 had released an open statement letter about the state of Incarna, criticizing the lack of communication with the CSM and the apparent lack of planning of the expansion.[244] In a sense, the CSM has grown and evolved as a concept within the eye of the gaming media.

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[244] (Mynxee 2011)

The difference between CSM6 and other CSMs was its willingness to use public discourse to leverage financial pressure against CCP. This leverage in turn broke through cultural barriers that had been a significant barrier to making in-game change. As the CSM has no hard power, the power comes from solely from the CSM's ability to influence the decision-makers at CCP. Many of the players mentioned the Icelandic temperament as a barrier to being heard by the CCP staff; this thus inhibited their ability to lobby on behalf of the player base. Insular and often skeptical of outsiders, one informant described it as "Icelandic group think" that reinforced the decisions and opinions of those within CCP. "They really do have a Viking sense of just charge forward and smash all impossible barriers," described another source, suggesting that the approach to change and specifically how the opposition of the player base was seen from the Icelandic point of view. Historically, most of the CCP management staff has been Icelandic. This changed somewhat during restructuring after Incarna; handovers in key positions to non-Icelanders opened up the ability for dialogue in some areas.[245]

To break through the traditionally insular Icelandic thinking of the developers that resisted outside opinion, the CSM turned to the media. "We just cut them out of the process entirely," described one informant. "We shaped our own message—i.e. we went to the press. We did things independently, and that meant that they had to play along." The ability of CSM6 to recruit the media and shape the dialogue is characteristic of how propaganda plays out within EVE politics itself. This CSM was comprised of influential members of strong alliances, several of whom had developed contacts with the industry media through regular game play. Setting the tone and shape of public discourse of the

[245] See (Gera 2012) for an in-depth interview with one of the non-Icelandic producers that took over a major role after the Incarna debacle.

player base is routinely practiced by alliances within EVE, and industry media proved to be similar. As seen with threadnoughts, those that set the initial tone of public discussions gets to frame the narrative in whatever way they wish; in circumventing CCP, the CSM got the ability to shape the tone, form, and content of the aftermath of Incarna. The CSM's singular interpretation of events is then redistributed by the media to the industry and the player base.

This largely negative media coverage offered leverage that earlier CSMs did not have. Part of the newfound leverage was not only the deliberate focusing of the media, but the circumstances in which that attention was leveraged. As one of the few companies that were left operating after the Icelandic financial crisis, negative coverage was a powerful motivator. Iceland's economy had just begun to show signs of recovery in 2011 when the Incarna protests took place, and a drop in confidence in CCP's products would incur a drop in an income stream that CCP—with its two games in development outside of EVE Online—and Iceland itself sorely needed.[246] As part of the refocusing, many of the staff that were let go were outside of Iceland; for example, content development staff in Atlanta that was offered a choice to accept severance or move to Iceland.[247]

In these ways, CSM6 found new weapons of influence to use against CCP to affect desired changes. EVE's most effective leaders bring all available tools to a conflict, as well as the willingness to use them. Within the circumstances that surrounded Incarna, the determination to use all of the CSM's available means including the media and the large alliances to which they were connected led to far greater results than had

[246] (Carey et. al 2011)
[247] (Tiann 2011)

any previous CSM. While the success of these strategies were in part connected with the broader economic climate in Iceland, success is also determined by EVE's cultural mentality to assess weakness, apply the appropriate pressure, and do what is necessary to deliver results. While some informants suggested to me that the CSM has no power at all—the power to enact change came from external influences such as the media—I would argue that its true strength comes from the culture in which the council is embedded. By allowing the CSM to operate "as Eve-ish[ly] as possible," as one developer would describe, this enables cultural norms that pull no punches in the road to achieving power.

These methods of influence are culturally constructed through EVE's political gameplay, and provide a means of working around the limitations of the CSM model. While these methods have not been universally adopted, the broader effect is that it demonstrated the possibility of the CSM to exert real change. This, in conjunction with other factors, is part of the new receptivity of CCP to the CSM. While some CSM7 members described the difficulty of living in the shadow of CSM6, the access created by the focus on the stakeholder status provides numerous opportunities for influence in the manner of CSM6 should the situation require it. "CCP guarantees and provides all council members an audience," describes Has Jagerblitzen. "Its [*sic*] up to us and our individual skill to make the most of that opportunity to influence and affect [*sic*] real change."[248]

[248] (Jagerblitzen 2013)

Chapter IV: Authority and Legitimacy

Introduction

"[CCP has] been talking about this stakeholder thing since CSM4. What is this? What is it to you? What part do we play in it?" asked Seleene, the Chairman of CSM7.[249] The CSM was hosting one of its semi-regular town hall meetings. Town halls are one of the ways that CSM representatives gain feedback from the player base and answer questions about the direction CCP is taking on different features. Hosted on EVE University's Mumble server and broadcast live over EVE Radio, the audio quality occasionally became distorted due to a large number of players listening on the server. Players asked the CSM questions on the issues of the day over voice chat or over a specially-created chat channel in game. It was also Super Bowl Sunday in the United States, and the sports-related background noise could be occasionally heard behind the discussion of some American players.

CSM7's work has been driven by the need for procedure and focused on codifying the CSM's feedback into CCP's internal structures. Perhaps this is unsurprising considering that the Chairman is a former CCP developer who understands CCP's particular needs through this framework, and this shapes CSM7's approach to its work.[250] This has mainly revolved around developing the CSM's stakeholder status, a role that was granted to the CSM at the end of CSM4. Within CCP's development methodology, stakeholders are consulted to help shape the course of product

[249] (Council of Stellar Management 2013)
[250] The Chairman position was determined by the candidate that received the most votes during the election. CSM7 originally had a different Chairman, who stepped down after comments made during Fanfest 2012. The position is now determined by an internal vote. The means of selecting the officers has been one of the changes made to the CSM White Paper in early 2013 was enacted during the election of CSM8. See (Óskarsson 2013).

development. "That's what our focus has been this year is holding accountable for not just using stakeholder as a pretty name," suggests Hans Jagerblitzen, "but actually using us the way that they use the product owners, the marketing team, the individual developers, and actually the people that are part of their own internal stakeholder meetings."[251] This experiment in codifying the stakeholder status was a way for the CSM to "prove that we were a worthwhile contributor and that we could do this without slowing them down."[252]

The town hall was filled with specific questions about the direction CCP is taking with particular game features, and the delegates talked around their non-disclosure agreements as best they can. They talked less like regular game players and much more like company representatives, though I have been repeatedly told the CSM is *not* like being a junior game designer. "CCP seems to have adapted the AGILE methods pretty well to the release cycle," suggested Issler Dainze. "Somebody that wants to be in the CSM would really be well-served if they really had some familiarity with software engineering and experienced working in an AGILE environment."[253] CCP uses a holistic and adaptive method of development that involves cooperative teamwork to develop an idea. This is known as the scrum development method. CCP has adapted this process with elements from the AGILE, which is another flexible and adaptable method of software development.[254] "We call it 'scrum, but," described CCP Unifex, Executive Producer of EVE Online. "When you end up saying 'Oh, well it is kind of like scrum

[251] (Council of Stellar Management 2013)
[252] (Council of Stellar Management 2013)
[253] (Council of Stellar Management 2013)
[254] (Beck et al. 2001)

what we are doing, but,' and you kind of make all these excuses. We try to get away from that and move ourselves to a better sort of scrum-agile combo way of doing things."[255]

In many other games, this type of technical talk would likely feel out of place. In EVE, however, there is an active conversation in the Mumble chat room about player's least favorite software development method, the waterfall method; this was CCP's old approach to EVE's development, which was based around linear, sequential, and less flexible model.[256] "The thing about AGILE is that there really is not a lot of time to stop and think and plan…" continued Dainze. "Being on the CSM now there really isn't a sit back for three months and talk to CCP again. You are engaged real time, because they are thinking real time and they are developing real time."

CSM7's talks have been filled with a focus on building these processes. Their meeting minutes have been extensive, with more than a hundred pages of transcripts and descriptions of the on-goings of the summits with developers. Much work has been done to build these processes where no clear guidelines existed before, and CSM7 seems to have come a long way in laying that groundwork with CCP. "It remains to be seen if this new planning process actually produces a better set of EVE futures," describes Dainze. "We will have to hope for the best and see what these new expansions look like as a result of this change. But yes, I think CCP is paying a lot more attention to the CSM and letting us work a lot more closely with them."

The transition from CSM6 to CSM7 is a dramatic shift in methods, and not everyone is pleased with the new direction. "Releasing like 100 pages of completely trivial bullshit for minutes was just drowning people in excess information," described

[255] (CCP Unifex & CCP Seagull 2013)
[256] (Lee 2012)

one informant. Although no politician can please everyone, it illustrates the disconnect between what the community considers legitimate authority and what is not. As one informant would suggest, other than a small demographic, players "do not care about transparency; all they are about are results." And while functioning processes may lead to more tangible outcomes down the line, results and accomplishments tend to be concrete within EVE culture.

The change in the relationship with CCP is somewhat analogous to a shift between different types of authority. Despite the lack of hard power to enforce the changes they desired upon CCP, CSM6 developed powerful methods of influencing CCP developers. CSM6's actions and negotiation with CCP during the Incarna debacle were legitimized by the community, in part by tapping into the same strong community supports that got the representatives elected in the first place. Filled with influential personalities, CSM6 could typify Weber's charismatic authority; CSM6 was not seen as a legitimate entity because convention demanded it—indeed the CSM was still seen by many as a public relations tool until that point— but because the community believed in the picture of society they represented.[257] This picture is one that is shaped by the experiences within a 0.0 alliance, which is the type of gameplay that many players felt was most threatened by the changes in Incarna. And it is ability to run the CSM like an EVE alliance that let them successfully navigate the Incarna crisis and come out looking like "a major force in the game."[258]

The transition from CSM6 to CSM7 in part mirrored the changed state within CCP. "What happens on the CSM in terms of activity out in public tends to be a

[257] (Weber 1946c:79)
[258] (Arcturus 2012)

reflection on how things are going with CCP at the time," describes Seleene, Chairman of CSM7. "CSM6 was a reflection of what was going on at the time. [CCP] could not tell left from right … They could not put out a single [developer] blog without stepping on themselves. It was just atrocious."[259] The more confrontational tone of CSM6 was needed for the circumstances that surrounded Incarna, and "that approach worked for what was going on at the time."[260] These lent themselves well to the leadership strategies of EVE's major alliances. "We decided from day one…We are going to run this like we run things in the game," describes Seleene, "and the results speak for themselves."

The more cooperative focus of CSM7 was in part due to the change in receptivity of CCP after CSM6. Describes Seleene, CSM7 tried to:

> …get the CSM into a position where we were not necessarily the rabble-rousers, but we were seen as a more of a partnership in pushing the game forward. Some people seem to have the opinion that the CSM's job is specifically to raise hell whenever things aren't happening. Well, things were happening fairly well over the past year, so there wasn't a lot of rabble to be raised. So we spent the majority of the time trying to make progress.[261]

The fact that there was "rabble to be raised" allowed CSM7 to work on formalizing the rules that could and should rightly govern the relationship between CCP and the CSM. This could also roughly parallel Weber's concept of traditional authority; as there was no reason to manage crisis mode with the more authoritarian tactics used by large alliances, this allowed the deeper, more cooperative relationships such as the stakeholder status to take hold. This incorporates methods of influence into the development process.

The key difference in this shift in authority is that traditional authority is generally seen as codifying those relationships that maintain the power and world vision that was

[259] (Seleene 2013)
[260] (Seleene 2013)
[261] (Seleene 2013)

posed by charismatic leaders. The CSM as a coalition of major alliance leaders makes the concept useful and relevant for players who see the CSM as a way to navigate the at-times unstable relationship between CCP and the player base. However, that same political authority is lessened for the community when the relationship settles into more "peacetime" processes. While these processes legitimate the authority of the CSM for both the CSM and for CCP, the community skepticism of a "peacetime" CSM is bound by the cultural ideas of democracy and process that confer a stronger sense of legitimacy in times of crisis than without it.

Democracy and War within EVE

"Quick question, Jessica, and don't take this the wrong way, but I am curious. You do realize what EVE Online is in terms of community, right?"

As a standard part of the interview process, I shared with my sources an informed consent agreement. Informed consent is used, in part, to understand the risks that one could face a result of participating in an academic study. While many types of harm that could come to a subject do not apply within virtual worlds, confidentiality is always a concern. EVE thrives on secrecy. Outsiders are not to be trusted. Asking too many questions brands you a spy, which can have many negative consequences such as being removed from a corporation, bounties placed on one's head, etc. For my purposes, asking for information violates some measure of these social norms, which are have developed as a defense against the threat of espionage in a society that is in a constant state of war. Therefore, confidentiality is often very important in these situations; while no physical harm would likely happen, a carelessly-spoken about another corporation could easily lead to an incident between alliances. Material harm—such as ships or

territory—or loss of prestige are possible losses that could occur. But then again, as EVE players come willingly into a player-versus-player game environment, it might be a lot of fun too.

I laughed, and I assured my informant that I do.

"It's kind of amusing. You are making all these qualifiers about how you're not going to be a horrible person or anything else like that. You know this community prides itself on such things," he laughed. "This will be rather pleasant then, compared to the other interviews I do."

"I have only been playing the game for four months now," I answered. "I don't have any way to prove that I am not a spy except to point to my university. [Through the institutional review board process], they have vetted that I am somewhat more ethical than a Nazi and I have no agenda." I had explained that ethics reviews like the institutional review board, or IRB, have their historical roots in the aftermath of the Nuremburg Trials. Normally, a player could point to their corporate history—a list of corporations that a character has belonged to since its creation—that is attached to their profile to vouch for my integrity. As a new player, my corporate history is dismally short, another indicator that a person may not be who they claim to be. As the EVE saying goes, "In rust we trust," and trust is earned over time, just as a ship accumulates rust the more battle it sees.[262] Instead, my informed consent form stands in as a kind of real-world corporate history.

[262] The phrase was popularized in part by fan-made machinima Clear Skies 3 (Chisholm 2011). A machinima is a film made through a 3D computer graphics rendering engine. While Clear Skies 3 was many players' first exposure to the phrase, it was already embedded in Minmatar lore, one of EVE's four playable races. According to one player, it harkens back to the "game lore of a slave race just trying to hold on by throwing whatever it could at the enemy… and beating them despite insurmountable odds" (Orakkus 2012).

He laughed. "I have to write some of this shit down." The tone of the conversation immediately shifted to something more informal and casual. While the CSM members are accustomed to dealing with the public and the media, it has a tendency to get caught up in EVE's larger political narratives. Summit minutes and community posts are carefully crafted—both by the CSM and CCP—to present a certain image. For a community whose interactions are couched in alliance propaganda, CSM communications are often treated in a similar way. All releases to the public are reviewed by CCP as part of the CSM's non-disclosure agreement to prevent information about in-development features from leaking to the community before CCP is ready. CSM messages are parsed for both what did and did not say by the player base, who still treats CCP with a heavy amount of skepticism after the T20 incident. The community initially cast the CSM with an oversight role to keep CCP from taking advantage of the player base's trust again; a cooperative relationship, such as the one CSM7 sought to build, is treated with a similar amount of skepticism.

As a game, EVE's virtual society exists in a constant state of war. Corporations struggle for power over scarce resources. While war can be profitable, it is also seen by most players as a tremendous amount of fun. Many of the social norms that govern EVE player's conduct are a consequence of the actions that a corporation must take to maintain itself during wartime. As the primary mode of social organization within the EVE itself, corporations and alliances help to orient player understanding as they move through the game world. This includes what constitutes effective leadership to navigate constantly troubled times.

"Democracy is death," described one player. "In a situation where you need to be able to respond quickly and with force to strategic problems, invasions or what have you, you can't wait for a vote."[263] The inefficiency and vulnerability of the democratic system comes in both the time it takes to make decisions as well as the amount of people necessary to make those decisions. The more people that participate in the administration of your corporation, the more vulnerable you become to both internal and external threats. Information can be leaked to enemy corporations and destroyed from the outside, or it can be corrupted from internal spies that might sway corporations to make unwise decisions. Described one player:

> Dictatorship is pretty much the most effective way to run an EVE alliance or corporation… When you have to wait for the council to get online, then discuss the issue, then vote on the issue, then revote on the issue because someone dropped cheese on the table, it just takes too long… In any persistent, virtual world, democracy rarely if ever works. Decisions simply cannot be made in time for when they actually matter.[264]

As these threats are part of everyday gameplay within EVE, the ability for a corporation to have and project a united front through propaganda has become an important defense against such weaknesses. "Usually speaking, what you see publically or what you hear publically is a lie," describes The Mittani.[265] The skillful control and manipulation of the public narrative—both within your own corporation and on the public forums—has become an important mechanic in EVE's gameplay. While such countermeasures are not rendered unnecessary by authoritarian control, it serves to highlight some of the culturally perceived weaknesses to widespread public discussions that are necessary to the CSM's model of deliberative democracy.

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[263] Quoted in (Smith 2011).
[264] (Reiisha 2011)
[265] (The Mittani 2009b)

In addition to tighter controls over the function and security of corporations and alliances, dictatorships are regarded as providing better game play. Many EVE players regard themselves as simply that: players, as opposed to virtual citizens. "Why would you want to join a dictatorial corporation where pretty much whatever you say is ignored or you think it is ignored?" asks one player.[266] "Most people in EVE just want to have fun. They are playing a game and they want to have fun… They will gladly join an organization where they don't have any power because that means they have more to fight and less paperwork."

Some of the players I talked to felt similarly, and were happy to give up a voice in corporate decision-making in exchange for the ability to simply show up and fight in a conflict. One player I talked to likened it to being a "cog in the machine," and was happy to have a low-effort outlet for fun whenever he logged in. "I would rather keep it simple and easy to leave and come back when I need to."

While the casual dismissal of citizen rights might be objectionable in a real world context, EVE's status as a game changes that perception for its players. Democratic rights become characterized as work, and a barrier to fun. This is particularly important in the context of EVE's status as a sandbox universe, where individual agency is required to drive game play. In a universe that offers unrestricted player freedom, the tendency to immediately surrender those freedoms to those that would dictate player action might be concerning to some readers. As one developer would tell me:

> EVE does not offer any goals to reach. You have to set the goals for yourself in the context of the community. EVE does not offer you any moral guidelines. You are allowed to do what you can… It is difficult for people to understand this lack of morality.

[266] (Reiisha 2011)

For players that are used to traditional MMOs that offer a determinative path through content, EVE's completely open universe can be overwhelming. A corporation with a strong authoritarian framework can provide ideological structure that can help orient player behavior in an otherwise indeterminate environment. You need a "dream you can sell to people," suggests one player:

> You basically have to find a reason to make people come and join your little corps…The joy of EVE Online is that it is an open sandbox setting, and you can pretty much say this is what we stand for. These are our ideals. This is what we're against.[267]

Those corporations that offer a strong ideology can offer predictable opportunities based on that ideology; for instance, a mining corps would tend to favor higher security areas of space, lower stress asteroid mining, and focus on market competition. A pirate corporation, on the other hand, would encourage scamming, small group or solo fights against other players, or gate camping in lower security space.[268] In each, the ideology of the corporation determines the type of experience a player can expect. Rather than a loss of personal rights, EVE players see it as an investment in fun: "If you don't trust your leaders that he can provide you your fun, then why would you stay with that leader?"[269] Strong, unified ideology provides the clear goals for player action the sandbox game does not provide, and can prove a powerful means of organizing players for larger action. For those that view EVE as a game, this leads to opportunities for more fun.

From this perspective, democracy does not provide clear outcomes. A corporation's objectives and strategies based on the makeup of players offering input.

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[267] (Constantine 2009)
[268] Stargates offer a means of travel between planetary systems. Some players will engage in gate camping, where a small gang of pirates wait for unsuspecting pilots to warp into the system. They will then destroy the player's ship before the pilot gets time to react, and salvage the ship's materials for money.
[269] (Reiisha 2011)

This instills a measure of uncertainty to what is expected and the direction a corporation will go. This becomes a hindrance to a player trying to decide what type of corporation to join.

While contingent actions happen within EVE—the most carefully laid plans may go awry or become unfeasible during large scale combat maneuvers—dictatorships provide clear direction without deliberation and ideology can shape that behavior in the absence of present leadership. According to one informant, a democratic corporation might be "strong, but not that agile." The capacity for unified action is an asset when things go awry, rather than responsiveness that is traditionally associated with democracy. A dictatorship's responsiveness to changing circumstances through action is seen as an asset over a democracy's slow accommodation of many player viewpoints.

Considering these views on democratic processes, we can begin to understand the cultural expectations EVE players have for leadership within the community: decisive, unified, timely action that is focused on outcomes. Those outcomes are structured to provide the maximum fun for the most players, and "fun" is defined by the strong ideological concepts that underpin that leadership style.

This type leadership is valued in the community, the widespread skepticism of the Council of Stellar Management can be understood within its own context. Elected to represent the needs of the player base to CCP, the CSM was originally seen as a space parliament. This would further extend the principles of deliberative democracy that underpin its structure. The time needed to sort through community opinion is significant, and while the focus is on a unified set of recommendations to CCP, arriving at those

recommendations takes time. These types of processes are exactly those which, for EVE players, characterize weakness and vulnerability.

When asked about the possible disconnect between EVE's skepticism of democracy and the ideas behind the CSM, developers told me that they now work together much better than expected. The idea was to let the democracy be as "as Eve-ish as possible." In the real world, people make the mistake of thinking that "democracy is this ultimate social utopia where everything is nice and good and works as flawlessly as possible. That is just not the reality and will never be." The decision to let EVE players act like EVE players would have important consequences for later CSMs.

With few examples of player elected governments to follow, the CSM had to develop their own operational mechanisms. The only formal goal was to set the agenda for the summit in Iceland; otherwise "CCP [had] set no expectations" for the work the CSM was to do.[270] The CSM had to develop its own guidelines for CSM officers, their job duties, future CSM appointments, voting on user-submitted petitions, etc. The chat logs of the first CSM meetings are filled with discussions of process. Described one informant, at first the CSM was a "completely useless parliamentarian talking shop where people are squabbling over procedure." From an institutional perspective, identifying procedure is important foundational work. However when the community is used to decisions being made quickly and decisively, the CSM's work moves very slow by comparison.

Compounding the issue was the fact that the CSM had no official power to command CCP to listen to player suggestions. According to CEO Hilmar Pétursson, in the beginning, their biggest power was setting the agenda for the summit in Iceland. "But

[270] Darius JOHNSON, quoted in (Council of Stellar Management 2008).

as the whole concept moves on—and if they are able to bring to us matters which are truly representative of players' concerns—then their influence will grow over time."[271] When the CSM presented issues to CCP developers, they could not compel developers to implement the changes. Even when community proposals were passed internally by the CSM, those changes would have to "wait 18 months to even begin being worked on," according to one informant. While this is understandable given the lead time necessary to make large scale changes in a video game with a large production staff, it lead to a huge backlog of CSM-submitted issues. At one point the CSM "had actually submitted over 150 issues, of which maybe 10 had been dealt with," described another informant. "The community were [*sic*] less than impressed."

In a community that values speed of decision-making and decisive leadership that leads to concrete outcomes, the frustration with the CSM's lack of measurable results is understandable. While the CSMs did manage to pass some small, easily implemented fixes, these "Small Things" type changes were not enough to cultivate a sense of legitimacy among the EVE community. By CSM4, voter turnout had fallen to 7.36% of eligible voters.[272] At this point, it is easy to see how the CSM could be seen as only a "cynical PR stunt by CCP to paper over the damage caused by the infamous T20 incident."[273] It is also easy to see how the CSM had been "written off by the vast majority of the player base as being irrelevant," as one informant described.

Public perception of the CSM began to change some structural changes during CSM4. Among the important changes was the change in term length from six months to one year. According to one player, "six months is just too short of a time to learn how

[271] (van Nes & Wolting 2009)
[272] (CCP Xhagen 2009a)
[273] (CCP Xhagen 2010)

the fuck CCP works and gets anything done."[274] The entire six months was spent getting acclimated to how CCP functioned at the design level, and then a new council would be elected. In addition, the lead time on CSM suggestions was much greater than six months; a given CSM would be well out of office by the time their suggestions might be implemented. The shift to a term of one year allowed CSMs to understand CCP's function as a business and develop long-term working relationships with CCP development staff. As the CSM does not have power to enforce changes, these relationships become crucial to persuading developers that the CSM's suggestions are wanted by the community. It also led to stronger community relationships, as players had time to be invested in their candidate. "If you artificially limit [community participation] with term limits then interest and the validity of the system goes down."[275]

Peacekeeping and the Stakeholder Status

In commenting on the CSM8 election, one community blogger describes the effectiveness of a CSM:

> The judge of how well a CSM does is related to three things.
>
> 1) How well they expressed community concerns and ideas to CCP
> 2) How well they increased the profile of the CSM to the EvE populous
> 3) How much they have increased the power of the CSM within CCP
>
> They are our voice, CSM 6, while I dislike the Mittani [*sic*], he did a great job of all of the above. CSM 7 has pretty much failed in all of these as while they are working closer with the developers they have already stated that CCP ignored 50% of what they actually wanted.
>
> In essence the CSM is our union, well our union just got taken over by the employers.[276]

[274] (Crowd Control Productions 2012b)
[275] (Crowd Control Productions 2012b)
[276] (Doom 2013)

Similar discussions can be found across EVE's forums and network of blogs as CSM7's term comes to an end and the EVE community prepares for the next election. Much of the talk of ineffectiveness revolves around the lack of immediate outcomes that can be held up to the community.

The current climate of CSM7 has been a "peacetime CSM," and many of the culturally appropriate ways of leading might be less immediately applicable, the influence recruited by CSM6 has been used to building working relationships with CCP. According to one informant, "CSM7 is much more interested in trying to prevent a similar crisis than be lauded for dealing with one." This focus on process-oriented signals inefficiency for much of the community, and at "25% into the term and already we're being called a failed CSM because of lack of accomplishment," as one informant described.

Central to the focus on forging relationships is the push for stakeholder status. From a product development standpoint, CCP utilizes the scrum method of software development. Scrum is a holistic and adaptive method of development that involves cooperative teamwork to develop an idea.[277] In scrum, development work is organized into fixed time intervals called sprints. Each sprint team is assigned a given software development task, comprised of a number of work items called a backlog. The focus is on quality of software over quantity; the short, concentrated focus of sprint teams helps to keep development on schedule.[278]

[277] (Takeuchi & Nonaka 1986)
[278] (Beedle et al. 1999)

Within the scrum system, stakeholders "enable the project and are the people for whom the project produces agreed-upon benefit(s)."[279] "What [the stakeholder status] is really zeroing in on is that it is part of this specific software development process," suggested one player.[280] By labeling the CSM as a stakeholder, CCP was officially recognizing the expertise the CSM had been offering from a product-development standpoint. This allows the targeted feedback from the player base to be built into their development practices. While poorly defined at first, the stakeholder status became a "big feature in their marketing fluff," according to one informant. It became a way for CCP to tell the community that their feedback would be officially considered and codified, though at the outset neither party knew how it would play out in practice.

For EVE players, legitimate authority is cultivated in part by productive action; those that can deliver on their promises are seen as best qualified to speak on behalf of the player base. This creates two different routes to political legitimacy. Does a CSM produce better results when it focuses on creating strong ties with CCP developers, and increasing legitimacy within the company framework? Or does a CSM produce better results when political legitimacy has already been established through the actions of community leaders, which then are elected to the CSM?

Both strategies were employed since CSM5, when the structural changes allowed deeper and more meaningful work relationships with CCP. Cultivating a sense of legitimacy within CCP meant codifying and operationalizing stakeholder status. Embedded relationships translated into explicit procedures for translating the CSM's work into actionable items. Gaining an elected seat based on existing community

[279] (CCP Xhagen 2010)
[280] (Council of Stellar Management 2013)

relationships led players to treat the CSM much more like an authoritarian EVE alliance, rather than a business relationship. Relationships with CCP developers were more informal and less open to public scrutiny. Different cultural practices arose around the changing nature of the CSM-CCP relationship that conferred very different senses of legitimacy within the community.

This is not to suggest that both types of legitimacy are not important. As one CCP director would describe: "Saying you're accountable to the players is a pretty narrow view– You need to be accountable to the people who work here, and you have a responsibility to be professional."[281] Being taken as a legitimate institution by both the players and CCP are clearly important; however, both strategies are shaped by EVE's cultural logic in different ways.

Beginning with CSM5 and continuing in CSM7, these CSMs worked to shape processes that would help define the work of the CSM. As the T20 incident became more distant, the focus for the CSM became less about oversight and more a "movement within the community to see if this tool CCP had provided to them could actually accomplish anything." According to one informant:

> The first few CSMs didn't really understand what it was they were supposed to do. CCP didn't really know what to do with them… But as time went on it evolved into something that had the potential to be a bit more collaborative and to where the CSM could actually be a proper middle man or liaison between the company and the player base at large.

The implementation of stakeholder status provided the impetus to define and codify these relationships. At the outset of CSM5, this meant that the CSM would be allowed to submit development lists for consideration in the planning cycle, and have those lists represented by an advocate during release planning. The CSM worked closely with the

[281] CCP Unifex, quoted in (Council of Stellar Management 2012:36).

community to prioritize items that were of most importance to the player base. One developer would liken the CSM to an "idea filter that helps get rid of some of the white noise" in terms of player feedback. The CSM worked to codify these processes into actionable language that the developers at CCP would respond to.

The stakeholder relationship is being further codified within CSM7. As part of an experiment, the CSM has been assigned to a specific team to develop a feature for future release. While these collaborative efforts are still being refined, the first "test run at that resulted in the bounty-hunting feature."[282] While mistakes were admittedly made on both sides, this allows the developers more targeted, in-depth feedback on one particular area of the game. It also allows the CSM to better understand the constraints of the scrum system, as well as experimenting with how stronger, more formalized relationships might work.

As part of acknowledging the way the CSM was now embedded within the corporate culture of CCP, CSM5 consciously adopted a "culture of inclusiveness and professional standards of behavior" that would be expected of any stakeholder at the corporate level.[283] This was to consciously improve the perception of the CSM within the development teams; as "CCP [developers] have no obligation to interact with the CSM," maintaining a professional demeanor during communications was of paramount importance.[284] While there were many reasons for the institutional pushback, the level of transparency in communication and activities from CSM5 served as a way to prove to the community they were working on their behalf.[285] The transparency served to illustrate

[282] (Seleene 2013; CCP SoniClover 2012)
[283] (Council of Stellar Management 2011:3)
[284] (Council of Stellar Management 2011:13)
[285] Reasons include CCP's particular historical and cultural circumstances. These are addressed in chapter five.

for the community that work was in progress even when development times meant that actual results had yet to come. And while this did not satisfy the entire player base, it served as an attempt to justify the workings of the CSM for the community.

However, this also served to attach names to particular projects so that they could be held accountable by the community. When players have the tendency to analyze every aspect of the game, negative feedback can be directed at the developers who are directly associated with certain areas of the game. "As soon as a dev blog comes out, even though he or she is representing an entire team, the name gets flamed if the contents are not liked," one informant described. This level of accountability made developers nervous, due to the intensity of community feedback. This hesitancy increased distance between developers and CSM5, serving to undercut the legitimacy of these working relationships.

With ideas about perceived vulnerabilities within organizations that offer complete transparency and accountability, we can understand why players might act this way. Any organization that makes its inner-most workings public leaves itself open to the possibility of attack. Everything is interpreted within this culture of conflict, and the more formalized procedures that developers use is no exception. For players, this leaves the possibility to scrutinize perceived weaknesses within game mechanics, and leave feedback targeted at the particular developers responsible. While EVE players may routinely engage in this sort of forum metagaming, developers can be uncomfortable with that amount of scrutiny.

In CSM6, a reduction of community transparency also helped to foster stronger relationships with company developers. Informal methods of communication helped to

strengthen the relationships between individuals on the CSM and CCP, rather than merely facilitating communication between functioning entities in the development process. Shielding developers from public scrutiny made them more willing to consider implementing new changes. According to one source, summit meetings in Iceland are "recorded so everybody from the CCP site has to be sort of aware that potentially they could say something that their bosses might disapprove of." A more guarded approach to the CSM's communications keeps them away from the ire of the community, as well as possible retaliation from their bosses at CCP. From EVE's cultural perspective, shielding these communications and processes from public scrutiny allows for fewer exposed vulnerabilities. Whatever weakness might exist are not admitted or are explained away through carefully crafted ideological messages, which allows the real work between the CSM and CCP to get accomplished without consequences.

Conclusion

The stakeholder concept is still evolving and outcomes of these collaborative efforts are unclear. CSM7 has been noted for its movement back toward being open with the community, releasing detailed minutes and summit notes. However, these reveal the very deep working relationships that have been built as part of the stakeholder process. The new focus does not please everyone; the wealth of information serves to illustrate just how embedded in the design process the CSM is becoming. For those that still believe it is the CSM's job to police CCP, these new peace-time relationships are very uncomfortable, especially where there are few concrete results that can be immediately pointed to for the community. Many of the results of CSM7's new cooperative approach will be apparent in the coming expansions, which does not altogether satisfy a

community that is used to immediate results. This perhaps doubly more apparent when held up next to the previous CSM6, which routinely communicated loudly and clearly what it had accomplished to the player base and the media.

I would suggest that for a community used to combat, a CSM is seen as having the most authority when they are seen behaving in ways most akin to a successful alliance within the game: navigating conflict, battling on behalf of the player base, and making sure the game is fair for all involved. When the CSM's activities have a more cooperative function—building relationships, giving feedback, helping with the development process—the players seem a bit puzzled about what they are doing and why. "Things have been very quiet," described one player. "CCP doesn't seem inclined to go insane again just to give the CSM something to do."[286] And while as CSM7 Chairman Seleene suggested that the CSM's public activity tends to be a reflection of its relationship with CCP, the fact that "things were happening fairly well over the past year, so there wasn't a lot of rabble to be raised" tends to slip by a community that simply does not know peace in-game. For EVE players, peace allows no opportunity for the combat game play that keeps the game fun and interesting for much of the player base. Battle is where the most interesting, engaging, and emergent gameplay happens, and it is harder to see institutions like the CSM as relevant when they focus on the more cooperative and peaceful ventures.

The hope from CSM7 is that the legacy they leave down the road will speak for itself in terms of the work they have accomplishment through the expansions and game play that has come as a result of such collaborative efforts. Perhaps then the player base will see that new ground can be forged between old enemies, and that old hostilities such

[286] (Arcturus 2012)

as the T20 incident can finally be put to rest. But then again as any EVE player would ask, what fun would that be?

Chapter V: Conclusion

After the long winter months, the snow outside had just begun to melt. The weather was turning warm, and the sun shone outside my apartment. I looked at the people enjoying the very beginning of spring, and turned back to my computer. Other things were heating up that required more immediate attention. Election season was in full swing in New Eden, and the Jita Park Speakers Corner was cluttered with posts outlining platforms and election promises. EVE's satellite network of associated websites, blogs, news sites, and twitter feeds engaged in open speculation on the outcome of the election.

Official election information was decentralized, disorganized and sporadically released. While the distribution of accurate and timely information is critical in any election, it was doubly so during CSM8. The election of CSM8 brought with it some of the new changes to the White Paper that CSM7 implemented over the past year, including the new Single Transferrable Vote system. To make it on to the election ballot, candidates must now be endorsed by 200 voters in a pre-election. During the actual election, a player must then select 14 of the possible candidates in order of preference. After all the ballots have been cast, they are run through advanced calculations to allot the votes where they are most effective. For example, votes that would be "lost" due to overvoting—a vote given to a candidate that already has enough votes to make it on to the council—or undervoting—where a vote is cast for a candidate that has no chance of

making it on to the council—the votes are then moved upward or downward to the next candidate in order of each voter's preference.[287]

While the actual mechanics of such a system are relatively straight forward—CCP released the code that was used to process the votes as a measure of transparency—the explanation of such a representative system is long and overly complicated.[288] Voter apathy is an ongoing concern within EVE's player base, and the growing worry among the community was that a more complicated voting system, announced close to the election, that puts a greater responsibility on the individual would make already low numbers fall.[289]

The sporadic release of information was blamed on working the STV code into the development team's tight schedule.[290] However, this among other election mishaps raised early concerns over CCP's handling of the election process. For example, candidates received updates on how many more endorsements were needed to reach the qualifying 200. Due to an internal error, "false positive" notifications were sent out to candidates that had not yet qualified; this led to loss of campaign time for those individuals that needed it most.[291] Two candidates were removed from the running by CCP: Fon Revedhort was removed after professing Neo-Nazi sentiments on the official forums and during candidate interviews.[292] Xenuria was supposedly removed after being accused of belonging to the hacker group LulzSec, which attacked EVE Online's servers in June 2011.[293]

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[287] (CCP Dolan 2013b)
[288] (CCP Dolan 2013g)
[289] (CCP Dolan 2013b)
[290] (CCP Dolan 2013b)
[291] CCP Dolan 2013c)
[292] (Alizabeth 2013; Riverini 2013a)
[293] (Schramm 2011)

In addition, some CSM Skype logs were leaked by Darius III, a member of CSM7 who had spent most of the term absent, claiming that another incidence of developer misconduct had occurred. While this story is still developing and under investigation by CCP, most players seem to write it off as nothing more than a bid for attention.[294] Some of this was admittedly par for the course in CSM elections. "Think of the dirtiest election in [real life]," described one informant. "That would be a boring CSM election. Lots of character assassination, forum-warrioring, trolling, etc."

For my purposes, some of the developing community concerns were somewhat moot at this point. Following the campaigns and platforms of candidates as they emerged, I voted with my two accounts both in the pre-election and in the real election as soon as voting opened.[295] In EVE, "Vote early, vote often," is sound advice. The intermittent information released by CCP could have clarified the somewhat complicated process.[296] As a voter, the criticism that the new system adds additional barriers to voting carries some weight. The community stepped up to fill the information void in what CCP promised to be a heavily promoted election; websites designed to match players with candidate platforms, extensive candidate interviews, reward programs for voting, and long lists of candidate endorsements were widely shared.[297] Despite these efforts, the

[294] (Riverini 2013b; Riverini 2013c; Darius III 2013; Diotima 2013; EX3CU7OR 2013; ISD Suvetar 2013). Both Darius III and the community took to Kugutsumen.com to share and parse this leaked information. Banned for leaking the initial information that lead to the T20 incident to the community, Kugutsumen started his own uncensored EVE forum. While this is not the only site that fosters such discussion, the site is self-described as "the premier site for airing EVE Online's dirty laundry." For the community, the site becomes one important place to discuss scandals, share hacked corporate forums, or simply to discuss EVE matters in a space that is not corporately owned and moderated.

[295] Unlike other games which sometimes prohibit the ownership of multiple accounts, this practice is commonly accepted within EVE. Each account that is older than 30 days may vote in the CSM elections. The user interface of the voting system for CSM8 was improved two days into the election, specifically to simplify the process of voting with multiple accounts. See (CCP Dolan 2013d).

[296] (CCP Dolan 2013b)

[297] See (Vaal 2013; Phoena 2013a; Baby 2013; Karrde 2013; Sugar et al. 2013) among many others.

voter turnout was only 12.12%, down from 16.63% in the CSM7 election.[298] While according to CCP calculations, an individual's vote made a greater impact under the new system—a shift from 53% enfranchisement to 85.1%—the dip in already low turnout is still disconcerting.[299]

This is one of the issues brought up to the outgoing CSM7 at EVE's Fanfest. The CSM panel has become a fixture during EVE's yearly fan convention in Iceland, giving the community a chance to ask questions of the outgoing council. It one of the few times the community has an opportunity to see the council together as *players*, rather than hear their words through blogs, forum posts, or podcasts.[300] CSM results are announced the last day of the convention, and the CSM panel allows the outgoing council to look back over the contributions they have made to the EVE community. "In sort of typical EVE fashion, you had a very simple voting system and then you made it way more complex," joked Dierdra Vaal.[301] A veteran member of CSM1, CSM3, and CSM5, Vaal ran Vote Match 2.0 during this election season, a website which helped match with players candidates that matched their vision of EVE.[302] His voice carries weight due to experience on the CSM and prominence within the EVE community.

"I have encountered a lot of players who were sort of scared away by its complexity," Vaal continued. "Some people I noticed found it very intimidating. Are you not worried then that having a single transferrable vote and a 14 person ballot is

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[298] (CCP Diagoras 2012; Stanziel 2013)
[299] (CCP Veritas 2013)
[300] EVE's real life events become important ways for players to connect face-to-face in an otherwise digital environment. Events such as Fanfest or EVE Vegas can help to lesson in-game hostilities between alliances, or increase camaraderie between CSM representatives and developers. See (Coleman 2012) for a discussion of the importance of face-to-face conventions in the hacking community.
[301] (EX3CU7OR 2013)
[302] (Vaal 2013)

going a bit too far and making it a bit too intimidating for players who aren't intimately familiar with the CSM process?"[303]

CSM7 is divided on the issue. "It looks more complex and that probably does scare a lot of people at first," quipped Elise Randolph. "Then they probably remember they are playing EVE, and it is probably the easiest thing they will do that day."[304] For others, the frustration of the player base reflects the more systemic issue of CCP support. "CCP needs to invest resources in promoting the election, and making the CSM visible, and explaining to players what we do," described Hans Jagerblitzen.[305] While he admitted that CCP made some efforts toward the end of the election, Jagerblitzen suggested:

> I think we all know that there could have been more support for the election, and there should always be that increasing support for the elections... CCP Dolan has done an excellent job since taking his position of doing what he can to give us those tools, but he needs more support from the company. He needs more resources invested in us as well.[306]

There has been a gradual handover in power from the previous CSM project leader, CCP Xhagen, to CCP Dolan. A former pilot within the TEST Alliance Please Ignore, the handover to CCP Dolan moves the CSM project more into the realm of EVE's community team.[307] While his background within TEST has raised some questions about impartiality in light of the T20 scandal, CSM7 Chairman Seleene assured that is not of real concern.[308] "[CCP Dolan]'s a good guy," Seleene described during a community

[303] (EX3CU7OR 2013)
[304] (EX3CU7OR 2013)
[305] (EX3CU7OR 2013)
[306] (EX3CU7OR 2013)
[307] (CCP Dolan 2013b)
[308] (Seleene 2013)

question and answer session. "He is adapting to a very big situation, and he has got some very big shoes to fill. He is doing a pretty good job so far."[309]

Many changes have been implemented with the election of CSM8; it is apparent that between the changeover in management and the new election system, things did not run smoothly. Among the most critical charges are the lack of promotion of the election and the failure to distribute information. To compound the problem, the CSM did not directly address this lack of attention from CCP. As one player describes:

> "There is no collective statement or blog post from the group as a whole. Not only do CCP seem not to care about the election, we are getting nothing from the current CSM about what they are doing to fix a massive [lack of information] that is clearly at the forefront of the community's concerns.
>
> It is clear from tweets from certain CSM7 members that they are unhappy with what is happening. I have spoken to certain members of CSM7 privately and they are giving nothing away other than to confirm that they are very disappointed with the situation. I presume they are working with CCP on a solution. But we have complete radio silence from them as a body publicly… Then we have a situation where CCP seem unwilling to invest any real effort in the election despite assurances to the contrary. And yet CCP clearly appears to have CSM7 in their pocket, telling them anything they need to hear to keep them quiet."[310]

For a community that routinely uses propaganda in its game play, the *lack* of information is as telling as messages that are controlled by the strongest alliances. While some of the CSM's silence can be attributed to their non-disclosure agreement, the absence of communication from either party is a disconcerting hole in the public discourse. For the moment, the election remains an event that remains unframed by the politics of either entity—the CSM or CCP—who have a vested interest in how that story is told. In EVE, the continual negotiation of those narrative frames is part of what drives the emergent

[309] (Seleene 2013)
[310] (Phoena 2013b)

gameplay that players find compelling. While this does not necessarily mean that no attention is paid behind closed doors, the absence of interplay between CCP and the CSM at the time when it is historically most visible is confusing. As one player asks, does "CCP's lack of enthusiasm and promotion for this years [*sic*] CSM vote [indicate] how they feel about the role of CSM's? [*sic*] I mean, if they don't take the voting very seriously doesn't it beg the question of how seriously they view the position itself?"[311]

Not all players believe that the lack of public discourse is as innocent. Describes another player:

> CCP isn't responsible for forced voting on the players or massive [get out the vote] campaigns about the CSM. If anything, from CCP's perspective, the weaker the CSM is, the easier it is for CCP developers to do what they do with as little interference as possible.[312]

From this perspective, the lack of public promotion becomes a way to ensure that the power dynamic stays balanced in CCP's favor; the CSM becomes a way to simply channel public discontent onto an institution that can only be as powerful as players choose to make it.

Such community speculation illustrates the potential for multiple interpretations an event like a particularly lackluster election promotion can have on a community that relies on narrative to make sense of public events. In a virtual world where player action has the potential to impact the *entire* player base, the absence of public interest by either party leaves players questioning the relevance of the CSM to that public sphere. How events are framed and how the story is told becomes a very important way for players to understand how power and relevance are reckoned among EVE's 500,000 accounts.

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[311] (Anonymous 2013)
[312] (Courthouse 2013)

The deliberate shape of public narrative becomes particularly important when much of EVE's negotiation of power takes place behind closed doors. The true dynamics between powerful actors are not open to public scrutiny; in order for those exchanges to be known to the rest of the player base, those stories have to be *told*. "One of the most alarming lessons of playing EVE Online is that the galaxy is literally ruled in a smoke-filled back room with 15 guys in it," described one informant. In order for those more informal, influential power dynamics to play out through the rest of the server, those perspectives need to be stated deliberately to shape public understanding of relationships between powerful actors. In the case of the CSM, much of the negotiation with CCP occurs behind closed doors. The fact that neither party wants to shape how the player base understands that relationship is reflective of a disconcerting shift in the relationship, though the rest of the community can only speculate what that shift might be.

The negotiation of power apart from public scrutiny is reflective of the cultural skepticism of democracy and the culture of secrecy that EVE itself cultivates. Power and decisions are always negotiated with the mindset that someone might be listening, that these channels of communication might already be compromised by spies and other actors that are out for personal gain. Within EVE, those real or imagined threats lead to decisions being made within smaller circles of the highest trust, away from public debate or discussion. Known threats are often not eliminated but rather managed, and controlled misinformation leaked to enemy alliances.

The potential for virtual worlds to facilitate such behind-the-scenes negotiations of power is at once both compelling and mundane. Informal agreements between interested actors is "fundamentally where human political behavior happens," described

one informant. "You play EVE and you deal with stuff like the CSM or null sec for long enough and then you look at the real world and you go 'Huh. This is eight guys in some back room in Capitol Hill getting drunk on too many martinis.'" As outside observers we can see these same tendencies within the CCP-CSM relationship. The more formal, process-oriented, democratic tendencies of the early CSM were ineffective in negotiating change. New avenues of communication, such as the Skype channel between developers and CSM representatives, were created to facilitate such informal discussions. However, even then the *real* work takes place outside even that more secret, inclusive space. In speaking of the leak of the CSM Skype channel logs, Hans Jagerblitzen confirmed that "a lot of social, ice-breaking sort of conversations go on there, and that a lot of the serious business takes place elsewhere."[313]

These more informal, private arrangements serve to both shape and undermine the order that an institution such as the CSM is alleged to provide. The CSM serves to open more formal channels of communication between CCP and the player base, and to establish a formal process for conveying that feedback. At the same time, informal arrangements between individual actors serve to shape these relationships of power in ways that are not open for public scrutiny. The explicit and implicit goals of each set of allegiances do not necessarily work to reinforce the other; this opposition was apparent during CSM5 and CSM6, and the Incarna expansion. As an institution, the CSM becomes an expression of the regularizing processes and situational adjustment between the CSM's structures and the social agreements that allow individual actors to make do within the nuanced social landscape.[314]

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[313] (EX3CU7OR 2013)
[314] (Moore 1978)

This negotiation between rule-governed structures and the indeterminate ways in which actors behave within that system are further embedded within their specific cultural contexts. Composed of players from a diverse set of play styles and countries, EVE culture serves as a reference for individual actors as they seek to enact change through the CSM. Yet the institution they create exists in part to facilitate interactions with CCP, which has its own set of corporate and Icelandic cultural conventions that EVE players do not necessarily share. These different cultures inform individual behavior as they influence each other to enact change on the server level. Specifically, the emergent behavioral norms within EVE shape interactions and expectations players have for CCP. These conventions are in part players' own adaptations to working within EVE's environment of constant war and uncertainty. It is the negotiation of these complex social and cultural landscapes that is what makes both the CSM and EVE's gameplay compelling. As that negotiation takes place behind closed doors, it becomes all that more crucial for the narrative to be shared with the rest of us. While that discourse is in some way shaped by the powerful that decide the shape of that worldview, it is in line with the sandbox style objectives that EVE sought to create in the first place. EVE "offers more freedom but it requires you to think and be an active participant" in the adventures you create.[315] The CSM becomes a unique way to tell and construct the story between the players and creators of EVE's virtual world, though the dynamics of that relationship change and are not always open to public scrutiny.

[315] From an archived version of the EVE Online FAQ, quoted in (Amazon Basin 2012).

Glossary

0.0 – See null security.

Alliance – a collective organization of several corporations.

AURA – the built-in, onboard ship computer in the game interface. AURA provides players with a variety of information, including access to new player tutorials.

Avatar – The graphical representation of a user within a virtual world.

Blue print originals or **BPOs** – Blue print original serve as plans for manufacturing valuable goods, such ships or ammunition. BPOs can serve as templates to create copies of these plans, which are destroyed in the production process. Tech 1, or more common, blue print originals can be bought from NPC corporations. Tech 2 BPOs cannot be created or sold via the market; a limited number were given away through a lottery system and can only be purchased from other players. This makes T2 BPOs incredibly valuable.

Capsule – See pod.

Care Bear – A colloquial term for a pilot that plays predominantly in high security or Empire space. These areas carry stronger penalties for player-versus-player actions, and are policed by CONCORD. This makes high sec a relatively safer place to exist for those that do not enjoy PvP, though no area in EVE is truly safe.

Clone – Within EVE's game mythology, cloning allows EVE's pilots immortality. When a pilot's body is destroyed, their consciousness is downloaded into a new clone. A clone must be kept current with the player's number of skill points, which is how players gain access to new abilities. Should a player not be current on their clone, they lose a percentage of their skill points upon pod death. As skills train in real time, one at a time, this may set a player back months of real life time.

Council of Stellar Management or CSM – the player-elected council that represents community issues to CCP.

CONCORD – the NPC police force that responds to non-sanctioned acts of aggression within high security systems with deadly force. This provides consequences for criminal behavior. Response time depends on the relative security rating of the individual system. The wrath of CONCORD is referred to as "concordokken" or simply being "concorded."

Corporate History – a list of corporations that a character has belonged to since its creation.

Corporation or **Corps** – Corporations are large groups of players that band together for a common goal. These are similar to guilds or clans in other MMOs.

Crowd Control Productions or CCP – the Icelandic video game developer and publisher that produces Eve Online.

Empire Space – See high security.

Gallente – one of the four available player races.

Gamemaster or **GM** – Gamemasters serve as moderators in many games, both online and offline. Within MMOs, gamemasters tend to provide a customer service role that provides players support in areas of gameplay, bug reporting, player interactions, account issues, etc.

Ganking – Killing another player unfairly. Some games use this to describe a group killing a single player. Other games use it to describe the killing of a player immediately after they revive after death, or respawn. However, the common thread between these several definitions is the unfairness of the death in question.

Gate camp – a small gang of players wait for an unsuspecting pilot to warp into the system through the stargate. They will then destroy the player's ship before the pilot gets time to react, and salvage the ship's materials for money.

High security – High sec space is designated by systems with a security rating of 0.5 to 1.0. High sec is patrolled by CONCORD. An act of non-sanctioned aggression would cause CONCORD to appear and retaliate with deadly force. This makes high sec somewhat safer than other areas of the game; however, there is no truly safe space in EVE.

Internet culture – The emergent culture that has arisen on the internet as a result of computer networks. This includes, but is not limited to, online communities, virtual worlds, MMOs, internet-based games, forum communities, social networking, and texting.

Internet meme – Ideas or concepts that are shared from person to person. Tracing back the concept to Richard Dawkins's book The Selfish Gene, these image or text-based ideas spread and replicate cultural information via transmission over the Internet.

Internet slang – Internet slang could be broadly defined as the wide variety of slang languages that arise to support internet cultures. These include a wide variety of practices, such as particular acronyms ("OMG" for "oh my god"), leetspeak ("n00b" for "noob"), disemvoweling ("srs" for "serious"), intentional misspellings ("teh" for "the"), etc. See (Kim 2010).

Interstellar Kredit or **ISK** – EVE's in-game currency.

Interstellar Services Department or ISD – a volunteer group that assists CCP on a variety of tasks, such as quality assurance, bug reporting, news reporting, fiction writing, administration of the official EVElopedia page, and forum moderation.

Jabber – an open-source instant messaging application that allows players to chat over the internet. Available at www.jabber.org.

Machinima – a film made through a 3D computer graphics rendering engine.

Massively Multiplayer Online Game or **MMO** – a massively multiplayer online game or MMO is a persistent virtual universe in which players come together to complete game challenges.

Metagame – The use of out-of-game resources, activities, or information to affect in-game play. This could refer to information gained from internet forums, voice chat servers, corporate espionage, etc.

Microtransactions – The sale of in-game virtual goods for real world money

Minmatar – one of the four available player races.

Mission – Similar to quests in other games, a mission is a task given to a player by an NPC to earn a reward. This may include reputation, money, or in-game items. In EVE, there are four general types of missions: security missions that feature combat, distribution missions that involve delivery of goods, mining missions that involve procuring minerals, and research missions that involve scientific research.

Module – a piece of equipment that is attached to a ship to enhance its abilities.

MUD Object-Oriented or **Moo** – stands for "MUD object-oriented," and MUD stands for "multi-user dungeon" or "multi-user domain." These are text-based environments which provide persistent virtual worlds in which players can interact. In MUDs, the focus is entirely text-based, and players respond to challenges that have been built into the system. In MOOs, players create persistent in-game objects as a way of setting their own challenges and shaping the world to their liking.

Multi-User Domain or **MUD** – See MUD object-oriented.

Mumble – an open-source voice over IP application designed for text and voice chat. All communications are encrypted to ensure player privacy. Available at http://mumble.sourceforge.net/.

New Eden – the name given to EVE Online's universe. Within the game lore, it is also the name of the first star system settled by humans after traveling to the area.

Non-Disclosure Agreement or **NDA** – a legal contract between parties that outlines confidential information that is to be shared between the parties, but restrict its access by third parties. These may protect confidential or proprietary information.

Non-Player Characters or **NPCs** – virtual actors within a game that are controlled by server-side game programing. These may be friendly or hostile.

Null security – Null sec is a lawless area outside of the purview of CONCORD. This makes it the domain of stronger alliances that retain sovereignty over higher value resources.

Pilot License Extension or **PLEX** – a virtual item that can be used to add 30 days of game time to a player's account. A PLEX can be purchased with real world money, and can be traded on EVE's auction house.

Player-Owned Starbase or **POS** – semi-permanent, anchorable structures that can be placed around a moon. These allow corporations a wide range of benefits such as research opportunities, manufacturing facilities, moon mining, infrastructure, staging locations for fleet operations, etc. These can be placed in systems with a security rating of 0.7 or lower.

Player Versus Environment or **PvE** – In this form of gameplay, players battle virtual opponents that are generated by the game. These are referred to as NPCs or non-player characters.

Player Versus Player or **PvP** – In this form of gameplay, players battle other users in combat. In EVE, this is generally considered ship-to-ship combat. However, the term may be applied to any form of battle between players, such as market competition or metagame activities.

Pod – A pilot's escape vessel. Should a pilot's ship be destroyed, they are given the ability to escape through a pod. This does not guarantee escape, as pods can also be destroyed.

Podding – The destruction of a player's escape pod. While the game lore itself describes that pilots are immortal and upon death will wake up in a newly cloned body, the actual penalties for pod death may be severe in terms of loss of skill points and training time. In practice, podding is looked as adding insult to injury.

Roleplaying or RP – A kind of collective storytelling, roleplay in video games allows concepts to structure in-game actions. These may be individual or group backstories that determine player behavior. Instead of using the avatar as solely an extension of self or a vehicle to navigate the environment, it becomes a character in the broader narratives that are told through game events, history, and lore.

Single Transferrable Vote system or **STV** – To make it on to the election ballot, candidates are endorsed by 200 voters in a pre-election. During the actual election, a player must then select 14 of the possible candidates in order of preference. After all the ballots have been cast, they are run through advanced calculations to allot the votes where they are most effective. For example, votes that would be "lost" due to overvoting—a vote given to a candidate that already has enough votes to make it on to the council—or undervoting—where a vote is cast for a candidate that has no chance of making it on to the council—the votes are then moved upward or downward to the next candidate in order of each voter's preference.

Skill – The equivalent of spells in other MMOs, skills "govern the abilities of your character. They determine which ships you can fly, what modules you can use, the effectiveness to which you can use those ships/modules, and much more" (EVELopedia 2011). These are learned through skillbooks, which are bought over the market.

Skype – a voice-over-internet-protocol application that allows users to communicate with others over voice, video, or text-based chat. Available at www.skype.com

Sovereignty – the control of a particular region of space within EVE Online. This allows alliances to build structures within the system.

Stargate – a means of travel between planetary systems. Players warp between stargates to travel long distances in space.

Tech – Tech levels are used to rate the quality of different modules that can be used to outfit a ship. Tech 1 modules are more common, and are thus more affordable. Tech 2 modules are more effective and more powerful than their Tech 1 counterparts. They require higher skill levels to use, and are more expensive.

Threadnought – A threadnought is a forum post with many replies. In general, topics that generate the most discussion are those in which players express dismay or rage over a controversial topic. The name is a play on words between a forum "thread" and a "dreadnought," one of the largest ships in Eve. While slow and cumbersome to navigate, dreadnoughts have immense firepower that can lay siege to the largest player structures in the game, the player-owned starbase or POS. With effective use, a dreadnought can change the course of a war. Similarly, the slow but successful change of public opinion over the forums can be as formidable of a weapon as the largest ships.

Unsub – Short for "un-subscribe," unsubbing is the cancellation of a player's account in a subscription-based setting. While many players can be unhappy with changes made to their virtual worlds, they rarely cancel their accounts. The time invested in building their avatars, communities, and worlds can generally not be taken with them should they choose to move to a different game. Therefore unsubbing is generally an empty threat. When players unsub in masse, it sends a very powerful message to game creators.

Vanity content – Items that provide social prestige within the game. Vanity items generally have no impact on game mechanics.

War – In EVE, war is both an organized social conflict and a game mechanic. Declarations of war or war decs can be purchased by CEOs. War deccing another corporation or alliance flags enemy players in the game as hostile; you may then attack them without security status penalty or retaliation from CONCORD. Enemy corporation assets such as star bases, customs offices, etc. are also considered fair game. War will go into effect 24 hours after declaration, and will last one week, unless the war bill is renewed.

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