

**MMO GAMING CULTURE:  
AN ONLINE GAMING FAMILY**

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Michael Harris, Department of Anthropology, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology.


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## **ABSTRACT**

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This study examines the social organization of Gaiscíoch, a large online gaming community that exists within the simulated world of a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). It provides an ethnographic account of an online gaming community that is open to any player without skill or time commitment requirements, but still maintains high status within the game world. This project identifies eight elements that make this inclusive, friendly, and casual community successful in virtual worlds that tend to be dominated by communities that have a competitive, strict, and exclusive approach to online gaming (social interaction, code of values, leadership, rank system, events, community building, population size, gameplay). Lastly, this project briefly inquires about the nature of the border between the virtual and the physical and establishes that gamers can be considered pseudo-border-inhabitants that are in control of the community they place adjacent to them in the cyber world.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to Nati, who has brought me back to life on more than one occasion. And to my family who has supported me no matter what I do.

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

In the United States there are over 180 million active gamers who, in surveys, claim to play computer or video games thirteen hours a week on average. This number quickly grows when the global gaming population is taken into account: 4 million in the Middle East, 10 million in Russia, 105 million in India, 100 million in Europe, 200 million in China, and many more from other locations. Globally, people spend over three billion hours a week playing online games (McGonigal 2011:3). Playing online video games is a popular activity that occupies a substantial amount of time for a large portion of the world's population. Furthermore, the gaming population is not uniform; it is, in fact, quite diverse. In the United States: 59 percent of Americans play video games; about 48 percent of all gamers are women; the average game player is thirty one years old and has been playing games for fourteen years; and, perhaps more importantly, 62 percent of gamers play with others, either in-person or online (Entertainment Software Association 2013; Entertainment Software Association 2014).

This ethnographic study examines the belief system and the social, “family,” and political structures of Gaiscíoch, pronounced gosh-kia; a large online gaming community that primarily functions within the simulated world of a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). Many online gaming communities in the MMORPG genre that are well-known and respected by other members of that game world expect, if not require, players to achieve and maintain a certain skill level and adhere to strict gaming schedules in order to join and maintain membership. This often creates a competitive

attitude between members and communities that has become commonplace in many MMORPG virtually simulated worlds. This is because their primary goal is to become the best players and the best community in the game world.

This study examines an MMORPG community that has opted out of the competitive paradigm. The thesis aims to create a detailed ethnographic account of a type of online gaming community that is open to any player without any requirements in terms of skill or time commitment, but still maintains high status within the game world. This project seeks to determine what makes this inclusive, friendly, accessible, and casual community successful in virtual worlds that tend to be dominated by communities that have a competitive, strict, and exclusive approach to online gaming. Lastly, this project briefly observes the nature of the border between the virtual and the physical world by inquiring about the manner in which values can traverse from the online plane to the offline plane and vice-versa.

### Methodology

This study was approached via three avenues. First, the organization of the Gaiscíoch “family” and the anatomy of its culture were examined by creating a clear outline of rank, authority, and internal relationships. This was coupled by an outline of relations with other communities and their role in the Gaiscíoch’s goals. This provided a framework to all relationships and allowed the mapping of patterns in activity and behavior. Second, different types of behaviors and daily activities within those outlined relationships were observed carefully. The particular types of behavior observed included: topics discussed; mannerisms; overall demeanor towards each other in text and voice chats; types of events and activities Gaiscíoch members lead and participate in;

Gaiscíoch's overall group dynamics during events; how events are executed; who leads the events; and how events are perceived and received by participants. This was done by recording detailed observations and keeping ethnographic fields notes. This process helped determine, in more detail, how the outlined relationships are applied, and how they, ultimately, shape the way the community works as a whole. Finally, the collection of statements and narratives, such as the website's pages and Celtic mythological chronicles, were analyzed. These were used as reference to represent what are the family's ideals (Malinowski 1922).

The data gathering process for the elicited data took place in little over a month; however, non-elicited data from participant observation was recorded over a period of four months. An anonymous online survey was posted on the community's forum website at the beginning of the data gathering month and removed once a sufficient sample size was achieved. Interviews were performed throughout the same month as the survey. Participant observation was carried out throughout the data gathering month and continued after elicited data was gathered. Participant observation was mostly scheduled around the numerous events hosted by the community; however, it also included non-scheduled, spontaneous get-togethers and other activities that arose unexpectedly. The type of participant observation used for this study differs from the established methodology applied in face-to-face ethnographies in that it is completely done in the virtual environment. However, participant observation still provides a deep immersion that allows the ethnographer to become an insider as it has been seen in other papers, such as Boellstorff (2008), Guimarães (2005), Jones (2007) and others. This virtual

participant observation allowed me to learn how to interact with other players and what it means to exist within that virtual world (Jordan 2009).

The bulk of the data was gathered via participant observation by participating in events and engaging in conversation with members as an insider after joining the community as any player would. This is because participant observation offers insight into practices and meanings as they unfold. This allowed the gathering of non-elicited data that was used to compare and contrast with the results of elicited methods, such as interviews and surveys. Informal interviews were conducted over voice chat with seven Gaiscíoch members. The selected interviewees were composed of variety of members from the Gaiscíoch community. These interviews were supplemented by 44 anonymous surveys that were completed by a diverse sample of volunteer members of the Gaiscíoch community.

Interviews and surveys gathered data including: what attracted individuals to this particular virtual community; their perceptions of how the community is situated in the virtual world; opinions comparing the Gaiscíoch with similar communities; opinions about family and rules of conduct and the role they play in shaping the community as a whole; the overall experience of participating in events and other activities with other members of the family; opinions about the nature of the border between the offline and online; how values may or may not traverse the border between spaces; and which values are more likely to traverse the border and why. Interviews with Gaiscíoch members provided information about the creation of the community, its goals, progress over time, clarifications about family and rank structure, leaders' perceptions of how the community

is situated among others within the same virtual world, and what the leaders want the community to become in the future.

### Research Significance

This research aimed to study an online gaming community, the Gaiscíoch family, which is mostly active in the virtually simulated world defined by the Guild Wars 2 video game. The Gaiscíoch family has some initiatives and activities within the physical world, such as charity campaigns, sponsorship and occasional in-person meetings. However, most social interactions and activities take place and have consequences on the virtual world they inhabit. This community aligns itself with Boellstorff's (2012) notion of separation of the online and offline planes because the Gaiscíoch family exists within a virtual world. This provides an opportunity to explore Boellstorff ideas and create a path for future research and exploration.

The Gaiscíoch community thrives in a world that is typically dominated, in number and recognition, by communities that have a competitive approach to online gaming. These competitive communities tend to be quite exclusive; they have rigid leadership structures, scheduled time commitments for members, and equipment and skill requirements. In these guilds, new members' applications are carefully scrutinized, and many players are quickly rejected. Memberships can also be terminated for not adhering to certain skill and in-game equipment standards established by guild leaders. A representative example of this type of community is Alex Golub's Power Aeternus (Golub 2010:27-30). However, these competitive communities, as common as they are, are not the only ones that exist within MMORPGs. There are less well-known communities that maintain very different cultural systems. These other communities have

a “casual” approach; they tend to favor fun over victory, friendship over status, and inclusivity over exclusivity. However, these “casual” communities tend to be smaller, less recognized, and less powerful in terms of their ability to complete missions and battle other groups in game. They are usually blanketed by the larger and more powerful competitive guilds. The Gaiscíoch family is one of these casual communities that values friendship, fun, and inclusiveness. However, they are well known within the game world and with video game developers. They are well-recognized and very large when compared to both competitive and casual communities. This kind of success is rare when referring to a casual online gaming community. This is why an ethnographic analysis of the Gaiscíoch family represents such a superb opportunity to enrich our understanding of online gaming communities that exist within the virtual worlds of the MMORPG genre.

This study looks at the development and maintenance of the Gaiscíoch family, seeking to reveal insights into what it takes to create a persistent and relevant online gaming guild. It also looks at the interactions between individuals from a participant observation standpoint in order to determine what it means to be part of a “casual” online gaming guild. Furthermore, this study provides information about what factors play a role in the success and survivability of the “casual” guild model, a form which is rarely successful among a predominantly competitive guild population. Lastly, this research provides insights about the virtual and physical border. It determines how individuals bring physical world values and motivation to the game world and vice versa.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The internet could be viewed in two ways. On one hand, it can be seen as a cultural artifact, a technology that is the product of cultural understanding and is used to enhance or facilitate human interaction in the physical world. On the other hand, it can be represented as a place or cyberspace where culture is formed and reformed (Hine 2000:14-40). This virtual environment allows us to create cybercities and simulated worlds that act as stand-alone societies, which exist parallel but separate from the offline world (Gattiker 2001:11-12 & 79-80, Shaw 2010:404).

Christine Hine's perspectives are recognizable when examining today's array of virtual domains. Most of them fall within a range that is defined by two extremes. On one side are offline communities that use the online domain as an enhancer or communication tool, such as Facebook (Dalsgaard 2008, Baron 2010), email, weblogs, or twitter. On the other extreme are virtually simulated worlds inhabited by people who have independent and disconnected lives in physical space. Each of these simulated worlds has particular cultural customs that are native to it. However, within these worlds there are a variety of virtual communities that have their own cultural differences and particular approaches to the activities taking place in that world (Gattiker 2001:11-12 & 80, Shaw 2010:404).

Gaming worlds such as Second Life (Boellstorff 2008, Malaby 2009), Everquest (Taylor 2006), or World of Warcraft (Nardi 2010) fall towards this end of the spectrum. This is a spectrum, not a dichotomy, which means that there are domains that have elements of both phenomena in differing poles. For example, Wikipedia acts as a method of



communication because it allows any individual to simultaneously create articles and inquire about subjects within their database. However, this has also created an imagined community (Anderson 2006) with specific customs, such as “trolling,” between article writers and regular visitors (Reagle 2010). Free open-source software communities are another example of online spaces that fall somewhere between the two extremes because they communicate ideas through code and create “modding” imagined communities (O’Neil 2009). However, this spectrum can be flexible and it could easily be expanded or have exceptions that emerge because of the malleability and rapid change of the online space and technology.

This way of thinking about the online explains some of the differences among scholars regarding the relationship between the online and the offline as social spaces. It is important, however, to consider that defining space in the social sciences tends to be dependent on ideas of disconnection and dissimilarity. Distinct societies and cultures tend to be defined in terms of “natural” and straightforward partitions of space. It is commonly perceived that each nation embodies a relatively distinct culture. This emanates from the key concept of “a culture” as it embodies a separate cultural entity that is typically associated with a certain group of people, a tribe, or a nation. This also means that the geographical territory that culture is affiliated with does not have to be a specifically defined nation. For example, small scale unitary groups such as the Nuer occupy land that overlaps with that of a nation-state and perhaps other groups (Gupta & Ferguson 1997).

This social space partitioning model does not address those who inhabit a bordering area. “The fiction of cultures as discrete, object-like phenomena occupying discrete spaces becomes implausible for those who inhabit the borderlands” (Gupta &

Ferguson 1997:34). Border inhabitants, such as online gamers and any other member of a virtual cyberspace that is mostly independent from the offline world, live lives of crossing borders between spaces, in this case the online and offline space. They can spend time in either space, which influences their perceptions and behaviors. People may move to a space that is generally independent from the other, but they tend to do so with assumptions and understandings that are shaped by the merging of both spaces. Therefore, it is important to understand what occurs when people freely traverse between the offline and the online to better understand the phenomenon itself as well as virtual cultures that predominantly exist online.

In terms of the virtual space, some scholars argue that the virtual is entirely separate from the physical. This is applicable to virtual worlds that exist independently from the offline lives of its members. The communities that inhabit a virtual world are more likely to be separate from the offline because their setting is entirely online. The interactions between and within these virtual communities tend to revolve around the virtual world they inhabit, and usually have consequences that stay within that online space. Tom Boellstorff (2012) states that the notion of the digital has generally been used as a placeholder adjective to simply mark interest in that which you plug in; he says that if digital only stands in for “computational” or “electronic,” then digital anthropology is doomed to irrelevance (Boellstorff 2012:39). If digital is simply a synonym for internet-mediated, then almost all anthropology is now digital anthropology in some way. The center of his analysis is for treating the digital as a methodological approach, founded in participant observation, for investigating virtual worlds and their relationship to the physical. This places digital anthropology as the methodology for studying virtual

environments and performing virtual anthropology, which could be considered parallel to such branches as medical anthropology or legal anthropology. Boellstorff considers digital anthropology as a field that keeps in focus how the terms of an object of study are not merely a derivative of the offline, but always involves the direct and indirect ways online sociality points at the physical world and vice versa. This technique is, again, critically grounded in participant observation, which can take several forms. In other words, digital anthropology cannot be boiled down to interviewing in isolation or the use of other elicitation methods such as surveys (Boellstorff 2012:39-40).

Boellstorff also discusses what other scholars understand as digital anthropology, particularly in regards to the relationship between the virtual (the online) and the physical (the offline) because this relationship determines what we understand as the virtual, the knowledge the virtual entails, and social phenomena within the virtual. His objective is to challenge the belief that the virtual and offline spaces are fusing into a single domain. The idea that the virtual and the physical cannot be treated as distinct and separate is seen in the work of scholars such as Vili Lehdonvirta (Lehdonvirta 2010:2). Lehdonvirta claims that the virtual should be placed on the same level as family, political, and work aspects of culture, thus avoiding the artificial boundaries based on technological distinctions. In other words, virtual communities are not different or separated in any way from physical communities. The non-separation of the virtual and the actual is also frequently represented in the apocalyptic language of “the end of the virtual/real divide” (Rogers 2009:29).

Gabriella Coleman also supports this notion of melding. She notes that research on virtual worlds “continues to confound sharp boundaries between off-line and online

contexts” (Coleman 2010:492). She discusses how many open source projects, such as Wikipedia, video game mods, and other open source software, are partially centralized organizations that have complex procedures and policies that closely mimic guilds of medieval times and some centralized bureaucracies. Furthermore, she notes that digital activism through widely accessible social media is another aspect that demonstrates how the boundaries between the virtual and the physical are thin, if they exist at all. An example of this is the instance when social media tools simultaneously supported grass-roots political mobilization as well as government surveillance and human rights violations during the 2009 post-presidential election protests in Iran (Coleman 2010:493). Although this point of view is applicable to some virtual domains, this perspective does not specifically refer to primarily virtual communities and virtual worlds; instead it is more compatible with the other side of the spectrum, communities that predominantly exist in the physical world and use virtual space as a medium to mediate discussions, space for storage, or as a means of communication that enhances the spread of information. This is because the actions performed have a significant connection and even direct consequences in the physical world, while producing little to no effect in the virtual domain. This distinction between the types of communities that can be observed in the online space allows us to understand how truly virtual worlds should be regarded differently than physically-centered communities that utilize the virtual space as a tool. Thus, online communities that exist within virtual worlds should be studied as independent communities through the use of online participant observation among other traditional ethnographic research strategies, such as interviews and surveys.

Brigitte Jordan also puts forward the argument that we are “witnessing an underlying process of technology-spurred blurring” (Jordan 2009:181). She states that a central consideration is that people live in a hybrid world with fading boundaries between physical and virtual. She discusses how the flow of information, capital, and ideas are crossing transnational borders that are increasingly permeable. Many transactions crucially involve the internet as global corporations sell commodities to traders across the world market. This increasing ubiquity is what she perceives is leading the virtual to become more real and the real to become overlaid with virtual characteristics (Jordan 2009:181-182). However, this is only occurring in domains where offline to offline communication is occurring. In other words these transactions are between an individual who has physical world information or products and another individual who wants that information of product in the physical world as well. This means that the primary functional space is the offline world and the online space is a communication tool and nothing more.

Jordan claims that separation between online and offline has been breached because digital tools such as the laptop allow for collaboration and communication on a wider scale than cell phones (Jordan 2009:182). However, this does not represent a fusion between offline and online spaces specifically. Instead it represents a union between two geographically or cultural distant offline spaces via an extremely efficient communication tool. This creates a “border porosity” (Jordan 2009:183) between nations, which in turn creates a new transnational form. However, this is different and separate from border crossing between offline and online planes that are discussed in this paper. Jordan further demonstrates this phenomenon by describing how the ubiquity of the new technology, the

internet, has provoked the emergence of new communication technologies (Jordan 2009:182), but not virtual spaces that fuse with the physical. The best examples she provides for this occurrence is the paper written by Churchill and Nelson (2009) about an experiment that aimed to engage people online with people in physical spaces (and vice versa). They used digital displays as communication devices to facilitate communication between online and offline participants in a café/art gallery in San Francisco via bulletin boards. Jordan claims that this accentuates the melding between physical and virtual presence because the displays provided a tool that users could use to interact with those online. However, these devices bridge offline to offline communication. Neither participant is entering a virtual world. She correctly points out that these types of social artifacts will become ubiquitous, and that they will ultimately fuse offline geographical spaces that are otherwise separated by time and space.

Furthermore, Jordan correctly identifies game virtual worlds as described by Boellstorff (2008) as “actual places that persist and continue to operate dynamically when individual participants leave” (Jordan 2009:182), and that those worlds have a physical existence in the technological servers and networks that provide the infrastructure. However, this becomes vastly irrelevant once inside the world itself because most actions that occur within these worlds generally do not have repercussions in the physical world. Jordan states that Massively Multiplayer Online Games “put players into a parallel world where they can buy and sell, acquire real estate, go to parties, devise new social systems, and much more” (Jordan 2009:185). She also states how this is crossing the boundaries between the physical and virtual worlds, thus between offline and online economies. Lastly, she hints at how values may traverse between these online worlds and the offline

world by noting that online worlds are “adding new dimensions to people’s lives, changing our perceptions and expectations of how we work, how we learn, and what social activities we engage in” (Jordan 2009:185). She equates these online worlds with neighborhood bars as “third places.” However, these online worlds and neighborhood bars are removed from one another because the game virtual worlds have less opportunity of affecting the offline world than bars.

There is also a persistent misrepresentation of the offline as the “real.” This implies the online is unreal. Although this might be disregarded as an issue of semantics, it is important that such misrepresentations do not underscore the understanding of digital anthropology research because virtual worlds are real but disconnected. This is why Boellstorff urges scholars to rethink digital anthropology. “The idea that the online and offline could fuse makes as much sense as semiotics whose followers would anticipate the collapsing of the gap between sign and referent” (Boellstorff 2012:42). Extending this notion to the digital can help avoid any assumptions that the virtual and the physical are melding or blurring. (Boellstorff 2012:40-43).

Furthermore, Boellstorff demonstrates through his case studies and research in the simulated world of the Second Life video game how a single excerpt elucidates up to six aspects of virtual interaction that can only be gathered via online participant observation. First, residents worked together to educate each other rather than relying on an instruction manual. Second, the fact that everyone knows that physical-world gender might not align with that of the virtual-world affects the social construction of gender within this virtual space. Third, residents learn to organize dialogues from a chat with multiple threads and overlapping conversations. Fourth, the virtual world offers different articulation

modalities, which can be viewed as ‘channelswitching’ as derived from the long standing linguistic term of codeswitching, such as ‘chat’, ‘whisper’, ‘shout’, etc. From another set of excerpts, Boellstorff notes that co-presence in a virtual neighborhood within the Second Life game could help shape an online community. Here, there is evidence that the view across the virtual landscape can be important to members. This shows how space in this game is shaped and defined by interaction in other virtual worlds, such as Second Life. In turn, this knowledge about other game worlds influences how users experience the game and the social networks within it. Boellstorff demonstrates how virtual presence for participant observation was critical in providing him with insights that he would not have obtained from elicitation methods such as interviews (Boellstorff 2012:43-50).

Boellstorff further merges the theoretical discussion with his ethnographic analysis. More specifically, he expands how the relationship between the virtual and the physical can be defined as inter-indexical. He explains that indexical signs have a causal relationship with referents: smoke is an index of fire. A causal relationship points from the index (smoke) to the referent (fire). In this example, smoke does not mean fire, but smoke is connected via a causal relationship to the fire that burns the fuel. Indexicals are defined within specific social realities, however. This means that they are not limited to the physical world because they take place online as well as offline. The emergent set of social realities the virtual has to offer cannot be directly inferred from the physical world. This is why we must consider the virtual and physical as separate. To effectively consider this perspective one can apply the inter-indexical relationship between the online and the offline as a two way street. In other words, the virtual and physical have an inter-indexical relationship. This means that the physical plane constantly and rapidly causes



changes in the virtual plane and vice-versa; it entails strong linkages of context between both spaces (Boellstorff 2012:50-53).

According to Boellstorff, the misconstrued assumption of the melding between the online and the offline can be explained as the misinterpretation of each plane pointing at each other as referents. In other words, the notion of blurring between these planes is created by the fact that they are extremely dynamic and quickly adaptable spaces, which means that any changes done in either plane can quickly be used as a reference by the other plane, thus creating the illusion of melding planes. However, these differences may be better understood when considering the spectrum of communities that can be found in the virtual space, which may be observed to some extent in this thesis.

### **CHAPTER III: THE GAISCIOCH FAMILY ORIGINS AND OVERVIEW**

The Gaiscíoch (pronounced Gosh-Kia) is a social gaming community that, from an anthropological perspective, is considered an imagined community (Anderson 2006). This is because it is unlikely that members of the community will ever know most other fellow members, yet within each of them lives the image of the community. This is not to say that it is false or fabricated, instead it is created and maintained by the belief of belonging of its members. The Gaiscíoch is imagined as a community because of the prevailing notion of horizontal comradeship, shared values, and deep sense of belonging. This sense of fellowship is what makes it possible for so many thousands of people to defend and align themselves with this online gaming community.

The Gaiscíoch has a relaxed approach toward gaming. They allow members to play how they want, when they want, and as long as they want without constricting them with quotas or requirements. They do not require any dues or fees from members; they only require that member abide by the code of values of the community. This is what makes the community stand out from other large and powerful gaming communities. The Gaiscíoch's overall focus is to support online members while being understanding of the offline world communities members belong to. They host public online gaming events where anyone, even non-members of the family, can participate. They also participate and host forums and discussions with members of the community. They consistently interact with game developers to provide input and feedback in matters regarding the games they play, and they also provide new players with information through in-game

advisors and out-of-game tutorials, guides, videos, and maps. They have a strong focus on relationships and they want to create fond and meaningful gaming memories as well as friendships; they are not just another online competitive guild. It is their endgame goal to create memories, friendships, and overall to create community. It is through gaming and social interaction that they forge new friendships and relationships.

Today Gaiscíoch is active on more than one game. However, most of the Gaiscíoch's activity concentrates on the game world of Guild Wars 2. This game, like all others they have played, is an MMORPG. It was released to the public on August 28th, 2012; however, the Gaiscíoch community was involved in its development well before its release and beta testing. The server they reside in, Sanctum of Rall, is named after a deceased member of the Gaiscíoch community who died shortly before the game's release.

### Origins

The origins and development of the Gaiscíoch community are chronicled throughout the website and visually mentioned during game events and other activities members participate in. This historical depiction of Gaiscíoch was drawn from their website, discussions and interviews with community members, and an article published in the Gaiscíoch magazine (Foley 2014). The Gaiscíoch's story is one full of epic adventures, friendships, hardships, and obstacles.

### **Dark Age of Camelot**

The Gaiscíoch was officially founded on November 11<sup>th</sup> of 2001. They originally played in a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) named Dark Age of Camelot. They played on the Nimue roleplaying server with a focus on creating a

fun and enjoyable community environment for players of all ages and skill levels. Prior to the creation of Gaiscíoch, the founder was part of an active guild within the Dark Age Camelot game world named Silverfist Brigade. He, three other Silverfist Brigade members, and four local volunteers decided to break off to form the Gaiscíoch na Anu, the first chapter of the family. It did not take long for the community to grow. They held public events and people began flocking to the community. The original design was to create an immersive roleplaying environment that players of all ages and skill levels could enjoy. Within the first year they had a little over 250 members. They began leading larger events, including a once a month dragon hunt. They hosted “Siege Night,” a Realm versus Realm (RvR) festival for all players on the Nimue server who cared to join. The family kept growing, the events expanding, and for four years the Gaiscíoch na Anu was a major part of the Nimue game world.

After guiding the success of the Gaiscíoch community, the founder was forced to step away from the Gaiscíoch community to try to prevent the collapse of his offline family due to financial difficulties. In an attempt to prevent the collapse of Gaiscíoch, the community leadership was entrusted to a council that would vote on decisions in the absence of their founder. The council was made up of five active members of the community who were closely related to the founder. However, quarrels and disagreements between council members resulted in the division of the council and the dismantling of the Gaiscíoch. It took roughly three months for the trusted council to run Gaiscíoch into the ground; Gaiscíoch went from 500+ members to under 50 members in this short time. Over the next two years membership would slowly dwindle towards non-existence. One member held onto the guild, waiting for the founder’s return for an

additional five years. Once the founder was able to return to the game, the member that had taken custody of what was left of the Gaiscíoch passed leadership back to the founder and said, “I couldn’t let the family end up in the wrong hands so I kept it in case you ever came back” (Foley 2014:7).

This entire experience was a wakeup call on many fronts. The strife the founder had to face during his time away from Gaiscíoch had exposed him to some of the worst things that life had to offer. He had lost everything in the online and offline world. After slowly rebuilding his offline relationships he was able to start rebuilding the Gaiscíoch community.

### **Warhammer Online**

In late 2006, I was introduced to the MMORPG Warhammer Online. At this point the new Gaiscíoch began to be forged. This new Gaiscíoch would welcome all types of players and focused on creating lasting memories and friendships, but not at the expense of the offline life of its members. They knew what had gone wrong the first time. The council and the democratic way tore the guild apart with arguments and debates that turned into feuds. To avoid these problems the new Gaiscíoch took a different approach. Gaiscíoch would be a sole proprietorship, with a group of elders whose main purpose was to help ease the burden on the single leader. This way the founder would be the voice, the decision maker, and the only individual who could be blamed for the community’s situation. This also helped prevent people from drawing imaginary lines within the guild that would turn into fractures and divides between members and goals. By utilizing this method the Gaiscíoch has existed for over a decade without collapse. The founder created the rule “Blades out, Not in” to prevent any future form of infighting. This rule also

requested that controversial topics stay outside of the online community to help prevent heated arguments. The Gaiscíoch's new goal was to create a family friendly environment for all to enjoy regardless of their playtime or availability.

At this restarting point, Gaiscíoch began with 5 people, a simple concept, and created the "Family." They redesigned and redeployed their website while maintaining some of the elements such as wood textures and gate graphics, which act as remnants of the past. Within a month they had grown to 250 members. Over the first few months they began leading events by engaging every random person who wanted to participate. Their events quickly grew in scale, and they began to gain server wide attention on the battlefield.

After they quickly regained popularity, they launched the "Open PuG Nights" (Pickup Group is a term commonly used to refer to groups that are not formed by people you know; instead they are composed of random members of the MMORPG world). Events would top 600 people in attendance at times. Despite this success, the player population in Warhammer Online began to decline and soon server closures began as well. By the end of November 2009, the server world where Gaiscíoch was housed was in the list of closures. At this point the Gaiscíoch Family moved to another server within the same game world called Badlands. They rebranded "Open PuG Nights" as "Battle for Badlands" and started their first major public community event series with a set schedule, set leaders, and a start and end date. Also, a website devoted to the contest was created. This brought the attention of not just players, but also journalists, even developers. This was the first time they began working on public image and networking with developers and journalists.

## **RIFT**

Unfortunately, in 2010 a series of changes to the Warhammer Online game world sent activity into the ground. This is when Gaiscíoch began to put together teams to scout out new titles for potential homes. There were two promising titles that were considered: RIFT and Guild Wars 2. Both had promising siege warfare and epic adventures, and both were scheduled to release in the next year. RIFT was the first to act by bringing several of Gaiscíoch's players into the game testing stages. Between the time of game testing and when the game was launched several key factors were withdrawn from the game. All siege mechanics were removed from the game and promised in future patches. Gaiscíoch moved into the RIFT game world regardless and tried to create siege battles.

Gaiscíoch created the "Telara Saga," a 22 week trek across Telara (the name of the game world) that culminated in "The Siege of Meridian" event between the two opposing factions in the game world, "Guardians" and "Defiants." This was with the goal of overtaking the game world city of Meridian, the Defiants' home city. The first few weeks were filled with massive player versus player (PvP) warfare in various areas. Hundreds joined for this mix of player versus environment (PvE) and player versus player (PvP) events. At the culminating battle at the gates of Meridian, there were over 800 people in attendance. This battle raged for more than two hours until its climax where a story plot was revealed: the "Dragon Cults," groups of non-player characters, had the master plan of pitting the Guardians and Defiants against each other to make them weak had worked. At this point season 2 launched as a cooperative adventure for both Guardians and Defiants to enjoy.

Gaiscíoch managed to successfully overtake Meridian city and overwhelm all of the Defiant Leaders, which had been considered impossible. Because of this Gaiscíoch became a beacon for making the impossible possible. Membership numbers boomed in RIFT and with that growth a new side of the community that enjoyed styles of play other than their traditional siege warfare focus, such as PvP and PvE, joined their ranks. Gaiscíoch members experienced raiding for the first time since Dark Age of Camelot and spent time crafting in-game equipment by gathering materials throughout the game world, and completing instanced dungeons (independent copies of an enclosed location with scripted events and obstacles newly generated for each group entering the area) together. They went from 750 members at launch, to well over 2,500 in just over a year. This growth brought the necessity for structure and revealed the need for managed growth and control over their reputation. Correspondingly, they expanded the eldership, refined the website, event and rank systems, and mastered the new processes. Feats others deemed impossible were made possible because of their size. They repeatedly showed other gamers that it is not necessary to be a hardcore community member to overcome epic encounters. Although the PvE side of the family boomed, the siege battle hungry members became discouraged because the conquering of the Meridian city changed the game world by removing siege warfare since Guardians and Defiants were now working together against the Dragon Cult.

Gaiscíoch was on top of the RIFT world in 2011. Its membership numbers were higher than ever before, and it was getting involved with gaming and community development. But siege warfare loving members were still without a focus. Meanwhile the team inspecting the Guild Wars 2 game world continued reporting to the elder council



about the progress of the game and encouraged the community to approach ArenaNet about lending a hand in testing the game world. Arrangements to meet members of the ArenaNet at Penny Arcade eXpo (PAX) Prime, a large gaming festival typically held in Seattle, WA, were made for August of 2011. The founder discussed with the game developers what Gaiscíoch had to offer to the game world. It seemed like the siege warfare fans within Gaiscíoch would finally have a home. But on September 27th, 2011 tragedy struck in a big way. One of the Gaiscíoch elders was nowhere to be seen for days on end. After a week the news of the member's passing found its way back to Gaiscíoch. This loss hit the community very hard. Many felt a profound sense of loss. This elder had been a source of inspiration to the family for years. He was a solid voice of reason that kept the community on track and focused. His humor and kindness radiated to all of us. Just by being in the room he could change bad days to good ones, take stress and turn it into laughter. He was one of those people who brightened people's lives just by being there. A few days after his passing ArenaNet contacted the founder about bringing Gaiscíoch into their Alpha Team. As they continued gaming in RIFT they placed over 500 members into the Alpha Test for Guild Wars 2. This was a tragic triumph for many members of Gaiscíoch because they knew their close friend that heralded the move towards Guild Wars 2 would not be able to see the community thrive in this new game world.

By fall season, tides started to shift within the RIFT game world. It was something members had witnessed before. In Warhammer Online developers made similar mistakes. Sweeping changes to RIFT that required players to forfeit years of experience and to relearn the game pushed a lot of its population out. The new game

patch released on October 17th, 2012 required players to completely relearn their character's class. This meant that all the work and habits they had created in this game world were pointlessly removed from the game. This discouraged and drove away a lot of players; in Gaiscíoch, member activity within RIFT dropped by 40% within 2 months of this change. A month later, another patch release caused players to relearn their class yet again and removed the ability to play PvP siege warfare from anyone who was not a certain rank. They also implemented a crude character leveling structure that isolated players from the way they liked to play, which required several hours of repetitive tasks that did not appropriately reward characters and gamers. Because of these reasons, by December of 2012, Gaiscíoch's activity had decreased by 86% on RIFT.

## **Guild Wars 2**

Just weeks before the launch of Guild Wars 2, ArenaNet notified Gaiscíoch that they were going to pay tribute to the deceased Gaiscíoch elder's memory in the form of a server called "Sanctum of Rall." This news spread through the media and many gaming communities. Players from far and wide flocked to the community to be a part of its legacy. By the time Gaiscíoch launched into Guild Wars 2 they had more than 2,000 unique players slamming into the game world. The launch was probably one of the most chaotic in their history. Elders spent days sending invites to players. The siege war drew hundreds of inactive members back to the fold. They maintained a foot in both RIFT and Guild Wars 2 through March of 2013, when it was finally decided to pull the plug on RIFT and focus solely on Guild Wars 2. Life in Guild Wars 2 was ideal for the siege warfare lover and the casual gamer, as the game provided content for both audiences. In-

game equipment crafting was wildly popular and players found much enjoyment in hunting the grand creatures throughout the land.

One of the greatest challenges was creating a public community event in Guild Wars 2. Gaiscíoch originally wanted to host it in the World versus World (WvW) arena, a PvP game mode where players from three different physical servers but in the same game world waged siege warfare. However, lack of technical support for large player population hindered their attempts at first. Flooding the World versus World arenas with hundreds of people and leaving some members without being able to join at times. Thus they decided to create a public community event that focused on traveling through all of the zones in Tyria, name of the PvE game world. After a few months of test runs to identify any pitfalls, they began building a plan for the first season of the Great Tyrian Adventure. The first season of the Great Tyrian Adventure took participants across all of the zones in the game, obtaining waypoints, point of interests and skill points found across the land. In the 26-week adventure, over 500 players joined.

The second season was shortened to 14-weeks. Gaiscíoch had 312 people join the events. They changed the format to focus on the guild missions system by creating SOR (Sanctum of Rall) Community Events [SORC], a temporary guild used for the events in order to allow everyone on the server to get a chance to participate in these events. The Season 2 of Great Tyrian Adventure, increased in numbers every week. In the start there were between 60 and 70 people, and by the last event over 100 people were joining every week. This laid the foundation for more ambitious public community events that were later executed.

The third season was named “Legendary Edition.” It was a 12 week, 4 events per week, series. These events had a massive raffle pot at the end of each quarter and at the end of the entire event series. The Gaiscíoch Family pulled together in gathering in-game materials, completing dungeons, and creating 7 Legendary Weapons, 14 Mystic Forged Weapons, and countless exotic items that would be given away as prizes for the raffles. They decided to go all out for this event series by creating prizes worth over 30,000 in-game gold roughly earned over a few hundred hours of gaming. Season three took off like wild fire. Numbers consistently topped 300 weekly. They conducted 4 events per week at various timeframes to allow everyone to participate despite time zones and work schedules. In all, 793 people attended this 12 week series, making it the most successful event series in Gaiscíoch’s history.

Guild missions consist of a variety of timed events that are unlocked in a particular order. Gaiscíoch participates on four particular types regularly: “Guild Bounty,” “Guild Challenge,” “Guild Puzzle,” and “Guild Rush.” Each of these mission types requires a differing degree of cooperation. However they are impossible to complete without communication and cooperation.

Guild Bounties are open world missions where members work together to hunt and kill targets across the game world Tyria within 15 minutes. Each target walks around the game world through its own predetermined path, however, these paths are massive and sometimes confusing. In these events all guild members are given, via in-game chat, possible location for the assigned target and are told to search around specific zones for the target. When the target is located by any member of the guild, they then inform the rest of the guild who gather for an ambush. These battles have to be coordinated well or

fought in large numbers, usually over 100 players, because the targets are very challenging. The targets have tactics that are specialized for dealing with large number of attackers. Gaiscíoch events always have a large number of players in attendance, which helps alleviate the need for careful strategic planning. However, these are still rarely completed without any casualties.

Guild Challenges are also open world missions that require guild members to overcome one of six different tasks that vary greatly from one another. One of the most common is titled “Save Our Supplies.” In this event players are tasked to defend supply barrels that are under attack from waves of computer generated enemies. The supply camp has turrets that can be used by players to attack enemies with cannon fire and help protect the area. These turrets can be upgraded over the course of the battle to maximize their support. During Gaiscíoch events, preparation is key for the success of this type of mission. Since there is no shortage of players this can be an extremely easy event as long as players are positioned correctly. The whole group is divided into smaller groups that surround the perimeter of the supply camp. Each small group is tasked to protect that area alone and to only provide assistance when requested from another sector and then promptly return to the assigned location. Preparation for this event is important because it is difficult to coordinate such a large group while in combat. This strategy is simple and effective, but unless performed correctly enemies could slip into the camp and cause havoc on the precious supplies. Another Guild Challenge that is well-liked by Gaiscíoch members is called “Branded for Termination.” In this mission the guild is tasked with killing three large targets within 30 seconds. The best strategy for completing this mission is to divide the group into three smaller groups that attack each target separately.

The leader keeps track of the health bars of each target and instructs teams to either attack or momentarily disengage depending on the progress of all three groups. All of these events require some degree of preparation and coordination during battle in order to be successfully completed.

Guild Puzzles are missions where members have to work together to complete one of three possible multi-room puzzles that have varying requirements and solutions. “Langmar Estate” is perhaps the longest and most challenging of all three because it requires a great deal of coordination. During this particular puzzle, the first challenge is to search weapon racks to find weapons that then must be placed on statues in the correct order, with hints provided by a book on pedestal at the center of the room. The second challenge involves climbing up to four separate platforms and standing on a panel that is on each platform in order to open the next gate. The following puzzle involves communication above all else. This particular room requires twelve players to complete. In this room there are six inner/small curtains and six outer/big curtains. To solve this puzzle one player must stand on each curtain, inner and outer. After a countdown all inner curtains must be revealed at the same time. After they are revealed, each player on the inner curtains must communicate the expression hidden behind the curtain, such as bow, salute, or wave, to their corresponding partner on the mirror side so they may perform it. If each player on the outer curtains performs the corresponding expression then the puzzle is completed and the gate to the final puzzle opens.

The last phase of this consists of a room that has three floors. A player starts out on the top floor where players have to find 2 square panels on the ground. Once two players stand on the panels located in the top level, the level below, which was previously

covered in a poison cloud, clears out and becomes safe for everyone else. After the poison cloud is clear most players must jump down and kill enemy oozes that drop grease, which has to be applied to the gears located in the second floor. After enough ooze grease is applied, players can then go to the bottom level to pick up broken parts from old siege weapons to build a makeshift ram that will break down the last door to the puzzle. However, some players must stay above on each floor to keep standing on the panels and applying ooze to the gears. Otherwise the players below will not have materials to build the ram or the poison cloud will come back. This is one of the simplest guild puzzle missions when everyone understands what is going on and what role each plays in the puzzle. However, without coordination and understanding it is extremely easy to fail these missions. This is particularly difficult to do when considering Gaiscíoch's events had over 100 players coming along on these missions. Ironically, the number one mistake that occurs when participating with such large amounts of people is that players assume that others will fulfill a role and move on to the next task, thus not completing the puzzle entirely.

Guild Rushes are more individualistic, but coordination is still a requirement. In these events members are transformed into animals that have limited and unique powers. They are then required to pass through a series of markers before reaching a finish line within a time limit. Non-transformed guild members assist by clearing or distracting enemies that attack the weaker, transformed players. Transformed players get three skills they can use. The first skill is always "Search," which allows them to see traps that are laid out in the path. The other two skills depend on which of the six possible guild rushes is being attempted. For example, in the "Spider Scurry" Members transform into spiders

and must pass through an enemy ore mine. This guild rush can be confusing because players are required to use their leap skill to cross large gaps between mining catwalks. This brings a vertical element that is uncommon for a lot of activities in the game world.

### **Elder Scrolls Online and Gaiscíoch's Future**

By 2014, Guild Wars 2 had been a wonderful home for most, but the majority of members who enjoyed raiding and large scale siege warfare were left somewhat dissatisfied. Guild Wars 2 did not fully meet siege warfare expectations because large groups easily overpower smaller groups regardless of game skill in most circumstances, and winning or losing matches was largely meaningless because of the arena setting, which had no lasting effect on the game world. Considering the limitations in Guild Wars 2, a new home was requested. The elder teams put together a list of over 200 in-game features that aligned with Gaiscíoch's goals and functionality requirements, which would in turn help the everyday running of the community. These features were used to create a scoring system that measured potential games against each other. Items were broken into 5 categories: Critical, Important, Needed, Useful, and Added Bonus. With this scheme, they started comparing several different game titles. The games that stood out the most were Archeage and Elder Scrolls Online. However, Archeage had a limited size of 250 players per guild, which did not truly work for the over 800 active member population of Gaiscíoch. This essentially halted any attempts of Gaiscíoch moving into Archeage. Furthermore, preexisting relationships with many of the developers in the Elder Scrolls Online team also aided in learning and getting involved in the game development quickly. In its first run through their scoring system, Elder Scrolls Online had scored 86% 6 months before it was scheduled to launch. This was the highest score of any game



world they had ever played in before. This is how they decided that this was the direction to follow. They would enter the new game world in hopes to reunite the raid and large scale siege warfare players under one home world.

Gaiscíoch started with a bang within the Elder Scrolls Online game world. Inactive players from past games flooded to the scene to get a taste of the newest game world. By the end of the second month, they experienced the traditional surge and fall seen in games prior. By May 2014, Gaiscíoch was in a stable position where they were able to begin exploring their role in the Elder Scrolls Online game world.

Over the next few months (from May to July), Gaiscíoch's plan was to keep growing within both Guild Wars 2 and Elder Scrolls Online and further establish their presence. They hoped to find a role for their community in the Elder Scrolls Community and begin hosting new public community event series. In Guild Wars 2, they planned to continue to be a leader and role model for those within the Sanctum of Rall server. They hoped their methods and reputation will be solidified within the Elder Scrolls community, while keeping an eye on the horizon for involvement in the development process of new games to play. They also hoped to help guide ZeniMax Online, developer studio of Elder Scrolls Online, and ArenaNet to improve and bring new features that help communities such as Gaiscíoch unlock their full potential. Their 5 year plan was to continue their course of bringing fun, friendly, and memorable gameplay to various fantasy based players and games.

### Family Values and Beliefs

The Gaiscíoch community has adopted an Irish, Celtic mythology theme, and holds honor, respect, integrity and fellowship over hierarchy and dictatorship. This may

seem contradictory when looking at the family structure and rank system as a rather rigid and clearly defined structures. However, in practice it is very perceivable that those principles are maintained. The community takes its name and values from Irish legends found in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (Macalister 1938) and *Cath Maige Tuired* (Gray 1983). These documents chronicle the Tuatha de Dannan; They were the most honorable and loyal warriors chosen by the Tuatha de Dannan to fight alongside Celtic gods against the Fir Bolg, one of the groups of people that inhabited ancient Ireland. Those warriors were called Gaiscíoch. During the battle and negotiations with the Fir Bolg, the Gaiscíoch demonstrated a great deal of respect, honor, and integrity by initially offering them half of Ireland to the Fir Bolg in order to avoid conflict, and repeatedly reminding them that bloodshed could and should be avoided. Lastly, the Tuatha and Gaiscíoch demonstrated their commitment to those virtues by offering the Fir Bolg one of the five provinces of Ireland even after the bloodthirsty Fir Bolg were defeated in battle. The story ends with a final remark about how both nations prepared a feast together and celebrated their newfound friendship and embraced each other as brothers. This brief chronicle is depicted on the Gaiscíoch website and it quickly provides a snippet of the community's publicly endorsed values. These values are one of the aspects that define the uniqueness of this online gaming community.

Some of the primary house rules, lifestyle, family etiquette and beliefs are thoroughly described on the website. The most prominent one is embodied as the “blades out, not in” motto. “This is an ancient Celtic family rule, which states that one member of the family shall not turn their blade on their family” (Gaiscíoch Website 2014). Whenever any hint of internal conflict sparks up, this motto is quickly mentioned and the

conflict then turns silent or is resolved in a polite manner without anger or agony.

Another less important but very commonly referenced etiquette rule is that of language and conduct. They ask that a “family friendly” environment be kept at all times in the text and voice chat. “If you know you have issues keeping it clean we ask that you join one of our many 21+ channels” (Gaiscíoch Website 2014).

In line with Celtic values and background of the community, a Gaiscíoch member is expected and taught not to allow anger, hate, rage, pride or greed control their actions and mind. They bestow kindness and benevolence to family, friends, realm mates, and even enemies when appropriate. They act from selflessness, and are always searching for a way to aid travelers who come along. “Learning the Gaiscíoch way of life takes time. Many of us have been shaped by pop culture, trends, and the capitalistic world we live in today” (Gaiscíoch Website 2014). They hope that through patience and perseverance they can help people learn how to act as a team and be able to put aside selfish needs to enable them to complete difficult challenges within the game world.

Their values permeate to most aspects of the Gaiscíoch family. For example, they recruit new members by setting examples and actions. The first part of becoming a Gaiscíoch member is to approach an existing member and ask about joining. They do not spam chat channels with recruitment messages, or send private messages to people to ask them to join. Instead they do their best to show people who they are and what they are about through their events and current member behavior. This further demonstrates the importance placed on the values and rules of conduct. Despite this recruiting tradition, the Gaiscíoch community maintains a very large population size. This ultimately shows

how important it is for a gaming community to maintain well-defined values and rules of conduct in order to pave their road to stability and growth.

Through participation, a Gaiscíoch member will pass several trials. The first is a test of fellowship and the willingness to participate with others. The second is a test of sacrifice and the willingness to contribute to the family. The third is a test of leadership and ability to inspire and guide others. The final test is one of selflessness. It is only out of an act of selflessness that a member may become part of the family's eldership. This is what the Gaiscíoch family credos represent. They are used to ensure that the members of the community slowly, but surely, become accustomed to and internalize the main tenets the family follows. Members are required to accept a credo to receive certain promotions within the family, but they are welcome to not accept the oath in exchange for halting their rank progression. In other words, everyone can be a member, but not everyone has to become a leader or progress through the ranks. This aspect of progression through the ranks of the family will be further discussed below.

The first credo is called "The Kindred Credo." It embodies the Gaiscíoch's shared value of willingness to participate as team members instead of as individuals. People who accept this credo acknowledge that their actions affect all who are involved with the community, and they are expected to refrain from actions that will cast a negative shadow on the community, such as cheating, insulting, or attacking fellow members of the community. Furthermore, they are expected to respect their enemies and friends regardless of how they are being treated by said foe and ally. In the case a problem between two members arises, both members are expected to approach a solution in a peaceful way via diplomatic communication and calm discussions. In the event that a

solution is unreachable in this manner they pledge to reach mediation from officers or elders in the family. All of these expectations are obvious when gaming with the Gaiscíoch community because of the habitual serenity, but they take the spotlight whenever issues arise. For example, most interactions between Gaiscíoch members and anyone else in the game world occur with agreeable voices that generally do not portray or match the chaos that occurs on screen while playing the game. Respectful and grammatically correct sentences that utilize short hand internet and game specific acronyms are also common place. In one instance, some of Gaiscíoch's enemies in a multiplayer siege battle event were found to be cheaters, and Gaiscíoch members expressed their disdain, disappointment, and disapproval to that group. However, they did so respectfully and utilized the proper channels for reporting the perpetrators, which are quite uncharacteristic reactions to such behavior in gaming worlds. They said "You might have beaten us while cheating, but now your accounts will be banned for that" (Male) and "Why do you feel so good about yourselves by cheating? You are not actually winning" (Female). This contrasts with the insults and anger outbursts that other groups so enthusiastically offer. This also demonstrates how Gaiscíoch members make an effort to treat enemies and friends with deserved, or undeserved, respect.

The second credo is called "The Protectors Credo." It symbolizes a greater degree of commitment to the community than the Kindred Credo. It represents a member's willingness to contribute to the family over personal glory and reward. However, this credo concentrates on shifting the member's commitment towards helping others learn the ways of the Gaiscíoch family. In this way they provide assistance to Elder members and start proving themselves to everyone within the community. These members are

considered protectors of the family's values, and integrity. When gaming with Gaiscíoch, as a member or an outsider, this credo will appear to have been accepted by almost everyone because everyone is more than willing to provide guidance to anyone who needs it. People are regularly encouraged to ask questions, and whenever they do there is never a lack of people who are willing to guide and help without any regret or air of arrogance. Although this credo ensures that rising new members understand what the community is all about, it is incredible to find many individuals who have not actively accepted this credo yet are already upholding its values to the letter. Some of the most common questions asked are about improving game strategy and figuring out how the community website works. No matter what time or day it is someone usually answers the question and helps that person. This reaching out to provide help is one of the factors that push individuals to get to know one another, and for those members who wish to rise to leadership positions it is an opportunity to become known throughout the community. However, to do this they must sacrifice their own play time to spend it helping others, and those that are willing to sacrifice more time to explain and guide others are usually those who rise to leadership positions.

The third credo is called "The Leaders Credo." It represents the member's dedication to leadership and their ability to inspire and guide others. They must be willing to help the family grow by doing tasks that make players feel welcome and part of something greater and significant. They must understand that they are not in a position of power and control. Instead, they are a source of inspiration and motivation. They are expected not to pass judgment, hold a grudge, speak out of anger or hate, but instead show kindness and benevolence and remain calm, caring, and friendly to all. They pledge

to consider achievements, rewards and fame as lesser than serving members in helping them grow closer and form fun memories together. Gaiscíoch leaders are the most predominant members of the community as they plan and execute most of the coordinated activities, in which members can participate. Because of this, they are usually easily recognized by members via their voice and even in-game avatars. When members ask for clarification about what is going on during an event, leaders take the time to explain the group's actions and why it is that the strategy works. They also take criticism and suggestions about current strategies into consideration and sometimes even apply those suggestions on the fly. In one instance, a group of about 40 or so Gaiscíoch members were attempting to capture an enemy tower. However, it was more difficult than expected because of the enemy's strong defensive tools. While the leader explained what the group was doing with battering rams to some members, others suggested using trebuchets from a position that was unreachable by the enemy's artillery. This was a simple suggestion that turned out to quickly deplete the enemy's supplies and ensured victory.

Leaders also try to make members feel like an important piece of something greater. They achieve this by sincerely telling them what worked, why they succeeded or failed, and how they can improve to overcome their obstacles. However, this is done with generalized constructive criticism and in a positive manner, instead of calling out specific members for doing something wrong or demanding better performance. They also assign special jobs to anyone who is willing to volunteer. For example, leaders of siege battle events regularly ask for volunteering scouts to act as lookouts for the main group. These

lookouts let the leaders know about enemy movements. Thus the lookouts are able to make significant differences in strategy and tactics.

The final credo is called “The Elders Credo.” This is a test of selflessness. Accepting this credo means accepting to surrender self-gain and reward for becoming a protector of the Gaiscíoch way of life. Elders are expected to think of all problems with a calm mind and from every angle. They commit to supporting the elder council and providing feedback to help steer the family in the correct direction. They are expected to put others before self and go out of their way to help those in the community. Thus representing the family values in the most pure form possible. Elder rank members are not as prominent as leaders because they do not necessarily lead events, which are the center of participation. However, it is distinguishable when one of them is speaking because of how much they know about how Gaiscíoch works, and how they embody the community’s code of values through their behavior. They tend to have a very kind and confident way of speaking that certainly comes from extended gameplay and Gaiscíoch membership experience. They also go the extra mile when helping others in whatever they need. Elder members do not just provide verbal assistance, but they often offer help in clearing whatever missions or tasks others need to overcome to obtain rewards for equipment, or offer crafting materials and in-game currency for those who need it.

Elders also are the main source of reason in moments where there is conflict between members. In one instance, one of the members insulted other members for not following the directions of the leader. The elder stepped up immediately and talked with the aggressor in order to calm him down and explain how he should not be so nasty to his fellow gamers. In another instance, a member who could not stop being conflictive was



flagged by one of the elders and taken in private to discuss the terms of his temporary banishment from the community. That member was later evaluated by the elder council and allowed to rejoin the community as long as he was no longer confrontational.

Elder members also play a significant administrative role regarding the community as a whole. They have a significant say regarding what the family will do next. For example, when the community was looking for a new game, it relied heavily on the elders to keep an eye out for game features and new releases. Groups of elders were assigned to keep an eye on different game development cycles in order to determine which game would be best for the community to move into. They also meet monthly with the founder and discuss the status of the community and possible future adaptations and suggestions.

“With each credo, members are expected to represent the family at a higher standard. Members may opt to stay at an existing rank to take a less active role in the family” (Gaiscíoch Website 2014). These credos are a significant part of progressing through the Gaiscíoch ranks and becoming more involved with the inner workings of the family. However, they do not define membership within the family. Anyone and everyone has the opportunity to accept or reject any of these credos and remain within the family. However, once accepted, the member will be held to the fullest of their commitment. Gaiscíoch’s open world events, such as map exploration, guild missions and story missions, are visible to everyone, even non-members, on the website. The only exception is competitive server versus server events. This is because open world events allow everyone to participate without causing negative repercussions as everyone receives rewards and gets to contribute. However, server versus server events are only

shown to logged in members because they want to keep the schedule hidden from other servers' spies. However, anyone in the same server is more than welcomed to join any and all of Gaiscíoch's events. In fact, leaders regularly announce an event as it is about to begin in the world-wide chat menu for all players to see, thus giving them a chance to join.

The Gaiscíoch family also encourages its members to be part of other communities and their activities. Members retain their membership with the Gaiscíoch family regardless of affiliation with any other guild or group. There are Gaiscíoch members who are also members of other guilds within the same game world. The only exception to this is if that member is acting as a spy for another server or community. This is considered to be hostility against fellow member and a violation of the code of values. Only banished members are ever removed from the roster. Dismissal from the community is decided upon elder review of inappropriate action. Only members that are found in repeated violation of credos, and are causing general conflict or turmoil within the family or the game world are banished from Gaiscíoch.

#### Family/Rank/Political Structure

The founder is director and overarching leader of the community. He also designed, programmed and currently maintains the website used by the group. The website provides a central hub to all of the Gaiscíoch activities. He regularly takes charge of leading many in-game events, building and maintaining relationships with game development studios, media, and charities. He is the top decision maker. It is not possible to compete or progress into this leadership position. The website makes the process of

entering the guild and progress through the established ranks very clear and easy to understand after it is read thoroughly.

**Table 1 - Gaiscíoch Family Rank Structure**

Category	Rank Name	Days Active	Family Honor Points (FHP)	Fellowship Points (FWP)	Contribution Points (CP)	Valor Points (VP)	Tokens of Valor
Guest	Buirdeiseach	-	-	-	-	-	-
New Member	Treubh	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Muinntir	3	500	-	-	-	-
Member	Lorgair	7	1,000	750	-	-	-
	Freiceadan	30	2,500	2,000	-	-	-
Veterans	Saighdear	90	5,000	4,000	1,000	-	-
	Gaisgeach	180	10,000	7,000	5,000	-	-
Officers	Seaimpin	270	15,000	10,000	10,000	-	-
	Laoch	360	25,000	15,000	25,000	-	-
The War Council	Ard Tiarna	450	50,000	15,000	50,000	20,000	25
	Caomhnóir	540	75,000	20,000	100,000	40,000	50
	Taidhleoir	730	125,000	25,000	200,000	80,000	150
Elders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

As represented in Table 1, the family is broken into six groups of ranks. Although the difference between each particular rank is not always significant, advancing through the groupings opens up different privileges and duties assigned. However, members are not required to advance ranks in order to be part of the family. Accepting promotion generally means accepting more responsibility and commitment to the family, such as weekly events, new member guidance, etc. The rank system seems to be the most important aspect that contributes to the Gaiscíoch family's stability regardless of its casual approach to gaming. In other words, the commitment usually requested of almost every member in other MMORPG communities is only requested of volunteering leaders in the Gaiscíoch family. Even then, stepping down temporarily or permanently from

those positions of responsibility is not condemned or used against the member in any way. Another element that is quite different from other communities is that higher rank does not mean more power and control over other members. Instead, it means more responsibility taken onto oneself. Some Gaiscíoch members, for instance, are not interested in being leaders, event planners, or taking up any other responsibilities outside their offline lives, but they still want to play with a group online regularly. Thus players do not advance further through the ranks. It is interesting to see members not advancing through the ranks because they know they do not want extra responsibility, and they respect the principles of each credo and rank.

Rank structure is clearly defined and has very specific guidelines, with the exception of the elder positions. Rank names are derived from their Irish background, as all of the ranks are in Gaelic, and each of them reflects meaningful words in reference to the rank. For example, Buirdeiseach means freeman in Gaelic, Muinntir means folk and refers to the upper new member, while Lorgair means hound and refers to lower official members.

Guest members (Buirdeiseach) are unregistered members that are trying out the community. They have limited access to the website and its features. They can register at any time, but they are not required to register to stay as long as they would like. New members (Treubh and Muinntir) are the first ranks of a registered member. This is an opportunity to get to know the family from the inside. The main objective of this level is to allow members to learn how the community operates. This ensures they visit and familiarize themselves with the website and the values of the community. Members (Lorgair and Freiceadan) are players that already have a firm understanding of the inner

workings of the community and have begun to find their place within it. They have the privileges to use the community's marketplace for game items, invite people to the family, and start leading events for the family. To reach these ranks new members must accept the Kindred Credo.

In one of the observed examples, a male joined the Gaiscíoch community, coming from a competitive community. At the beginning he listened to orders as if they were definitive and refrained from giving feedback and making conversation. After a while he started noticing that other players did not get in trouble for giving suggestions, but instead they were encouraged to provide it. He then began to give his suggestions and possible new strategies constantly, as if he was unloading years of holding back in a few weeks. Some of these suggestions were applied on the spot and were successful because he knew the game well. This opportunity made him feel valuable and allowed him to contribute to the community.

Veterans (Saighdear and Gaisgeach) are members who have proven their dedication to the family by attending other leaders' events. They have a firm grasp of the family's code of values. Veteran members can choose to completely focus on leading or participating in events. Veterans must accept the Protectors Credo to reach the next rank level. Officers (Seaimpín and Laoch) are expected to help newer members learn about the community, website, and the values system. They are occasionally expected to report misdoings to elders and act as advisors and overall protectors of the family image and name. They do this by documenting what they see and hear through screenshots, chat logs, and any other information that might be used to help resolve any issues. This position is the first that comes with true responsibilities and expectations. Accepting this

position signifies willingness to sacrifice playtime to help make the community run smoother. Officers must prove their leadership commitment and skills in order to progress into the ranks by leading events. Officers must also accept the Leaders Credo in order to become part of the War Council ranks. The War Council members (Ard Tiarna, Caomhnóir, and Taidhleoir) are the community leaders that devote the majority of their gaming time to hosting family and public events, such as guild missions and WvW events. They work closely with elders to ensure member and public participation in events and to maintain the image and values of the family intact. They focus on entertaining the crowd by hosting preferred and requested events. For example, the most coveted types of events are WvW and Guild missions because of the rewards and level of cooperation they provide players. In guild mission public events, such as the Tyrian adventure, the leaders must know how to prepare for each challenge and coordinate a large group of people, usually over 100, to achieve victory. Guild missions are pre-structured; these do not require as much improvisation from leaders unless mistakes happen because there is a pre-designed solution to the challenges. However, in WvW events leaders must take into account the ever changing enemy strategies because they are fighting other teams of players instead of designed obstacles. The trial and error of different strategies is what makes the WvW events so entertaining to most Gaiscíoch members. Event leaders are usually well-known members of the Gaiscíoch family and they must be sure to control their behavior and exercise the values of the family to their fullest.

Elder council members are ranked as the main supporting cast to the founder of the community. They are members who have repeatedly shown their ability to “help and

motivate people” (Gaiscíoch Website 2014). Elders must always display “honor, integrity, fellowship, respect and willingness to give without reward” (Gaiscíoch Website 2014), which echoes the virtues of the mythological Gaiscíoch from the Irish chronicles. Elders are responsible for overseeing all aspects of the Gaiscíoch family. They must be naturally inclined toward helping others, and they must have peaceful demeanors that allow them to approach each situation with a clear head. They spend more time organizing and planning different aspects of the community than playing the game. Thus, this position is rarely filled by events leaders. They must be able to handle the stress of solving conflicts and handling a large number of members. They bear the burden of retiring members who repeatedly show they are unable to abide by the rules that maintain family stability, thus preserving the family code of values. Elders must attend monthly (online) summits to discuss the status and direction of the community with the founder. There are no specific requirements or ladders to become a member of the elder council. Instead, potential elders are nominated by other members of the community and then considered for panel review in regards to their virtues. They are carefully observed until a decision about the member’s promotion is reached, at which point it is announced at the next monthly family summit.

The elder council is subdivided into three roles. First is the Ceannard (chieftain). They make decision about the family’s future and general direction under the advisement of other elder council members and war council leaders. They set up networks with game developers, or media agencies and protect the community’s name. Second, the Draio (druids) act as advisors to the Ceannard by suggesting and supporting the decisions made by the Ceannard. They are the main conflict solvers of the family. Lastly, the Fili (bards)

are former Draio that have become inactive from the community for whatever reason. They tend to have the role of observing other games and introducing players that are a good fit to the Gaiscíoch Family. If a Fili elder returns to the family as an active member they immediately resume their rank of Draio.

Progression through the ranks of the Gaiscíoch family is built around participation in events, leading events, and trading with members of the community (with the exception of the Elder rank). The more a member participates the faster they climb the “family tree.” Progression through the family ranks is determined by a combination of points accumulated and time spent as an active member in the community as portrayed on Table 1.

Family honor points (FHP) keeps track of all the successes a member has achieved with the Gaiscíoch community. This category is the accumulative total of a member’s Valor, Discovery, Lore, Artisan and Fellowship points. FHPs provide a comprehensive look at the amount of involvement a member has within the community. Fellowship points (FWP) are awarded by participating in Gaiscíoch events and raid groups. These points show the level of involvement with the family of each member. The number of points received is determined by the objectives completed by that group, and the type of scheduled events in which they participate. Participation is the foundation of the Gaiscíoch community and is essential to their overall long term success. This is because synergy between the number of leaders and followers is needed. Leaders cannot advance and achieve goals without followers and followers cannot advance to leadership without events and group leaders. Valor points (VP) and tokens of valor are earned by leading events and demonstrating “outstanding leadership ability” in those events. Valor



points are only awarded to the leader of a group event of four or more Gaiscíoch members. This ensures that scheduled events align with what other members want to do. Tokens of valor provide a secondary layer to this system by only allowing lower ranks that are impressed by their leader's ability to award tokens to events leaders. Tokens function as endorsements for leaders who organize events and run them according to the Gaiscíoch family values and goals. Tokens are supposed to be given to members who make the community better. Tokens are special because they are required to ascend into the war council ranks. This is done to ensure that upcoming leaders of the community are supported by members and not just other members of the leadership.

Family vault credits (FVC) are the main currency of the Gaiscíoch community. This currency is calculated by adding the accrued FHP and Contribution points (see below). FVCs are used to trade for items, crafting materials, or other equipment components with other Gaiscíoch members. Contribution points (CP) are earned by donating and supplying other members with equipment, and crafting materials via the marketplace. In other words, members create work orders with their FVCs which are then fulfilled by another member that receives CPs. With the exception of CP, participation in events is the focus of the points system and the family rank overall.

The rank structure clearly outlines the authority, power, and responsibilities all throughout the Gaiscíoch community. Everyone, from War Council event leaders that consistently schedule events for members to participate to Elder community leaders that advice the founder in community-wide decisions and maintain the code of values throughout the community, must be familiar with and uphold the rank system in order to ascend to those positions and maintain their position. Their work comes together and

creates a platform for the rest of the member to utilize for playing together while veteran members and officers help Elders and event leaders whenever possible. Lastly, rank progression is based on event participation, which encourages member to remain active. This structure acts as the structural backbone to the community that ultimately provides the Gaiscíoch community a uniquely stable flexibility within the game world.

## **CHAPTER IV: ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY**

The success of an online community revolves around maximizing the enjoyment its members have within the game worlds in which they play together. However, this is entirely dependent on what the members of that community perceive as fun and enjoyable about the games they play. This is why there are different types of communities within online game worlds. There are as many types of gaming communities as there are gaming styles and personal preferences. Although, online gaming communities share the overarching goal of creating a community that increases the enjoyment of each of its members, they tend to differ in regards to what constitutes an enjoyable gaming experience and their approach to acquiring it. After observing the data from the Gaiscíoch community, it is evident that players are aware of several different types of communities that accommodate to different tastes and goals:

“There are a couple of types from what I see. First are those that strive to be the absolute best and thus promote the game because they hold the "titles" and get rewards. Some of these are even classified as professionals since they can actually make money in tournaments that are sponsored by various companies in the industry. Then you have the ones that promote a sense of community within the game. They are not known as being the "best" or the most "hardcore" gamers. They are known for being friendly and helpful because they care about the community and the "world" they call home. Now there can always be a mix of these two types within any one "world". I believe that a successful MMO actually needs both” (Female, 55-64 years old).

“There are essentially three types of communities because there are three types of content preference in MMORPGs. PvE & Roleplay focus on active collaboration for small groups for world exploration and dungeons. PvP focuses on self-sufficiency with collaboration only sought for tackling large objectives or multiple opponents, such as

large group raiding and tournaments, Solo Play focuses on self-sufficiency in play” (Female, 45-54 years old).

In online game worlds, the spotlight tends to focus on “elitist” or “hardcore” gaming communities because of their competitive nature and all-or-nothing attitude. For these communities, being the best at anything in the game world is their idea of fun and amusement. They find enjoyment in being the best in competitive arena-like tournaments, number one in defeating newly released game content, or the most efficient raiding group. This competitive concentration tends to build tension between members and other communities that culminates in aggressive clashes, vicious accusations, strict community rules, and fierce arguments. Despite these negative consequences, these competitive communities persevere and thrive within game worlds because they strive to accomplish the wishes of their members to be the best. The community provides them with play they consider to be entertaining, liberating, and meaningful. This type of community tends to function similarly to the aforementioned Power Aeternus from Golub’s work (Golub 2010).

There are many other online gaming communities that do not share that approach. In fact, there may be more communities that do not follow the hardcore approach to gaming because unsuccessful hardcore groups tend to disband very quickly and frequently. These other communities are generally referred to as “casual” because of their relaxed approach to experiencing the game world. They tend to focus on creating a friendly environment for playing the game content at one’s own pace, cooperating, and helping others instead of concentrating on tournaments, or trying to get recognition and fame. However, casual gaming communities usually stay in the background away from acknowledgement from the general game world population and gaming media. They also

tend to attract a general stigma regarding capability, skill, and commitment to the game. However, that stigma is not applicable to the community observed for this study, the Gaiscíoch Family. Gaiscíoch can be considered casual because of the relaxed and helpful approach toward gaming in the virtual worlds, but they are capable players and committed to the game world. This is more than likely the same situation for most casual gaming communities; they simply appear to be less talented than elitist communities because they do not aspire to recognition, titles, or conquest in order to have fun and feel satisfied with the community and the game.

This study determined what allowed a casual community like Gaiscíoch to move towards the forefront and be acknowledged by other players, media, and game developers. Furthermore, the data gathered revealed elements that play a significant role on the sustainability, growth, and recognition of any online gaming community. The elements distinguished by this study were the following:

- Rules of conduct that conform to the needs and wants of the members;
- Sense of community building through attempting to achieve a goal;
- Focus on social interaction via cooperation and/or relationship building;
- Proactive leadership that listens to community members and adapts according to member needs and community goals;
- Regular events that satisfy the community's desires and goals;
- Well-structured and fair rank/progression systems;
- Manageable or appropriate member population size that allows the community to work towards and achieve its goals;

- Residing within a game world that naturally enhances or reinforces the rules of conduct, goals, and activities that players in the community want from the game.

### Social Interaction

While “having fun” is the number one mission of every player, they join a gaming community to play with others and to expand beyond what they can do by themselves. In this process players forge friendships and relationships they never would have achieved in other ways. The need for collaboration is the main factor that leads players to search for communities to play with. However, players want to play with others to achieve things that bring them enjoyment. This means they must look for communities that work towards those things they find enjoyable. “I like the ability to form groups and, using voice communications, work together to complete common goals” (Male, 55-64 years old). The common ground is that players want to work together with others to achieve things they collectively find enjoyable. “I like the feel of belonging to a large group. I like being able to find like-minded individuals daily to do fun things with” (Male, 55-64 years old). Furthermore, many MMORPGs have several activities that cannot be accomplished without being part of a group. This is why it is important for some players to find communities that have their same goals. In some cases players, as is seen with most Gaiscíoch members, desire to find friends online with whom to experience the game world.

Although Gaiscíoch’s approach to gaming is not competitive or tournament oriented they still participate in player versus player (PvP) activities within the game world. The most popular events are big scale siege battles where hundreds of players battle for control of keeps, towers and other strategic points on a map. These arena battles

are competitive in nature because combat occurs between players instead of computer generated opponents. However, Gaiscíoch members enjoy it not because of battling other human players and showing they are the best, but because of the cooperation and coordination required for effective strategic conquest. There are a lot of gameplay mechanics that can be utilized to strategically improve the chances of outmaneuvering and winning several different combat situations. However, most of these necessitate a considerable amount of coordination, communication, and knowledge of the game to execute. “Before finding the Gaiscíoch community, I was bored and frustrated with the game. Now it is one of my favorites because I can help others defeat a difficult boss, or simply explore the world with them. It gives me purpose” (Female, 25-34 years old). It is this act of working together that is so enjoyable for a significant portion of the Gaiscíoch community.

One instance where strategy, cooperation, and some experimentation were required to outsmart the enemy tactics was when a Gaiscíoch group first encountered what they now call the “hammer train.” The hammer train is a group formation where hardy warrior and guardian characters “class” with healing and damage protection *buffs* (favorable effects) that help them stay their ground stand in the front; meanwhile, the less hardy and more vulnerable spell caster and archer characters attack from behind the protective warrior line. This is a simple strategy, but considering the chaotic graphics of each battle, it requires a lot of coordination. This tactic’s functional premise is that most enemy attacks are received and withstood by the front row while the ranged units launch attacks that do not damage their front row allies. By using the hammer train tactic the group effectively absorbs most of the damage because it is received by the front row of

warriors and guardians with heavy armor and defensive spells. Meanwhile, the ranged characters following behind concentrate on casting large damage spells and abilities that kill as many enemies as possible. This strategy easily tramples any unorganized defense of almost any size.

Gaiscíoch groups have worked out different strategies to beat the hammer train tactic. The first is to counter with the same strategy. This was effective only when they had a larger group of players than the enemy. The strategy depended on the ability to coordinate the group better than the opponent, which is difficult considering the enemy has likely practiced the tactic more often than Gaiscíoch groups. Gaiscíoch groups have also tried to use battering rams in open field combat against this tactic, because it provides a significant defensive bonus to players around it. Although this did overcome the tactic from time to time, it was not effective because it relies on having enough supply to quickly build the siege weapon, and players of a certain level who can use the weapon in battle. However, the most effective tactic against the simplistic hammer train is another very simple strategy. The main point of the tactic is to dodge or split right after the hammer train starts to rush the Gaiscíoch group. After the split or dodge around the front line of the hammer train players must attack the tail, the enemy ranged characters. This tactic proved to be the most effective because it did not require complex planning or hard to control variables. The trial and error process of determining how to overcome these kinds of obstacles in the large siege battle arenas is what the Gaiscíoch community truly enjoys.

Over time, this cooperation in virtual battle grows into friendships. At one point the game world and guild become more than just a group to complete missions,



achievements, or challenges; it becomes about the relationships with the rest of the members in that community. “I started playing with Gaiscíoch because I like the game, but then I found that there are lots of nice people. I made some new friends with whom I had some great discussions about all sorts of things” (Female, 55-64 years old). This kind of progression between community members is very evident and plentiful within the Gaiscíoch family. A lot of members consider the Gaiscíoch community as an extension of their close friends and family. “We are more than just pixels or a voice chat - we are humans with feelings and we show that to each other” (Female, 55-64 years old). Gaiscíoch concentrates in creating meaningful experiences and friendships that may outlast the life-span of a game world. Most, if not all, of the structure of the Gaiscíoch community is dedicated in great part to ensuring that social interactions between members and other players are fruitful, enjoyable, and satisfying.

Social interaction is one of the biggest reasons gamers play MMORPGs. This is why social interaction should be one of the main elements all MMORPG communities should keep in mind. “Over the years I have developed friendships with people from around the world and have had the pleasure of being with them in person” (Male, 35-44 years old). “I wanted to be able to help people and in the guild I was in previous to Gaiscíoch that wasn't happening. I wasn't able to be a part of groups” (Female, 35-44 years old). Regardless of how members are coming together, with goals or socialization in mind, a successful gaming community ensures that all aspects of its structure and plans enhance cooperation, communication, and solidarity between individuals that ultimately drive them towards whatever their collective goal might be.

## Family Values

As described previously, the Gaiscíoch family is not an exclusive guild; they are an inclusive community that reaches out to everyone in the game world and supports their gaming experience. Gaiscíoch provide help and assistance to all regardless of their community affiliation, and do their best to help the game world flourish. This is included as part of their code of conduct and overall community values. The Gaiscíoch family publicly and clearly explains these values on their website, and their values and rules of conduct are visibly practiced on a daily basis. These rules of conduct provide the structure for most social interactions that take place between a member and anyone else in the game world. It is the most significant factor that makes Gaiscíoch a unique community from the perspective of its members. Gaiscíoch's code of values is repeatedly described, by members, as the biggest strength of the Gaiscíoch family. Furthermore, the code of values is one of the major factors that affect the decisions of potential members to join the community. Gaiscíoch members believe that the community has lasted this long because of what they stand for in terms of values. "Usually at some point communities either drift apart because of lack of focus or are torn apart because the leader does not know how to present the vision to those around" (Male, 35-44 years old).

As discussed in the above section, social interaction is one of the main reasons players join a community whether it is for working together, helping others, or teaming up to be the best in the game world. The code of values is the element of the community that defines how socialization takes place. If a code of values is vaguely or not defined and implemented it will develop naturally, but it might not always be conducive to what the community is trying to achieve. This means that the group may suffer severe

membership losses and collapse altogether, For example, towards the end of the first Gaiscíoch chapter their code stopped being implemented in the absence of their leader, and the community imploded because of feuds and disagreements. It is important that if a code of values is defined, it must align with the goals and desires of the community; otherwise it will not hold together for long. For example, members must understand that they have to dedicate a certain number of hours per week and perfect a particular character class in the game world in order to be the best. Just as importantly, the code of values should define the manner in which members are expected to treat everyone they interact with. In this way, it ensures that everyone understands what will happen if they break the rules and prevents feeling of unfair treatment or abuse of power.

Most Gaiscíoch member agreed that it is their community values that makes the community stand out from many others. “The openness they show to everyone even if they are not in the family; it is very rare nowadays to find a community as open minded as Gaiscíoch” (Female, 25-34 years old). This is something the community is very proud of and will not hesitate to brag about. “Gaiscíoch’s motto is something that is different. There is no mandatory playtime. You can play how you want, when you want, for as long as you want” (Female, 35-44 years old).

Almost every participant in the study mentioned the code of values in some way as a reason for choosing to join the community. Gaiscíoch members consistently mentioned their interest towards family friendly organizations and groups that support each other instead of those that are competitive. There is always someone watching out to maintain the communication, via voice or text chat, family friendly. Even if curse words are used by mistake someone will always remind them to keep it light. One member said:

“I was attracted by their message of being a casual, inclusive guild. It took me a bit of time to get used to the family friendly atmosphere and the policing that goes on to keep it that way” (Female, 45-54 years old). In one instance, for example, some Gaiscíoch members were making fun of how some of the avatars had, accidentally, been positioned in a sexually suggestive manner. This was not an issue because no curse words or sexually graphic language was used. However, when someone wrote on the chat “LOL, it looks like they are fucking!” about three or four members immediately asked him to refrain from using such words in the future. The situation did not escalate any further because he was a newcomer and apologized while reassuring it would not happen again. This seems petty to many players, because the word was not being used to address anyone in a derogatory manner. However, this petty kind of policing helps keep curse words from ever being addressed to anyone in a derogatory way while also helping maintain the code of values in place.

Another participant said: “The guild accepted me as a new member right away and I was encouraged to play however I want. There were no requirements other than to be respectful of each other” (Female, 55-64 years old). This is to be expected for the Gaiscíoch community, but it is important to note that it has a great degree of importance in the decision making process of submitting an application to join the community. Communities with different goals need a code of values that supports their goals, because this is one of the determining factors that members consider before joining. Those values must be exercised, otherwise members will feel cheated, and will not remain for long regardless of their success at achieving their collective goals. Furthermore, standing by those values within the game world is a powerful tool that allows other players to see

what the community is all about. For example, one of Gaiscíoch's new members mentioned that he became interested in joining the community because he "happened upon two other players that were Gaiscíoch that helped him on a quest" (Female, 55-64 years old). This simple random act that abides by the community's values allowed the Gaiscíoch to gain another like-minded member to its ranks. Of course there are other factors that come into play, but commitment to the community values play a significant factor in the overall appeal of the community:

The code of values ultimately defines the longevity and stability of the community as a whole. "Most guilds do not have the longevity and usually implode or disband after a year or two" (Male, 45-54 years old). The code of values helps ensure that the community stays together past the initial phase of being a group that simply gets together for missions and achievements into creating meaningful friendships and memories. "Because everybody treats each other with respect, and tries to help rather than hurt their fellow members, Gaiscíoch is likely to not only continue to exist but to grow in the future" (Male, 25-34 years old). However, values alone are insufficient. A community needs to ensure that their values stay aligned with the goals of the community and its members' desires in order to endure. "People move on and the guild must adapt to those changes in order to endure. Gaiscíoch is an example of a community, among few, that has done those adjustments to remain alive" (Male, 25-34 years old). Gaiscíoch adapts to those changes by moving from one game to another, providing member with enjoyable events and a safe environment to interact. It is important to remember that the goal of each community is essentially the same, but having defined values creates an enduring community.

Communities that thrive within game worlds have well defined codes of values that delineate what their community is about, how they approach their goals, how they handle disputes and disagreements, support what they stand for, and have the means to implement those values. This is aptly described by one of the Gaiscíoch members as follows: “the common characteristic between successful gaming communities we have encountered is that they have a self-defined code of values, a structure to reinforce and strengthen those values, and the means to enforce those values whether through discipline or promotion” (Male, 35-44 years old). This is where the other elements come into play. Most, if not all, other aspects of the community have to complement the vision put forth by the code of values, which is what attracts members to a particular community in the first place.

### Leadership

Leadership is also one of the critical aspects of having a successful community. Communities can have thousands of people involved, but unless there are activities for members to participate in, the community members will become bored and trickle away. This is why a good collection of leaders is needed to service the community. Leaders come in many varieties: some do not think they have what it takes to lead, but lead very well; some have led in the past and know how to encourage and motivate people to act; and others demand respect and try to force their way into the leadership seat. The Gaiscíoch family is designed to keep the self-proclaimed leaders out of the leadership seat by firmly adhering to their code of values. For example, during a WvW event a new Gaiscíoch leader was being coached by a well-respected and established War council member. While the new leader was the one giving the orders, the coach would

occasionally give advice and pointers for how to handle situations. This was a very challenging event because the enemy was well organized and had the strength in numbers. However, this leader was persistent and led the way through a very rough defense of the arena's main keep. This challenge allowed him to gain experience leading the Gaiscíoch community and gain confidence in his leadership ability. This is also an opportunity for the coach to guide the new leader into what the community wants. This type of coaching is done for events that have a lot of members participate, such as guild missions or WvW raids.

Leading within Gaiscíoch is not about telling people what to do or how to do things. It is not about being a ruler or dictator. It is about encouraging and motivating people to better themselves and building confidence, morale, and most importantly fostering healthy relationships among followers. Leaders within the Gaiscíoch community must be calm under pressure, be reliable, trusted, show confidence in their decisions, and stick by them even when things do not go as previously planned. They are expected to never push blame on others, never belittle those who follow, and be accountable for their choices and actions. Guild Wars 2 gameplay is quite chaotic in nature, with a lot occurring on the screen at the same time. Fire is launched from one side of the screen to the other, spiked thorns grow from the earth, jumping, disappearing and reappearing avatars. All of this, and more, happens simultaneously affecting both allies and enemies. However, leaders keep their tone very calm and determined; in fact, all conversation between players has a casual tone as if none of this was happening. This does not mean that they are not engaged. However, calmness actually helps maintain emotions in check and makes a friendly environment where players feel comfortable to

discuss anything as well as provide suggestions to leaders. This example contrasts with the strict leaders in other communities that bark orders and do not tolerate mingling while gaming.

Members who commit to lead in Gaiscíoch can find a greater purpose within the Gaiscíoch family, because members respect those who take initiative, and spend their nights and weekends planning activities not only for Gaiscíoch members but for the game world as a whole. “I enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes from successfully leading a group of people to achieve objectives in the game, while joking around and having fun” (Male, 25-34 years old). Gaiscíoch highly encourages members to practice their leadership skills by involving themselves in anything the community does. Gaming communities must promote leaders who truly fit their value system and will not sabotage it. The community must have leaders who support and follow the family’s code of values. In this way the leadership is the direct support to the community values and thus further ensures stability and longevity.

“It is totally the leadership of the family staying true to the doctrines and principals that are outlined in our credos that maintains Gaiscíoch thriving over the years. Our founder never fails to adhere to them either. Some people may join us and wish we would become predominantly hardcore raiding community, but the founder and leaders beside him ensure that we will remain a family, play how we want, and no one will be forced to do anything they do not want to” (Female, 55-64 years old).

“The major reason that Gaiscíoch thrives is because of the commitment and amount of work that the guild leaders devote to preserving the guild's reputation, building a sense of community both within the guild and within the game world, and networking with game developers” (Female, 55-64 years old).

This does not mean change is frowned upon within the Gaiscíoch community. In fact, community leaders are expected to listen to the community first. However, the commitment of the leaders to the credos and values of the community ensures that change



comes in naturally instead of in the form of rapid unstable change. “I run events people want” (Male, 25-34 years old). Gaiscíoch leaders are allowed to plan events according to their likes and dislikes. However, Gaiscíoch leaders are expected to listen to the overall community desires and schedule events accordingly. “I lead dungeon groups and open world content, with the possibility of leading raids/trials if needed. I have found that this content is the most in demand, and is also content I enjoy. I occasionally lead something else if people want and I think it would be fun” (Male, 25-34 years old). This means that the community does not stay statically centered on any particular aspect. It allows new members to have a voice that can then be calmly and methodically transformed into new activities.

A good example of this is the expansion of the community into different games, called chapters. These expansions are sometimes put forward by non-leader members that want to play new games. Their opinions are evaluated by the leaders of the Gaiscíoch community and a decision is reached based on the number of members that want to participate on that game world, and the features it offers to support the whole community. If there are less than 250 active members who wish to move, then only a recreational division is opened. Should more than 500 active members want to join a new game world, then the community expands into that new game.

Community leaders must also know all the necessary information about the game and the events they are leading, in order to effectively earn the respect of their followers and the community as a whole. Without this knowledge, they will not be able to answer questions from new players or lead the group to victory with any degree of certainty. This does not mean leaders are not allowed to do things for the first time without training

sessions. It is simply recommended because it improves the leader's effectiveness and the overall enjoyment of every participant.

“Leaders must have some experience doing what you are trying to lead at. You cannot just walk in there without understanding the advantages and disadvantages of the game and the field they are playing and some strategies to tackle obstacles. They must also know the people that you are leading that not everyone is experienced. You must take into account that you are leading a wide diversity of people in terms of culture and skill” (Female, 55-64 years old).

It is important for the community to have a good balance of leaders because some leaders have the skill and interest to host a certain variety of events despite their willingness to adapt to the wishes of their members. Therefore a good balance of leaders would mean a good variety of events. “I would consider trying out leading WvW now that I'm doing that more often as a follower and learned how to lead in siege battles” (Male, 25-34 years old).

Lastly, the Gaiscíoch family recruits by action, not words. This is why it is so important for them to have leaders that do not drive possible members away by portraying the wrong vision of Gaiscíoch, but instead attract new members through public events, example, and inspiration. “Leaders are expected, at all times, to be fair and friendly, take the time to teach people about the game because they are the front image of the community. New member join once they see us in action” (Female, 55-64 years old). Gaiscíoch's leaders sometimes invite people via the chat, but only for attending events and not joining the guild. Leaders only direct individuals to the Gaiscíoch website if they ask about us. “As for attracting new members to the Gaiscíoch Family, I let people know that we are running an event and have room for more when that is the case, and if they are interested they will seek Gaiscíoch out” (Male, 25-34 years old). Many members mentioned how simply participating in a few of Gaiscíoch events is enough for them to

become interested in looking into joining the community. “The first raid led by Gaiscíoch I joined I realized I had never raided with a leader like this one. He was calm, knew what to do, and how to lead members without shouting and barking” (Male, 35-44 years old).

Most of Gaiscíoch members heard about the community from a friend or from events that the community led in the game world. One of the biggest open world events are the guild missions series, such as the Great Tyrian Adventure. These events always attract a big crowd that is not part of the Gaiscíoch community. Sometimes these players ask about joining and they are always pointed towards the community website and encouraged to read about the community before submitting an application.

### Family Rank System

The rank system of the Gaiscíoch community unifies the code of values and leadership expectations. It is crucial for Gaiscíoch members to find out the level of commitment that is most comfortable for them and find out the role within the community that fits them best. The rank system allows each member to become as involved as they desire. No one member will be forced to do anything they do not want to do, but to become a leader members must go through the necessary steps laid out in the rank system to advance to those positions. Leadership positions are always earned by the work the individual has done for the community, which prevents any possible feuds that may arise from unjustified arbitrary promotions that occur in other online communities. “It allows for fairness because it is very clearly explained and shown to you the reasons for the qualifications for each rank” (Female, 35-44 years old). This is evident when considering that leaders need to obtain tokens of valor that are awarded by lower ranked members for exceptional performance during scheduled events. This acts as a kind of

check and balance that ensures the voice of lower rank members is heard by upcoming leaders, and it ensures that leaders truly demonstrate mastery over the game, community credos, and leadership skills before advancing too far in the community ranks.

“Leaders cannot get valor tokens without members and members cannot get fellowship points without leaders. It is a nice cycle where everyone needs everyone. This keeps the family strong. This is also great because it keeps self-proclaimed and entitled leaders from running rampant” (Female, 55-64 years old).

“The ranking system works well to help the member know how the family functions and they gain rank by proving they know how to be a family member and leader rank by leading successful events” (Female, 45-54 years old).

Furthermore, the requirements of the rank system force upcoming leaders to become knowledgeable about Gaiscíoch’s code of values, website hub, events, gameplay, and any other information they might need to be effective leaders. “The Gaiscíoch ranking system is well rounded. You cannot just contribute crafted items and go up in rank. They want you to be active in the family by participating in events as well” (Female, 55-64 years old). This is accomplished by requiring members to get involved in several different ways that contribute back to the community. For example, members who want to rise through the ranks must obtain FHP, FWP, CP, VP and tokens of valor in order to rise to the highest leadership ranks. This means that leaders get to know every aspect of the community, and become experts that have the ability to guide new members with ease and confidence. “You cannot lead more advanced events, until you get your feet wet with the lower level events. It is impossible to jump in and start big siege battle raids without first doing small supply camp and support type events” (Female, 55-64 years old). One last thing the rank system accomplishes, in regards to leaders, is that only those people that truly have the desire, dedication, and understanding to lead get those positions. “I only see people who like to lead wanting Lorgair at least to start doing so”

(Female, 45-54 years old). This helps bring the most dedicated and motivated members to the leader ranks of Gaiscíoch.

“It awards people for their level of involvement. Without the structure I could see problems with promotions where people feel they were passed over or personal likes/dislikes cause friction. With the well spelled out structure you get promoted for the work you put in” (Male, 35-44 years old). The rank system, however, is not just a tool used for members to rise through the ranks. Members who do not want to become leaders also receive benefits from this structure other than receiving achievements and promotions. Participation in the community events is rewarded with family vault credits, which can be used to trade with other members of the family. This further encourages continuous event participation beyond title gaining and promotions. “Furthermore, it offers rewards to those who play, without actually punishing those who do not wish to join events” (Male, 25-34 years old). Lastly, Gaiscíoch members are impressed with the fact that there are no negative repercussions for not participating in events, or for refusing to get more responsibility by becoming leaders. This is something that is quite uncommon within other gaming communities.

### Events

While the rank structure is the element that centralizes the community, events act as the fuel that keeps it running. Events are the essential devices for achieving the goals of the community, first and foremost maximizing the enjoyment of community members. A way to do this is by having leaders that abide to the values set forth, listen to members' preferences, and lead enjoyable events capably and with confidence. Gaiscíoch manages events by scheduling them weekly on a calendar on their website. Anyone at a certain

rank or above is allowed to post events of progressive difficulty. This provides members with a variety of activities to do throughout the week. “There is always something going on” (Male, 35-44 years old). A lot of Gaiscíoch members participate in the scheduled events in order to get together and tackle quests or battles that are not possible in small, unorganized groups or alone. “I like how organized things are, that there are scheduled events” (Male, 35-44 years old). The calendar structure also provides members that have busy schedules the ability to know ahead of time and decide which events they will attend. Event participation is the primary method for rising up through the ranks and it is the main way to get involved with the community. This means the ranking system is dependent on a continuous flow of events hosted by current leaders, thus supporting the symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers.

Events are the main contributors for exposing the Gaiscíoch community to potential new members. This is true for all communities, but it is especially important for Gaiscíoch because they do not recruit via solicitation. Events bring in a horde of non-members’ attention and attendance. Potential new members will be looking at how the community leaders handle events and may plant the initial seed toward joining the community. This is another reason why it is important for Gaiscíoch to maintain many events going every week. Events are also the way that Gaiscíoch promotes their values of helping the community, teaching anyone new to the game with regular events that walk new members through difficult content and personal story line quests.

Although the types of events will vary widely between different communities because they are dependent on the community’s goals, they are always going to be the most important point that fulfills or dissatisfies members’ desires. Gaiscíoch members

overall prefer siege battle, cooperative quests, dungeon missions, and world exploration activities. They do not stay away from player versus player content, but it is not what the majority of the members want. Events are the most malleable part of the community. This can, and perhaps should, be very flexible in order to accommodate as many members as possible. This way the Gaiscíoch family makes sure that events are left for the community and leaders to determine.

### Community Building

Another factor that greatly affects the growth and longevity of the gaming community is focusing on building a sense of belonging that encompasses the entire game world. This exposes the community, like Gaiscíoch, to many potential new members and gives everyone a sense of what they are like. Many successful communities within Guild Wars 2 do regular events that provide a service to all inhabitants of the game world. For example, Gaiscíoch conducts the Great Tyrian Adventure public community event series that is open to all players on the server. “Gaiscíoch attempts to build a strong community within the game world by organizing public events. The majority of players knows of us and appreciates us because of these events for the entire server instead of them being for our own groups” (Female, 45-54 years old). Some of the study participants joined after frequenting these kinds of public events that they host. This aspect of the Gaiscíoch family is particularly important because it benefits them in getting much needed exposure for new applicants since they do not recruit via the conventional route of message invitations and chat spamming.

Exposure through events is generally not be the focus of other types of communities that utilize other recruiting methods or simply focus on different goals that

do not allow them to attract new member by exposure such as PvP tournaments, which does not allow hundreds of people to play with them at the same time. However, it could prove beneficial to do raids or runs that benefit the game world as a whole to further increase their numbers and attract more attention from players. There are other communities within Guild Wars 2 aside from Gaiscíoch that regularly coordinate and conduct massive raids that require a great deal of coordination between several hundred people to succeed. This benefits the community by providing them with a new layer of recognition within the game world that ultimately leads to the attraction of new and better players to join their numbers.

### Population Size

Communities of the size and scope of Gaiscíoch are rare because they tend to disband before they are able to grow to this size or they simply refuse to get bigger than the founder is able to handle alone. Population size is important to keep in mind because it can be difficult to handle a massive number of players under one umbrella. The Gaiscíoch family benefits from being a large population, at least 500 active players weekly, because of their focus on open world events and massive siege battles. Since Gaiscíoch does not have gaming skill requirements, they attract many new players that are not completely familiarized with the game yet; however, this does not matter as much during events and battles because there is such a large number of individuals simultaneously working together. In fact, it offers an incredible learning opportunity for those new members that then become experienced players and who in turn then help even newer members. Furthermore, active population size is another factor that attracts people to the community because it gives them a sense that they will always be able to find



someone online to play with. “The size of the community allows me to find others to play alongside me at any time I am able to play” (Male, 35-44 years old). “What attracted me to the family was that it was so large, there was always something going on and I could be a part of it” (Female, 35-44 years old).

However, not all communities want to have a large population. Communities that focus on PvP tournaments will want to limit their population size to small groups in order to maintain their focus on being the best PvP team in the game. As with all other elements, population size must be carefully managed in accordance to the community’s goals and values in order to ensure stability and prosperity.

### Gameplay

Guild Wars 2 (GW2) is geared towards cooperative play. Resource gathering points can be shared with everyone in the group, rewards are provided for everyone that was involved in the battle, and missions can be shared despite the fact that other players made different choices throughout the storyline. This reinforces and supports a lot of Gaiscíoch’s goals and allows them to be a helping hand to anyone in the game world. This game lent itself well to social gaming because of the gameplay features it has. The game also offers several other activities that are also enjoyable to a big portion of the Gaiscíoch population, such as siege battles, big monster battles, dungeons, and group coordination missions. This variety of content proves to be of great benefit when dealing with a large community because it gives everyone something different to do, which keeps players from getting bored.

Elder Scrolls Online (ESO) has similar kind of content as GW2, dungeons, siege battles, open world events, etc. Also, a lot of the activities in ESO were what Gaiscíoch

was looking for. However, ESO is a game that often punishes players for working together in large groups because of the game's loot and character leveling mechanics among other things. The Gaiscíoch community has had a difficult time keeping membership numbers up within this game world. It is impossible to cooperate in some missions because of its phasing mechanic. Phasing refers to a technique of having certain areas of the world look distinct for different characters. When something is "phased" it means that an object exists in the same virtual geography as other creatures or objects, but it is not visible to other players, and thus it cannot be interacted with. "It is a pain to play with others in ESO. Some missions are not even possible to play in groups due to the phasing (Doshia, Main Story)" (Female, 25-34 years old). This means that players may be on the same team, but literally cannot see the opponent their ally is facing and cannot help them with the challenge. This was done in ESO to create a personalized experience for each player that is based, to some extent, in their choices while roaming the game world. However, this also alienates members from one another as it makes it more difficult for players to cooperate and help each other at different aspects of the game, thus hindering one of the biggest purposes for the Gaiscíoch community "teamwork and mutual support" (Male, 35-44 years old).

ESO gameplay also does not allow for higher level players to help low level players. This is because there is not level scaling, when a character's level is lowered to match the level of the area it is currently in, and higher level players overshadow lower levels and do not allow them to gain any rewards from the encounters. This game also focuses on equipment. This makes it possible for a few players that play many hours a week to obtain the best equipment in the game and destroy anything or anyone in their

path regardless of strategy. Gaiscíoch had many encounters where “10 to 15 fully equipped players effortlessly annihilated 100 to 150 of us no matter what strategy was used” (Female, 55-64 years old). Furthermore, ESO does not provide Gaiscíoch any significant exposure within the game world. The game does not match the approach of the Gaiscíoch community in many aspects regardless of having so much desirable content. They can only do a few events together as a community. The game does not have many communication and socializing tools.

The Gaiscíoch community has a complex screening process for expanding into new game worlds. They screen games, cross referencing game features, content, and tools. After this screening is done they determine if there are enough members of the community that are truly interested in playing that particular game. If so, then a new chapter is opened. Despite their rigorous screening method used to determine if a new game fits the needs and desires of the community ESO failed to deliver on many aspects, which affected the community that plays within that game world.

Although gameplay design within a specific game world is largely out of the control of the community, game features have a significant impact on the overall stability and longevity of a gaming community. If a game world has features that hinder the values and goals of a community, it is very likely that community will collapse rapidly, as has been the case with Gaiscíoch within ESO. They began with around 1000 members in the ESO chapter, but because of the lack of community supporting features, membership numbers dwindled below 350 in less than 6 months. This is why it is important for the community to choose the game worlds they participate in carefully. And emerging

communities must also consider the game features in order for their goals and values to match the game well.

## **CHAPTER V: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ONLINE AND OFFLINE PLANES**

Border inhabitants such as the Nuer, who inhabit the region of South Sudan and southwestern Ethiopia, typically occupy territory that overlaps or borders with that of other groups. This means that they are exposed to cultures that have different values and manner of thinking, but occupy the territory near them. Today, this is not limited to physical location. The internet allows us to cross borders beyond those physically around us by connecting individuals around the world very efficiently. This makes almost everyone a border inhabitant with other geographical locations. The increasing circulation of all types of products and ideologies across the world are a testament to this new widespread connectivity across borders. However, this is sometimes misunderstood as the fusing between the online world and the offline world. This is simply a bridge between distant offline locations in a general sense. This is different for each domain throughout the internet, as discussed previously, because each has a varying degree of separation and possibilities for self-sustaining cultural life.

However, there is another type of border crossing that certain online domains, such as game worlds, allow. Gamers, for example, simultaneously inhabit the physical world with a geographical location and a virtual cyber world that is mostly independent from that offline world. They cross the border between the online and offline space every time they log in and out of the game. They can spend time in either space, which influences their perceptions and behaviors. They tend to travel from one plane to the

other with assumptions and understandings that are shaped by the merging of both spaces, much like one would during a vacation to anywhere away from home. However, gamers are in a unique position because they are in complete control of the community they join in the cyber world.

This means that the gamers get to choose the type of community that borders their offline geographical location. Members within Gaiscíoch provide some insight into how that selection occurs and how this border existence might change a player's life.

Members tend to refer to the community as having similar values to that of their own in their offline lives:

“The family has not changed me because for me to have enjoyed my time with Gaiscíoch for this long their values had to match my own values pretty closely. You just do not survive in a guild if it does not match who you are” (Female, 55-64 years old).

“I looked at many forums and they seem universally divided, derogatory, silly and unfriendly. Not all the time, not all posters, but at least once a day someone says something revolting and it is just accepted. Even the OPs or mods are generally arrogant in their tone. This is not what I am like, which is why I was so happy to have found the Gaiscíoch community” (Female, 55-64 years old).

Other members idolize the values of the Gaiscíoch community. These individuals express how they wish to become more like what Gaiscíoch stands for: friendliness, helpfulness, inclusiveness. “They are the types of values I try and follow personally” (Male, 45-54 years old). Another said: “I admire the values Gaiscíoch stands for. I guess I joined them because I want to be more like that” (Female, 55-64 years old). This implies that perhaps the gamers that admire and respect Gaiscíoch's code of values hope to learn how to be more like that by associating themselves with the community online. This means that they want to culturally assimilate Gaiscíoch's values, and what better way to do that than to place the online community next to them, to integrate it via the online

border connection. This might be done instinctively without thinking about it in this manner. However, since people are not always able to surround themselves in the physical world with individuals they admire, they may seek out the opportunity to do that in the online plane in the hope of becoming a better person themselves.

A few others mentioned that they had a realization while playing with the Gaiscíoch family. They admit to having changed in some way because of their involvement with the community. In all cases they consider this personal change a very positive thing:

“Gaming with Gaiscíoch has made me aware that people are more than just pixels in a monitor. When you are playing in a game with other "characters" it is easy to forget there is a person behind them; someone with feelings and thoughts. It is so easy to be anonymous and become a jerk, a coward or a hero, but the reality is there is a person there with real feelings” (Female, 55-64 years old).

“They taught me that a lot of people from different paths of life, who could easily hate each other and make enemies, can work together under the same banner to achieve a higher goal” (Female, 25-34 years old).

“Playing with them most likely helped me control my tongue a little. I was in the Navy for a while, so I learned to curse pretty darn well!” (Male, 25-34 years old).

These points imply that there is a relationship between the online gaming world and the offline plane because members believe or want to be influenced by their association with this community. Thus, it is likely that their identities are shaped by the merging of both cultural spaces. Because of this relationship, the virtual world must be separate, but parallel and overlapping with the offline plane. As Boellstorff explained, the relationship between the virtual and the physical can be defined as inter-indexical.

It is inter-indexical because there is a causal relationship that points back from the index (online) to the referent (offline). The emergent set of social realities the virtual space has to offer cannot be directly inferred from the physical world. It is something

separate that originates from their inter-indexical relationship. This is why we must consider the virtual and physical as more distinct than other domains in the online plane. It is important to mention that although game worlds are towards the far end of the spectrum, perhaps the farthest achieved so far, they are not absolutely separate from the offline plane. As Jordan (2009) noted, these worlds are dependent on offline world servers, computers and networks to function. They also present a significant, but somewhat uncommon, opportunity for players to get to know each other outside of the game world and instead begin to interact in the offline world. This is somewhat uncommon because virtual friendships do not always move outside of the game world or into the offline world because of geographical limitations. However, because friendships do move from the game world to the offline world it is possible to see how these online worlds are not unconditionally separated from each other. In fact, such a place as a purely online world does not seem to exist yet.



## **CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION**

The success of online gaming communities entirely revolves around maximizing the enjoyment its members get from playing together. This can be achieved by building several aspects into the anatomy of a community. The elements that play a significant role on the sustainability, growth, and recognition of any online gaming community are:

- Focus on social interaction through teamwork;
- Code of values that adheres to the members' desires;
- Leadership that listens to members and adapts accordingly;
- Clearly defined rank/progression system;
- Regularly hosting events that satisfy the community's goals;
- Building and maintaining a strong sense of community between members;
- Maintain an appropriate population size that allows them to work towards their goals;
- The community must inhabit a game world that naturally enhances or reinforces the code of values, goals, and activities that members find enjoyable.

Social interaction should be one of the focuses of the community because players choose to join a gaming community to play with others. Collaboration is the main reason they seek out communities. In this way, players create friendships with other members of the community. In order for a gaming community to prosper the community must guarantee a structure that fosters teamwork and healthy communication that gets them closer to their collective goals, regardless of how community members play together.

A community should have a well-defined code of values that provides a structure for social interaction for members to follow. These values must be connected to the community's goals and foster the kind of social interaction the community desires as well. Furthermore, the code of values has a significant effect in the decision of potential members to join the community. Lastly, a firm and comprehensive code of values will help ensure that the community remains stable for as long as there are players that stand by those goals and rules. If the code of values is vaguely defined and implemented as such it will then be shaped by the community. However, that might move away from the original goals of the community with the help of just a few vociferous members and not the voice of the entire community. This means that the group can suffer severe membership losses and collapse altogether because the code of values was not firmly defined. This does not mean the code cannot change; in fact it must be able to do so in order to accommodate the changing opinions of its members. However, a well-defined code of values helps ensure that change occurs with the consent of the majority of the community. Communities that thrive have a clear code of values that delineate what the community stands for, the methods used to achieve goals, how to handle disagreements, and provide the means to implement those values. Most other aspects of the community have to complement the vision put forth by the code of values, which is what attracted members to the community in the first place.

Having trusted and reliable leaders is one of the most critical aspects for supporting the code of values, and the community. Without leaders to host events and run mission there would be no activities for members to do. This is why it is best to have leaders that enjoy and excel at a variety of content that the community wants to

participate in. However, more importantly leaders must complement the code of values set forth by the community's voice. In this way, the leadership is the direct support to the code of values and thus further ensures the stability and longevity of the community. This also means that leaders should be expected to listen to the community desires as a whole and not just to a small group of vociferous individuals. This way, if change is necessary, it comes from the leaders within that truly know and understand the structure of the community; it does not come abruptly from outside sources that do not understand how things work in that community.

The rank system is a very important element for any gaming community because it is the structure that unifies the code of values with the leader and follower expectations and interactions. It is necessary for a system to clearly delineate rank and authority structure, but it must go beyond that. It is ideal when the community clearly explains the requirements that potential leaders must have to be promoted. This ensures that leadership positions are earned by the member's actions and prevents conflict that may arise from seemingly arbitrary promotions. It is also a good idea to progressively introduce new leaders to increasingly difficult events and challenges in order to ensure the individual is capable to lead and grow trust between members and the upcoming leadership. A rank system that rewards people for their involvement in a community works well because it forces potential leaders to become familiar with the community's vision and methodology, and also allows members to feel that their contributions are taken into consideration.

While the rank structure centralizes the community, events help keep it running smoothly. Events are essential for achieving the goals of the community. Weekly

scheduled events that are posted in a calendar-like manner for all members to see and reference are critical. This gives members the opportunity to either change their schedule ahead of time or choose the events they are able to attend according to their schedules. Events participation should be the primary method for rising up through the ranks because it is the surest way to involvement with the community. A continuous stream of regularly hosted events simultaneously helps the community achieve desired goals and provides member with the necessary tools to become leaders.

Communities must consider events as a significant contributor to their exposure within the game world, regardless of their recruitment methods because potential new members may see what the community is doing in the game world and choose to join because of the group's achievements. Building a sense of community through game-world-wide events is a good idea to further foster the growth and prosperity of a gaming community. This exposes the community to many potential new members and gives everyone a sense of what they are like and capable of. This might not be the focus all communities, but it can prove beneficial by providing a new layer of recognition within the game world that may ultimately lead to the new and better players joining their numbers.

Community population is important for practical reasons. It can be difficult to handle a large amount of players during play. Not all communities need a large population. For example, communities that focus on PvP tournaments should attempt to manage their population size to small groups in order to maintain focus on being the most competitive small PvP tournament team in the game. Population size must be carefully managed in accordance to the community's goals and values in order to ensure stability

and prosperity. Furthermore, active population size is a significant factor that attracts people to a community. It gives new members a sense that current members are dedicated and that they will not be bored after joining.

The gameplay environment is a significant factor though it is outside of the direct control of the community. Gaiscíoch may petition certain changes to game developers, but cannot ensure they will be implemented. If a game has characteristics that obstruct the vision and goals of a community then it is likely that the community will collapse. This is why it is important for the community to understand the game worlds they inhabit and determine whether they can provide desired content.

Most importantly, communities should not forget that their sole purpose is maximizing the enjoyment of its members. All of the elements put forth in this study are only meant to support that search for joy. Regardless of what the community goals and the code of values are, the moment any of these elements directly obstructs the game world enjoyment for members that particular element has become a factor that could tear down the community; as an interviewee said “*Fun* is the key word here” (Male, 55-64 years old).

Online gamers simultaneously inhabit the physical world with a geographical location and a virtual cyber world that is in many aspects, although not absolutely, independent from their offline world. They spend time in both spaces; this influences their perceptions and opinions by the merging of the cultures of these places. This is similar in essence to what occurs to communities that are border inhabitants in the offline plane. One very important difference is that while offline cultural groups do not choose

the neighboring cultures, gamers are in complete control of the community they join in the cyber world.

Gamers choose the kind of community that will act as their online pseudo-bordering culture. Furthermore, people seem to choose communities with values they admire. This indicates that gamers hope to learn how to become more like what the community stands for by association; they want to assimilate the community's culture and values. This is perhaps done subconsciously, yet it provides people with an opportunity that is more difficult to encounter in offline world since it is not always an option to surround oneself in the physical world with individuals that person admires. Furthermore, some participants even admitted to have had a change in their opinions or outlook because of their involvement with the gaming community. They consider this personal change to be an improvement. Although there are hints of this phenomenon occurring in this study, the most significant finding regarding the bordering nature of these two planes is that they should be understood as distinct and separate, but connected. Inter-indexicality explains this relationship to some extent, but further research into the subject would yield valuable information that helps us understand how to online space interacts with the offline world.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL LETTER



### Institutional Review Board

*Mailing Address:*

Division of Research  
777 Glades Rd., Bldg. 80, Rm. 106  
Boca Raton, FL 33431

Tel: 561.297.0777 Fax: 561.297.2573

<http://www.fau.edu/research/researchint>

Michael Whitehurst, Ed.D., Chair

DATE:	May 6, 2014
TO:	Michael Harris
FROM:	Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB
IRBNET ID #:	465416-2
PROTOCOL TITLE:	[465416-2] Gaming Culture
PROJECT TYPE:	<i>New Project</i>
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	May 6, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE:	May 5, 2015
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category # B7

Thank you for your submission of Response/Follow-Up materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB has APPROVED your *New Project*. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

- This study is approved for a maximum of **100** subjects.
- It is important that you use the approved, stamped consent documents or procedures included with this letter.
- **\*\*Please note that any revision to previously approved materials or procedures, including modifications to numbers of subjects, must be approved by the IRB before it is initiated.** Please use the amendment form to request IRB approval of a proposed revision.
- All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All regulatory and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed, if applicable.
- Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.
- Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.
- **This approval is valid for one year.** A Continuing Review form will be required prior to the expiration date if this project will continue beyond one year.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Tina Horton at:

Institutional Review Board  
Research Integrity/Division of Research



Florida Atlantic University  
Bldg. 80, Rm. 106  
Boca Raton, FL 33431  
Phone: 561-297-0777

\* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

**This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations,  
and a copy is retained within our records.**

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