



Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture (MIT Press)

By T. L. Taylor

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In *Play Between Worlds*, T. L. Taylor examines multiplayer gaming life as it is lived on the borders, in the gaps -- as players slip in and out of complex social networks that cross online and offline space. Taylor questions the common assumption that playing computer games is an isolating and alienating activity indulged in by solitary teenage boys. Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), in which thousands of players participate in a virtual game world in real time, are in fact actively designed for sociability. Games like the popular *Everquest*, she argues, are fundamentally social spaces.

Taylor's detailed look at *Everquest* offers a snapshot of multiplayer culture. Drawing on her own experience as an *Everquest* player (as a female Gnome Necromancer) -- including her attendance at an *Everquest* Fan Faire, with its blurring of online -- and offline life -- and extensive research, Taylor not only shows us something about games but raises broader cultural issues. She considers "power gamers," who play in ways that seem closer to work, and examines our underlying notions of what constitutes play -- and why play sometimes feels like work and may even be painful, repetitive, and boring. She looks at the women who play *Everquest* and finds they don't fit the narrow stereotype of women gamers, which may cast into doubt our standardized and preconceived ideas of femininity. And she explores the questions of who owns game space -- what happens when emergent player culture confronts the major corporation behind the game.

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Taylor's detailed look at Everquest offers a snapshot of multiplayer culture. Drawing on her own experience as an Everquest player (as a female Gnome Necromancer) -- including her attendance at an Everquest Fan Faire, with its blurring of online -- and offline life -- and extensive research, Taylor not only shows us something about games but raises broader cultural issues. She considers "power gamers," who play in ways that seem closer to work, and examines our underlying notions of what constitutes play -- and why play sometimes feels like work and may even be painful, repetitive, and boring. She looks at the women who play Everquest and finds they don't fit the narrow stereotype of women gamers, which may cast into doubt our standardized and preconceived ideas of femininity. And she explores the questions of who owns game space -- what happens when emergent player culture confronts the major corporation behind the game.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Refuting the idea that playing video games is an act of isolation undertaken by teenaged boys in dark basement rooms, Taylor presents the world of online gaming as a thriving social scene where players create friendships that transcend the digital domain. In playing EverQuest, (an MMOG, or massively multiplayer online game), Taylor travels through the digital fantasyland, slays other players, builds up her character's inventory and skills and, most importantly, shows how playing creates a huge network of people, many of whom take an almost job-like approach to gaming. She even meets up with fellow gamers and notes how "Recounting fights is a common topic of conversation among players." Also insightful are her thoughts on women and gaming, an underreported topic to which she dedicates a chapter. Taylor is, however, an academic, and tends to make simple concepts overcomplicated. So, sentences like: "There is no culture, there is no game, without the labor of the players. Whether designers want to acknowledge it fully or not, MMOGs already are participatory spaces (if only partially realized) by their very nature as social and cultural spaces" are far from uncommon. Save the moments of impenetrable jargon, Taylor's immersion into the online gaming world is a fascinating one that proves video games aren't just for the geeky neighbor kid anymore. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

A fascinating peek into the formal and social architecture that undergirds and shapes the cultural phenomena that is EverQuest.

(Jane C. Park *New Media and Society*)

Reading *Play Between Worlds* is anything but grinding. Taylor has long been one of the most nuanced scholars of life in the massively multiplayer game world, someone who knows her orc from her dark elves, who understands the complex intertwining of online and offline identities, and who has interesting things to teach us about the ethics of power gaming. At the same time, she is someone who asks big questions about the relationship between work and play, about the debates surrounding gender and games, and about issues of online governance and intellectual property which will shape the future interactions between gamers and game companies. Each of the book's chapters could be read and taught on its own terms; taken as a whole, they add up to a vivid picture of a world where many of us are spending lots of time these days.

(**Henry Jenkins** , Director of Comparative Media Studies, MIT)

An articulate and thoroughly researched work, *Play Between Worlds* is an intriguing look behind the curtain of the world's hottest entertainment phenomenon: virtual-world gaming. Unlike other academics who merely play tourist in these games, Taylor spent four years in one world and became part of the community. You get to reap the benefits of her close association with the people who make these worlds exciting: the players.

(Jessica Mulligan, coauthor of *Developing Online Games: An Insider's Guide*)

From the Inside Flap

Endorsements "T. L. Taylor's book takes the reader on a full-immersion tour of a virtual world, coupling solid academic discussion with vivid descriptions. A must-read for anyone interested in the ways in which

this fascinating medium has developed and will continue to grow." --Raph Koster, Chief Creative Officer, Sony Online Entertainment

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"Taylor's well-researched book provides a lively and engaging explanation of the social significance of online gaming. *Play Between Worlds* is essential, not just for scholars of gaming and computer-mediated communication, but for anyone interested in popular culture, social organization, and the relationships between leisure, socializing, and work in everyday life." --Lori Kendall, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, author of *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub*

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Robert Hester:

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