

Strategies and Tactics in Digital Role- Playing Games: Persuasion and Social Negotiation of the Natural Order Doctrine in *Second Life's Gor*

Christophe Duret
Université de Sherbrooke, Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this chapter, the authors examine the strategies and tactics of persuasion used by the players in the Gorean role-playing games organized in Second Life, which is a video gaming adaptation of the series of novels The Chronicles of Gor by John Norman, games in which a doctrine is both defended and contested. These strategies and tactics fall into six different categories of closure conveyed in Gorean role-playing games: institutionalized enculturation, informal enculturation, hermeneutical closure, sociotechnical closure, narrative closure, and legal closure. The chapter shows that the PRPG-VE is an inadequate medium when it comes to conveying a persuasive message to a target, but it can be useful in the context of a media critical education program.

BACKGROUND¹

As a communicologist, I am particularly interested in sociocriticism, reception theories in general and hermeneutics in particular. It is with this dual focus that I feel particularly suited to the uncovering of social meanings embodied in video games and which brings me to focus on the study of role playing in *Second Life*. I have defined these games elsewhere (Duret, 2014) as “Participatory Role-playing Games in Virtual Environment” (henceforth “PRPG-VE”). Of the PRPG-VE, it is the Gorean role-playing games which have caught my attention, for two reasons: firstly, they are the videoludic adaptation of a work of fiction where the ludic activities they embody concretely reflect the appropriation of the work by the players; secondly, they convey an explicit *doctrine* (which already exists in the original work) which the players defend or challenge, and which they either apply literally or subvert in their role play. Thus, it is a role-playing game with a *subverted doctrine* that I present here. It is not as a player or as a member of an organization or a producer, that I will approach this atypical object, but as a researcher attracted by its complexity, for its uniqueness and for the enlightenment that it offers regarding role playing and video games in general.

SETTING THE STAGE

I will discuss the Gorean role-playing games in the light of the transmission and challenge of a doctrine in a participatory environment in which persuasion is no longer the privilege of a single author, but of the players. To do this, I shall first describe the Gorean role-playing games and their characteristics as subverted doctrine. Then I shall describe them as texts, after which I shall elaborate a typology that will allow me to classify the strategies and tactics deployed by players to support their perspective on the doctrine conveyed by the game. Finally, in conclusion, I shall show how my analysis of the strategies and tactics of the players is enlightening for anyone interested in games as a medium of persuasion and as a learning tool. The case study I present here is based on an exploratory study conducted in the summer of 2012 on Gorean role-playing games. I later analyzed the documents produced by the players in an extrinsic play ² situation (posts published on the forums *Gor-SL.com* and *The Gorean Forum*, as well as blogs, fanzines, online journals, wikis, game scenarios, game narratives, etc.). In addition, during the same summer I dedicated my time to a non-participatory observation role in virtual Gorean environments.

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