Guild Wars and World of Warcraft Compared

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Introduction

This article intends to compare the gameplay of two major massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG), namely *Guild Wars* by NCsoft and ArenaNet and *World of Warcraft* by Blizzard Entertainment. They will be compared using the *Component Framework*.

What is a Game?

Definitions

We have provided one definition each, first one is in swedish by Filip Gedell.

> "Ett spel är ett slutet system styrt av regler där en eller flera spelare strävar efter att uppnå ett eller flera mål, bestämt av systemet eller av spelarna själva, vilket resulterar i ett mätbart resultat där spelarens insats påverkar utfallet utan att ha några verkliga konsekvenser."
> – Filip Gedell

According to the definition provided by Gedell both *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars* are games as they indeed are closed systems with one or more players and contains one or more goals (system and/or player defined.) Efforts exerted by players affect the game state and produces quantifiable outcomes without real consequences.

Per Lindstrands provides the following definition.

> "An unreal and informal activity where at least one participating agent can intentionally achieve one or more (system or self defined) goals given a set of constraints and a set of actions."
> – Per Lindstrand

According to this definition both *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars* are indeed games. They are clearly unreal and informal as both are virtual simulations and not part of the reality or environment of any player. Players can achieve self or system-defined goals given the set of rules and constrained enforced by the game world, other players and server software and administrators.

Guild Wars

This section contains an overview of the game *Guild Wars* developed by NCsoft in collaboration with ArenaNet.

Overview

Guild Wars consist of two main parts, a traditional RPG[1] part and a PvP[2] part. In the RPG part the player ventures through the world, solving quests, defeating enemies and completing missions in order to achieve level ascension, acquire new equipment as well as skills. When playing PvP, the player faces other players rather than computer controlled characters (monsters and other enemies.) There are the PvP arenas, tournaments and guild battles where you can fight and strengthen the avatar.

In the RPG part the player controls an avatar and acquires, as mentioned, various rewards such as experience, equipment and skills by defeating enemies, completing quests and missions. When a target amount of experience is reached the avatar increments its level which yields increased maximum health as well as attribute and skill points. Attribute and skill points can also be gained by completing quests and missions.

Gameplay

The Avatar

The game starts by creating an avatar, the player can have at most four avatars on an account at any given time. When creating an avatar the player chooses a RPG or a pure PvP environment. Avatars in the latter environment are created with maximum level and the player is allowed to equip items and skills. In the former environemnt, the created avatar can participate in both RPG and PvP whereas a PvP avatar is limited to PvP play only.

After the environment, the player chooses the primary profession and the appearance of the avatar. When creating a PvP avatar the player gets to choose a secondary profession whereas the RPG avatar makes this decision later in the game.

Every profession have a set of four to six attributes classes, one of these are only available when that profession is choosen as primary. Each attribute has a set of associated skills that becomes more effective when the player invests attribute points in the attribute. The available professions are

- **Elementalist** The Elementalist depends on his skills and is a lot like a "classic" magician found in many RPGs, using skills mainly to inflict magical damage to the enemies.

- **Mesmer** The Mesmer does not deal damage instantly[3] in the same way as the Elementalist. Instead, he deals damage over time (DoT) or de-buffs[4] the foe.

- **Monk** The Monk's primary task is to heal and protect the other players but can use his skills offensive using smiting prayers.

- **Necromancer** The Necromancer is a profession highly dependent on his skills in order to inflict damage. The skills revolve around death and suffering and they may require corpses or sacrifices. They are the only profession that can summon minions.

- **Ranger** The Ranger often works from a distance using different ranged weapons such as bows.

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[1]Role-playing Game.

[2]Player versus player.

[3]Commonly known as "nuke" in other similar games.

[4]Contrary to a "buff" which is a positive effect on an avatar a "de-buff" lowers attributes or affects other abilities of an avatar negatively.

They can charm animals they encounter to have as companions and use in combat.

- **Warrior** The Warrior relies on physical abilities and strength in melee combat as well as absorbing damage and protect followers. They are often on the front line guiding the rest of the party.

The World

Guild Wars take place in a large explorable world. In the world there are a few large towns and many smaller outposts where players can meet and form parties. When a party ventures out in the world, leaving a settlement, a private instance is created for that group. When a player discovers a new town or outpost it is added to the players map. The player can instantly travel between known towns and outposts.

RPG

After completing the avatar creation the player finds himself in a starter area of the game where he can familiarize himself with the controls, different game concepts and eventually choose a secondary profession before traveling – in time – to the main game world. The avatar is, naturally, unable to return to the start area after this event has taken place.

As most other RPGs the player solves quests, kills monsters and travels around the world as the plots develops. There are special types of quests called Missions that have a greater connection to the story and follows a chronological order of events. When solved, these gives the avatar access to new areas in the game world, for instance a mission might carry an avatar across a mountain ridge. The avatar can, in most cases, reach these areas without doing the missions but then, of course, experiences a less coherent story.

RPG

When completing the RPG part of *Guild Wars* player often begins playing the PvP part. Here player fights as a team against other players in secluded arenas. In regular arena play, two team fights until one team is victorious.

Tournament mode works a lot like the arena play with the exception that the winning team immediately faces a new challenger after each match until they are defeated. There are some RPG areas in the game world that are only accessible to players from the same region as the leading team in the tournament.

In guild wars mode, guilds forms teams (as in arena or tournaments) to compete against other guilds. Each guilds is associated with a guild ranking in a "ladder" in which guilds gains points for winning games and looses points for loosing games.

World of Warcraft

This section describes Blizzard Entertainment's MMORPG version of their *Warcraft* series. The previously exclusively real-time strategy[5] games have to some extent defined a "world" in which the online RPG counterpart now takes place.

As stated by Blizzard Entertainment and recognized by almost all players of their games, they never invent new ideas but rather, in their own way, "enhance" present ones. *World of Warcraft* is no different and borrows features from several previous titles.

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[5]With the exception of the *Diablo*-like game elements throughout the *Warcraft 3*.

Overview

The player interacts with the world through an avatar. An avatar belongs to one of two factions: *Horde* or *Alliance*. In each faction there are four races; *Undeads*, *Taurens*, *Trolls* and *Orcs* for the *Horde* and *Humans*, *Night Elves*, *Gnomes* and *Dwarfs* for the *Alliance*. Furthermore, there are a set of classes from which the player can choose; *Mage*, *Priest*, *Warrior*, *Rogue*, *Shaman*, *Druid*, *Paladin*, *Warlock* and *Hunter*. An avatar can also be either male or female. All of the mentioned "features" of the avatar affects gameplay in different ways except for gender which has no effect apart from visual and audial appearance.

The world consists of two islands which are divided into several areas; each belonging to *Horde*, *Alliance* or neither (*Contested*). Each faction has one capital city as well as two larger cities which offers unique services to faction members such as auction houses and island travel connections.

Gameplay

The player creates an avatar and is introduced to the world through initial quests with material and experience rewards. *World of Warcraft* uses, as many previous titles from the genre, a finite level system based on experience points. The player's avatar gains experience points through quests, exploration and combat. When reached a target amount of experience points the avatar gains a level and is amongst other things rewarded by increased attributes (such as *Intelligence*, *Stamina*, *Strength* etc.) These attributes determines the abilities of the avatar such as chance to perform a critical strike, dodge or its total amount of health points.

In order to do certain "harder" quests the player can assemble or join smaller "parties" with other avatars. Players can also participate in so called "raids" which is a larger system of parties assembled for some greater task. Worth mentioning is that players can form *guilds* in order to create a community of communication with other players. A guild can create a distinctive tabard which can be worn by the guild members.

The initial part of the game consists mainly of quests designed to introduce the player to game elements such as combat, non-player character (NPC) interaction and geography. When an avatar has reached the maximum level (currently 60) nothing can be gained that directly affects the its abilities – positively or negatively – except for equipment. The avatar can engage in player versus player (PvP) combat in controlled faction against faction battles or participate in larger "raids" to kill "bosses", other players (on special PvP servers) or enter so called *instances*. Instances are separated from the world and are "instantiated" when a player or a party enters it. A new unique instance is created for each player or party that enters it.

The game focuses heavily on game immersion though not realistic but emotional. Game elements such as travel time and linguistic abilities yields an impression that the avatar "lives" in a *world*. However, the game supports different types of gameplay.

Component Framework Analysis

This section contains a combined analysis of the games using the *Component Framework*, an activity based model of game interaction. To fairly compare the games the analysis is performed simultaneously and they are compared

rather than described for each topic.

Holistic

The holistic view of the game activity describes how the activity is performed, preparations and closing events. These actions are divided into a set of, in some sense, hierarchical groups of activities.

Game Instance

Set-up The perhaps most obvious prerequisite for online games is that some server (if server-based) software is running. Usually this is maintained and supported by the game companies responsible for the product, this is the case with both *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars.*

Several prerequisites must be fulfilled by performing a series of formal actions in order to "create" a game instance. These are more or less identical for both games, the common actions include

  - Purchase an account (client software license)

  - Install client software

  - Run the client application

World of Warcraft has a monthly subscription fee, therefore its game instance also include

  - Pay subscription fee

in order to "maintain" the game instance.

Set-down In order to terminate a game instance one can in *World of Warcraft* end the subscription and uninstall the client software. The game instance is perhaps more thoroughly terminated if the maintained servers are shut down and taken offline. This,

again, is not entirely true if one considers the possibility of private servers.

In *Guild Wars* it is unclear whether or not one can actually terminate a once purchased account as there are no subscription fees. There are at least no obvious ways of doing this apart from uninstalling the client software.

Furthermore, in *World of Warcraft* game sessions are preserved after resignation in order to allow the player to return at a later date. How long the game sessions are maintained is unclear.

Game Session

Set-up For both *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars* a game session is initialized by the creation of an avatar – the procedure is, details ignored, rather similar. This implies that there are a game session for each avatar created and maintained by the player.

Set-down The game session for a given avatar is terminated when the player removes it. This feature is supported by both games.

Play Session

Set-up The play session is initialized when the player enters the game world with an avatar. Progress from previous play sessions is restored by the server software to some extent, there may be minor differences in the avatar state. In *World of Warcraft* an avatar's experience point gain factor might be twice the normal for a number of experience points – technically to a maximum of one and a half levels worth. In *Guild Wars* an avatar is transported to a previously visited town or outpost if the player ended the play session in the wilderness. This process is identical for both games.

Set-down For both games, the player can terminate a play session by logging out. This action triggers the server software to save current progress of the avatar.

Extra-game Activities

World of Warcraft has a powerful modification system using scripts which supports distributed in-game communication during simultaneous play sessions as well as user interface customization. There are several modification sets with unique appearance and functionality. *Guild Wars* lacks these aspects.

There is a community for the creation of videos presenting certain aspects of the game, player versus player combat as well as comedy and criticism. This activity is dependent on external software running on the client machine and none of the games supports this inherently. However, a screenshot feature is provided by both games which can result in extra-game activities.

Trading items, in-game currency and accounts is common to both games. This is usually organized via web sites. Articles discussing the theory and practice of game aspects, providing databases of information regarding in-game elements such as items and maps of areas as well as quests and statistics. Fan artwork is also shared and present for both games.

For *Guild Wars* there are certain "elite" or "official" fan sites categorized by a rank system hinting quality and popularity provided by ArenaNet.

Boundary

Boundaries describe rules and other limiting factors for the player. These restricts game world interaction of the player.

Rules

The immense set of rules in both games is clearly too large to cover in its entirety for this analysis – it would be meaningless to discuss this in detail. Thus we must impose a number of generalizations in order to simplify the comparison.

Both games contain a large set of game world inherent rules such as physics and the finite set of possible valid actions is in itself limiting factor. The world in both games is obviously finite and implies a geographical limitation.

This is perhaps the first real difference between the games in this analysis. In *World of Warcraft*, Blizzard Entertainment insist on forcing behavioral rules upon players including forbidding players to exploit the physics engine to their advantage and not allowing verbal or "physical" harassment. There are a great number of these rules and most of them are enforced by so called *Game Masters* – players with certain authority to apply behavioral rules as well as the ability and purpose to assist players in case of game related errors or problems.

Apart from in-game rules there are several rules regarding software on client machines running *World of Warcraft*. Software facilitating or enabling "cheating" is forbidden, this is enforced by the client application and must be approved by the player in order to install and run the client software.

Guild Wars has very few or no behavioral rules and does not rely on *Game Masters* for in-game support.

Modes of Play

There are a vast set of different modes for each game if described in detail, different modes of play for different types of avatars. These are generally similar

in both games and are inherent modes of gameplay. Conceptually they are the same, enabling and disabling sets of features, events and effects depending on the type of avatar created and played by the player. As mentioned, this is basically very similar in *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars.*

A severe difference is that *World of Warcraft* has a continuous world for each server in which all avatars can interact. The mode of play for all avatars in that world is affected by the server type; *role-playing, role-playing player versus player, player versus player* or *normal.* These determines the level of interaction between players as well as other rules.

Guild Wars contains two principal modes of play; *role-playing* and *player versus player.* The former allows the player to participate in a story-driven adventure through the game world by doing quests and missions with other players. The latter allows the player to participate in team player versus player combat in special arenas. This also include guild wars where guilds compete against each other in a ladder system.

Goals

Both games contains the avatar level ascension motivation in the initial part of a game session. The player is mainly motivated by acquisition of experience points to reach the next level. Also, personal goals may be defined and achieved by the player for both games. The obvious social interaction motivation is part of this, disregarding attempts to facilitate this through chat features in both games. Both games have a finite maximum level which when reached terminates the avatar ascension phase in *World of Warcraft* and initiates the end-game phase. In *Guild Wars* the maximum level of an avatar is by relatively low and acquired quickly but does not end the development of an avatar.

In *World of Warcraft* it is hard to derive any other primary end-game goals than the acquisition of items. Every action is either motivated by the possible attainment of an item or some personal goal. Quests are usually motivated by experience, and in some cases item, rewards during the avatar ascension phase and items only during the end-game phase.

Guild Wars has several goals, level ascension and item acquisition which is common to *World of Warcraft* as well as mission and quest completion in order to continue the story. There is also avatar development in the form of skills which can be gained through purchase, quest completion or in some cases on the battlefield. These are, in contrast to *World of Warcraft*, penultimate goals in *Guild Wars.*

The ultimate goal in *Guild Wars* is, as the name suggest, guild wars. A global ladder where guilds from different continents compete for recognition. Everything in the game is motivated by guild wars, avatar ascension and improvements to ensure greater rate of success in guild wars.

Temporal

The temporal aspect of a game describes the flow of gameplay and how it changes due to player actions and game system events.

Actions

Both games support a standard movement control system, worthy to note is that *Guild Wars* is more restrictive on spatial freedom and can be described by essentially two dimensions. Obviously we are still ignoring details in both games regarding race, class and/or faction inherent skill and/or ability specialization and restriction.

Being continuous, the world in *World of Warcraft* allows a standard set of actions in all situations. An avatars possible set of explicit actions is available through the user interface at all times.

In *Guild Wars* the player may only use skills outside towns and outposts, and furthermore only a small finite set of the possible skills of the avatar. This set can be set-up and configured for the occasion before leaving a town or an outpost.

Events

There are a number of different game events not meaningful to the analysis and some even mentioned – namely basic physics and spatial limitations due to a finite world etc.

In *World of Warcraft* there are few events affecting the gameplay for the player significantly, that is, changing the game state. Epic quests that are performed may have a visual impact on the world – e.g. killing the great dragon Onyxia results in a statue being raised with her head in the faction capital. Quest events are generally governed by the same system and usually triggers the same type of functionality.

The story-driven role-playing part of *Guild Wars* contains several events such as world traversal through completion of missions, a type of special quest. These have a unique context and contains several scriptural events and changes the game state for the player.

Closures

There are clearly a enormous number of closures in both games, from food and beverage consumption to level increments. Notably, *Guild Wars* is the only game that contains a measur-

able "outcome" or a periodically persistent quantifiable state through the ladder system. *World of Warcraft* has a player versus player rank system but it merely provides a statistics for players and has no real impact[6] on the game state.

End Conditions

Currently there is no end condition in *World of Warcraft* as it does not contain any terminating goals. The end condition for *Guild Wars* is the ladder reset. Also, the story in the role-playing part of the game has currently an end upon completion of the last mission.

Evaluation Function

In *Guild Wars*, when the ladder is reset, the guild with the highest score has the highest ranking and is therefore the winner. *World of Warcraft* has as of today no real evaluation function as it does not contain an end condition.

Structural

The structural components of the game describes the elements that are manipulated by the player and/or the game system.

Interface

Both *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars* uses a two dimensional user interface on top of a three dimensional world representation. The interfaces provides a subset of the possible actions that the player can perform, others are – common to both games – event bound to some input devices. The interface also exports current game state information, results of player actions and actions of other players.

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[6]It does in fact affect players participating in player versus player combat in certain "Battlegrounds" where a player of high rank is allowed to trigger certain events.

The visual and audial theme differs greatly among the games, following previous titles both *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars* maintains their companies previous titles' style; cartoonish and realistic respectively.

Game Elements

Here both games are extremely similar and supports a more or less "standard" set of features; NPCs, landscapes, infrastructure, interactive talking frogs[7], settlements, cities etc.

Players

A major difference between *World of Warcraft* and *Guild Wars* is that the latter supports the use of henchmen. Parties in *World of Warcraft* consists only of players while in *Guild Wars* a mixture of players and henchmen controlled by the game system can form a party. Both games contains situations where a NPC assists the player either directly or indirectly.

Game Facilitator

The server software and server administrators are the principal game facilitators for both games. One might argue that *Game Masters* in *World of Warcraft* are game facilitators too, in some sense.

What did we miss?

Technical features that facilitates gameplay, less interruptions and more involving play sessions is gained through the streaming technology in *Guild Wars* compared to the dated use of periodical patches used by *World of Warcraft*.

To qualitatively analyze, verify and validate the accuracy and completeness of the *Component Framework* within this context can, perhaps, yield a better result than with simpler systems but the article length constraint implies generalizations of almost all aspects of these more complex types of game systems. Therefore, it is possible to illustrate areas affected inaccurately, incompletely or not at all more effectively with simpler system with a complete analysis. We have consciously and purposfully simplified and generalized the analysis aspects of these games in order to provide a meaningful discussion in the article. This, perhaps, at the cost of locating and measuring the inaccuracies and/or incompleteness of the *Component Framework*.

Final Thoughts

These games are indeed complex systems, describing them is at the very least equally complex, in any model. This article gives a generalized comparison of gameplay elements in each titles. To describe both games in detail would have been less meaningful – and perhaps, generally, less interesting. Therefore, we have generalized elements of both games and compared these "governing" features in order to provide a qualitative comparison.

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[7]At the time of writing it is not known if *World of Warcraft* contains this feature or, under the assumption that it does, to what extent the frog is interactive and talking.