

## 4 Thrift players in a twisted game world?

### A study of private online game servers

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This chapter considers massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) player motivations for using ‘private game’ servers and considers their gaming experiences. Here, the term ‘private server’ refers to unauthorized MMORPGs video game servers that operate in parallel to official game servers. Private servers are set up and operated by individuals who do not pay licensing fees and use leaked, stolen or hacked source code to run games. A private server may support anywhere from less than 10 to several thousand users. Many private server operators offer access for free, or charge much lower fees than official servers, while some rely on a donation system for fee collection.<sup>1</sup> Statistical data on this ‘informal gaming sector’ are unreliable, yet game companies and authorized local distributors believe that they are losing substantial amounts of revenue due to private server activity. They are working closely with law enforcement agencies to crack down on illegal servers and the Internet cafes that provide access to them.

Game companies and even some players who have no experience on private servers generally perceive private server players as either trying to save money or as super-achievers who want to get around the player level requirements of specific games. Game companies and law enforcement agencies have a very clear perception of private game servers as illegal substitutes for official servers, similar to the selling of pirated copies of music or software. However, there are some important differences: first, the owners of private servers do not simply copy server software, but frequently bend or alter official game environments. Second, to a significant proportion of private server operators, profit seeking is not their primary goal.

This chapter considers evidence gathered from Web-based sources (mostly in blogs and game forums) in an effort to: (a) understand the motivations and experiences of players who use private game servers; (b) determine what meaning private game servers provide to the players; and (c) identify the distinctive meanings of private servers to the general game culture. Our primary assumption is that private game servers and players should not be considered parts of a marginal phenomenon but as factors that support our understanding of the gaming experience.

## Background

There are at least two reasons why it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of private game servers in operation at any time. First, due to their illegal status, many operators purposefully avoid drawing attention by limiting their announcements to forums that require membership registration or by attracting users via interpersonal communication. With a few large-scale exceptions, most private servers are used by small and relatively short-lived player communities. Second, owners frequently change server names to avoid detection by law enforcement authorities. Nevertheless, by monitoring private server-related Web sites and interviewing players, we were able to find hundreds of private servers for popular MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*, *Lineage*, *Lineage II*, *Ragnarok Online* (RO), and *MapleStory*. Significantly, whether they are pay-to-play or free-to-play, almost all popular games have private servers. This single phenomenon may suggest that saving money is not the primary reason for private server players.

Because of the geographic locality and familiarity, we limited our search to Chinese-version servers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Southeast Asian countries; not surprisingly, the largest number of servers we found were operating in China. The technical requirements for setting up a private server (also known as an *emulator*) are not complex. One interviewee with such experience told us that a ‘2D game such as *Lineage* requires only about an hour to set up. A more complex game such as *Lineage II* needs some research time, but can be done in two days.’

Most private server operators eliminate all original game quests to save themselves capacity and to simplify operations for players. At the same time, they almost always increase levelling speeds and virtual money-making return rates to levels that are tens or even hundreds of times higher than those offered by official game servers, thereby supporting players’ monster-slaying and resource collection efforts. Some servers even give new members immediate access to top-ranked characters and the highest-level game features.

Small private servers generally do not collect payment of any sort. Donations are often welcomed. Sometimes private server operators encourage donation by giving high-ranked gears as gifts. Many players consider such voluntary donation a legitimate charge as the cost of maintenance and operation of private servers needs to be covered. Only a small number of the largest private servers offer ‘virtual malls’ for buying equipment, using the above-mentioned donation mechanism to generate revenue.

## Perspectives

Our analysis is based on two pivotal perspectives: (a) private servers should be collectively interpreted as a parallel culture to mainstream game culture, and (b) ‘fun’ is the central motivation for players to use private servers. When addressing these issues, it is important to remember that MMORPGs are ongoing worlds in which player roles are both active and productive; therefore, their gaming activities are central to creating game value. As Jenkins (2006) notes, media users

consume and participate in the production of media commodities, a process he calls ‘participatory culture’. He has observed that some Japanese animation fans in the United States are adding their own original English subtitles (known as ‘fansubbing’) to imported products – an activity that he views as an example of unofficial production that promotes Japanese anime in the United States. Whether legal or not, such examples of media user participation are shaped by social and cultural consensus and they are generally controlled more by consumers than producers.

In a similar manner, Taylor (2006) and Kerr (this book) point out that the game activities of MMORPG players produce savings for game producers and add considerable value to games. In the absence of economic incentives, players participate in public testing and debugging prior to the official launching of games, and later participate in the production of game objects and exchanges of virtual goods and services. To achieve more efficient and rewarding gaming experiences, player communities frequently initiate and support borderline illegal products such as mods, plug-ins, and user interfaces. Products that make game worlds more colourful or efficient are sometimes incorporated into the upgrades of official game versions, thus saving companies the costs involved in market surveys and product research and development. Taylor, who uses the term ‘productive players’ when discussing gamers who create value in this manner, has commented on another aspect of this relationship: some game companies try to exert too much control over game ownership, thereby running the risk of putting unwanted constraints on the creativity of individual users. The complexity of the progressive implications of player contributions to gaming culture resists simple interpretations based on intellectual property rights or End User License Agreements.

As stated above, there is a fun or pleasure aspect to using private servers that we believe is at the core of understanding all gaming experiences. As MMORPGs inherit and remix various features such as action, adventure, role-playing, strategy, and social game genres, they increasingly provide a multidimensional framework for pursuing fun. McMahon (2003), Buckingham (2006), and Yee (2006) are among researchers who have identified three categories of MMORPG gaming elements that are closely related to game enjoyment:

1. *Ludic* factors include rules, goals, missions, and constraints established by game systems. Players interacting with these elements and overcoming challenges enter an attentive state called ‘engagement’ (Buckingham 2006), and those maintaining a level of successful involvement over time are motivated by a sense of accumulative progress (Rieber 1996). According to Csikzentmihalyi (1990, 2002), this sense of fun exists in isolation from external rewards because players maintain a balance between game system challenges and their own skills when entering a ‘flow’ state. Player anxiety increases when skills cannot meet current challenges and no alternatives exist; player boredom increases when challenges fall below skill level. Both scenarios result in a decreased sense of fun. Game companies therefore try to provide missions with finely

calculated degrees of challenge to allow players to develop their skills incrementally during a prolonged flow state consisting of optimal gaming experiences. At a certain point, game missions become less interesting and engaging, and players lose a sense of challenge, such as when facing the repetitive monster slaying and resource collection tasks that game companies promote as necessary for achieving promised endgame rewards. The rewards may appear worthwhile, but the majority of MMORPG players consider the process of achieving incrementally higher gaming levels as either tedious or, at best, a necessary evil.

2. *Narrative* fun elements can be divided into two categories based on ‘passive’ or ‘active’ player participation. Passive players who enjoy background scenery, character appearances, and storylines feel effortless involvement, immersion, or pleasure that is akin to reading a novel or watching a movie (Buckingham 2006). In the active category, Murray (2004) notes that virtual worlds are story-rich, with an abundance of narrative elements. When events take shape in MMORPGs, players can actively put together narrative elements in conjunction with other players for stories such as castle sieges or improvised cyberdramas. Narrations and discourses solidify experiences and memories that form a sense of game history. Such deep immersion is an important reason for strongly identifying with a game. Ideally, MMORPG players should be able to freely navigate, explore, and immerse themselves in these worlds either passively or actively, but the emphasis of game companies on player level has resulted in the division of game worlds into zones. There are serious consequences for players entering maps or dungeons they are not qualified for, and this design feature seriously affects the preferences of players for narrative or immersive fun.
3. The *interactive* dimension of gaming consists of social features such as chatting, teaching and learning, cooperation, and organization, among others. Players can collectively construct social networks, gaming cultures, and community identities. Game companies are fully aware of the importance of social bonding to game success in terms of popularity and profit, but such interactions are often restricted by game system design and character level. Once again, playing level is at the centre of this dimension: the highly interdependent structure of player roles/occupations and the collective requirements of many quests demand that players cooperate with each other in order to achieve higher levels. Furthermore, MMORPG designs generally discourage the mixing of players at different levels, meaning that players at lower levels risk rejection when they try to join an achievement-minded community. But on the other hand, when players are accepted into social-oriented communities where everybody knows your name (Steinkuehler and Williams 2006), they may feel pressure from the community when they want to just play alone with everyone else in the background ambience (Ducheneaut *et al.* 2006). In certain cases, players who want to maintain distance from others and play less seriously may find it hard to do so because their characters have established reputations.

## **The research**

We collected data for two purposes: to establish a general picture of MMORPG private server activity and to analyze private server player behaviours and gaming culture. As mentioned earlier, most of our data came from Chinese-language Web sites, blogs, and game forums based in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; we also reviewed a small number of English language resources.

We found many Web sites with dozens or hundreds of links to private servers; many links quickly became obsolete as owners tried to stay one step ahead of law enforcement officials. Each private server Web portal presented detailed technical information on joining, the current number of active accounts, features and settings, and different payment methods. Many portal sites also included discussion forums for their specific player groups. We relied on game-related discussion forums and blog postings to get a general understanding of private server culture, how players discover and initially use private servers, and why they see private servers as an attractive alternative to official servers.

To broaden our understanding of gamers' personal experiences with private servers, we conducted in-depth interviews with six female and seven male players (between the ages of 18 and 34) with extensive private server experience. Interviewees' have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. These participants were identified by purposive snowball sampling and were interviewed between February and July of 2009; each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Three of the interviewees had experience setting up or operating a private server. All interviewees were asked to describe their personal MMORPG gaming histories and gaming experiences in detail.

## **Motivations, meanings and economics**

The findings of this research can be divided into four key areas. First, we have identified a number of key motivations for games using private game servers. Second, and closely linked to this, we identify the meaning of private servers to gamers, and in particular key here is the importance of customizing the game experience. Third, this research has highlighted a complex economic relationship between official and private servers, while fourth, we consider private servers as a form of gamer resistance to the rigidity of official game systems and servers.

### ***Motivations to use private game servers***

We identified three primary motivations behind player decisions to use private game servers, these we have labeled 'nostalgic', 'dissatisfied', and 'explorative'. However, each of these should be considered ideal types for analytical purposes, and are not mutually exclusive categories.

First, *nostalgic gamers* use private servers either to return to games that they played long ago or to keep playing games that no longer have official servers. Players in the first sub-category have either left the specific game in question or stopped

playing all games for a considerable period of time. Their return to a game can be interpreted as evidence of positive previous gaming histories, and they tend to be very enthusiastic when describing the private servers that give them opportunities to return to old favourite games. As indicated in the following two blog excerpts, nostalgic gamers care most about maps, background scenes, and non-player characters that they were once very familiar with:

When I was surfing on the Web, suddenly I found this private server for *Risk Your Life II*, an online game I played [a] long ago. I was so happy because it had been a long time since I last played the game . . . When I saw the scenery I had not seen for several years, I cried.<sup>2</sup>

After the game [official server] was closed . . . I wanted to play it so bad that I even tried private servers and the Japanese [official] server.<sup>3</sup>

One interviewee consciously used private servers as part of an exit strategy for leaving a specific game that she had been playing for a long time. She described private servers as ceremonial spaces for saying farewell to the current period of her gaming life:

You can say that during that afternoon, once I had collected everything I wanted, I felt fully satisfied. I felt that I always wanted to get those desirable items but had not gotten any results. Then, after that afternoon, I felt I could leave the game without any sense of remorse.

(Wei, female, age 30)

Some private servers are established for games that have been abandoned by their respective companies – for example, *Battle Marine Online*, *Bomberman Online*, and *NHero Online*. These games have small but active populations of loyal players who voluntarily establish and manage private servers. In the case of *NHero Online*, a couple of the last official game managers copied game content for the specific purpose of giving ongoing access to such players.

Second, among *dissatisfied gamers*, the advantages of private servers correspond directly to the drawbacks of official servers. They still love the game in question, but have very negative feelings about local server operators. We heard several players express the opinion that if reasonable and legal alternatives to their official servers were available, they would not use private servers – in other words, their problems are with the gaming environment and not the game itself. Common complaints that we heard were tied to incompetence and indifference to complaints on the part of game managers. Official gaming environment flaws that our interviewees mentioned included bots, stolen accounts, cash trades, and unfair ‘PK’ (player killing). Four interviewees specifically mentioned a desire to find better gaming experiences but did not want to abandon the game. Their comments suggest that they view private servers as unsatisfactory substitutes, but also as the only outlets for expressing their dissatisfaction with official servers.

Other interviewees made specific comments about what they felt was the unnecessarily long process of moving up the player-level ladder on official servers – ‘levelling hell’ was a phrase we came across frequently during data collection. Some players just want to have some casual fun without getting involved in competitive levelling, others are willing to compete but are tired of repetitive monster slaying and other levelling-related tasks, and still others complain that they do not have enough time to follow the normal levelling process due to school or work responsibilities. When players hear reports from friends about immediately participating in high-level game activities via private servers, their efforts on official servers can lose meaning. One interviewee told us:

At one time I was practicing to become a sorcerer.<sup>4</sup> As you know, you have to do it alone. Every day, practice, practice, practice – two hours a day, alone, automatic. It is really outrageous, why should it be so painful, so repetitious? Why should I go online and torture myself? Really, that dark thought of deleting my account would emerge sometimes . . . When I went to play on that private server, I was actually very disappointed and annoyed because my good online friend, she left the official server for a while and came back to tell me how nice the private server was, how easy and fun it was, blah, blah, blah. To me, the private servers are there to mock people like me who practice very slowly, very obediently . . . I felt a little betrayed.

(Yoshi, female, age 27)

Another time and effort-consuming task in gaming is organizing teams for major quests, a process that entails collaboration with unknown players. In order to promote acquaintance networks and formal player organizations, many gaming companies purposefully add a strong interdependence component into their game designs, usually in the form of character occupations. Many quests need specific combinations of occupations, thus limiting opportunities for solo play, or forcing players to spend a great deal of idle time waiting for chances to form teams. Team play also increases the potential for individual failure and criticism from team mates. For these players, private servers allow them to play whenever they want without being dependent on the availability of other gamers.

To a certain extent, the private server phenomenon can be interpreted as resistance to a rigid ‘one-size-fits-all’ game system on the part of players who come from different backgrounds and social contexts and who possess different technical skills and cultural preferences. Players generally move back and forth between official and private servers, and if our interviewees are representative of larger gamer populations, the majority clearly understand their distinctive qualities. This leads us to suggest that most players use private servers to satisfy needs that are not being addressed by official systems – in other words, players use private servers to express dissent towards game operators and managers. Private servers thus represent a third option to remaining completely loyal to a game or leaving it due to a sense of frustration.

Third, *explorative gamers* describe themselves as searching for gaming fun that they

cannot find on official game servers; they view levels, competition, and equipment as conditions for achieving other types of fun and not as goals in and of themselves. Our interviewees frequently described fun on private servers in terms of visiting places they are denied access to on official servers because of their current levels. They enthusiastically described the places they visited, the bosses they had pictures taken with, the magic creatures they rode, the cuteness of non-player characters they saw, and the breathtaking landscapes they ‘flew over’. To have the same experiences on official servers, players must have top ranks, wear the best equipment, and have experienced team mates. Even then there is no guarantee of success, and in many cases the best that players can hope for is to take quick glance at their victorious surroundings before ‘running for their lives’; posing for pictures is out of the question. In contrast, private server players can easily obtain the best armour or weapons, and testing those pieces of equipment at a leisurely pace is viewed as a form of recreation.<sup>5</sup> One interviewee described this activity as similar to ‘playing with paper dolls’.

In the same manner as ‘real-world’ tourist travel, picture taking plays an important role in MMORPG explorative experiences. In addition to serving as records of ‘I was there,’ pictures taken in rarely visited places on private servers add to a sense of ongoing immersion in a game. As described by one interviewee:

It compensates for something I cannot do on the official server. For example, I can do the quests and read the stories on the official server, but I cannot take a good look at certain scenes, I can only do that on other [private] servers. On the private server I also tried on clothes that I usually won’t wear. I started with the lowest-ranked clothing, one piece at a time. I created them, tried them on one-by-one, and took pictures.

(Shita, female, age 25)

In addition to exploring game worlds, private servers help players explore game systems. Developing characters on official servers is costly, making it difficult to experiment with various character occupations, skills, and roles. Private servers thus play very useful roles as inexpensive laboratories for testing new characters. Two interviewees specifically addressed this positive aspect of private servers. First, Shita stated:

On the official server I can only play as a Prophet. If I want to play using other characters, I need to invest a lot of time in developing them. On private servers I can learn the characteristics of each occupation. With that knowledge, when I come back to the official server I will know what others need for their occupations . . . I have deliberately created various characters on private servers and researched all of their skills.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Yoshi (female, age 27):

[On the official server] I did not have sufficient time to develop so many characters, yet I envied others for their good-looking Burst Shots or high-powered



Backstabs. I can get these characters very quickly on private servers, take a couple of shots, and enjoy the instant killing of monsters or other characters. So private servers sooth my frustration . . . It was only after I levelled up rapidly on a private server that I learned what occupations I was really interested in, and I may develop them after I go back to the official server. In *Lineage II* there are so many occupations, the first one you pick may not necessarily be your favourite. I know many Bladedancers who have reached level 79, then found that their second occupations were their favourites. If you haven't tried them, you won't know what you really prefer, you don't have that much time to try every occupation to its limit. Private servers give you experimental space. It's like a practice field, telling you that 'you may become that strong!' It is a space for imagination, for dreaming. Sometimes it turns out to be a motivation for going back to the official server.

To me, private servers are like short dreams, because at the end of the day you have to go back to the official server. Otherwise – like on my private server – everyone is acting alone. The monsters stink, you can reincarnate yourself, you don't need any team, so if you want to have interactions with others, you need to go back to the official server. I feel that private servers are only there to tell me what skills I can have when I grow up, or what places are out there for me to explore, so I can do that later on with a team on the official server.

### *The meanings of private servers*

Private servers represent player efforts to control their own gaming experiences and to satisfy their individual needs. MMORPG players have long-expressed interest in having stronger and more active control over their gaming experiences. Evidence of this is the number of bots, cheats, and cash trades for virtual goods and higher ranks that are used in response to the repetitive 'grind' of monster slaying and other levelling tasks. Private servers support more extensive modifications of environmental settings and fundamental game structure, especially for players who establish close relationships with private server managers. This explains why many players compare multiple private servers with various settings before choosing one to use on a regular basis, after which they regularly interact with the game manager to bend rules, adjust parameters, create more convenient ways of transportation, and so on to fulfill their individual gaming needs. In comparison, game managers on official servers are impersonal or indifferent, with most strictly adhering to established game rules. It is not unusual to find private server game masters regularly chatting with players on public channels, exchanging MSN messages with them, and holding spontaneous activities from time to time.<sup>6</sup> The next two excerpts attest to the more personal nature of player–manager relationships on private servers. The first is from Evilshadow (male, age 30) who expresses the greater level of connection felt with game controllers on private servers:

You feel isolated from the GM [game master] on the official server, you don't have very much interaction with him. He is more like a robot, starting an

activity as part of his job, not as something that he wants to participate in himself. On my private server, whenever the GM wants to create something, he calls for everyone to create it together.

And similarly Kitty (female, age 22) highlights the personalization and personal contact possible with private server, significantly adding to her pleasure in gaming:

What attracts me most about private servers is . . . all prayers are answered . . . On my birthday, the server owner built a guild house on the ocean, and gave it to me as a present.

Flexibility also has a down side: instability. Private server operators feel constant pressure from game companies and law enforcement authorities; therefore, players must be prepared to lose their servers and characters without warning. Instability is also increased by the above-mentioned tendency among many players to jump between different private servers in the belief that the next one may fulfill all of their needs. One interviewee pointed out that one of the best features of private servers also represents a reason for leaving them:

Gaming experiences on official servers are cultivated at a slow tempo, but on private servers they are very fast. At the beginning it surprises you, and when you have reached your goals, you don't have so much desire to stay. And private servers are temporary businesses, you never know if tomorrow morning you will still find them running. When they say we'll close it, it is closed. But official servers, with all that money we pay them, can they do that to us?

(Shita, female, age 25)

Hence, it is evident, that for players, private servers provide multiple functions; and we can identify at least five of these: (a) private servers act as 'photo albums' for remembering past game lives and histories; (b) private servers provide spaces for flexible gaming schedules, thus helping players avoid the pressure they feel to spend large amounts of time working on skills as well as the feeling that they 'must get their money's worth' from official servers; (c) private servers provide buffers for leaving specific games by offering players a mechanism for moving on; (d) private servers act as inexpensive laboratories for serious gamers who want to experiment with new game features that they want to use on official servers; and (e) private servers are playgrounds for leisure players who want to enjoy the pleasures of exploration without having to endure the grinding process of performing repetitive levelling tasks.

### ***Economic relationship between official and private servers***

It is evident that official and private servers have a complex economic relationship. This relationship cannot be reduced to a formula in which one side completely

suffers from the success of the other. There are four aspects of this relationship that must be considered when determining whether one side or the other receives benefits. First, the game designs and degrees of player participation on some private servers occasionally benefit game companies that want to meet player demands for new and innovative game features.<sup>7</sup> Second, a significant number of gamers use official and private servers concurrently, some simply refuse to join official servers under any circumstances, some player communities established on private servers move intact to official servers, and sometimes private servers help keep jaded players 'in the game' until new versions are released. Third, while money is a factor, it does not appear to be a primary motivator for players to join private servers. Player cost-benefit calculations are influenced by the payment mechanism – as stated above, a monthly fee creates pressure to play more to get value, but that can also create a sense of being controlled by a game. The 'donation' payment system used by many private servers gives them an advantage in this regard. This dual system also encourages simultaneous play on official and private servers, at a rigorous pace on the former and at a leisurely pace on the latter. Finally, in terms of gaming experience, private servers act as supplements to, rather than replacements, for official servers.

In summary, private server players are usually strong fans of gaming in general and of specific games in particular. Almost all of them have experienced play on official servers in the past, and very few limit their play to private servers only. When choosing a free game or a private server, they are not making arbitrary decisions, but are actively selecting a gaming source with certain affective or social qualities that they understand based on their past experiences with official servers. Also, the stability factor is most likely a primary reason why more players do not jump to private servers. MMORPGs are considered ongoing worlds, and participant identities and memories of past gaming events are representative of the large amounts of time they have invested.

## **Conclusion**

As commercial products, MMORPGs are designed to keep mainstream players in game worlds as long as possible so as to prolong the lives of game titles. Low flexibility in terms of rules and experimentation is one result of these marketing goals. In a limited sense, private servers are versatile mutants of official games for players interested in finding more customized gaming experiences. In a broader sense, they can be viewed as new incarnations of Coleman and Dyer-Witthford's (2007) *digital commons* (in which everyone voluntarily contribute to the production and exchange, with no one claiming ownership), a disappearing aspect of gaming due to digital game commercialisation. However, the potential loss of game company revenue means that private server operators will almost always be considered illegal outsiders. In this study, we offered evidence indicating that: (a) despite their illegality, private servers offer some benefits to game companies; and (b) most players move between the two worlds for reasons tied to the current characteristics of commercial gaming and not simply to save money. We have highlighted that

gamers have a variety of motivations for using private servers, but these are mostly as an addition to, and to enhance their game play, on official servers. Although private servers are invariably cheaper for players, this does not appear a primary motivation, and while private servers may be used as a counter to issues encountered in the official game version and server, this often ensures that gamers remain in the official game. It is our hope that this information can be used to support further discussion of related issues.

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## **Notes**

- 1 This system is very similar to that used for popular ‘free-to-play, but pay-for-equipment’ MMOs, except that all payments are used to support server maintenance.
- 2 <http://lolopo416073.pixnet.net/blog/post/24389410> (Retrieved 1 August 2009).
- 3 Available <http://koukaki.pixnet.net/blog/post/11174203> (Retrieved 1 August 2009).
- 4 The formal name for a sorcerer in *Lineage II* is ‘Storm Screamer’.
- 5 Certain private servers offer objects (e.g., clothing that makes players invisible) that are not available from official servers.
- 6 One interviewee told us that a ‘GM suddenly announced that we are going to raid a certain boss 10 minutes from now, and he set a transmitting crystal in the castle so that everyone could join this event. Then the GM set free the boss for the players to attack, and he just stepped aside and watched. He did not join us in the attack, but he did revive dead characters for us.’
- 7 In November 2006, NetDragon Websoft, Inc., published their *JY2* online game, in which they offered game features commonly found on private servers – for instance, accelerated experience point rewards and exceptionally high drop rates for high-level equipment. They called their product a ‘high’ server. Within a few days, a large number of players reached top scores that would have taken them several weeks on a regular server. Another example can be found in Blizzard’s new version of World of Warcraft and Wrath of the Lich King, released in November 2008. Players who have a character of at least level 55 on the account they play are able to create a new level-55 death knight and start levelling from there. This design considerably saves the players from repetitive work for developing a second character.

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