



Leet Noobs: The Life and Death of an Expert Player Group in World of Warcraft (New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies)

Mark Chen

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Leet Noobs documents, for over 10 months, a group of players in the online game *World of Warcraft* engaged in a 40-person joint activity known as raiding. Initially, the group was informal, a «family» that wanted to «hang out and have fun.» Before joining, each player had been recognized as expert in the game; within the group they had to adapt their expertise for the new joint task and align themselves to new group goals. Through their shared activity, members successfully established communication and material practices that changed as they had to renegotiate roles and responsibilities with new situations and as the larger gaming community evolved. Players learned to reconfigure their play spaces, enrolling third-party game mods and other resources into their activity. Once-expert players became novices or «noobs» to relearn expert or «leet» gameplay. They became «leet noobs» who needed to reconfigure their expertise for new norms of material practice. Ultimately, these norms also changed what it meant to play *World of Warcraft*; some group members no longer wanted to just hang out and have fun, and eventually the group died in an online fiery meltdown.

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