

# THE PRIMORDIAL ECONOMICS OF CHEATING: *Trading Skill for Glory or Vital Steps to Evolved Play?*

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## ABSTRACT

In a period marked by cultural, industrial and technological convergences of new media platforms globally, what constitutes ‘Situated play’? One of the key aspects of the global digital industries has been the increasing importance of locality in determining modes of game play. Far from homogenising game play, globalisation has resulted in “disjuncture” and “difference” at the level of the local. Take, for example, the considerable successes of the Massively Multiplayer Online scene; despite its movement towards the idea of the connected gaming civilisation model, many MMO are not global but, rather, played by certain communities that share linguistic, socio-cultural or political economy similarities. A considerably poignant example would be the way in which different aesthetics appeal to cultural contexts. The formulation of these distinctive taste cultures are marked by what Pierre Bourdieu noted as modes of cultural (productions of knowledges), social and economic capital. These types of knowledges effect and impact modes of game play as well as “appreciation” of types of skills and knowledges.

So how can we conceptualise these productions of localised game play? One way to understand some of the nuances of the local and how it impacts certain modes of game play is through the rubric of “ethics”. Can we speak of right or wrong behaviour? Who determines it? Is it the companies, the producers, the gaming community, or the socio-political context that governs and moderates modes of behaviour?

In this paper, I will explore the role of ethics in gaming and how it relates to cultural relativity and situated play. The paper will outline a compact historical account of the definitions of “cheating” within the realm of the digital and how online gaming has revolutionised some of these precepts. In order to do so I will explore the evolution of cheating and its newfound degrees of acceptance within the contemporary global online gaming community. I will

firstly outline some of the ways in which ethics have been conceptualised in game play, following this; a look at a case study of Melbourne MMO players and their definitions of the “ethics” in games through the rubric of cheating.

The case study of MMO users in Melbourne will consist of users from over 10 ethnic backgrounds. The sample study will ask users about their definition of cheating and right or wrong game play so that we may mediate on some of the saliences and nascent socio-cultural dimensions of play and locality.

## KEYWORDS

Cheat, Debug, Trainer, Twinking, Build & Levelling guides, Camping, Programming flaw exploitation, Walkthrough, FAQ (Frequently asked question document), Patching, Speed run, Gold/Stat farming, Ghosting, Unlockable, Easter Egg, PEEK/POKE, Hacking.

## INTRODUCTION

In Bernard Suits eminent account of the concept of gaming, he raises the notion that games allow their contestant a passage toward the goal, that limits said contestant to “less efficient means”. [9] Suits elaborates that while this restriction is enforced, there is almost always an ultimately superior however prohibited means of reaching the goal. Was he referencing the obstructed path model of the classic/contemporary game? Or does this theory suggest that cheating is the subversion of less efficient means?

Johannes Huizinga describes games as being separate to reality as “they are assigned a separate space and separate time” which perhaps nullifies any breach of moral ethicality that would be considered sensitive to reality, however inapplicable to states of reality. [2] Does this cardinal

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understanding of gaming therefore justify the use of cheating?

In scholastic education, a student may resort to cheating in order to ascend to a higher academic level, without the application of study. Institutions in general, make use of Academic honour codes as a means to officially and contractually condemn the act of cheating, making it punishable by expulsion. This reduces the amount of cheating, though it doesn't abolish it completely. But is cheating really the antithesis of learning? Does not play involve transgression? Who said rules weren't meant to be broken?

### **CHEATING: A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT**

The 'Cheat' in single player video gaming has been embraced by game culture since the first "Created by Warren Robinett" unlockable 'Easter egg' featured in *Adventure* (1980), birthing cheat related segment articles in both videogame relative print media, television and the internet. In these instances the act of Cheating in videogames is celebrated more so than scorned, with those who do not believe in resorting to cheats separately opting to gain notoriety, respect and heightened gaming skills through completing a game separately to these advantages. What most players know to be 'cheats' were initially included in the working prototype of any given game title. Functioning as a developer tool and used by the game programmers in order to beta-test some of the more final aspects of the game's functionality. Therefore, the Cheat is nothing more than a muted variant of the debugging tools.

Console and Computer based videogames (until recent years) maintained extensively differing concepts and practices of cheat doctrine. Console games predominantly contained cheats that were intentionally left inside the game programming in order to be discovered as a secret reward, accessed through a complicated and/or ontologically timed control pad button combination, or perhaps a sequenced activation inside the game's options menu. The existence of said cheats were commonly discovered upon completing the game at its highest level of difficulty. From its discovery here the cheat would travel by word of mouth and publicly accessible cheat specific forums, such as the aforementioned print media & websites. The function of these codes would commonly access a basic debug construct, allowing the player any or all of the above keyword norms of video game cheating.

The presence of debugging utilities renders some game titles 'debugable' in which a player discovers the game's developer tools, activated inside the completed commercial game construct. In some cases unintentionally left within

the release version, stylised in others so as to appear rewarding or humorous upon discovery. Debugging tools have been known to range from Level select, Item spawning and 'God mode' toggles. God mode in particular can operate in a number of ways, however serving the single purpose of removing the player's mortality and/or corporeal form from the game environment completely, allowing the player/developer to traverse the game, unharmed by hostile game events or hazards, and in some cases allowing the ability to adjust in-game features to a build foundation capacity. Interestingly, the concept of God mode originated as a programmer/developer term, referencing the developer gods eye view upon their embryonic game, it has since evolved into something better recognised as a method of cheating through immortality when gaming, or the gamers transition to a god like state of being, within the simulated mortal coil.

While Computer games largely contained similar unlockable cheat codes, they instead were accessed through keyboard keystroke combinations. More importantly though, Computer games have an open ended quality that console games do not possess. This quality allows for gamers with adequate knowledge to make use of basic programmer skills to alter aspects of the game's core code in order to change the way in which it operates. Console games despite their irreversible nature, eventually became exposed to the effects of debug cheating through the manufacturing of cartridge piggyback converters such as the 'Game Genie', 'Action Replay' & 'Game Shark' which essentially allowed the cartridge to operate within the console at a partially and temporarily reprogrammable capacity, where PEEK/POKE commands became possible.

A basic PEEK command in many older PC games would return a specific memory address. The POKE function could then be used to alter the information inside the requested memory address before returning to game play. If the information had been altered correctly, the gamer could potentially be rewarded with considerable advantage over their chosen video game. This technique of altering a game through its program code is better recognised today as a form of Hacking, which flags the method as a potential infringement of the video game developers end user license agreement (or EULA) it also bares a separate classification within the gaming community as one of the highest echelons of video game cheating.

This ideology behind hacking a videogame's core code has taken some independent programmers outside of the game code and into writing their own independent piggyback interfaces for videogames, some of which are known as 'Trainer's'. Through loading a trainer first before the game its self, a gamer can essentially debug any aspect of their in-

game character or their characters relationship to the game environment. This particular aspect of cheating has become one of the most recognised practices of videogame cheating in the Multiplayer online gaming community.

The connective nature of online play has expanded the concept of cheating immensely since the birth and development of the multiplayer concept. The simple advance in player numbers through online play has created an international exchange for the methodology of cheating, it has also provided the individual gamer with the anonymity to explore and exploit any form of cheating they may wish to undertake.

Aside from these traditional classifications of cheating, there exists a myriad of understandings into common game elements that subvert the game periphery. These are usually offered by the game first-hand, and while they may not be identified as advantage to be considered, are nevertheless altering states of play to a nondiegetic extent. In the next section I will outline further examples of cheating that maintain a subsequently non-confirmable identity.

#### **THE CONSCIOUS & UNCONSCIOUS ADVANTAGE**

Alexander R. Galloway compares cheating and hacking concepts to separate nondiegetic game operator acts such as Pausing while in-game; both are enacted unseen from outside the game environment by the player, effecting the game in some way. [5] Specifically to this theory, he expands with examples of the common game 'Setup' or 'Options' menu as being *the third cardinal nondiegetic game element* stating that "The pause and cheat acts are both part of this category. It includes and adjusts all preplay, postplay and interplay activity". These are made important while citing Johanes Huizinga's definition of Cheating; [2] "harmful to gameplay" and Huizinga's citation of cheaters as *Spoilsports* as it expands the theory toward a different understanding, asking the question "Does this mean that hacks & cheats are not a part of what it is to play a videogame?"

For Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska the concept of cheating and its versatility, is extended in the context of online gaming. [6] In an example of two players sharing wealth/items within a multiplayer environment, some might view this as gaining an unfair advantage from a player who has already braved a specific challenge if they decide to assist a lesser player in essentially bypassing said challenge. Others however, might consider this to be a perfectly acceptable method of play, or as King/Krzywinska put it as "In keeping with the social dimension of the game".

David Meyers explains the recent RPG, *Might & Magic VII* (1999), as a video game that the majority of gamers would find extremely difficult to complete without further

involvement in online registration, updates and participatory dialogue within the M&M online communities. He states "It may well be impossible to complete such a game without third party aids; it is certainly not very much fun to do so". Based upon the dialogues of seasoned M&M veterans from said communities, Meyers describes some exploited forms of manoeuvre during multiplayer combat in-game, as recognised 'cheating' by active players, offering the example of 'Duck Jumping'. He also states that a particular commonly identified form of cheating by player standards is the use of a game's save/load functions, as akin to the theory of pausing; these game utilities essentially disrupt the game flow at an external capacity.

Interestingly though, Meyers includes Trainers for this title in his cataloguing of Third party programs. Citing this common form of cheating (Trainer usage) as something that advances the development of the players in-game agent, rather than something comparable to the previous example of God mode toggling. Cheating in this fashion "transported the player-character to some advanced portion of the game context; they did not transport the player-character outside of said game context entirely". [7] Perhaps making this something distinguishably detached from the non-diegetic school of videogame cheating, he states that "Almost all play aids, hints and codes for the M&M games remained bound to the broader series context and were, for that reason, less play cheats than they were play supplements". Meyers describes the online generation of Trainer use as cheating that doesn't subvert the narrative context of gaming, alternatively something that merely accelerates and maintains the semiotic fundamentals of the game.

In *Monster Gaming*, Ben Sawyer outlines somewhat notorious cheat methodologies known as 'Map Hacks', used by cheaters (on occasion) in MMO/RTS online gaming, in order to allow their character a birds eye view advantage over one or all of the other participants. [8] This form of cheating is particularly overlooked, despite its frequent use. Specifically In the case of RTS genre videogames, where players commonly resort to 'Ghosting'; a seemingly undetectable form of cheating where by LAN gamers covertly glance at the monitor of their neighbouring combatants in order to subvert the fog of war. This method of cheating is outstandingly distasteful as it allows rival players a brief view of their opponent's entire base of operations, and in addition is rarely detectable, marking Ghosting with a similar stigma to that of a student whom dishonestly completes an examination through glancing at their neighbours answers.

Sawyer also outlines 'Punkbuster' & 'CounterHack'; examples of commonly used cheater detection/prevention programs, often used by online gaming administrators. Which are in turn maintained through program relevant web forums, here administrators meet to discuss current cheat tactics, detection, and prevention. These organizations are

principally devoted to the abolition of unscrupulous play through externally updated black lists of user names and handles belonging to known cheaters.

The gamers behind these schools of cheat policing are dedicated to teaching the etiquette of game play to online communities, through lessons in the identification of specific signs of play (inside the common multiplayer field) that indicate cheating, and the common etiquette attached to identification concerning the exposure and penalisation of said cheaters. Or, as Sawyer states, how to be ‘Vigilant and fair’.

These online focus groups suggest primary retaliatory options that encourage gamers to simply exit a server if signs of another multiplayer cheating are confirmable; as this approach deprives the cheater directly. Further steps in penalising a cheater include attempting to take as many other players with you when leaving the server and if possible, making note of identity information about the cheater so as to publicly circulate their identity as a cheater. These groups even encourage disgruntled players to attempt taking screen shots of the suspect in mid cheat if possible. Though they remain firm in their initial ruling of server abandonment; ignoring the act is paramount as statistically, the base psychological drive behind a cheater in multiplayer environs is the irritation of others rather than cheating to gain advantage.

In keeping with Sawyer’s *Monster Gaming*, he explains that someone of ‘monster gaming’ status and/or disposition is a player that won’t ever cheat, nor will they refer to cheat related literature, supposedly never resorting to a cheat in order to complete or gain an upper hand in any video game. [8] They may however only resort to checking a Walkthrough after the completion of a game in order to better understand some sections they might have missed. Based upon this gamer trope, we assume that ‘monster gamers’ are the class that have taken it upon themselves to formulate this zero tolerance judgment of cheating gamers.

If cheating is inherent in gaming aside from the ethic grasp of the player above all else, then can a gamer admit in all honesty to resorting to cheat related tactics at any one point in their gaming career? Does the example of the ‘Monster Gamer’ truly exist or is it simply the product of gamer pride? In the next section I will attempt to understand the gamers estimation of these examples and which truly constitute ‘cheating’.

## ETHICALITY & APPLICATION OF ‘CORRECT/INCORRECT’ CHEATING

In December of 2006, I invited a research group of 10 active video gamers residing currently in Melbourne (Australia) to take part in an empirical survey. The demographic consisted of equal male/female respondents aged between 18-35 years. Each individual was selected specifically based upon his or her social, academic and/or employed background(s) in the new media arena. Thus all respondents came with a similar particular social and cultural capital that would seem to suggest that they are informed about the politics, policies and practices surrounding gaming and game play. They each completed a survey consisting of 14 questions relevant to the concept of cheating in video gaming, offering their own approach to the ethical nature of advantage. Through the collated responses I have attempted to understand why cheating can or cannot take place.

One of the key motivations for the case study was to sample the often grey and unspoken area of ‘cheating’ to ascertain what methods were considered acceptable and which ones were viewed as categorically unethical. To begin with there was a 90% affirmative response to the admission of cheating. Respondents admitted to the use of a wide variety of cheat related wares, each of the ten subjects listed an individual artefact that belonged to a school of cheating, including the use of Walkthroughs and/or FAQ’s, Cheat codes, Build/Levelling guides (MMORPG only) and the in particularly poignant exploitation of programming flaws, or ‘Bugs’ (errors within the game engine that are discovered and subjugated). Most interestingly though, where players admitted openly to exploiting bugs within a game, they justified this particular cheat in stating that it was the fault of the game developers for releasing a game to retail with such addictive exploitative bugs going undetected, in the case of computer games, the fault of the developer continued for as long as it went unremedied by patch updates for the title.

The bugs (where discovered) were stated to have only ever been utilised in gaining a slightly unbalanced advantage over AI or other online players. One respondent, age 30, justified the use of bug exploitation as they only ever used the advantage to complete a section of their game that they were previously unable to overcome using their skill alone, with this example;

*(in) Metriod Prime (2002)*– there’s a boss fight where you’re required to kill a giant rock beast. After SEVERAL attempts to defeat the boss legitimately I found that if you back into one particular crevice in the arena, Giant Rock Beast is unable to reach you. So eventually I defeated him with 100% health intact. I gained absolutely no

level of satisfaction from killing the rock man in this fashion, but was gaining no satisfaction from repeatedly dying either.

When asked about cheating at a capacity that would fall under the category of Hacking, 70% responded negative. With the remaining 30% admitting openly to having used external game altering codes/wares such as Patches and Trainers.

The majority of respondents though, were unanimous in their honesty, predominantly stating that they retained the desire to keep their player statistics honest. From this we could ascertain that the majority of gamers, while having utilised methods identifiable as cheating, do not however approve of using external wares to alter the factory preset of their games in order to gain advantage.

The subjects were then urged to recall any moments during past play, where they had accused another gamer of cheating. Respondents intimated that undesirable tactics could only ever be classified as cheating where they subverted enjoyment and/or ambition during play, to the point of rendering a game unplayable. This suggests that other players can only ever detect a cheater when the game has become significantly, therefore noticeably unbalanced; making accusations rare.

Though statistically the response to this section yielded a 50/50 outcome, the 50% that responded positively, suggested that single player cheating is viewed as a detriment to the individual only. In the case of Multiplayer online gaming; Camping (avoiding movement within the game as a means of breaching certain rules) was apparently the most frequent form of cheating, possibly as it is easily noticeable to other multi-players, is unjust and frowned upon.

However one respondent age 30 notes, that in certain team based FPS games, a party member is usually designated specifically for camping as it is often a necessary tactic within this game genre. Respondents felt at times that judging the ease at which they had been bested by certain others could only suggest the use of some form of unfair, concealed advantage i.e. Aimbot (automated weapon aiming constructs), although the grounds for accusation are unsupported. Almost all respondents made mention of the more detectable methodologies such as Corpse Camping, Gold farming through Ebay (the real time sale of game world currency) the creation of bots to be used specifically for gold farming, and players that resort to buying pre-made

avatars from Ebay so as to start a game at an unfair level, rather than earning their stats.

At this point, respondents had been successful in discussing the concept. They honestly confessed to the use of cheating and outlined a hierarchy of cheat methodology ranging from the justifiable to the unacceptable. They were asked then to state their understanding of right and wrong cheat related techniques. 80% responded positively to the existence of right and wrong cheat models. In terms of particular understandings 50% stated that single player cheating relies on the ethics of the individual. 40% stated that cheating in a multiplayer scenario is permissible as long as the cheater acknowledges publicly that they are using a guide or advantage that others might consider inappropriate. One respondent age 28, suggested that, 'surely "wrong cheating" is a tautology and "right cheating" is an oxymoron.'

While a second respondent age 30, suggested that the act of 'Twinking' (players of higher class allowing levelling advantage to players of lower class) to be a widely acceptable form of cheating, avowing;

A game that prides itself on its in-game community (eg MMORPG guilds) is all but encouraged by the publishers to enhance a sense of belonging between guild mates.

Other respondents echo this in suggesting that build & leveling guides for MMORPG are not so much a form of cheating as they are necessary training. In addition to this, 30% suggested that cheating was acceptable as a form of catch up when save game points were far between. Another respondent age 30, names the use of official Walkthrough codex as a form of cheating, before expanding upon the unavoidable requirement to reference them in many cases, in a sense identifying these types of literature as a developer approved form of cheating. They state,

A player who buys the game guide with their initial purchase of the software is obviously planning on using it. The mere fact that it is available to you is a temptation. Although used judiciously the game guide or walkthrough can help to merely enjoy your experience of the entire game without having one small section ruin your progression. Example: reading a section of the *Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* (2002) walkthrough to end countless hours of randomly sailing around an empty ocean looking for a small island that is necessary to continue

the game.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a recurring ideal of the gamer's individual choice to play by the rules; experiencing the game as it was intended. Players that cheat other players in an online scenario are breaching a common grasp of ethicality and can therefore be justly branded as 'cheaters' aside from right and wrong definitions. Those who chose to subvert the intended flow of a single player game by cheating however, are taking this option based solely on their own sense of what they would permit themselves, this is still considered to be cheating however less heinous.

Next the respondents were asked that if the knowledge of a cheat hypothetically became available to them, would they remain interested in completing the game based upon its initial challenge, or if the temptation to cheat would potentially win out; 60% responded positive, though these subjects apparently would not hold themselves responsible for using the cheat, once again Developers seem to take the blame for the emergence & practice of cheating as in all cases they have allowed the cheat to be included in the game to begin with.

Be it accidentally (in the event of a Bug) or intentionally (in the event of a Debug). Even where external game alterations or Hacks could have been made, they are justified by the respondent as never having been necessary if the game had remained consecutively interesting from start to finish. Some respondents indicate that they would be more likely to consider cheating if it has no effect on the game progression, narrative or difficulty. This particular description however is rare and instantly removed from the common cheat model.

At a fundamental level, cheating seems to be acceptable to the 60% affirmative and the 40% negative if it allows the gamer to eventually access all potential modes of the game, upon completion. As one respondent age 31 notes, 'the Cheat will wait, its not going anywhere. It will still be there when I complete the game.'

Another respondent reflects that they view cheating in some aspects as an individual and enjoyable facet of the game itself. Curiosity might prompt the gamer to inspect the cheat, however they would rarely use it to complete the game. Another also felt that gaming has evolved the concept of cheating presently, perhaps concerning cheating from a marketing angle. They state cheating should not prolong the use of a game product, as ideally the developers want the game to be accomplishable without

cheating, thus a gamer can then purchase a new game.

It is important to note here that if the cheat its self requires time and skill to uncover, this also will apparently reduce the gamers interest in accessing it, perhaps more so than moral reasoning. Ultimately gamers will only cheat if the game is boring yet the desire to complete it remains. One player puts cheating down to 'Post release support by developers' and in the case of multiplayer 'Research into online practice'.

Next the respondents were asked about debugging utilities in older single player titles and their consideration of said utilities as cheats or simply an extension of the game options; while 60% answered positively, this section still worked well in coaxing the group to specify their definition/opinion. The respondents agreed, though they felt that attaining knowledge of the cheat prior to completion in many cases would render the completion of the game somewhat pointless. One respondent age 30, observes that, 'Anything outside of the set conditions in the game standard is a cheat'.

Another states that there is no affirmative or negative in the differentiation here, and that rather than looking behind the curtain, they are merely experiencing the entire package through the metaphorical window of the game. In more detailed examples, the subjects seem to follow an understanding of cheats that have been left accessible in-game & indicated directly by developers. These were obviously intended to be found and utilised by the player, however the exact same advantages can be accessed through cheat codes which have not been indicated by the developer, nor have they been detailed in the game instructions and have only been learned through a source external to the game. Both are seen as unfair advantage, though the latter of the two might allow gamers to use these unfair advantages earlier in the game progression than intended, rather than uncovering them where actually intended. Nevertheless, both roads to accessing the cheat were left inside the retail game framework by its developers. Aside from these separations, by definition, if these advantages are utilised during play, they are still cheats. One sites debugging as a form of Unlockable or Easteregg and as being specifically harmless and rewarding to a player.

Next the group was asked to separate single player from multiplayer, asking them to agree or disagree that cheating has only truly come into existence since the birth of online gaming, as the player is no longer cheating themselves alone. 80% respond positive, though 20% state that simply entering into online play should be an arena where cheating

is unavoidable and expected. Others feel that exploiting farming or build tactics online are merely getting the maximum amount of enjoyment for their buck, As one respondent, age 25, observes,

I'm playing for my own amusement rather than to maintain a metaphor for others... As long as my gameplay experience and the experience of seeing a narrative unfold are not compromised for me, then I don't see that I'm cheating anyone (even if I am distorting the in-game economy).

Another respondent age 31, states that cheating in this regard adds to the game dynamic, ultimately bringing online play closer to how things take place in reality, which aligns with Chris Crawford's description of games as "A closed formal system that subjectively represents a subset of reality" [1] or as the respondent avows,

Online play utterly changes the dynamic such that the concept of cheating becomes more like the real world... In any true multiplayer sense, life included, we have to deal with how to handle those who choose to not follow prescribed etiquette.

The majority however want to know first and foremost, who they are cheating & who in turn is potentially cheating them; other players? AI players? They also make light of the fact that socially maladjusted gamers unfortunately make up a large part of the online gaming community, which drastically thins out the players interested in abiding by the rules. Which in turn, thins out the desire to best someone based on your skill alone.

The next question asked the group to recall ever being encouraged to cheat in a multiplayer scenario, and if so, did they feel that if afforded them a degree of fairness or equal opportunity to other players of varying experience. Or did it in fact spoil the challenge they sought initially. 60% answered negative, those that had been propositioned to cheat seem to have been only interested in taking on the cheat if it was unfortunately a tactic used by the majority, One respondent, age 30, uses the example of 'Duck jumping' & 'Rocket Jumping',

I felt that I was using an in-game glitch to wean an unexpected, creative advantage. While I wasn't altering the fundamental principles of the game engine or abusing a developer oversight I felt that cheating in this manner reflected a unique approach to playing and that the reward was justified... Once other players understood my

approach to play the advantage was lost and the practice no longer featured in my game-play style.

Ultimately the players seem quite divided over this particular section, some state that they have never wished to cheat while others succumbed to the temptation. Most importantly though, its here that we've learned that the culture of cheating is cultivated and maintained primarily through the player network its self; more often than any other instance players would not have been aware of a specific cheat unless it had been introduced to them through other players exploiting, coveting or encouraging others to cheat. Though, the respondents remained quite reluctant to cheat if they knew, first hand, that they could potentially ruin the game for everyone else on the server, they still state that the direct knowledge of playing against other people should override the temptation to cheat all together.

In an attempt to trap the group into understanding the existence of un accomplishable game obstacles, the next section asked if they had ever encountered a videogame that they were certain its level of difficulty rendered near impossible to complete unless resorting to cheating. 90% had little trouble in listing numerous titles they were surely convinced as being unachievable to some extent.

Respondents put a limit of roughly 48 hours on play, until they feel they've exhausted their ability to pass an obstacle; at which point they will resort to cheating or quitting the game permanently. One Respondent notes that occasionally a game is released 'broken' or incomplete where bugs are concerned, making the need for cheating a necessary evil in order to complete the game.

Another respondent age 30, notes that their reasons for gaming are not identical to how they once were, asserting,

Numerous 'older games', particularly games from the era when they were expected to entertain for many months (contain) Narrative dead-ends or pin-in-haystack inventory quests. Running laps about a labyrinth of rooms looking for a hidden panel is no longer fun or acceptable as it once was in Maniac Mansion (1989), while the difficulty of many traditional side-scrollers; ie- Ghosts n' Goblins (1985) is no longer acceptable in an environment where I most commonly play to fill hours with a game and not months.

Another respondent interestingly states they feel that the concept of difficulty modes within a game are a form of

cheating if the gamer opts to complete the game at its lowest level of difficulty. They expand however by describing the difficulty setting in most contemporary games as impractical, saying that their experience in current games with the difficulty set to highest has clearly not been tested or thought out as the play (at a calculated level) has in many cases become simply impossible to complete, with player stats and health simply not being set to a balanced amount in order to complete the game. This was echoed in the concerns of another respondent, age 25 using a slightly differing example asserts, "additionally, some character based games (eg. D&D games) can sometimes create that problem by creating challenges that just don't seem to be complete-able unless you were a certain race/class, etc."

Aside from this one or two respondents defended their gaming pride by stating flatly that no game they recall has ever been too hard for their skill.

In the final section I asked the group to take all these examples of cheating into consideration and decide (as gamers) if they felt that cheating is a necessary know-how of interactive gaming, or a refuge for gamers lacking skill.

The group states that a good game does in fact allow cheating. And a bad game allows cheating that will considerably unbalance the play. Aspects of games such as wealth can easily be accessed through cheating, however other aspects such as trophies of experience simply cannot be obtained through cheating. One respondent states that gamers who cheat are more impatient than they are lacking in skill. Another states that, while they don't see cheating as a necessary tool of trade for online or single play, they do know first hand that the gamers possessing knowledge of forbidden cheats & advantages for a specific game are usually people who had to previously know quite a lot about the game its self. And thus are usually quite exceptionally skilled at said game. Another backs this up by providing the example of 'Speed runs' in which a gamer has recorded their completion of a game title in under a staggeringly short amount of time, while this would take many hours of play to work out the ideal route to take through the game, and an incredible amount of skill to pull off successfully without fault (while recording to video) it still provides others who view the video with a stripped back expose of the game from start to finish, and could even be viewed as similar to consulting a walkthrough or FAQ. One respondent age 30 summaries as, "People who cheat in games are merely avoiding the challenge that the designers have spent so long creating."

Another sums up by stating that the concept of a cheat relies on the game and its developer, as gamers that cheat are

radically altering the game experience for everyone else. To this end, those other players have no choice but to rise to the new challenges put forward and resort to using the same cheats. Gamers who attempt to break games rather than simply complete them, see what they're doing as a natural practice, and they usually do this only if they have enjoyed the game so much so that they resort to experimentation with said game.

Breaking a game is tied closely with completing it the natural way, which in the end rests on the shoulders of developers and how much attention they have given to their title. OR, as one respondent concluded, "cheating is almost always a sign of an inferior player, a n00b as it were; and n00bs are typically pawned in the end".

**CONCLUSION: REACHING THE GAME GOAL;  
(Instinctually approaching through Superior means/ethically approaching through less efficient means.)**

While the case study is in no ways definitive or exhaustive on the topic of cheating, the individual voices do shed some light and insight onto an often-authorized and nebulous discourse that is deeply imbued by the local. As has been noted in the case study respondents comments we can ascertain that some aspects of challenge within games can be poorly constructed at a level of difficulty where the likelihood of the player passing is quite low, these areas where encountered are among some of the poorest aspects of design as above all else they quickly reduce a gamers immersion and thus, their subscription to the game. This is where cheating can sometimes be introduced, not as something that destroys the linear flow of the game by removing an important boundary but rather something that aids a player briefly in moving past this poorly constructed obstacle, before disabling said cheat and returning to the game flow, even if the disabling/enabling of said cheat could be something as simple and pedestrian as changing the difficulty setting of your game to better suit skill.

However a player's victory over an obstacle or guardian in-game is usually heightened by the unconscious elation for the opening of previous restriction and the unlocking of the deeper areas of the game to come. This unconscious excitement at advancement is only ever hampered if and when the player prematurely decides to escape the confinement of the challenge through cheating, rather than completing the challenge unassisted.

We cheat sometimes as a form of expedition when growing impatient, sometimes as a form of salvation when our

interest begins to wane and mostly as a validation of discovery.

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