

by Jason White

Video game trends for the younger crowd

MMORPG?

Get to know the online gaming world

MASSIVE MULTI-PLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME (MMORPG) is an acronym parents who are tuned into their kids' lives may have been hearing a lot about, whether in the news or from their children but yet don't really know what it is.

An MMOG, or massive multi-player online game, is a virtual world that has a consistent environment; there is no real end so players can keep going in the game for as long as they are interested. Players can do quests to help make their character better, or just make armor, go fishing, kill monsters, lead dungeon raids, ride horses, or just hang out and chat in the local town.

They key here is that it's a fully interactive world, filled with various computer controlled characters (NPC) and even more real people controlled characters. This gives players a chance to talk with people from all over the country and even the world. So an MMORPG soon becomes more than just a game, it can become a very real place for a lot of people. It can become a place where a child or teen goes to escape from the pressures of school and life and lose themselves. But it's something that should not be looked at as just another game.

In an MMORPG a player can literally be anything they want to, from a hero to a villain, beautiful to ugly, young to old and even a different gender. These games can appeal to the teen crowd because they may feel they are too different or alone to relate to people around them. In the virtual world accomplishments can become well known, and a child will rally matter to other people in a way that in some cases far exceeds the real world.

Unlike the computer controlled games, a MMORPG is mostly about the other people playing. As weird as it sounds these games become virtual worlds that have all the drama of the real one except here things go away with a click of a button.

MMORPG = Real People

Parents really need to be aware of what goes on in this game more so than most. "If your kid is too young to play in neighborhood park without you watching, your kid is too young to play an MMORPG without your active supervision. This is a virtual world with thousands of other people you don't know," says Sanya Weathers, director of community relations for Mythic Entertainment.

In games like Dark Ages of Camelot by Mythic Entertainment, World of Warcraft by Blizzard Entertainment and to a small extent a game like The Sims 2 by Electronic Arts, the ages of the players ranges from 12 and older. The games are rated T for Teen and these companies do everything possible to keep it that way but things can be altered by the players. However, all the content that comes directly from the companies that make the games is strictly rated T and approved by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

"The T rating for The Sims 2 is accurate, and there is nothing in the game that exceeds that rating. However, virtually all modern PC games can be modified in some fashion with downloaded content from the Internet. This content is not rated and could be anything. Parents should closely monitor their children's Internet activities, whether related

to games or not," says Don Laabs, senior producer for The Sims 2.

Every player is judged only on how they play and how they speak, well type rather. "Your child is being judged solely on his (or her) communication skills and his ability to play the game. If he is an articulate, funny, interesting kid that plays with skill, he could be mistaken for much older," states Weathers.

Unlike a playground no one can see your child so they don't know they are dealing with some one younger. Most players, if they know your child's age, will be respectful of that and watch what they do and say. But just like in the real world all it takes is one creep to ruin someone's day. This is where a well informed parent can jump in.

Parents Can Be Heroes, Too

In most MMORPGs, like Dark Ages of Camelot and World of Warcraft players join things called guilds. These are player run organizations, like clubs, that help each other out for the more difficult quests that can't be done by a single player. Many of these guilds have their own websites and a parent can register on them to see what a child will be doing in a game or ask for the child's log in and see what is going on by reading the different forums on the site. There are also community sites run by the video game companies, like www.camelotherald.com from Mythic. Here a parent can actually see the character that was created and monitor it from there.

According to Laabs, senior producer for Sims2, "Virtually all MMOs include the ability of players to chat with each other online, and there is typically no restriction on that (text only) content." So the warning on the game label that says "Game Experience May Change During Online Play" should be taken seriously.

Another way is to keep the computer in a public area of the home. That one little thing will keep nearly all the potential harm away from your kid, because he's not going to

get into inappropriate conversations if you might be reading over his shoulder at any moment. You can also see if he is getting too emotionally involved in the game if you're seeing him play.

The best way to know what goes on in game is to actually make a character. Sitting down and playing for a few hours is the best way to see what makes the MMORPG such a fun and engrossing game as opposed to the regular games. It can be a great way to spend time with some

quality time with the kids. Most of the MMORPGs have quests that require thought, planning and specific strategies that can be fun to figure out for everyone.

I know. I have been playing World of Warcraft for a year now and have made many great friends from all over the country and belong to a guild. So keep in mind if a parent feels that their child doesn't have the right maturity level to handle interactions with people that may be decades older than them, the MMORPG game is not for them.

