

## The Internet as a Community

There is a lot of discussion about how the Internet will affect our society, more and more people becoming connected to the web, its information and other people. For the first time people are able to share ideas and thoughts with others who may live halfway around the world. People are able to come together with others who believe like them or who have similar interests. A Chat room is a great forum for this, as are newsgroups with email lists. There are also many online games, some of which are the typical male-oriented stalk and kill games. But there are many others that require creativity and imagination. Some of these games create a sense of community among the players. These places fulfill the requirements that we would use to define a community. For example, they have a physical space, or world, the players interact very regularly, some log on everyday, many of the players share similar interests and beliefs, the place has a definite size and history, the members of the community are concerned with the welfare and improvement of the community, and it functions much like a normal community with fights, lovers, and gossip. For almost two years I have participated in such a community. I've made friends and laughed and cried. I can't say that anything I felt was any less "real" than what I've experienced in real life. This online society has government, history, defined world, laws, money, and even Gods and Goddesses. The following is my experience of an online society.

When I came to St. Olaf I had never heard of a Multi User Dungeon (MUD). I had a very vague concept of what a role-playing game was. I didn't know they existed online, except for some games such as EverQuest, which include graphics and sounds. I personally thought it was absurd to pay \$10 a month to just play a computer game. My roommate was paying an unusual amount of attention to black screen with colored text that seemed to scroll by at a fairly regular pace. She seemed utterly absorbed in it for long periods of time.

Finally, my curiosity got the better of me and I asked her to teach me how to play. The black screen was actually a game. A text-based role-playing game set in the fantasy world of Melmoth. My imagination went wild, a world made up of words; it was just like being a fantasy novel except I could actually interact with others. The best part was that I was able to actually create the character I used to play this game, her history, personality, and everything else about her came from my mind. My roommate helped me download and install the MUD client, a program that allows a person to connect with any MUD. It has color and all kinds of features that make playing the game easier. Melmoth player-wise is a typical MUD, from the survey I administered (See Appendix A); it is mostly white, American, high school boys who play. Of course there are exceptions, but the age and maturity of the players definitely changes the tone

of the community. Especially since it is so homogenous, the quality of the community will be affected because of the seeming lack of diversity in backgrounds and age of the players.

## Character Creation

In order to enter Melmoth, first I had to create a character I would use to interact with others in the game. I had to pick a race and a class (classes can be divided into magic-using and fighting, with a few exceptions). There are many options for making a character. Players may have as many characters as they want to create; there is no limit. Melmoth is a MUD that supports but does not enforce role-playing. Role-playing is creating a persona, or character and acting out that persona. For example, the first character I created was a shy healer (cleric). I decided that she had come to Melmoth by accident after her family was killed by a plague. I decided to create a background and personality for my character but it is not absolutely necessary in order to play the game. Many people don't role-play at all. After a long and confusing creation process, which left me wondering how people do this with no help or knowledge of the game, I was finally transported into the game. Being unfamiliar with the basic commands and having no idea what I was reading was disconcerting. The text seemed to fly by before I could sort out what I should be reading. I understood how someone who didn't speak the language would feel transported to the United States. Everything around them would be unfamiliar and confusing. The very language was different; people used expressions and acronyms that didn't make sense. It took a lot of time to learn the words and actions to be understood by others.

## Navigation

First I had to learn simple directions, which are organized into the four compass directions as well as up and down. In my everyday life, I am used to "right" and "left," thinking in terms of "east" and "west" was very confusing. The game is organized into a series of rooms. Each room has its own description. It would be like the rooms of a house, except outside spaces are also described. You stand in one and the text description tells you what is in that room in terms of space, physical objects, and occasionally sensory descriptions (i.e.: running water, or temperature). There could also be other people in the room with you, whether they are computer-controlled dummies (called mobiles or mobs for short) or other players. The description will also tell you the ways out of the room; those are given in the compass directions. Entering one of those

directions will take you to the next room. It is a lot like reading a book; it is dependent on your own imagination to picture what the rooms could look like if they actually existed.

When I first started playing, Melmoth consisted entirely of descriptions, every place from cities to mountains to underground dungeons were all written out. Recently, something new was added to break up the terrain into areas, i.e.: cities, castles, etc. and the “wilderness” areas with mountains, rivers, oceans and forests. Stepping out of the main floating city, Eprellis, brings up a graphical representation of the terrain at the bottom of the city. Graphical in the sense that it has colors, but the picture is not made of images, but rather symbols representing various features. For example “o” is Ocean, “x” is Forest, and “^” means Mountains. All these are color coded so they are easy to understand. You also see yourself and sometimes others moving along in the wilderness, you are always a pink “@” symbol. This gives a more real representation of travel, since when you leave an area you can see where you’re going but entering a new area changes the images back to text again. Travel over the wilderness takes time but it is made quicker by purchasing a mount and riding it across the distances. Melmoth has more than one continent and various islands to explore. It’s a big place and easy to get lost.

## Communication

The main gathering place of Melmoth is New Eprellis. This is a floating city high in the Melmothian skies, held in place by a giant chain anchored to the ground. In Eprellis, one can eat, drink, sleep, gossip, trade, shop, and learn new spells and skills. The main cathedral is pretty much the hang out spot. There is a healer stationed there who will cure your ills for a price in gold.

Communication with any player currently on Melmoth is possible in a variety of ways. If you are in a room with other players, the easiest way is to <say> something. This means that anyone in that room can see what you are writing. Another method of expression is a <social>: there is a list of automatic socials, and by typing one word anyone in the room with you will see what you did. For example, type <smile> and the room will see, <your character name> smiles happily. A way of personalizing those expressions is called an <emote>, type <emote> and then a sentence and the MUD will automatically insert your name at the beginning. For example <emote> smiles politely, everyone in the room will see <your char name> smiles politely. It took a while to get used to referring to myself in the third person. You can communicate with someone outside of the room can be done by sending them a <tell>. Simply <tell> <player name> and your message. Only that person will see it. Some socials can also be done to someone who is not in the room, and they will only be

seen by that other person. Socials and emotes can also be made public so every player currently logged in can see them. There is also a myriad of different “channels” for public use. The list of public channels looks something like this:

## Channels

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Gossip- Gossip is the In Character (IC) channel, it is used to role-play (RP) publicly.

Auction- Items are bought and sold in public, MUD run auctions.

Music- Anyone who wants to “sing” out their favorite lyrics can use music.

Q/A- Really two channels, Question and Answer, pretty self-explanatory.

Quote- Amusing or teasing quotes of any kind can be broadcast over this channel.

Grats- Used to give a congratulations out to someone.

Shouts- Used for shouting anything to the entire MUD, but causes a lag so it can't be done over and over.

Tells- Private player to player communications.

Quiet mode- Turning on quiet mode only allows you to see things that are said in the room you are in and socials.

OOC- The Out Of Character channel, for any conversations about the outside world or in game matters but not in a role-playing way.

Curse- A channel for cuss words or discussions of a sensitive nature.

Wartalk- An In Character channel for chest beating and posturing.

Newbie- A channel for newbies to ask for help and ask questions.

Commune- A way to communicate with the Immortals, using this channel will be seen by every Immortal on at the time.

Clan talk- For communication between clan mates, all clan members see this channel.

The differentiation between these channels is done mainly by color. Each one is a different color and when someone uses one it is usually shown. For example: Bob OOC: Hi everyone!, Sally quotes “The only good dragon is a dead one.”

There are some restrictions to what can be said even on public channels. There are strict rules against harassment or inappropriate topics. Most of those topics can be taken to curse, including political discussions, religion or any sensitive topics. If people don't want to watch these conversations they can simply turn the channel off. It's a nice feature and would be useful in real life, if we didn't like what someone was saying we could just shut them off. It isn't that easy sometimes, there have been fights and arguments on public channels before, the IMM's generally stop them, or ask them to talk about it somewhere else.

Melmoth is supposed to be a place to relax and have fun; stressful

conversations are frowned upon.

## Social Interaction

There are two main features of Melmoth, most people play for one of these reasons. One is role-playing (RP) and the other is Player Killing (PK). Role-playing is one of the most creative and versatile activities on Melmoth. A player can create any kind of character they want. There is a wide range of races and classes to choose from and to that combination the player can add any sort of character history or personality they desire. Gender is also a chosen characteristic, on Melmoth one can only choose to be male or female. Often a male player will choose to create a female character. This creates tension sometimes because females usually get more attention than males since there are less female players. In my experience, I have been the target of numerous sexual advances. The anonymous aspect of the MUD encourages some males to say things they would never say to a female's face. Sexual harassment is never tolerated and the one time it happened to me was swiftly dealt with. This is not the norm, however, there is usually a playful atmosphere about sexuality. Generally males are not looked down upon because of playing a female character; in fact most of the males I know have played a female at some point. The MUD gives that flexibility for exploration of different roles and genders.

The game has many tools to aid in the presentation of a character. A description can be set so when others look at you the first thing they see is how you have chosen to describe your character. It can be anything from physical description to how the person behaves at first glance to what they carry or wear. Everyone is given space after his or her character name to add a title; it can be anything as long as it is not blatantly offensive. Also a tone of voice may be added so that when the character speaks it is shown before their words. There are also a few more RPtools, which have been added recently. Role-playing is pretty much the most important aspect of the fantasy realm; if you want to interact with others in this way then it adds so much depth to the game. Most people think of their characters as separate from themselves; we talk about our characters in the third person. We separate what we know Out of Character from what that character knows In Character. Not everyone is able to grasp this concept; they think that whatever you know, your character should know. I have noticed that the people who are the really good and well-known role players generally have this separation. It is important because it makes the character's lives more realistic, because they are not gods; they only know what happens to them. Although, as a player of that character I get to decide what happens to them, and I usually know more than my character. It is also more fun to expose them to different situations and try to decide how they would

react. Oddly, sometimes I would find that my characters would seem to have a life of their own; they would change and grow without my interference. It was also difficult to keep my emotions separate from what the character was going through. Just like a good movie or novel, we can get emotionally attached or involved with the characters and so what hurts them, hurts us.

Role-playing is not for everyone. In talking to players I found a variety of opinions on the subject. One male player said, “Yea, in my opinion RP is the base of Melmoth. Some people go there for PK, some just because friends there. I think without RP, the game is nothing. I RP, yea, it's not too hard, like acting but you've got to switch around emotions a lot, different people talk different, look different, etc.”

On the other hand, another male said, “RP again is what people make it. Is it important? To those that play for the RP of the game. Me myself, I could care less about all of it. I have always felt like a thumb trying to "pretend" something I am not. I found that a lot of the characters I have RP'd have been really close to my own personality. I have seen people leave the game because of RP so, I guess for that person it was very important. But then again, people like myself.. I could care less if I saw another RP note.”

RP is important because it gives a player the chance to become someone they could never be in real life. The player can live out all the fantasies he or she has kept inside. For some people this means they live more in the world of Melmoth than in the real world. On the other hand, since the character can be what you want it to be, it is easy to make a “perfect” character, someone who has no negative characteristics. However, this makes the character extremely boring to play, adding quirks is what makes it interesting to play. For me, RP is a freeing experience, I get to be who I want to be, try new things and personalities. Each of my characters is a facet of myself. This is not so different from the sorts of roles people play in real life; a person can be a mother, sister, businesswoman, and wife. Each requires different skills and even language. They all require different strengths. Many of us do a lot of role swapping in our lives.

Player Killing (PK) is the other favorite pastime of Melmoth. There are rules for who can kill another. As listed on Melmoth they are:  
The rules for PK are very straightforward. But before you consider PK'ing read Help rules and Help rules2 so that you are familiar with our harassment rules.

In order to PK on Melmoth, you must turn on the PK flag. To do this, just type 'PK' by itself, twice. If you type 'PK' followed by anything else, it will reset the

count. Warning: Once on, PK can NOT be turned off.

The limits are as follows. You may PK down 10 levels, up any number of levels (feel lucky, punk?). You may retaliate against anyone who has initiated a legal (otherwise, contact the immortals) PK action against you, so long as it is done once, and only once; no multiple deaths in revenge.

A PK action is defined to be anything that gives another character a reason to attack you; as such, nonPK characters committing PK actions repeatedly will be set PK. Actions include player killing and stealing, as well as common sensical variations:

\* Attacking

- Kill stealing (Killing a mob someone is already fighting)
- Healing someone engaged in a PK
- Dispelling someone engaged in PK
- Otherwise helping or hindering either side

\* Stealing

- Looting a player's corpse

-Picking up a player's items when the player is otherwise engaged but present

To find out why you were attacked, it is a good idea to gossip or otherwise roleplay. This is not required, but it does make the game more enjoyable if we speak to each other.

If you have questions, contact an IMM, or Ferric at [ferric@melmoth.org](mailto:ferric@melmoth.org).

Many of these actions can be done In Character or Out Of Character. As long as the player is not harassing another, they can kill when they want and don't need a specific RP reason to do it. Death on Melmoth isn't actually permanent. If a player dies in the game, they will leave a corpse behind and their spirit will float in limbo for a period of time, the length depending on their level (the higher the level the longer in limbo). Eventually they will come back to life except they will have none of their equipment or possessions. Those stay on the corpse they leave behind in the spot where they died. The player must go back to their corpse and recover their lost items. If the player is not PK then they are the only one who is allowed to remove those items from their corpse. It is illegal to remove items from a non-PK corpse. If the player is PK, however, their corpse is up for grabs to whoever killed them. The killer can take whatever he or she wants or just sacrifice the corpse and the owner loses everything. Another thing one PK player can do to another is steal or mug them. Steal is a skill that scouts and thieves have, it allows people to steal items held, but not worn by another player. Mug is a thief-only skill and it can be used to steal a piece of equipment right off the body of someone wearing it.

Whenever these two skills are used the player gets a violence timer which means they can't recall anywhere for a short period of time.

There are a variety of reasons for engaging in PK, some people do it because it is part of their RP but others choose to kill people just because they want a high kill count added to their score. PK takes strategy and skills, it also helps to have the right equipment and to know what other classes are weak against. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents is beneficial, as well as having quick reflexes if you are caught unawares. Mostly to be a good PKer takes experimentation and knowledge of the game and how battles work. Just like everywhere else, there are people who pick on others: bullies exist on Melmoth and the Immortals do everything they can to stop it when they find out. There are also sore losers, people who whine and complain because they got killed and are now naked. But being PK is a choice, so mostly people who whine don't get sympathy. There have been people who have gotten so upset about PK that they left the game. But for the most part, players understand that they are responsible for themselves and if they choose to go PK then they can't whine when bad things happen to them. There really isn't a justice system, unless a player is being harassed or repeatedly killed; then just about anything goes. Harassment is not ok, ever. It is severely punished.

PK is an interesting pastime, the MUD environment can be pretty tame, PK adds excitement for those people who don't like to explore or RP. There are some people who do nothing but PK because they have nothing else to do. The hunt and chase are a thrill for them. There is not a whole lot to worry about on Melmoth, most of the basic needs are taken care of, this leads to a lot of free time, and so someone invented PK. Melmothians don't need to work or worry about money, there is little else to do but kill mobs or go on quests. However, knowing that the person chasing you is another human is different, it changes the game into a quest for survival of the fittest. Either you have to be smart and quick and know all the tricks, or you have to have a half dozen good friends to back you up. This creates the need for alliances between players. Some will join a clan but others will just strike out on their own. Most PKers I know have at least a few friends to help them out should they get in a bind.

## Government

The Implementer (IMP), Ferric, and a group of people known as Immortals (IMMs) govern Melmoth. The Immortals' primary duty is to enforce the rules. They are granted privileges that set them above the rest of the players. All the IMMs were once players themselves and were chosen by Ferric for the extra responsibility of making sure the game runs smoothly. They are also able to use their extra privileges to enhance the game for the players, in creating quests and



new role-play. The Immortals are really a twofold position. On one hand they are the rule enforcers, any player caught breaking a rule is subject to punishment with the severity depending on the situation. This occurs like any normal punishment system: the player breaks a rule, possibly gets a warning if it's the first time, but if they continue they face varying degrees of severity of punishment. This is an Internet setting; since it is largely anonymous (although once a player logs in, Ferric is given enough information to track them down anywhere) one would ask how the IMMs could possibly punish anyone. The players would not be playing if they didn't care at least a little about their characters. The IMMs are equipped with commands that allow them to do anything from send a player to a "jail" cell to making it impossible for them to communicate with any other person logged into the game, to blocking them from logging in or deleting their character entirely. The players are expected to respect the rights of the IMMs to dictate punishments. A player is allowed to email Ferric with any complaints about an IMM but Ferric has the final say. The opinions of the Immortals range generally from positive to neutral: there weren't many extremely negative viewpoints even within the IMMs themselves. One male staff member said, "Personally I think the staff needs to get off it's ass and be more interactive with the morts [players]. The discipline is fine, however, too many imms sit high above the morts and almost refuse to come down to their level."

Or, from another inside point of view,

"Whatever we might think on a personal basis, we try to provide a uniform front to the players...either way, the IMM's for the most part become a tight knit group/family within the larger family/community of Melmoth."

The general consensus from the players was generally an acknowledgment that Melmoth couldn't run without the help and work of the Immortals.

The other side of the job of an Immortal is that each one gets to pick a "sphere" to represent, and to act out. In an In Character sense the Immortals are literally the Gods and Goddesses of the fantasy world of Melmoth. Each one picks their sphere and is able to create human or nonhuman manifestations of their divine self in the form of avatars. These avatars can have different personalities or can be separate parts of the whole sphere. For example, we have Delirium, the God of Thought. He has four separate avatars, one for Imagination, Dreams, Nightmares, and Thought. He role-plays each of them as separate beings yet part of the whole that is Delirium. It is possible to follow a God/Goddess on Melmoth as part of a character's role-play or just for fun. Some IMMs role-play more than others.

Recently, one player asked permission to become a temporary IMM in order to

role-play an evil God coming to try and take over Melmoth. The purpose was to involve the entire MUD in one role-play and it succeeded very well. The player worked very hard to involve everyone who wanted to participate. The other players were forced to take sides, most of the clans did too, and everyone had to decide according to his or her RP whether they would be for or against the evil God. The number of active players went up a great deal, RP notes were written by the dozens and the global RP channel was always going. The awareness of the world had been raised; things were taking place in areas where some players had never been. There was a strong sense of unity towards a purpose felt on Melmoth. There was a rallying cry to drive the evil out of the world. It is interesting that people were brought together and alliances made, possibly by people who never would have spoken otherwise. The world was changed by those events and the lingering effects will stay with the players for a long time. So many players and Immortals participated and it resulted in that player being raised to full Immortal status. He is now Drakoth, God of Pain and Suffering. There is a range of spheres from “good” to “neutral” to “evil.” The list of Gods/Goddesses and their spheres are as follows:

God/Goddess	Sphere
Ferric	Obscurity
Keogh	Entropy
Delirium	Thought
Slate	Winter and Loss
Nocturne	Night and Passion
Aurora	Day and Wisdom
Shaitan	Honor and the Hunt
Starkalien	Paranormal
Jorvaan	Undead
Glemogar	Machine
Drakoth	Pain and Suffering
Sasha	Serenity
Karandras	Intrigue
Rikakou	Strife

Each has their own role-play and group of followers. Following a God/Goddess is basically an individual thing and how each player wants to express their religious ideas is up to them.

### Laws and Rights

The rules on Melmoth are pretty commonsense; everyone knows the rules

and they are quick to point out to those who are new what they are. The MUD has extensive help files for any curious newbies or confused older players. The rules for the game are simply laid out:

These are our Rules. Please Follow Them. If you observe somebody breaking them, note to Ferric.

- \* No Harassment. At all. This includes racial/sexual slurs, unsolicited sexual advances, or spamming. Harassment may result in character deletion.

- \* Cursing should be limited as much as possible to the 'curse' channel.

We will cut you slack, but flagrantly ignoring this rule will get you in hot water.

- \* No Cheating. This includes asking for favors from gods and exploiting bugs. If you know of a bug but do not report it and are later found out, expect repercussions. Not reporting it is as bad as using it.

- \* No idling; see Help Idle.

- \* Read Help Multi for rules on multiplaying. [Multiplaying is basically logging on two of your characters at a time from the same computer]

- \* Wartalk channel is for all aggressive chest-beating type talk. Please keep it there.

- \* Pk is legal (see help PK for specifics), so long as your RP allows for it.

RP reasons include (but are not limited to): Clan War, Clan hatred, personal RP reasons. Non-RP (therefore unacceptable) reasons include: So and so is dating your sister, so and so said something OOC you don't like, etc. etc. You may be asked to explain the RP of any PK you partake in.

- \* Pk Continued: You may kill a person \*within reason\*. Killing a person to the extent that they may give up the character and quit is unreasonable. Same goes for 'pk until they renounce'. PK to this extent is considered harassment, and will be dealt with as such.

- \* No advertising of other MUDs. This includes notes, tells, and any global channel. This, above all, upsets me.

- \* The MUD is a game. Use it to escape from reality, not to deal with any Real-life \*issues\* you may have with other players. Note issues to mean 'problems', not necessarily just 'things to talk about'.

- \* We credit the players with common sense. We therefore also expect you to use it.

- \* The immortals are not unreasonable. Respect us, and we will respect you. Disrespect us, and we may decide it easier just not to deal with you any more. Addendum. Respect the IMMs. You may not like them, but they are here to run the game. Showing flagrant disrespect for an IMM will get you in trouble, no two ways about it. If you have a problem with an IMM, write Ferric about it in as much detail as you can (ferric@melmoth.uwyo.edu).

\* Polling. Sorry, no such thing. Just wanted to make sure you read through all these other rules :).

These rules will evolve (quickly at first, then slower) to address any other issues which may arise.

Those are the basic rules of the game and everyone is expected to know and follow them. Punishment as stated before is generally on a situational basis and is determined by the Immortals.

This system of government is actually quite different than what most Americans are used to. Melmoth is not a democracy, Ferric is the supreme leader and what he says goes. He makes all the rules and decisions. The IMMs and players may appeal to him but the actual decision is up to him. Players do not actually have any rights other than what is given to them by Ferric. In fact, on the MUD the rights of the players are explicitly stated:

Here is the Managements Stance on Players Rights:

The only inalienable right of a player is to delete his/her char and not return. Further privileges are granted through help rules/rules2 [See above], but there is a distinct line drawn between "inalienable rights" and "privileges". The reasoning here is simple. So long as you are provided a nice, clean, fun place to MUD, you won't leave. So, it is in my best interest to provide you with such. This prevents abuse of power on my part, and it is what makes me police my IMMS.

If you have complaints about how Melmoth is run, you do have recourse. You can email or note me (for long missives, email is best). Email complaints should go to ferric@melmoth.org. It is, after all, in my best interest to be reasonable, and in order to do that I must attempt to please the majority.

It is interesting to note that we aren't really oppressed, it's not like we have no say at all. And Ferric does his best to make everyone happy, because it is in his best interest to make the majority happy or everyone would leave. There have been many people who have become unhappy with Ferric's rulings and left. Some return, some don't. In talking to Ferric about why he runs Melmoth the way he does he said this,

"I chose to be the only Implementer purely for ego reasons, I suppose. I enjoy the fact that Melmoth is what it is due to the work I've put into it. Plus, a common problem is that if a team of coders argues, one will take the code and start up a competing MUD with the same codebase. The IMMs all come from the player base, and I had met none of them prior to placing them in administrative roles."

Basically, it is simpler for him if he is the only one in charge, but he does rely

on the IMMs to know what's going on and to tell him what he needs to know. There is a large amount of communication that goes on between the IMMs and Ferric. It is a surprisingly peaceful society despite the fact that the ruler is in fact all seeing and all knowing if he chooses to be. (The MUD records every command that is entered by every player and makes a log of it. If Ferric chose he could read everything the players ever did or said. However it would take a lot of work to sort through all the logs.) It is not as if Ferric is standing there, breathing down everyone's neck. He is on mostly every day but only for a short time, because he does have a real life to attend to. He does not always make himself visible to the players, possibly because when he does he is bombarded with complaints and requests. As a player, I had very little contact with Ferric; this was probably because I was quiet and played by the rules. I didn't have any reason to talk with him directly. I was actually afraid of him, since he was "The Creator," but one day I got up the courage to send him an IM and found that he was indeed very polite and friendly.

## Economics and Basic Needs

Melmoth does not compare with a real society in terms of economics. It is not necessary for players to have a job or earn a living. Since it is a fantasy world, this doesn't make sense. Some players may invent professions for their characters but they don't actually seek to earn money. Money is obtained by killing the computer-generated mobiles in the game. Once you kill a mob, you get whatever equipment and money it was carrying. Once you sacrifice the corpse, you get a little money for that as well. Money is very easy to get and anyone can get it quickly. There are stores throughout the game that sell just about anything imaginable, from potions to food to pets to equipment. Most of those prices aren't unreasonable. Money is also used to buy things off the MUD-wide auctions that take place whenever a player doesn't want something. Bidding is done in gold, and a player must be carrying it on their person. There is a bank in Eprellis where players can deposit and withdraw money. Since money does have weight once the limit of pounds the character can carry is reached the player must get rid of some of the items or money he or she is carrying. That, at least, is realistic.

Basic needs like food and water are met easily and at no cost. Most classes have a spell called "create food" which does exactly that. When a character gets hungry they simply create the food and eat it. The classes who don't have that spell have a skill called "butcher" which allows them to create up to four steaks out of any corpse, which are edible. The same goes for water; most classes have

a “create spring” or “create water” spell. “Create water” is cast on a container and it fills it with water. Drinking containers are easy to obtain and there is a permanent spring in Eprellis for an easy fill up. So with basic needs taken care of, there really isn’t a strong need for money. Some players expressed that they would like to see that changed; they want the money system changed to be more realistic but that would mean wiping all the bank accounts, which is rather drastic. Most things are done by trading or by simply asking someone for something. Making friends is a good way to get the things you need. I will generally help whoever asks me by getting what they need, if I can. I don’t usually expect anything in return and my helpfulness has paid off because people generally remember that. The fact that Melmoth is not a money-based society is a good thing, it helps shift the focus onto other things and there is still greed and hoarding of rare equipment and such but it would be much worse if money were harder to get. There is less tension because of the current system and most players don’t care if it stays the same.

## History and Creation

Melmoth in fact does have a long and varied history. Since it has been operational for 6 years it has undergone many changes both physically and in terms of players. I have actually heard people talk about the “good old days” when this or that used to be. There are players who played on Melmoth when it was in its infancy that are still around today. There are legacies, stories told about events that happened and people who walked in the same places as players today. Much of the history of Melmoth is oral, and it is still possible to visit the places that are mentioned in the stories. The creation of Melmoth is written, for anyone to read (See Appendix B) This, I am told, is not the original creation story, this one has been changed and the old one may not be obtainable. Things on Melmoth do change, players change and rules change, it gives rise to new things.

The actual physical creation of Melmoth, as told by Ferric is quite different. He said,

“I never actually 'decided' to start a MUD. I was home over the summer, and had a shell account with a local ISP. I'd been playing MUDs for a little while, and decided to see how stable the new Rom2.4 codebase was. I started a copy running, and logged in 3 days later to find a few people had found it and were playing. I decided to keep it going on a whim. If those 3 (Vapor, Viper, and Bloodshed) hadn't been logging in, I probably wouldn't have kept it going.”

He also related where he got the name “Melmoth”. He said,

“well, I took the name Melmoth from a book I liked, of the same title. The

name Melmoth itself comes from a mid 18th century book called "Melmoth the Wanderer", in which a man named Melmoth sells his soul for 150 years of power, and spends 149 years looking for somebody to trade places with him."

Of course, this has nothing to do with the actual game; its fantasy components are separated from its real life ones. But, it is interesting to see where the physical origins were as well as the fantasy story, which came along later. It may be hard to imagine how a virtual space could have a history. Since it's not actually "real" and none of the events or people were "real". But it is the people who make it real and the people who left their mark on the world. Many, many players have designed and built areas. Melmoth has a builder port where anyone who is interested can log on and create new areas. When they are finished it is checked over and approved by Ferric and connected into the actual game so people can visit it. Building is a lot of painstaking work; it takes time to layout an area and design room descriptions and mobs. But all players can build if they choose and so they and their imaginations shape the world. Every area has a story behind it, some have mysteries to solve or hidden treasures and rooms. Being a builder means a contribution to Melmoth, which in turn does convey some status. Building on Melmoth is an active role in Ferric's eyes, it also brings a player to his attention since he has to approve of all the changes made to the MUD. Any contributions to the MUD in terms of ideas or new areas is important, being an active player for long enough means you might be chosen to be an Immortal. Granted, there is a lot more that goes into the choice than simply if the player built areas or not, but it is one way to be recognized and noticed.

## Hierarchy and Social Stratification

Part of the history is the clan system. There are quite a number of active clans on Melmoth. For example, there is a clan completely devoted to peace; its members take an oath to never harm another living being. There is one devoted to the perfection of skills, especially fighting skills. A third is concerned with defending nature and guarding against those who would defile the world. Each has their own purpose, with a leader and 5 ranks. Every clan builds a clan hall, which usually reflects something of what their clan represents. There are many reasons for joining a clan. Most of my characters joined clans because it somehow fit their role-play and personality. Clans are a good way to find people to role-play with. Others join because they can then go out and PK people in groups made up of their clan members. Or, they have clan mates to call on if they get in trouble. Clan mates stick up for each other and help one another out. One player pretty much summed up his view of the clan system

like this,

“Well, usually they are pretty cliquish. And most of them really don't do MUCH RP, and if they do.. it is mostly among a select few. Or they are a band of PKers that want to go out and pick on the less skilled. On the flip, they usually are a good place to find some great ideas about everything and anything. People learn a lot there. People join them because at first it is something that is interesting, and then once you do.. you learn so much by just watching people. Then you are stuck with the friends you have made, so basically you are in a clan Out of Character as well as In Character.”

Clans are accused of being “cliques,” which does make Melmoth similar to any society. There will always be like-minded people who feel the need to stick together. So it is not surprising that groups would form in an online setting. In the past there have been problems with two or more groups fighting; Ferric did his best to diffuse the tensions but it is hard. Not everyone will always get along, but hopefully people will try to be mature and accept each others' differences. However, Melmoth has the same problems as any other place.

Besides the most obvious distinction between Immortal and regular player, there is a version of a class system on Melmoth. Older players have a definite advantage over newer ones. They have been around longer and therefore know the game better; they know all the subtleties and secrets. They have more different kinds of characters, and have experimented with the system to find out the best combinations of race, class and spells. The older players sometimes have one of each class and generally multiples of their favorite class. Another advantage of being an older player is that over time the types of armor and weapons that can be found on the game has changed. Some pieces of armor were changed because they were deemed “too powerful,” so they were changed. Some people still have the items before they were changed. An old PK player may have some of the most powerful equipment in the game simply because they don't make it anymore and equipment since then has been watered down. Older players generally know where all the best equipment is for the different classes. They also have participated in old clans and quests where one of a kind equipment was given out. Newer players will come in and try to compete with the better equipment and knowledge but it will be hard. In generally, newbies are not seen as a lower class, in fact there is an unspoken rule that everyone should always help new players as much as possible. That is only logical since every society needs new blood. It would only make sense to persuade the new people to stay around. The class structure here is fairly flexible, a new player can move up simply by enduring and working hard to learn where things are. The more active role a player has (building, RP, exploration, etc.) the faster they will move up so to speak.



The clan system can also be applied to here, there are older clans and new clans. The older more established clans have higher respect and permanence, while some of the newer and less well thought out clans. Leaders have a place of power, because they can dictate who joins and who doesn't. They decide the premise of the clan and whom the members are allowed to kill or associate with. Clans can declare war on one another, but the PK rules still hold. Clans have 5 ranks; there are different ways one can move up the ranks depending on the clan. Sometimes it's just a matter of brown-nosing the leader in order to gain rank. Other clans demand service or deeds done to deserve being raised in rank. Clans are an example of some players having power over others. Generally clan rule is passed from one leader to another, the clan members don't usually get any say in who the new leader is, but a coup is allowed if enough members don't like the new leader. Clan leaders don't actually have any real power outside their clans; they get the reputation they have built up but in comparison to an Immortal, they don't have any actual power. Basically, that is the class structure of Melmoth, players generally fail or succeed based on their own actions.

### Conclusion

Overall, Ferric and the Immortals work hard to make this a welcoming and fun place for people to play. It has many of the problems and pitfalls that happen in real societies, but everyone works to try and fix the problems. Sometimes people are asked to leave because of unsolvable problems. But people seem to always come back, one female player said,

“I've left over the years, because of a lack of people to RP with, I've left because I simply can't take anymore of the dorks posturing.....I've left for personal home reasons.....I've left due to bouts of boredom.....and I come home, because people, things, circumstances, and situations change, and because in the end, Melmoth is home....”

She said what so many others seem to also express in their thoughts about Melmoth. My experience also, Melmoth does feel like home. When I come back after being away I feel a sense of connection. In my mind Melmoth is a real place, it may mostly exist in my mind, but that doesn't make it any less real. The experience of playing there has changed me and I have grown because of it. I am not the only one who feels that way, and this leads me to believe there is something about a place where people can go where they are not judged for what they look like but for who they are. Granted, a person can easily lie about who they are, but most people seek to connect with others honestly and I have found few people on Melmoth who I believe lie about who they really are. I have met many people from the MUD and it has taught me a lot about myself

and how I see the world. Basically, my time on Melmoth has changed me for the better.

#### Appendix A

#### Demographic Survey of Melmoth

This is a survey I sent out over the Melmoth mailing list and asked for players' participation. I received 17 responses and the percentages (rounded to the nearest whole percent) for each answer are below.

1. What is your age?

- A. 11-14: 0%
- B. 15-18: 41%
- C. 19-22: 23%
- D. 23-26: 6%
- E. Over 26: 29%

2. What is your sex?

- A. Male: 71%
- B. Female: 29%

3. Where do you live?

- A. United States
  - I. Eastern: 6%
  - II. Southeastern: 12%
  - III. Southwestern: 6%
  - IV. Midwest: 53%
  - V. Western: 12%
  - VI. Other US: --
- B. Canada: 6%
- C. Great Britain/Ireland: 6%
- D. Other European--
- E. Australia --
- F. Asia --
- G. Africa --
- H. South/Central America --
- I. Other --

4. What is your race?

- A. American Indian/Alaskan Native --
- B. Asian: 6%
- C. Black/African American --
- D. Hispanic/Latino: 6%

- E. Pacific Islander --
- F. White: 88%
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed or are currently in?

(~ denotes approximate ages AND if you are not an American citizen please choose what best fits your level of education)

- A. Elementary school (ages 5 to ~12) --
- B. Middle/Jr. High school (ages ~12 to ~15) --
- C. High School (ages ~15 to 18): 47%
- D. College/University (18 to ~22): 53%
- E. Master's Degree --
- F. Professional Degree --
- G. Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your current living situation?

- A. Alone: 12%
- B. With roommate(s)/friend(s) (non college): 6%
- C. With significant other --
- D. With parent(s)/guardian(s): 47%
- E. With your/partner's children under 18: 6%
- F. With children over 18: 6%
- G. In a college dorm/apartment: 24%
- H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. What are your hobbies?

Please list: \_\_\_\_\_ (Large list) \_\_\_\_\_

8. How did you find out about Melmoth?

- A. A friend.: 65%
- B. A website or Mudconnector.: 30%
- C. Other: (message board) 6% \_\_\_\_\_

9. How long have you been playing on Melmoth?

- A. Under 6 months--
- B. 6 months to a year --
- C. 1-2 years: 41%
- D. 3-4 years: 24%
- E. More than 4 years: 35%

10. Why do you play on Melmoth? (choose as many as apply)

A. To hang out with friends/chat.: 36%

B. To Role Play. : 31%

C. To PK: 6%

D. To meet new people: 17%

E. Other: \_\_\_11%\_\_\_\_\_

11. Roughly how many hours a week do you spend on Melmoth?

A. 0-5: 24%

B. 6-10: 6%

C. 10-20: 18%

D. 20-40: 35%

E. More that 40 (I don't sleep): 18%

12. How many other MUDs, etc, have you played?

A. 0: 12%

B. 1-2: 41%

C. 3-5: 12%

D. More than 5: 35%

## Appendix B

### Melmoth Creation Story

The world of Melmoth existed long before the memories of any mortal being. It's growth was guided by the Ferric, The Great Coyote. Loping across the face of the land, The High One would sweet talk Melmoth into taking the shape of his ultimate design. Nurturing the infant world into a place of beauty, he saw it's loneliness for company other than his own. Feeling the need to share his pride at Melmoth's grandeur he created a way for aware beings to spontaneously birth themselves into existence. These creatures flourished, growing and multiplying at a constant rate, spreading across the face of Melmoth and giving the land it's own children to shape and mold.

Ages passed and the World of Melmoth and it's inhabitants matured and became basically self-sufficient, tending to their own needs and relying less and less on Ferric for provision of their needs. The High One, pleased with his "children", wandered the land making changes in the way of things to provide a more stimulating and challenging environment. The world of Melmoth itself grew and expanded and as any child does would occasionally experience growth spurts and growing pains that had a drastic effect on everything within it's influence. But with the resiliency that Ferric had imbued

his creations with, the inhabitants of Melmoth adjusted and adapted, causing yet more growth in it's diversity.

As is the natural balance of things, "good" has it's "evil" and so it was in the world of Melmoth. Nature would tip to the side of "good" and as the scales tipped, "evil" would emerge to attempt to overcome it's nemesis and so the eternal battle was waged.

Recent history has been an age dominated by the forces of good until an new scourge appeared in the land. Vampirism, an affliction that spread by unknown causes, made even the most pure of heart desire the blood, and even the life, of their friends and family. Melmoth, having grown content in it's long period of contentment was thrown into drastic growing pains, the spasms of such an intense and sudden change stretched the face of the land into a distorted parody of it's former image. Cities that had been but a short walk for a mortal creature now lay on opposite sides of the continents in some cases and familiar routes through ancient forests now confused even the most learned scouts and guides.

Ferric gathered around him the other Immortals that helped him in his efforts to shape the land and together they worked to ease the mortal inhabitants of Melmoth into the changes. The Gods worked feverishly to make the mortals more comfortable with the changes and vision of the wilderness around them was bestowed upon them to better enable them to find their way across the face of the changed land.

Together, the Immortals and the Mortals both watch and wait to see what effects these changes will have and what the next step in Melmoths' evolution will be.

## Resources

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