

Chapter 7 Reading Response

The discussion of Leaf Trombone and the whimsical nature of its judicial system made me think about a game into which I have sunk hundreds of hours (from childhood up to now).



MapleStory is an MMORPG from Korea that has been around since 2003 (2005 in North America). Though the game is admittedly pretty grindy, the social aspects of it are incredibly entertaining, and I found the most appealing aspect of the game to be the strange one-off interactions I had with in-game strangers, as these ended up being the most genuine. As stated in Principle 7.7, a little anonymity goes a long way, and I think it is exactly this anonymity that allowed me to disregard whatever social norms would normally be present when battling monsters to gain experience.

First, let's talk about self-presentation. MapleStory embraces the whimsical; from the wild hairstyles to the absurd accessories, MapleStory encourages users to explore all sorts of



outfits. There are in-game cosmetic items (that don't affect power) that cost real money, and these typically are equipped over your functional, stat-providing clothing (such as armor or robes). Thus, MapleStory explicitly acknowledges their decoupling of form and function in character customization. Also depicted in the image above is the ability for characters to temporarily change their facial expressions (default in bottom right, example temporary expressions in the second from the left on top and second from the right on top). Much like in the



design of reactions in Leaf Trombone (described on pages 382-383), MapleStory acknowledges the cuteness and levity of its cartoonish world, and so the most commonly-used facial expressions are over-the-top. Note the parallels between these emotions and Paul Ekman’s basic emotions from page 383 of *Artful Design*. We have happiness, sadness, anger, surprise (shock), and disgust (lame), as well as the legendary F3 emote (which really can mean anything at all). Such nonverbal communication allows for brief, but nuanced interactions with strangers who are experiencing similar events in time and place to you at that moment.

As mentioned above, I really treasured brief interactions in shared time and space with a complete stranger. Because MapleStory groups similarly-leveled monsters in certain areas and players must fight monsters around their level, one tends to interact with players in similar positions in their journey through the game. In this sense, MapleStory has followed Principle 7.13 to a T: the game has been designed for familiar anonymity. Each city in the game has a level range, and everyone you meet in those cities has similar goals and experience to you. While they might not be friends, these familiar strangers will be around when you’re completing quests, grinding levels, or just shopping around. What’s more, MapleStory encourages quick creation of “parties” (small groups of strangers or friends) by granting experience or monetary gains for



grinding together. There are specific quests meant for parties that grant the most experience, and I personally have made many in-game friends by doing party-related activities. It is clear that when MapleStory designers conceptualized the social aspect, they designed the experience to optimize the potential for friendships built from stranger familiarity. As mentioned on page 390, MapleStory provides users with “a different, more tacit and nuanced form of bonding with another human being, without knowing names, ages, lines of work, favorite movies...” Just by killing pigs alongside CMontyBurns, you’ve already established a meaningful connection that is



fertile for further development.

One aspect of the game that I always found interesting was the fame mechanic. Once a character reaches a certain level, they get to either fame or defame somebody just once every 24 hours. Somehow, fame was a fairly equalizing commodity in the game. Level 160s with nothing



better to do would go around soliciting fame, perhaps for monetary compensation that meant a whole lot more to the level 20s than to them. Suddenly, even level 20s had something of value to provide to more experienced players. Being famed by somebody unprompted sparked joy akin to that of being casually complimented on Leaf Trombone (p. 381); a stranger used a limited resource on you out of the millions of players in the Maple World. What a rush!

While I could go on about the social mechanics of the game for another 20 pages, I will truncate the discussion here. While I don't know if the countless hours of grinding for experience was worth it, I know that the brief but meaningful interactions facilitated by MapleStory's social design are irreplaceable in my heart.