Missing Mods: An Examination of an Online Fan Community's Archiving Practices

Introduction

My research investigates how members of fan communities store, share and archive content and what meaning or significance they ascribe to these actions.

Background

In order to narrow the focus of the study, the modding community surrounding the video game *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* was chosen.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic is a video game that was published in 2003. Since then, fans of the game have created a large number of mods, or modifications, for the game and released them online.

The mods are shared through a variety of websites, including sites dedicated to hosting mods (such as Mod DB and Nexus Mods), general file sharing sites and personal servers.

Research Questions

Why do individuals decide to archive information and share it online?

What meaning do these people ascribe to their actions? Is it an attempt to preserve this content? Or is it a way to gain social capital in a fan community?

Do users see online fan content as being permanent or temporary, in terms of accessibility? Does this factor into their decision to archive content?

Does the nature of copyright factor into their views on the temporality of accessibility?

How do communities encourage or discourage individuals reposting the work of others?

How are these shared archives discussed by others in the community?

How much do these archives cost those who run them? Both in terms of money (server costs) and time taken up by curation activities?

How do fans view copyright of the media that they are storing?

Andrea Budac, University of Alberta

Du bist es, Arajj... Ich habe dich nicht mehr gesehen seit wir Kinder waren... Arajj, du bist eine Jedi geworden!
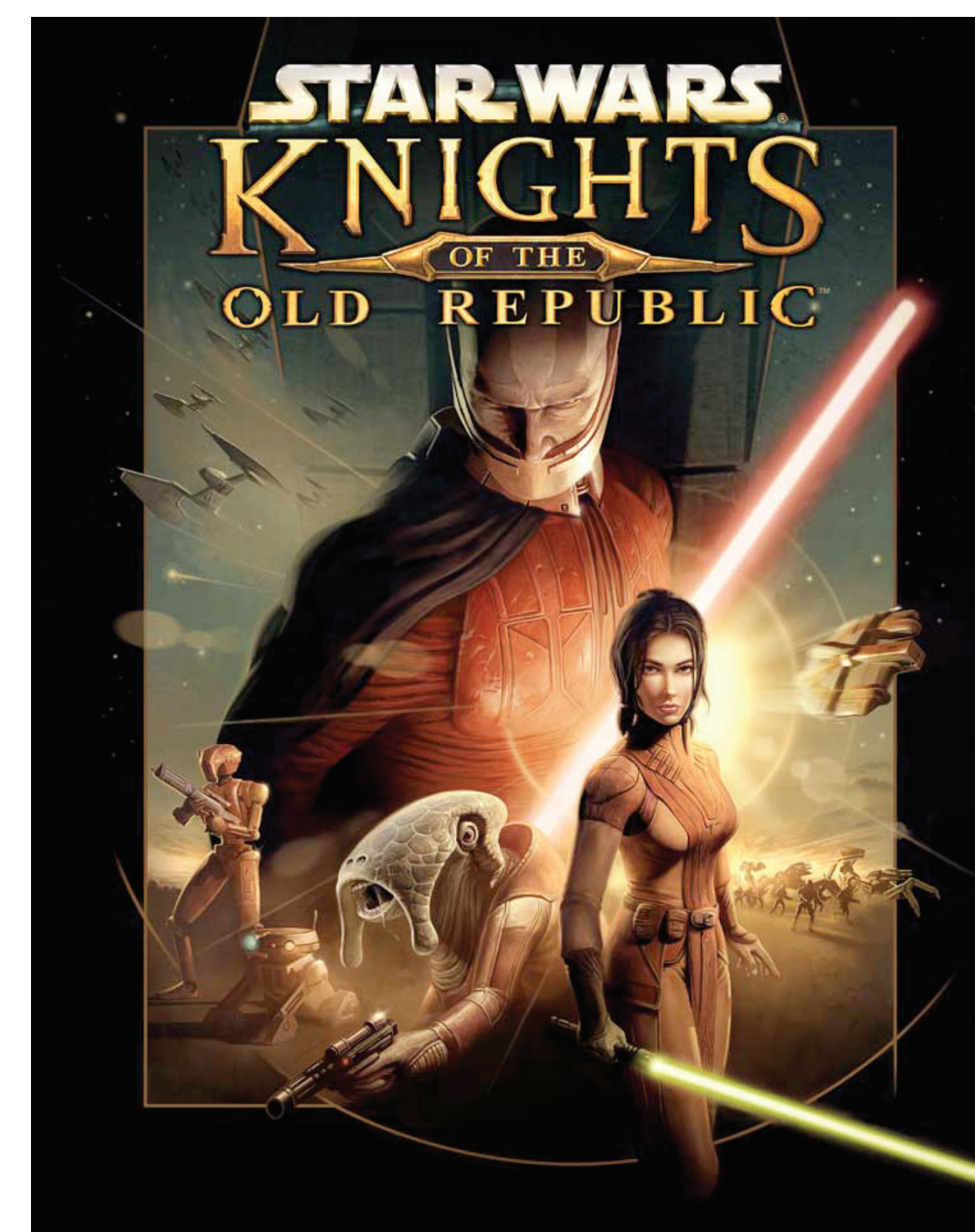
"I am only reuploading this mod to prevent the possible loss of it as GameFront is also shutting down. Thus, I shall receive no credit for this mod as all credit is for the appropriate authors."

NEW CATHAR LOOKING JUHANI | ORIGINAL NON CATHAR JUHANI

"With the closure of all of the Filefront sites back late last year, (Filefront was the precursor to sites like the nexus and the first modding community of its kind) the most downloaded and praised mod/expansion pack for the original Knights of the Old Republic was without a high traffic home... I decided (with Silveredge9's permission) to upload [the mod] here..."

Methodology

This fandom was chosen because the game is over ten years old. This should increase the amount of mods that have been archived by fans in an effort to preserve them. However, this decision is not without drawbacks as an older fandom is also more likely to have a larger amount content that has gone missing or disappeared.

There are several sites where content relating to *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* is hosted, in addition to Mod DB and Nexus Mods. I will have to extend my search in order to find any others. As well, any forums that members of this fan community may gather at to discuss and share mods will need to be sought out and examined. An example would be the Steam Community forums for the game where mods are shared and guides for mods have been created (WhiteGoblin 2016).

I have chosen a qualitative methodology. The data that is collected from the sites will be coded and analyzed.

Preliminary Observations

In April 2016 GameFront, a site that had been hosting mods since 1999, announced it was shutting down. This total shutdown of its servers would mean the erasure of all of its hosted content at the end of April. Another hosting site, Mod DB, called on its users to upload mods that had been hosted on GameFront to Mod DB's servers (XanT 2016).

> "We are very worried that many amazing mods and addons shared only on Gamefront will be lost in 2 weeks time after the closure. So we are calling on our entire community to help us preserve these files and make them available forever. If you have downloaded a mod, addon or know of files on GameFront that are not currently hosted on Mod DB, please share them."

In August 2016, the organizers behind Mod DB acquired GameFront, although not the hosted files, and began to rebuild it (INtense! 2016).

> "We have just started our initial rebuild efforts which you can read about here. Your assistance in helping us rebuild the file archive is greatly appreciated... After all choice, openness and preserving history are ideologies we value greatly at ModDB and IndieDB. So we began talking to Defy Media the former owner of GameFront.com and FileFront.com, and reached an agreement to acquire these domains. It is a challenge we are eager to take on, and we thank Defy Media greatly for giving us the opportunity."

By examining a list of old URLs they were able to determine what had been lost in the shut down and created a list of mods that were no longer available. They then asked the community to assist in recovering and preserving the mods by re-uploading them to the site.

> "We have already started analysing the old urls getting hit, and using this data have built a list of files that are in-demand. For those that have reached out with old patches, mods and content on their harddrives, we encourage you to browse this list and to fill the gaps by submitting what you have..."