Tampere University

Siiri Paananen

BUILDING FICTIONAL WORLDS:
Case Overwatch

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences

Master's Thesis

April 2019

ABSTRACT

Paananen, Siiri: Building fictional worlds: Case Overwatch
Master's thesis
Tampere University
Internet and Game Studies
April 2019

In this thesis, the worldbuilding aspect of the game *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016) is explored. Video games provide rich fictional worlds with audiovisual content and require design and development. In this study, the design and creation of fictional worlds, was studied, including how it was done in the case of Overwatch. The game is part of a transmedia universe, in which multiple stories take place.

The method used in this study is a qualitative analysis, which was done using the Grounded Theory Method. The process included collecting data, coding it, writing memos, and creating categories of the themes that arise from the data, and recording and explaining the process.

During the study, nine different worldbuilding themes were constructed, representing the different motivations and goals and processes during the development of *Overwatch*. The themes are: *Development Team's Story, Studying Company Legacy, Inspiration from Other Games, Deciding Guiding Values, Fast Iterative Development, Telling Stories Organically, Focusing on Characters, Trusting the Players, Global and Exotic Locations*. A chart of relations between these themes was presented as well, separating them into three levels. This study offers a look into a worldbuilding process of a contemporary video game.

Keywords: Overwatch, video games, worldbuilding, transmedia, Grounded Theory Method

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

While stories and fiction have existed for a long time, in the 21st century the rapid development of modern technologies and tools and new media have created even more possibilities. They have enabled more people to share their stories and create fictional worlds. Big companies have resources to create huge universes while producing content on many different platforms and giving the fans multiple ways to experience and be part of their fictional worlds. Video games are ever larger creations that combine both technology and creative arts, tied together as whole through design.

In this thesis my research question is **how was the world of *Overwatch* built?** The game takes place in a transmedia universe, how was that universe created by the game developers, and in what ways the world is communicated to the players. In addition to the game, the universe includes transmedia content, such as comics and short films that tell more about the characters and stories. I will also try to explore **what were the developers' goals and intentions when developing the game.** I am interested in what were the developers' motivations and the design process from their personal perspectives and what they wanted to build in this project. Since I was using the Grounded Theory Method, which is an exploratory method, the options were kept open during the research process and some unexpected insights were discovered.

The reason for choosing this topic is personal interest in game development and fictional worlds, as well as wanting to take a closer look into the creation process of a contemporary video game. The reason *Overwatch* was chosen for this study is that it is quite a new game and has fictional stories in various media. Other options for research topic could have included focusing on the players' perspectives on the game or just studying and analyzing the game itself. Instead, I want to find out the developers' thoughts and what goes on behind the scenes during the development of a completely new fictional universe and game, and how they share this process in public. In this thesis, I will use the term developer to mean anyone who was part of building the game. I know

in some context the definition is stricter, and it can even be a title for a specific job, but I will be using it more loosely here to mean everyone who worked on the game.

This study can shed some light on what the design motivations and processes behind a video game can be, and how games can be built in modern times and technologies, combining engineering, artistry and design. It might help people such as game developers or academics who are interested in the processes that can happen when developing a game and building a fictional transmedia universe. Some of the thoughts can be helpful for developers who want to create their own worlds, allowing them to find out ways to approach the process.

This is just a study of one game in a specific time and place. It is not the same process for every game in the world but may of course have similarities to other game design processes. Maybe this study can give a glimpse on the thinking process behind a modern western AAA- game, as seen from the outside of the developer team. As Kultima (2018, p.53) puts it, "Game design is timely and particular", meaning that the design processes are changing over time, as well as the environment where games are made. So that explains why a similar type of study on another game could have different results.

Overwatch is currently an evolving game and is being updated on a regular basis and requires servers to be able to run. Stenros and Sotamaa (2009) describe this kind of game as a service provided by the developer for the player. The player needs to have service from the company in order to play the game. For this study, it means that there has been updates to the game between collecting the data, writing this thesis and finishing it. The data used in the study itself was collected in September and October of 2018, so the possible game and developer updates after that have not been included in the material. The writing process was completed during a longer period but was finished in April 2019. This study is a snapshot of the game in its earlier and current stage, and as the focus is on the development and process before release, and it won't include everything that has changed since release. This also means that the game will probably continue to get updates, and more transmedia content, which makes it an ever-evolving universe.

The structure of the thesis will be as follows. After this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2, a literature review will be conducted, exploring the different terms used, and discovering what worldbuilding historically and in more traditional media is and how do modern-day video games include it in development process. After that, the concept of transmedia, which means fictional worlds spreading across multiple media platforms, will be investigated. Also, the concept of academic fan will be introduced. Next, in chapter 3, the game *Overwatch* and its universe will be presented, including describing the world of *Overwatch* in more detail, as well as looking into previous studies on the game.

In chapter 4, I will present the qualitative analysis method used in this thesis, which is the Grounded Theory Method. After that, the data and how it was collected will be discussed, as well as the process of using the method. Then in chapter 5, the results from the study will be shared and explained in detail. Then the results will be reflected on the worldbuilding concepts and literature. Finally, in Chapter 6, the conclusions will follow, and possible future research topics will be discussed.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, some of the key terms will be defined, and previous literature on fictional worlds and worldbuilding will be discussed. First, I will start by defining how the terms are used in this thesis, after that I will describe fictional worlds and worldbuilding in general and in more traditional media, then I will go through worldbuilding in video games and after that, the term transmedia will be explained. Finally, the concept of 'aca-fan' will be discussed, since it is important when talking about someone who is both fan and an academic to keep the study scientific and transparent.

The three terms I will be using in this thesis are: *fictional world*, *worldbuilding* and *transmedia universe*. These terms and their history will be explained and discussed further in this chapter. What should be noted is that the words universe and world will be used interchangeably in this study. I will use the term *Overwatch Universe*, when talking about the whole world of *Overwatch*, since that is also the term the developers themselves use while talking of all of the *Overwatch* universe on different media platforms and the story as a whole.

2.1 Building fictional worlds

Fictional world, or secondary world, is something separate from our own real world, also called primary world (Tolkien 1947). The fictional world can have its roots in this world we know but there must be some fictional element or border to make it separate from the primary world (Wolf 2014). Multiple different terms have been used to describe fictional worlds. Some of them indicate the exact same thing, while some are just related concepts with small differences. Fictional worlds have been called by these terms in different contexts; fictional world (many sources), fictive world (Salen and Zimmerman 2004), possible world (Juul 2011; Planells de la Maza 2017; Wolf 2014), ludofictional world (Planells de la Maza 2017), imaginary world (Wolf 2014), simulated world (Planells de la Maza 2017), synthetic world (Castronova 2008), secondary world (Tolkien 1947), storyworld (Wolf 2014), transmedia world (Schell 2008), gameworld (Jørgensen 2013)

and virtual world (Bartle 2004). Most of these terms have a somewhat different view on what these worlds are and how a fictional world (that is not this real world) is defined. Some are more specific and only used for certain types of fictional worlds, for example game world, requiring it to exists in a game, or virtual world, being digital. In this thesis I will be referring to them as fictional worlds, as it is popular among the literature, and has only one requirement, which is that it is fictional, i.e. not real.

Yuval Noah Harari (2015) claims in his TED talk that fictional stories and believing in them are the reason humans have come this far and have been able to create modern societies. Since humans can communicate what could be, instead of just what is, and co-operate in big numbers, we have been able to build these complicated systems that require us to believe in concepts and systems like money, nations, human rights etc. So, it can be said that this kind of imaginative thinking of hypothetical concepts and sharing them with others is essential for human societies advanced development and creation of new inventions. So stories play a big part in human experience. Wolf (2014) explains how worldbuilding can start already in the childhood, in the form of imaginary worlds, and how these worlds can be enjoyed by those building them, not just the ones created by others in media.

In the book *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*, Mark J. P. Wolf (2014) describes how the first transnarrative characters were historical figures. They would appear in many different stories and create illusion of believable characters who are familiar from many sources. First notable essay discussing fictional worlds is written by Tolkien (1947), who refers to the them as 'Fairy-stories'. He first talked about them in 1939, but the essay was published later. Creating fictional worlds and the research surrounding them has come a long way since then, as new types of media have been created, such as video games. Tolkien's essay and the books, he wrote are often referred in the literature considering world building. He created a massive fantasy world with new languages, cultures, locations and history, which acted as a stage for his stories and books. They have later inspired movies, video games and other creations even after his death. The term Tolkien uses for building fictional worlds is 'sub-creation', which

refers to God being the primary creator, and human creating something secondary to that. This demonstrates Tolkien's Christian view of the world, seeing himself creating inside of the world created by God.

When thinking about the difference between storytelling and worldbuilding, the perspective and focus of both can be discussed. Storytelling can leave out some things which are secondary to the story, while worldbuilding tries to make the world more complete by adding extra details that do not necessarily progress the story in any way but make the world more believable. As Wolf (2014, p.29) puts it, "Worlds can exist without stories, but stories cannot exist without a world." This quote demonstrates, how important the sometimes forgotten or overlooked worldbuilding is. Storytelling and narrative is however linked to worlds closely, as the worlds can be designed for the purpose of telling a specific story or stories.

Fictional worlds have been discussed from many perspectives, for example philosophy, literature, media studies, and it is not possible to include all of them in this study. A recent book on fictional worlds is *The Routledge Companion to imaginary worlds*, edited by Mark J P Wolf (2017), offering articles from different scholars on detailed worldbuilding aspects, such as cultures, creators, genres etc. It goes deep into different views on the topic and can give some kind of understanding of how many different things worldbuilding is related to.

All fictional worlds have some base in the primary world (the real world we live in). On that world as the base, worldbuilders can start crafting their own secondary world with its own unique features. It would be really difficult to come up with something completely original that had no connections to this world's concepts and then try to communicate it to someone. Three things that Wolf (2017) finds important when evaluating a fictional world are invention, completeness and consistency. Invention is the thing that separates the fictional world from the primary world, what makes it unique and interesting. Completeness is the illusion of completeness of the world, so that the world feels feasible for the audience. Consistency refers to a logical and aesthetically pleasing world with no contradictions. So there are a lot of values one can

aspire for when building worlds and trying to make them as good as possible, and when evaluating existing worlds. Wolf (2014) also divides the built worlds into two categories, open and closed, in the former, it is still growing, and new material is created, while in the latter, the world won't get any more canonical additions.

So what does worldbuilding mean? Worldbuilding practice in different media can be divided into three parts, one being the theoretical worldbuilding, the second part is the actual creation of text, visuals etc. And then the third way includes the users imagining the world while they experience it, believing in it and maybe even adding something new through their own perspective. Hanna-Riikka Roine (2016) explains these three parts of worldbuilding:

> "The main argument on worldbuilding has been divided into three sections that address different ways of engaging with works of fiction: imagination, immersion, and interaction. Worldbuilding is, thus, seen as a practice that guides both the creation of works of fiction and the ways the users approach the works". (Roine 2016)

So, it is not just the creator of the world who engages in the worldbuilding practice, but also the people who experience the content and stories. The interpretation of the world depends on the person experiencing it.

Since this thesis will be focusing on the developers' perspective, and not the players', I will be using the term worldbuilding to describe the activity of creating worlds instead of experiencing them. I think the terms worldbuilding and world design are much more neutral when it comes to worldviews, than the term sub-creation, which Tolkien (1947) used. Those two terms have also been used more often in the modern research. So, to summarize, what I mean by worldbuilding in this thesis is 'the process and activity of creating a fictional world'.

2.2 Worldbuilding in video games

In the past fictional stories were shared by telling stories or by writing and reading them, and through live theater and opera. Nowadays digital media, including games, offer

modern ways to present fictional worlds to people. (Wolf 2014.) At first, film and television provided visualization for the worlds, and later video games enabled people to get inside a 3D world and interact with it, which can be very different from traditional literature or other media. The new media has also enabled the creation of trans-medial content. (Wolf 2017.) Contemporary fictional worlds often try to use transmedia to their advantage, providing fans with more content in multiple platforms. The concept of transmedia will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

As technology is advancing, fictional worlds can be created to be more realistic and immersive. New technologies, such as virtual reality and augmented reality can provide the creators with more tools for creating the worlds people can experience and engage with. These new worlds need designers, builders, creators to bring life into fictional realms different from ours. In the book Game Design Essentials, which takes a more practical perspective on how games are created, Mitchell (2012) lists different roles needed in game production. One of these is 'World Builder', which is often referred as environmental artists in other contexts. He lists the different tasks for this role, which include "creating look and feel for the game, creating towns, houses, roads, forests and so on". This approach is focused on how the video game world is created in practice.

In contemporary game development, there can be teams of hundreds developing the game and universe. This is a lot when compared to creators like Tolkien and others who build worlds alone. When creating audiovisual game worlds with a big team, there must be some direction for the art and other content, to make them consistent and work as a whole. The consistency factor when creating worlds was mentioned in the previous chapter, so there needs to be some direction for these big groups of people creating worlds, such as art lead. This and creating a unified story for the world helps the game to have a canon, which the whole team can follow and create a consistent world. (Wolf 2017.) Similarly to the tasks listed by Mitchell (2012) previously, Wolf (2017) also explains how many different disciplines are needed to create fictional worlds in modern media:

> "Though at one level "world design" can refer to the construction of a world's infrastructures (map, timeline, genealogy charts, etc.), on a more practical level it refers to such things as terrain, architecture, technology, vehicles, clothing, food and drink, tools and weapons, customs and cultures, language, and other areas, each of which must be integrated in a plausible way with the others. Thus, world design is a very multidisciplinary activity, which in audiovisual media at least has become a highly collaborative activity requiring a large number of people, each with their own area of specialization, working under the guidance of some creative authority who tries to ensure the overall consistency and believability of the world being designed. As many popular imaginary worlds have demonstrated, the experience of a well-designed imaginary world is something that does not necessarily even have to include a narrative; the world itself can be the reason for the audience's attention and time spent with it. World design and world-building is an art in itself, and one that continues to grow as evermore elaborate worlds are constructed." (Wolf 2017, p. 72)

So here he describes the different aspects of worldbuilding and what kinds of requirements the activity can have. What Wolf (2017) also notes, is how the worlds do not necessarily need narrative to be enjoyed, but the fans might like it for the world itself. Also to add another perspective to the worldbuilding, Lily Alexander's (2017) article notes that when designing new fictional worlds in certain media, the old conventions of that specific genre should be taken into consideration, as well as inventing something new. The author sees the creation process as a mix of these two concepts of rules and innovation.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, worldbuilding can also in some contexts mean the users or the players experiencing the world. Fictional game worlds can allow the players to imagine the world themselves (Juul 2011). Not to be forgotten that there can be fans who never even played/read/watched the main piece and still are fans and love the world, and even co-create fan art, like in the case of *Overwatch* (Purslow 2017). They can be part of the community and enjoy the free content to get inside the world and the story, or even create fan art.

Storytelling and worldbuilding are linked, as mentioned previously, but sometimes the worldbuilding part is neglected and overlooked. This has been also noted in the popular

game studies book *Rules of Play* by Salen and Zimmermann (2004). They write about worlds and stories in games:

> "Too often, a game's fictive world is taken for granted, a generic backdrop for scripted plot events. Game designers should more rigorously engage with the complex, interdependent relationship between the fictive world and story events." (Salen and Zimmerman 2004)

So, both parts should be paid attention to when designing game worlds, as well as their relationship. Like in the previous chapter, Wolf (2014) claims stories need worlds. Building believable worlds is an aspect that should not be overlooked when creating new fictional worlds. This is also linked to the fact that multiple stories can take place in one world, so a well-thought-out world can be used as a base for many stories.

2.3 Transmedia

As the main topic of this thesis is worldbuilding, and not just game design, the concept of transmedia will be discussed and defined in this chapter. Many fictional worlds are also transmedia worlds, and some video games are part of transmedia universes, as is the case in *Overwatch*. Since the game doesn't really tell stories through the gameplay, it relies heavily in transmedia for storytelling and presenting the world in more detail to the audience, so it is an essential topic when discussing the game and its universe.

According to Lars Konzack (2017), transmedia worlds are often seen in literature, in the genres of fantasy and sci-fi, and designing them requires worldbuilding. As an example of this is the popularity of the titles like Harry Potter, Star Wars, and other popular franchises that use transmedia. So, how has transmedia been defined in the past? One definition of transmedia world is by Lars Konzack (2017, p. 136) in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*: "A transmedial world is an imaginary world presented on different media platforms". So, it is combining the notion of imaginary world, or fictional world, and adding the requirement of multiple media platforms. Another transmedia definition as expressed by Jenkins (2006):

> "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics…Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game or vice versa." (Jenkins 2006, pp. 95-96)

So, Jenkins is emphasizing the fact that each of the media should contribute to the whole and have its unique approach to the world and story.

One notable thing about transmedia is the concept of *core text* (Aldred 2017), which means the main piece of work the other creations lean back to, for example a book that is later created on into a whole transmedia universe. It can be also referred to as the original work (Wolf 2014). For example, some of Tolkien's books have later expanded into a transmedia universe, as the world created by him were adapted in movies and games, after his death. But his books are the original work or core text. In *Overwatch* the case is a bit different, since it has been created all at the same time, even though the game is the main product being sold and advertised, so the whole world is centered around the game.

Another quote from Jenkins (2006) that I think is very accurate in describing the relationship between transmedia and worldbuilding, which he calls 'world making':

> "Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making." (Jenkins 2006, p. 21)

And this quote is connected to the worldbuilding aspect of transmedia worlds too and including stories in the mix. I find the phrase 'art of world making' very interesting. I think it connects the transmedia and worldbuilding well together in a meaningful way. As mentioned earlier, Wolf (2017) expressed that worldbuilding on its own is art, and Jenkins is adding transmedia to that claim. But as can be seen, many researches think that building fictional worlds can be considered as art.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter about worldbuilding, transmedia worlds can also include the fans and their creations in them, which is called co-creating. One part of transmedia worlds are the fans and fandoms that create more content for the worlds.

(Konzack 2017.) Wolf (2017) also claims that the new ways of telling stories in multiple media platforms have allowed the stories to be told also in visual and auditory ways. That makes the fictional worlds more like the real world, with all kinds of different ways of experiencing it. One of the lenses in Jesse Schell's (2008) *The Art of Game Design: A Book of lenses*, is 'The Lens of the World". He emphasizes how powerful transmedia worlds can be if they are done right, and how fans can immerse themselves into them. Other features he gives them are how they are long-lived and transform over time. He even claims they are future of entertainment.

2.4 Academic fan

In addition to researching the game for this study and collecting the data, I have been playing *Overwatch* since the release, so I know the game well. Also, for this thesis project, to deepen my understanding of the whole transmedia universe and not just the game, I watched all the short films and read the comics to get a better knowledge on this specific topic. Going through them gave me a better understanding of just how many different storylines are happening in the universe and how the heroes are in important roles not just in game but also in the stories. It also gave me insight in interpreting the data used in this thesis.

I also want to disclose that I am a fan of both Blizzard and *Overwatch*. I have obviously done my best to discuss the subject objectively and scientifically, including criticism when needed, but I think it is good to know position me as a researcher for this thesis. But as this is nothing new in academia, there already exists a term for this kind of scholar and fan, used by Jenkins (2019), which is 'academic fan' or 'aca-fan' for short. The term had been coined earlier, but Jenkins has been using it and being known for it, and even the name of his blog, 'Confessions of an Aca-Fan' includes the term. He defines it as being part fan and part academic and wants to build a connection between these two.

I think both playing the game, and immersing myself in the universe, as well as following the discussions in social media about the game gives me a good base for studying the

topic. There should be still critical thinking, to not get subjective and try to think about the topic outside of the bubble of a gamer. As Dovey and Kennedy (2007) write about how researchers have “come out” as players themselves. The words they use are ‘academic gamers / gamer academics’, which is closely related to the Jenkins term aca-fan. They emphasize how we should notice our own preferences and background, and how they influence our choices, when it comes to choosing what to study and how to study. So with this knowledge, I attempted to see the topic also from outside the player perspective and conduct the study to the best of my ability. To add one more dimension in addition to the aca-fan aspect, I consider myself to be a game developer too. I have created games both as a hobby, during my studies, and also in one work project. I have been in multiple roles, mainly as an artist, but also as designer and programmer in some projects. I wish to continue creating games in the future and have gained some helpful insights for game development during this thesis project.

3 OVERWATCH

This chapter will include information on *Overwatch*, the game, as well as the transmedial universe. First, I will explain about the game in general and after that, describe the world of *Overwatch*, what it includes and how it is presented. Lastly, the previous studies on the game and its world will be examined.

3.1 Overwatch

Overwatch is a team-based first-person shooter game developed by Blizzard Entertainment, which is subsidiary of Activision Blizzard. The game was released in May 2016 for PC, Xbox and PlayStation 4. *Overwatch* is Blizzard's first new IP in 17 years. The game is set in our world in the near-future, with sci-fi elements like robots and floating cars. In October 2017, after one and half years, the game had reached 35 million players, and has since grown (Overwatch Twitter 2017). In the time of writing this there are now 30 heroes, Baptiste being the newest, and 20 competitive maps in the game, although there are more maps exclusive to arcade and other special game modes. *Overwatch* can be said to have a lot of story compared to many games in its genre, since not all multiplayer first-person shooter (FPS) games include many stories. New heroes and maps are still being added currently, in 2019, three years after the release, which makes *Overwatch* an evolving game and universe. *Overwatch* has to be bought in order to be able to play it, but the game also includes some skins and other content that one can either earn by playing or buy loot boxes to receive random items, so it is using two monetization models at the same time.

Overwatch was born after Blizzard canceled their project called Titan, which had been awaited and speculated for many years by fans. In the end it was never published, but the team was moved to other Blizzard projects and some were left to come up with *Overwatch*. After the reveal of *Overwatch*, the developers have also talked about project Titan, and what lead them to cancel it and how *Overwatch* got started after that.

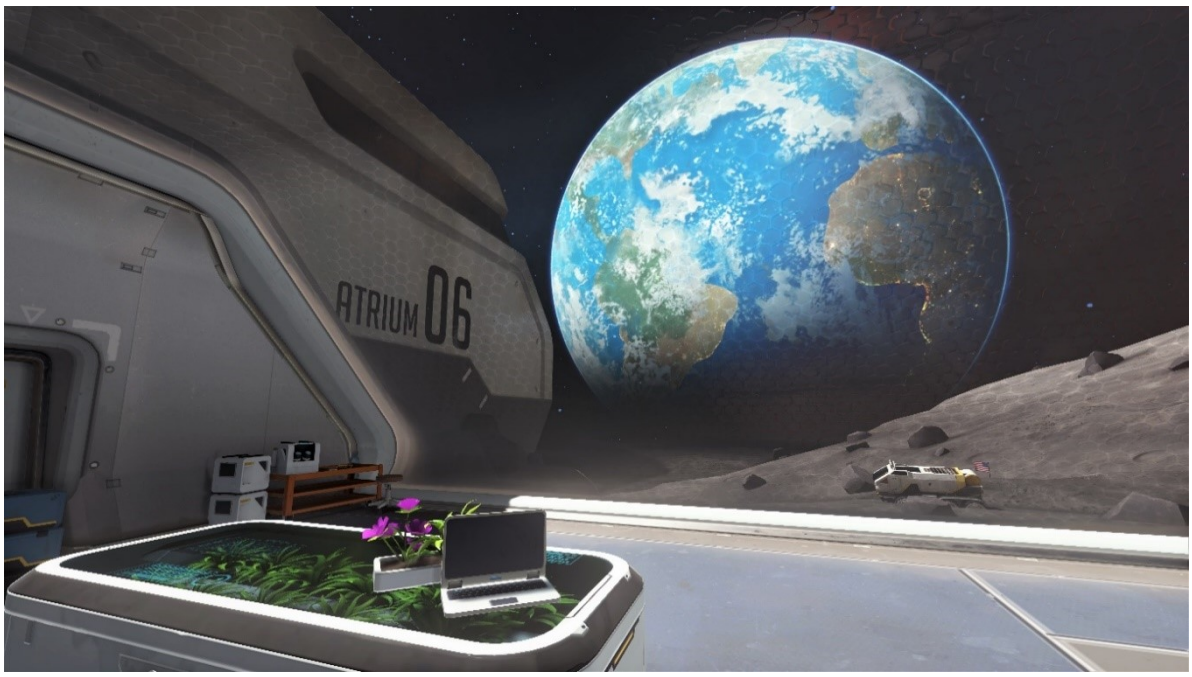

Figure 1. *Overwatch* base on moon called 'Horizon Lunar Colony'.

Blizzard's other universes have taken place e.g. in high fantasy setting in *Warcraft*, and alien sci-fi world in *StarCraft* but this time they are basing it off the real planet Earth humans are living on. This has helped them to create a rich varied world, because there is so much content to get inspired from, and not having to invent everything from scratch. For example, the game has voice lines in over seven real languages from around the world, which they could just use straight up. However, there are also fantasy/sci-fi elements included, such as one of the heroes being a super-intelligent gorilla, Winston, who was living on a research base on the moon, which can be seen in figure 1. This is the *Overwatch* vision on how a base built on the moon could look like, with Earth featured in the background.

Overwatch includes the following game modes: Quick Play, Competitive Play, Play vs. AI and Arcade Mode. Quick Play consist of games where you can join and leave whenever you want, and after one game ends you will be matched to another one. Playing in the Competitive Mode puts you into a game with 11 other players, matched by your skill rating. You will gain ranks by winning and lose them from defeat. On the other side, arcade has different quirky game modes, ranging from random heroes to Deathmatch, sometimes breaking the default rules of the game.

The maps have different objectives in them, such as Escort, where the attackers' task is to escort a payload to the finish line, and the defending team attempts to stop it. Another mode is *Assault*, where the goal is to capture an objective marked on the map by standing in an area, and for defenders to prevent it. The third mode is Control, which in other games is usually referred to as King of the Hill, where you need to control an objective until you get to 100% and stop the other team from doing that. The fourth map type is Hybrid, which is a mix of Assault and Escort, beginning with capturing a point and then escorting the payload, while defenders try to stop it.

Figure 2. An advanced city in Iraq, in a map called 'Oasis' in *Overwatch*.

Overwatch received many awards in 2016 when it was released, for example multiple Game of the Year prizes, and was praised for its art style, gameplay, accessibility and diverse characters (Wikipedia 2018.) Jeff Kaplan, the Game Director for *Overwatch*, has summarized how in the *Overwatch* team "Inclusivity and open mindedness were the goal, diversity was the result" (Kaplan, video 1). This refers to the diverse cast of characters as well as maps all around the globe, for example in figure 2, there is Blizzard's version of a city in Iraq, with flying cars and other sci-fi technology, looking different than the Iraq we know today. The aspect of diversity has led to the game receiving both praise and criticism in the media and communities, as it has been seen as empowering or negative, if done poorly (Campbell, 2017; Grayson, 2018).

The developers of the game are in the spotlight at times, for example during panels in Blizzard's event BlizzCon, as well as some industry conferences, such as Game Developers Conference (GDC). Jeff Kaplan is often featured in 'developer update' videos on the *Overwatch* YouTube channel, and shares the newest patch notes or new upcoming heroes with the community. So, the developers are not just behind the scenes but want to interact with fans and players and talk about their games.

3.2 World of Overwatch

The events of the game take place roughly in 2070. In the past there used to be a group called Overwatch, an international elite task force. They were formed by United Nations around the time a so-called 'omnic crisis' between humans and robots happened. The group saved the world and continued to keep peace on Earth and was loved by people. However, after few decades, some tensions started to rise and there was some conflict even inside the organization. Later on, Overwatch was shut down, with the heroes scattered around the world. Just before the game takes place, Overwatch was called to action again and reunited by Winston. (Ramos, 2017.) In the *Overwatch* announcement trailer the narrator announces:

> "Conflict. As the world teetered on the brink of anarchy, a new hope arose. An elite international task force charged with ending the war and restoring liberty to all nations: Overwatch. Soldiers, scientists, adventurers, oddities. Guardians who secured global peace for a generation. Under its steadfast protection, the world recovered. And today, though its watch has ended, its soaring ideals of freedom and equality will never be forgotten." (Overwatch cinematic trailer 2014)

So, as the quote above explains, there are multiple different types of characters, or heroes, as they are called in *Overwatch* universe. Each of the heroes has special skills that make them unique, and these skills are explained mostly with advanced technology but without too much detail.

Figure 3. Two of the characters in the menus; Mercy on the left and Genji on the right.

Many of the game mechanics are similar to the ones in fantasy games, but they do not use magic, but advanced technology, though not explained in detail. For example healing, which is often portrayed as magic in fictional fantasy worlds, is provided by different gadgets and modern appliances in *Overwatch*. For example, a hero called Mercy, seen in figure 3, can channel health or boost allies' damage with her staff using advanced technology. Another example of a hero who has benefitted from technology, is Genji, also seen on figure 3. He is a ninja, who has had his skills improved with technology, making him a cyborg. Also, other things like omnics, the robots of the world, are more advanced that in our current world development, as there are multitude of omnics who can operate individually, and seem to have personalities, suggesting that technology AI has developed far in the *Overwatch* universe.

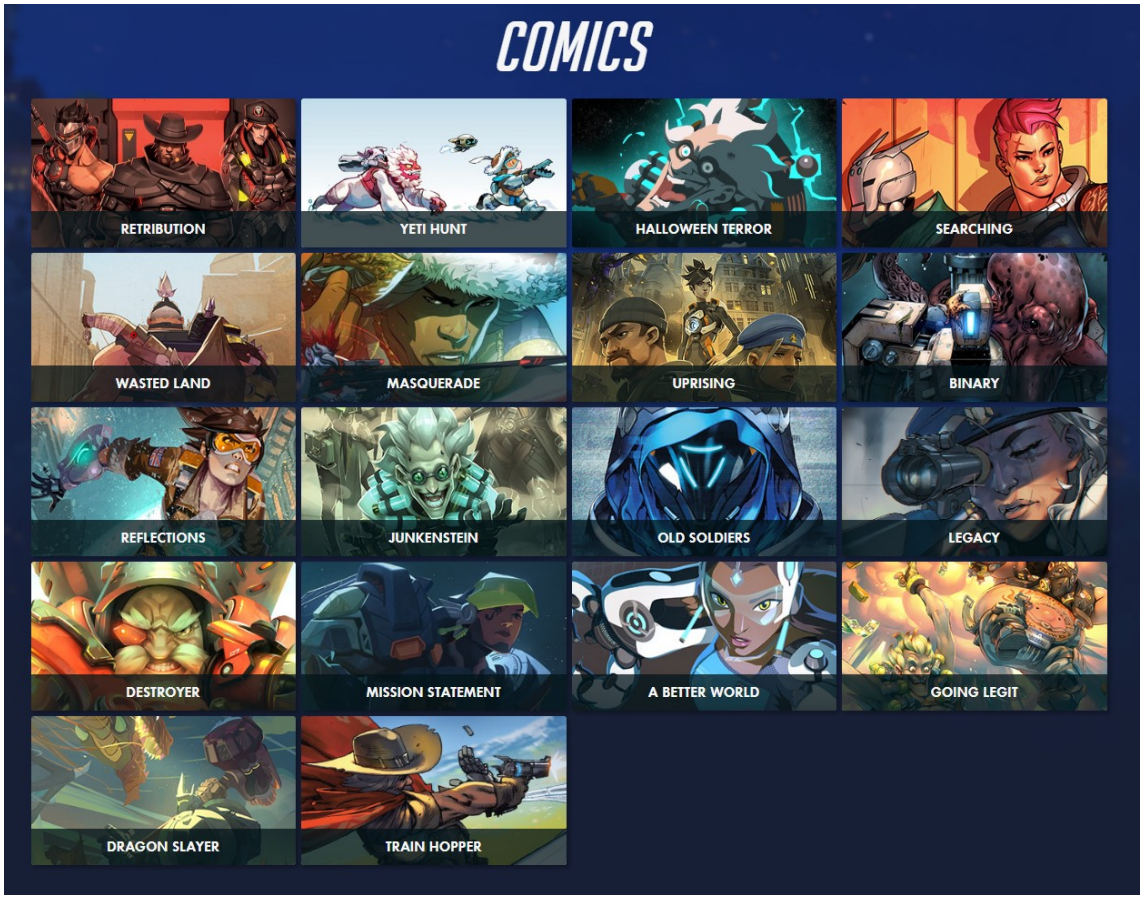

Figure 4. All of the Overwatch comics released to this date.

Figure 5. Animated short 'The Last Bastion', featuring one of the characters, Bastion.

Overwatch uses transmedia content to provide fans more of the backstory and engage them with the game world and allowing them to get to know the characters better. This can be a way to get more people interested in and involved with the game and to give it a try. As of April 2019, there has been 18 official comics, as seen in figure 4, and 10 'animated shorts', one of them featured in figure 5, released about the *Overwatch*

universe (Blizzard 2019). In addition to those short films there has been also origin story videos and hero trailers. In January 2019, a short story called 'Bastet' was released. It was the first story to be released in that format. It was released as part of a campaign where the players could collect in-game loot by playing. On the website it was advertised on its own page with the title "Get back in the fight with Ana's Bastet challenge". (Blizzard Entertainment 2019.) This can give an idea that the stories are also told in effort to make people return to the game and get them more invested in the universe.

All the transmedia content apart from the game, are freely available online for anyone. Telling the story in a multiplayer FPS game can be challenging, which might be why Blizzard has used so many different media to give some background to the world. The stories provided in comics and short films usually provide a backstory for a character – i.e. how they became who they are, or some meaningful event in the history of the world. The story of *Overwatch* is not just one singular story, but a collection of smaller ones. All of the heroes have some kind of origin story, as well as the locations. The stories are not the only thing provided, on the *Overwatch* website fans can find 'Reference kits' that have detailed pictures of the characters and their gear, and even color codes for their equipment (Blizzard 2019). They are titled as Reference Guides, and I think they could be used for things like cosplay or fan art in some form.

The default game rounds don't follow the canon (i.e. official storyline), since there can be for example two players on the same hero, or two characters portrayed in lore as enemies on the same team. Since the story is told mostly outside of the game, the normal matches don't have anything to do with the narrative. During special events player get to experience the story as well, since they are sometimes player versus environment (PvE) scenarios including lore to be experienced.

Figure 6. A cover for *Overwatch* comic Uprising.

So while the default gameplay is just about winning or losing a match, sometimes there are special events on *Overwatch*. Sometimes these are tied to real-world events and there are for example Christmas themed game modes and themed in-game loot such as skins. However, some events have told a story through an in-game PvE event, which means players playing against AI. These kinds of events have included going back in the *Overwatch* timeline to experience some previously happened event, for example Overwatch Archives: Uprising in figure 6, which told a story of an Overwatch mission from the past, as a comic and also through an in-game event.

In addition to the previous storytelling methods, *Overwatch* uses few other tools in telling the story. One of them is environmental storytelling in the maps where the gameplay takes place. Sometimes they represent some events connected to the heroes of the game, while sometimes quite random things about the everyday people who once lived in that area. In addition to that, there are many interactions between the heroes of the game, where they talk to each other or joke. These interactions are unique

between each two heroes and might refer to some event that happened in some *Overwatch* story outside of the game.

Blizzard has even taken some things from the game and created them in other contexts, for example an online soundtrack that has been “created by” a DJ called, Lúcio, who is a fictional character in the *Overwatch* universe (Blizzard 2015). Another example of this is a Lúcio cereal pack seen in game, and then sold in real life as a real cereal product (Bolding 2018). These are some things used to promote the game and bring it forward to the audience in many ways. These two examples demonstrate how not everything related to this fictional world are digital products or are there to directly make money.

Figure 7. *Overwatch* website navigation.

One can notice how the universe has a big role in the *Overwatch* website. When looking at the navigation bar in figure 7, there are different sections for heroes, events, media, which can all provide more content of the whole universe and story to the fans. So, the game is being presented not just for its gameplay, but for the whole universe. There are of course many buttons that read ‘buy now’, selling the product, but the website offers more than just the game as a commercial product.

Figure 8. Winston's base in-game.

Since the comics, short movies and game are part of the same fictional universe, sometimes the same locations can be seen in multiple media. Like in figure 8, the room is the same one that can be seen in the 'Recall' animated short movie.

3.3 Previous studies on Overwatch

There has been some research done on Overwatch to this date, November 2018, many of them being student work like bachelor theses. The topics in the papers found about Overwatch include transmedial franchises (Blom 2018), sounds of the game (Shur 2017), cultural appropriation (Svensson 2017), ethnicity and national identities (Belmonte 2017) and level design elements and flow (Eliasson 2017), and Overwatch universe and how it is seen by fans of the game and esports (Välisalo and Ruotsalainen 2018).

The one study that is closest to the topic of this study is Blom's (2018) paper 'Overwatch as a Shared Universe: Game Worlds in a Transmedial Franchise'. The author writes how Overwatch shouldn't be considered as a transmedial world, but as a shared universe, which is based on the idea of 'imagined communities' by Benedict Anderson (1983). Reasons for this claim are the difference of the storyworld and the virtual (game) world, people being connected through internet in the same universe and being aware of each

other, and not having the transmedial properties needed to be a transmedial world. There is also a claim that *Overwatch* isn't a transmedial world, as she writes:

> "That does not mean however that we should consider the *Overwatch* franchise a transmedial universe. Transmediality is a problematic notion in this case, as it comes with the complications of storytelling; it implies a connection between storyworlds that equally contributes to the universe regardless of the media capacities." (Blom 2018, p. 8)

While the paper has good points and analysis, I don't agree with the thought that different media in transmedial storytelling needs to equally contribute to the universe. I think each media can have its strengths and weaknesses, they don't have to 'equally' contribute, as long as they contribute in some way. As far as I understood the transmedia definition from Jenkins (2006), he just claims different parts of transmedia world should be self-contained and doesn't require that they are contributing equally. I think the term 'shared universe' would fit an MMO or other ongoing virtual world better than a game where you are usually matched with new players in each game and might not be a part of some active community, but just experiencing the game or other parts of the universe alone. So as my understanding of the terms goes, as explained in the literature *Overwatch* is a transmedia universe, and the game is the main piece of that universe.

What is interesting in my opinion is that the *Overwatch* universe can be experienced in multiple ways depending on person. Someone who plays the game seriously, could see it as just a competitive game, and not know anything about the game's lore or care for it. While someone else could have read all comics and watched all the films but never having played the game, but can still be a fan nonetheless. I think this diversity makes it an interesting game to study as a transmedial world. This is also noticed and mentioned by Välisalo and Ruotsalainen (2018), who explain how the different subreddits and therefore communities for *Overwatch* and competitive *Overwatch* demonstrate this divide. Their study is focusing on transmedial user practice, which also includes the activities fans engage in, for example *Overwatch* esports and fan art.

4 METHODS AND DATA

In this chapter, the process of choosing the method and collecting the data will be shared in detail. First, the chosen method, Grounded Theory Method (GTM), will be presented, and the data and its collection process will be discussed.

4.1 Grounded Theory Method

The semantics of the topic are of course important, but what is more interesting for me is what is being done in practice when it comes to designing and building fictional worlds. So that is why I want to find out the developers' practical perspective, and not just discuss the terms in theory. The method was chosen after finding the interesting topic, which was the development of the world of *Overwatch*. Since I didn't find any existing framework to study this topic, a more exploratory perspective was chosen. Qualitative analysis was selected as the method, because that way the developer's views can be analyzed by going through and recognizing key themes from their presentations and interviews.

The method used in this thesis is the GTM, which is originally from Glaser and Strauss (1967). Since there is many different ways to go about this method, I was looking at the different Grounded Theory Methods that are compared in Salisbury and Cole's (2016) article *Grounded Theory in Games Research: Making the Case and Exploring the Options*, where they are looked into through the lens of game research. They claim that the choice of style of doing GTM can affect the outcome one can get from the study. They present what features all of the different styles have in common and evaluate their differences as well. As there are many traditions on GTM, it helped to narrow down the method and which style to use in this thesis, and to get a better understanding of the method.

Salisbury and Cole (2016) explain how it is not required to follow an exact version of the three different GTM styles they introduce but explain that the most important thing is

being transparent on how the method is used and what the process looks like. Another important thing is to make sure the method fits your research, so which of them fits that project the best. So in this study, these guidelines have been followed, including documenting the process and being open about how the data was gathered, coded, and analyzed and finally reported.

In the beginning, having no experience in GTM made me doubtful of how to proceed. But as Salisbury and Cole (2016) state, the method shouldn't be considered for too long and trying to do it perfectly, but just get to action, so that is what I did. The style of GTM I ended up using is the one presented in Kathy Charmaz's (2006) *book Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Charmaz introduces a style that is called Constructivist Grounded Theory Method. The book gives guidance on how practically to do a research project in this exploratory way, and what the process can look like, and which questions to ask oneself while doing a research project. It has been very useful for me, since the book gives practical steps that can be used while using the method and constructing a theory.

Using GTM allowed the study to remain open to everything and not forcing it into some existing framework. The qualitative kind of coding done in this study differs from quantitative, because the codes are created while looking at the data and not beforehand, allowing the data to direct the study. Comparing the data with other data can be used as a method, finding similar claims in the same interview and different ones and forming and codes and developing categories. (Charmaz 2006.)

As the data is collected from already existing sources, and I haven't had anything to do in their production, they are called 'Extant texts' as stated by Charmaz (2006). This also means that they should be analyzed in such way that takes that into consideration, and questions about the context and the nature of them should be asked.

The data analysis was done in the following way: first, the search terms were selected based on the literature review on the topic. Next, the relevant articles and videos were selected out of the results of the search and saved in a document for later use. After

that, they were added into the program ATLAS.ti, and then coded. The process involved coding, memo-writing, going back to the data and coding more, and constructing the categories, which reflect the themes of worldbuilding process that emerged from the data. For this method, coding is important, since it is how the theory is constructed. (Charmaz 2006.) In the next chapter the gathering and coding of the data will be explained in more detail.

4.2 Data and coding process

After deciding on the topic, a systematic search was done to find the data available on the internet. The data was collected online with the help of search engines. Multiple different search terms and websites was used to get more trustworthy and diverse data and not to miss anything important, and they will be listed in detail later. The term worldbuilding is sometimes written as 'worldbuilding' and sometimes as 'world-building', so this had to be considered when conducting the searches. I also included a search with the word 'development', since this could offer some developer's talks or interviews that the other searches did not, for example from game development conferences and such. The term story was also added during the process, so that there might be some material on the transmedial world and how creating the story was a part of the games' development. These terms surfaced when doing the background research on the literature and the world of *Overwatch*, as well as doing the searches.

Table 1. The search terms and dates

Platform	Search terms	Date	Number of results
Google	Overwatch world building	19 September 2018	11 400 000
Google	Overwatch worldbuilding	19 September 2018	46 700
Google	Overwatch development	27 September 2018	14 600 000
Google	Overwatch Story	1 October 2018	42 800 000
Bing	Overwatch world building	19 September 2018	2 200 000
Bing	Overwatch worldbuilding	19 September 2018	18 900
Bing	Overwatch development	27 September 2018	2 110 000
Bing	Overwatch Story	1 October 2018	4 520 000
YouTube	Overwatch world building	1 October 2018	N/A
YouTube	Overwatch worldbuilding	1 October 2018	N/A
YouTube	Overwatch development	27 September 2018	N/A
YouTube	Overwatch Story	1 October 2018	N/A

In table 1, the search terms and platforms searched with dates and numbers of results are presented. All the four key search phrases were searched on Google, Bing and YouTube to get more credible results on each topic, not limited to one search engine. Five pages of results were saved from Google and Bing for each search done. And since YouTube has infinite scrolling, and not results in multiple pages, the first 50 results were picked in order. The reason for using multiple different search terms was to find all the relevant data, since not all the sites or people use the term worldbuilding even if the content was about that, they might talk about story or design or development, so that's why multiple different searches were done. In addition to the searches listed in table 1, the term 'Overwatch' was searched in GDC vault, Gamasutra, Polygon and Verge, as these are credible sources in the game industry, and could provide insightful material on the topic.

After collecting all of the search results in one Word document, they were all examined individually, and irrelevant ones that had nothing to do with the topic were removed. Relevant things included interviews and talks with the developers, where they explained something relating to the design or development of the world of *Overwatch*. Then these remaining were looked into in more detail to find out if they would have anything useful from the developers to use as data in this study. At first, I was collecting both articles

and videos, anything I could find from the search results that was relevant and saving them as links in my document. But after finding a lot of long relevant videos, and vague articles that didn't have so many quotes, but shorter snippets of information, I first started to work on the videos. After coding them for a while and seeing the amount of work, I decided to just stick with the videos, to stay in the scope of a thesis.

Table 2. The selected videos and developers in them

Number/Title/Developers	Length in minutes
1. D.I.C.E 2017 - Overwatch: How Blizzard Created a Hopeful Vision of the Future Jeff Kaplan / Game Director	33
2. GDC 2017 - Thinking Globally: Building the Optimistic Future of Overwatch Michael Chu / Lead Writer	62
3. GDC 2017 - The Art of Overwatch: Evolving a Legacy William Petras / Art Director Arnold Tsang / Assistant Art Director	66
4. Gamespot - The Story of Overwatch:	
The Fall of Titan	20
Return of the 90s Shooter	20
The Story of Overwatch: 21 Hero Salute Chris Metzen / Creative Director Jeff Kaplan / Game Director Scott Mercer / Principal Designer Aaron Keller / Assistant Game Director Arnold Tsang / Assistant Art Director Geoff Goodman / Principal Designer Michael Chu / Senior Game Designer William Petras / Art Director	20
5. IGN - The Making of Overwatch:	
How the Failure of Titan Gave Rise to Blizzard's Next Big Thing	4
Blizzard's First World in 17 Years Starts with A Robot War	5
How Blizzard is Preparing for Its First-Person Future Chris Metzen / Creative Director Jeff Kaplan / Game Director Scott Mercer / Principal Designer Aaron Keller / Assistant Game Director Arnold Tsang / Assistant Art Director	6

So in the end, I ended up with nine videos, which are listed in more detail in table 2, and numbered for easy referencing later on. In the table, there are the video titles, as well as the included developers and their titles, and the length of each video. There are two sets of three-part video series, which are listed under numbers 4 and 5, as they are from the same video series. Those videos were produced by external 'actors', which are Gamespot (video 4) and IGN (video 5). Gamespot had three-part video series on the topic, where Danny O'Dwyer interviewed Blizzard employees and these are total of 60 minutes. The three-video series by IGN, which have no interviewer mentioned, last total of 15 minutes. The remaining 3 videos were presentations and talks held by Blizzard employees themselves in conferences, which last a total of 161 minutes. Two of them were solo talks (videos 1 and 2), and one of them had two developers talking about the art in *Overwatch* (video 3). So all of the videos combined provide almost 4 hours of video material.

The data dates back to the years 2016 and 2017, since that is when the game was new, so the developers were talking about it on many platforms. All of these videos are available publicly on the internet, and they were not presented confidently, so there should be no concerns of using them on this thesis. And that is also why the quotes from the data will have the speaker's name attached to it. The developers in the videos have leading roles in the company. They are art directors, game directors, creative directors, game designers to name a few. So most of them, if not all (it isn't clear for all of the titles), have a big responsibility and impact on the process and final product and probably have to lead other employees in the development process.

In the next phase, the videos were added to the program ATLAS.ti and iteratively coded. As I was using this program and coding for the first time ever, during the first round I wasn't so sure what I was doing, so I was just finding and listing keywords of the topics the developers were talking about. Going through the videos once, I realized how slow it would be to work with video material, so I decided to transcribe the. Since the nature of the material is kind of similar, just consisting of interviews by journalists and the talks by the developers themselves, there wasn't much need to separate or group them in

any way but just analyzing them all together. After watching the videos and then transcribing them into text documents, I realized how much data there already was, almost four hours of video. So I decided that the few relevant articles would not be needed, just because this study has its limitations and scope. At first, I was thinking that maybe I should remove some of the videos to be able to finish the study in a reasonable time, but then I decided to keep them all, because I can just analyze the most relevant points more thoroughly and leave the more irrelevant stuff with less attention. Not all of the material is directly linked to building the world, but also on the connected topics.

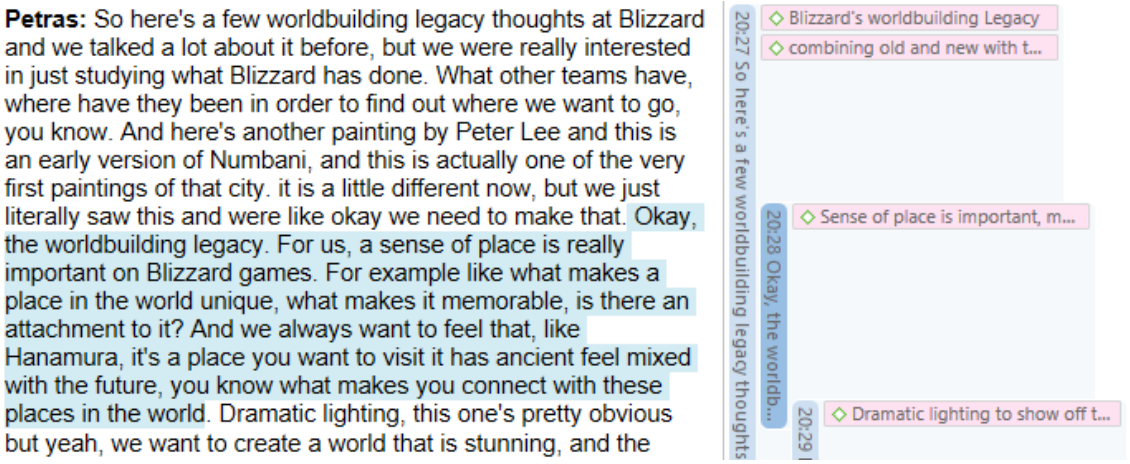

Figure 9. Example of the initial coding phase I made in ATLAS.ti

Next, I did the proper initial coding to the transcribed texts, and it went better than the first time, as I was using the line-by-line style of coding described by Charmaz (2006). Example of this coding can be seen on figure 9, so each line of text was included in the coding. The coding was more focused on finding out the processes and motivations and actions behind the words, rather than just listing out the themes that were discussed, as recommended by Charmaz. But I was still adding every line of text as codes, unless it was something really irrelevant, like “Hey guys, how are you doing?” I coded the transcribed texts quite fast and intuitively and did not worry about categories or other following steps yet.

As Charmaz (2006) points out, writing memos is an important part of this type of study that help to form ideas and refine them based on the data. Between reading the texts and coding them, I wrote down memos about the things I noticed, and thoughts that

came to my mind during the process. These memos were then later be used when analyzing and discussing the content and the process. They also helped to establish the base for categories of worldbuilding themes, and to notice what was important and how the different actions and processes in the data were connected to each other. The memo writing was done when needed, and not organized or timed in any specific way. But I think it did help me in writing out my thoughts about the data and coding, as well as finding new connections, and then later remembering the notions made in the early stages.

The next main phase of coding was focused coding. As Charmaz (2006) explains it, focused coding is going through the same data again, with the knowledge from earlier phases, and making decisions about the codes and categories. So I started to organize the codes in categories and think about how to connect them and what kind of patterns there was to be found. I realized that there was a lot of material about many kinds of design themes, but I would have to focus on the worldbuilding part, and how the processes are linked into that. There would have possibly been enough data for other kind of study as well, but the scope was be kept in mind, and so the research questions were focused on during this time. This phase of focused coding was harder than the initial one, since it included more decisions and thinking about the whole context and codes during the coding itself. It helped to refine the categories I came up with and allowed me to write more about them while categorizing the codes. As the whole picture started to form, it was easier to see connections between the different processes and how they were all connected.

After the categories that will be presented in chapter 5 were constructed, I also searched the data for direct quotes that could be used as an example to reflect each category. There were some very descriptive quotes that felt important to add, with the exact words of the developers. These quotes give the categories depth and assist in illustrating what the developers meant.

Charmaz (2006) notes how GTM also usually includes theoretical sampling and collecting more data until the categories are saturated, continuing until they no longer make new

theories or properties. For this study, I collected the data just once, and didn't go back to the data collection phase, as I felt like the amount I had was enough for the scope of this thesis. In an ideal situation, collecting the data in multiple phases could be used to reach a good saturation. But in this case, I just went through the material multiple times until I could find no more things to add or edit into the created categories and results. One of the categories was added much later than the others, when I realized there was something missing, and the topic would continue to come up in the data all the time but had no category yet. So, the data was examined until there was nothing left to add to the results part. This phase was necessary in making sure nothing important was missed and the constructed categories were comprehensive. In this way the saturation needed for the scope of this study was reached.

It must be noted, that the presentations and interviews used as the data can contain a specific point of view and intent of the developers. While reading the results, it is good to remember that the data used for this study is something the company wants to show the outside world. Maybe they are telling just the things they are asked, or they feel are important, since the interviews are short and probably also cut and edited by the reporters, and the talks aren't that long either. Also, the interviews and talks are something created for both promotion and marketing, for the game and also company, so the study conveys an image that Blizzard or the game developers want to present to the public. Therefore, in the next chapter 5. Results and discussion, the nature of the material will be taken into consideration.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the findings of the analysis will be presented, and the formed categories will be listed and explained with examples. Then, a discussion about the results will follow. It will include reflecting the results with the worldbuilding literature concepts presented earlier, as well as the game and transmedia universe itself.

5.1 Findings

The findings based on the data will be shared next, including the constructed categories of worldbuilding themes and examples of each of them as direct quotes. As I was using GTM for this analysis and had no pre-existing theses or claims I wanted to prove, I was open to everything the data had to offer and what it told about the process of worldbuilding in this case. The articles were first coded initially using line-by-line coding, and it was done quickly and not thinking about the analysis or categories, just letting the data speak for itself. After the first round I wrote some memos of the things that seemed the most relevant after the initial coding. As mentioned earlier, the data should be considered as marketing material as well and as a part of the company's public image. The story of the development team going from hardships to success as a narrative can maybe help them to boost team morale and keep on trying. Also, not to be forgotten that most of the interviews and talks were given during or after the game was released. That might affect the nature of the materials, looking back at the project and remembering the different parts of the project.

I noticed that the developers often referred to the game and its world with the term 'Overwatch Universe', which includes all the different media, not just the game. This can mean that they think of it as something bigger than a game. They also have some phrases many of them like to use and repeat, such as 'future worth fighting for' and how they wanted the game to be 'bright' and 'dynamic'. It is interesting how these phrases

are repeated by multiple people. Next, I shall present the worldbuilding themes rising from the data, and then explain them.

Table 3. Worldbuilding themes constructed from developers' reflections of *Overwatch* development

Worldbuilding themes in Overwatch
Development Team's Story
Studying Company Legacy
Inspiration from Other Games
Deciding Guiding Values
Fast Iterative Development
Telling Stories Organically
Focusing on Characters
Trusting the Players
Global and Exotic Locations

The nine categories of worldbuilding themes that were constructed based on coding the data can be seen on table 3. When looking at these themes, it can seem like they are not only about worldbuilding, but overall game development. But when I was thinking about it more, I think that they kind of are linked to the topic it in some way. Since worldbuilding does consist of many aspects, such as thinking about what you want to create, how, and then actually doing it in practice. And since I was interested how the process for the game's development went overall, all these kinds of close related concepts are interesting as well, and together with worldbuilding combine the whole game design process. For example, the values will impact on the world that is the end result, as well as the methods that are used to develop that. Another example is, how the focus on characters means that they will come first, before the environments or stories are decided, and are guiding the development. Next, each of the themes will be looked with more detail, explaining them better and giving examples of each of them. The title mentioned before the direct quotes is the same as in the video where the person is saying that particular quote. For example, Michael Chu has two different titles, Lead Writer and Senior Game Designer, depending on which video is in question.

Development Team's Story

The development team's own story through the development process comes through a lot from their talk. The team went into the project Titan with prideful attitude, after making successful games at Blizzard, but then in the end Titan was cancelled after many years of development. The developers mentioned often how after failing on Titan, they were feeling down and embarrassed for letting the company down. Part of the team was transferred off the project, into other teams and the remaining team were on limited time to come up with something new, and that is when they imagined *Overwatch*. The developers say the game is hopeful by nature, as they needed hope as a team themselves at that point too, so they said they sort of developed the game for themselves as well. They were motivated and wanted to succeed and prove that they could do it, to others and themselves too and go towards the new idea together. The developers mention the moment of announcing *Overwatch* few times, how it was really special and important for them. The Creative Director of *Overwatch*, Chris Metzen describes their team's story as follows:

> "And in so many ways Overwatch is, from its themes, to its gameplay, like everything about this project, whether that's visible to the end user or not, is our story. It is redemption story. We needed this as people." (Metzen, video 4)

This quote sums up this theme well. This theme also related to the *Fast Iterative Development*, as they worked quick and tried to avoid the things they had failed on Titan, which was developed in a slower pace. In the end, the team went from failure and despair to success. In their talks and interviews, the developers thank the whole development team many times and emphasize how developing the game was a team effort, so it can be seen that they are a very close team.

Inspiration from Other Games

The developers explained how they looked at other games on the market that were doing the same things as them for inspiration, both in the worldbuilding side and also in the FPS genre. When deciding what kind of fictional Earth they wanted to create, they

studied other games that take place on Earth, and noticed many of them being realistic and/or post-apocalyptic, like *Overwatch's* Game Director Jeff Kaplan describes here:

> "So you know, starting off an obvious one is post-apocalyptic and some of the most beautiful games of our era were post-apocalyptic. I look at a game like Last of Us, which I think we can all agree on is pretty much a masterpiece, or a Fallout 4. So, some incredible work being done in this space and it didn't feel like there was a lot of breathing room for us to make a new statement, it felt like a very daunting place for us to go. Equally daunting to us, because some incredible games were being built in the space was realism." (Kaplan, video 1)

So the hopeful future vision of Earth they created is contrasting the current trend in games set on Earth, but the Overwatch developers also explain that they didn't want a perfect utopian world without any conflicts. They say that their approach is different from the other games but shows that in the game industry there is room for many kinds of approaches for this topic. This theme is also demonstrated in how the developers decided on the advanced technology and how it works in their world. They wanted something that was sci-fi but didn't want to explain how it works in too much detail, so their version is called 'firm sci-fi'. Another thing where the developers used other games as inspiration for *Overwatch*, was looking at FPS games and their gameplay and mechanics, which helped them to decide what kind of game they wanted to develop, and also think about how to make gameplay mechanics that support their values. Some of the hero ultimate mechanics were inspired by the classic FPS cheats, like wallhack (seeing enemies through the walls) or aimbot (having an assisted aim). This theme also helped them on the *Deciding Guiding Values* theme*,* when evaluating and discussing their values.

Studying Company Legacy

The development team wanted to make *Overwatch* fit in with other Blizzard games, so the company's previous games had to be studied in detail. Blizzard has their own set of company values, which were considered when developing *Overwatch,* the developers mentioned *Thinking Globally* as an example. Blizzard has made other transmedia universes in the past so it's not a completely foreign concept for them, and the previous

worlds have included novels, comics and even movies. The developers looked back on the worldbuilding of the previous games, for example *World of Warcraft*, and what they learned from that process and how the players reacted to that type of a fictional world. The developers said to have thought a lot about how they wanted to combine old and new perspectives to create a fresh Blizzard game. This impacted the decisions made both for design and art, so it was one of the underlying motivations when developing the game and the universe, staying true to their company legacy. Here is Assistant Art Director Arnold Tsang explaining how they got started in creating the art for *Overwatch*:

> "So the art team came together with all this awesome imagery, but we didn't want to get too far ahead of ourselves, so we were like, okay, another thing we learned from Titan was, we wanted to make a game that was true to Blizzard's core art values. So we kind of explored what Blizzard has done before, to come up with some of what we feel like are Blizzards core art values, something that's consistent with all of Blizzard's games." (Tsang, video 3)

The development team didn't just go for the rough outlines but took note on detailed things like how to create heroes and based them off Blizzard archetypes. But they also say how they wanted to create some fresh heroes in addition to those classic archetypes. For example, a hero called Torbjörn, who was used as an art style guide during the development, is a mix of old and new Blizzard. A similar process was done when thinking about the colors of the world for example, following some old rules but having a fresh take on them. They used the lessons they learned in *World of Warcraft* and other Blizzard games, to make the changes needed, calling this process 'Evolving Blizzard Legacy' themselves. This also is evident when sometimes they had to put the company or project vision or values ahead of their own vision, like Michael Chu explained happened for him regarding the storytelling in *Overwatch*. As a lead writer, he would have wanted to tell the story inside of the game but had to accept telling the story in other forms in the end. The developers also mention multiple times how they learned a lot from other teams at Blizzard, like the animation team, that creates all the short films and helped them during the development.

Deciding Guiding Values

The developers had many guidelines and principles they created during the development, to be able to move in the same direction together as a team, while still staying true to Blizzard values. In a lot of the videos they listed and explained the values they used while developing the game and the world. This was the case for the whole worldbuilding process, as well as separate values for level design and art, which they had so called 'pillars' for, that the team can build on. This is also linked to the *Studying Company Legacy* theme, as some of the values are taken straight from other Blizzard games. Many of the developers in the videos explained how Game Director Jeff Kaplan, an old FPS player himself, had an instinct of what to aim for. They clarify how it was used in helping to create these values and guidelines for everyone and lead the team's shared vision. Here's Lead Writer Michael Chu describing the values they created for *Overwatch*:

> "So we had these three guiding principles but what we really needed were some pillars that would define the values of the content we'd create. So, we had some meetings we came up with these eight core fundamentals that we felt applied to the different content we were going to create both outside the game and inside the game. And we actually still use these, they haven't really changed too much in all honesty I may have tweaked them a little bit for this presentation. But I'm going to read you some of the things we said, and these are pillars that we give to everyone when they start working on Overwatch, so that they sort of understand where we're coming from." (Chu, video 2)

Chu also mentioned how the company and project values sometimes went before his own values, like explained in the previous theme. The art values include memorable vistas and colors, as well as exotic locations around the world, which will be described in more detail under the theme *Global and Exotic Locations*. Concept art was a big part of the world creation to get the look they were going for and knowing what the developer team wanted to build. They were focusing about the feeling they want to convey in the world, which was bright, fun and dynamic. As one of their values was global diversity, they wanted to include many different cultures to the *Overwatch* universe. They said this can also create conflicts and admit to making mistakes in the

process when representing different cultures. But they also say how they think it is okay to sometimes fail, after all they were trying and doing their best. So they accepted the mistakes, that aiming for these values might cause during the process.

Fast Iterative Development

The *Overwatch* developers felt that iteration and giving feedback on the designs were important during development to improve their designs. So for example, one map that they showed had gone through many iterations and prototyping. This decision was affected by the failure of Titan, so to prevent the same mistakes as they did in that project, they wanted to develop the game quickly. One of the development styles was to create milestones for the project, an example of that could be adding three heroes into the game. Here is a quote from Game Director Jeff Kaplan explaining how they couldn't use the assets from the Titan project, and had to utilize a fast development cycle on *Overwatch*:

> "A common misconception is that we were able to take a bunch of assets from Titan and that's what was sort of the foothold to make Overwatch. But you know the assets from Titan were completely incompatible, both from a technology standpoint but also in terms of art and design. You know, while there were some similarities, they really are two totally separate games. So, in essence we were really starting from scratch in a lot of ways with Overwatch and to do that in such an accelerated development cycle was a pretty huge challenge." (Kaplan, video 5)

The developers also talk about the ideation process and how they would just brainstorm and throw around ideas that could possibly later turn into heroes or storylines or maps. They also talk about mistakes, how there was a few of them but considered them to be okay, since it allowed them to develop quickly, without worrying too much about everything being perfect. They also admit that they weren't afraid to change things after receiving feedback. This is closely tied to the next theme which is, *Telling Stories Organically*, since these two themes enabled each other to function. They didn't need to work patiently in a linear manner but could add things later when needed, in the developing story.

Telling Stories Organically

The developers created a loose timeline in the beginning, and then built it forward organically from there. They said though, that a stricter timeline could have helped to reduce mistakes and other difficulties to some degree. Now they just made up stuff as they went forward and did quick prototyping to test out ideas which allowed them to develop the game quickly, as explained in the previous theme. Senior Game Designer Michael Chu explains how they approached the storytelling in this project:

> "You know we've sort of been trying to tell the story of Overwatch in this way that's a little different than how we usually do. We've really been trying not to over-explain things, over figure out like what we already have. We've been figuring it out piece by piece with each hero, with each map, with each story we're trying to tell and slowly we're sort of building the tapestry of what the story is. And it's been really interesting, because it's been a really natural process. It feels a little bit like archaeology, like we have these things we feel really strongly about and then as we put them together or as we dig them out more, we start to see connections that we hadn't planned for. But once we see them like that, of course that makes sense and you know, of course Winston and Tracer were friends and they went on all these adventures. And you know, that's sort of the organic process that we've been going with for Overwatch." (Chu, video 4)

The developers had to decide how to tell the story, and they ended up with telling it mainly outside of the game. As the *Overwatch* universe extends to comics and short movies, the developers had to design the world as a transmedia universe. Keeping in mind that what they create won't just appear in the games but can be experienced in other ways as well. Their process of creating the story wasn't always straightforward and in order, sometimes they went back to adding things to the maps after a short film told some story. So, it was not just about developing a game – but the whole transmedia universe.

Focusing on Characters

The developers emphasized the importance they put on the characters of the story, who are called heroes in *Overwatch*. The world was important as well, but their main focus was on the heroes while developing the game. As they kept the focus on the heroes,

who are center of the world, they needed to consider them in every phase of development, including in map design, story design, and world design. So this is one of the most important themes for the worldbuilding process of *Overwatch*, since they take all the things back to the heroes. They explain how for example the level design values included a design value that it is all about heroes. Here Lead Writer Michael Chu talks how the heroes were the main focus:

> ”We also knew that we wanted to focus on heroes, lots of heroes. You know one of the main things about the creation of the game was our desire to take the game mechanics that our hero designers were producing and meld them with the amazing visual designs that our artists were creating. We believed that heroes would not only drive the gameplay but also the story of the universe.” (Chu, video 2)

The developers described wanting to have diverse cast of characters, having a hero for everyone, and aiming for the heroes to be a mix of simplicity, gameplay, art and story. They also talk about how they wanted the characters to have different perspectives and want the players to empathize and understand villains as well. The heroes in Overwatch are created with backstories, like superheroes, and are also defined by their relationships with each other. Many small things were considered while designing them – how they talk, using color, unique animations etc. The developers explain that the design of a hero could start from multiple different sources, such as game mechanics, a culture or an archetype they wanted to add in the game. But for them, the most important part of creating a hero was the fantasy of the gameplay, which then leads to creating the other things supporting it. This whole theme about characters is of course reflected in the *Studying Company Legacy* theme, including the Blizzard archetypes. What is also noteworthy is the developers explaining that heroes like Tracer and Winston embody the world of *Overwatch*. Tracer was there from the start through the whole process and on the other hand, Winston is the imaginative hero, who believes in humanity despite being a gorilla himself. They felt like if Winston could be one of the heroes that shows how far they can go with the hero designs.

Trusting the Players

The developers explained how one of their values was trusting their audience as players and co-creators, allowing them to discover the story on their own. This means not telling too much and leaving something for the players to discover and figure out themselves. And slowly introducing more story, and also letting them have their own opinions on the story and having collaboration between the development team and the fans, as elaborated in this quote from Senior Game Designer Michael Chu:

> "One thing we wanted to try was, what if we don't just fill in all the blanks you know, what if we don't just give you a big timeline and say you know here are all the big important things that happened, here are the you know, explicit interactions between the characters that are in their history. And we want people to sort of experience these different parts and to start to form their own opinions like, solve some of these mysteries we put out there. Like, there's a certain sort of, almost like a collaboration that we're having with the community, where we give them some things, we see what they're interested in, it might inspire us." (Chu, video 4)

The *Overwatch* developers wanted to let fans co-create the world while experiencing it and expressing themselves through fan art. What was important for them was developing the game for both hardcore and casual players, so many different kinds of players, some who want story, and others who focus on gameplay mechanics for example. So they wanted to make the game was approachable for everyone and emphasizing teamwork in the gameplay. Also, the developers found it important to listen to the players and hear their feedback on the game and appreciate the reactions they see when releasing something new.

Global and Exotic Locations

The Overwatch developers explained how they wanted the maps to reflect their values for the bright fictional Earth they were creating. They used their experience of Blizzard games to aid them in creating the maps. In essence, they wanted the maps to take place in idealized, exotic locations around the world and using memorable colors and vistas for each of the maps. They also wanted to take into consideration how the heroes would fit into the maps, both in enabling their abilities, as well as restricting them in some

ways, for example how high some heroes can fly. An interesting aspect of how the developers came up with map ideas, was to think about where they would like to spend time on Earth themselves, as explained here by Game Director Jeff Kaplan:

> "Our goal was to make the game very approachable we wanted it to feel as inclusive as possible, we wanted as many gamers in the world to feel like Overwatch was a place that they were welcome. So, when it came to worldbuilding in Overwatch, we started to ask the question: "Okay we're making this game that takes place on planet Earth. Where would you want to spend time on planet Earth? What's cool and fun, so what are some vacation spots?"" (Kaplan, video 1)

So in this quote the fun and positivity is mentioned. It was important for them that the maps reflected something hopeful. As the game is taking place on earth it means that the world needs to be global and diverse, just like the real Earth. They talk a lot about the fantasy of a location being more important than the realism, so not just copying what they can see in the world but taking it to the next level. This also includes having some artistic license in how to build the world, instead of just doing everything like in the real world.

5.2 Connecting themes

Next, I will present a proposal of the constructed themes together in one picture, and how they are connected to each other, and how they can be sorted in three different levels.

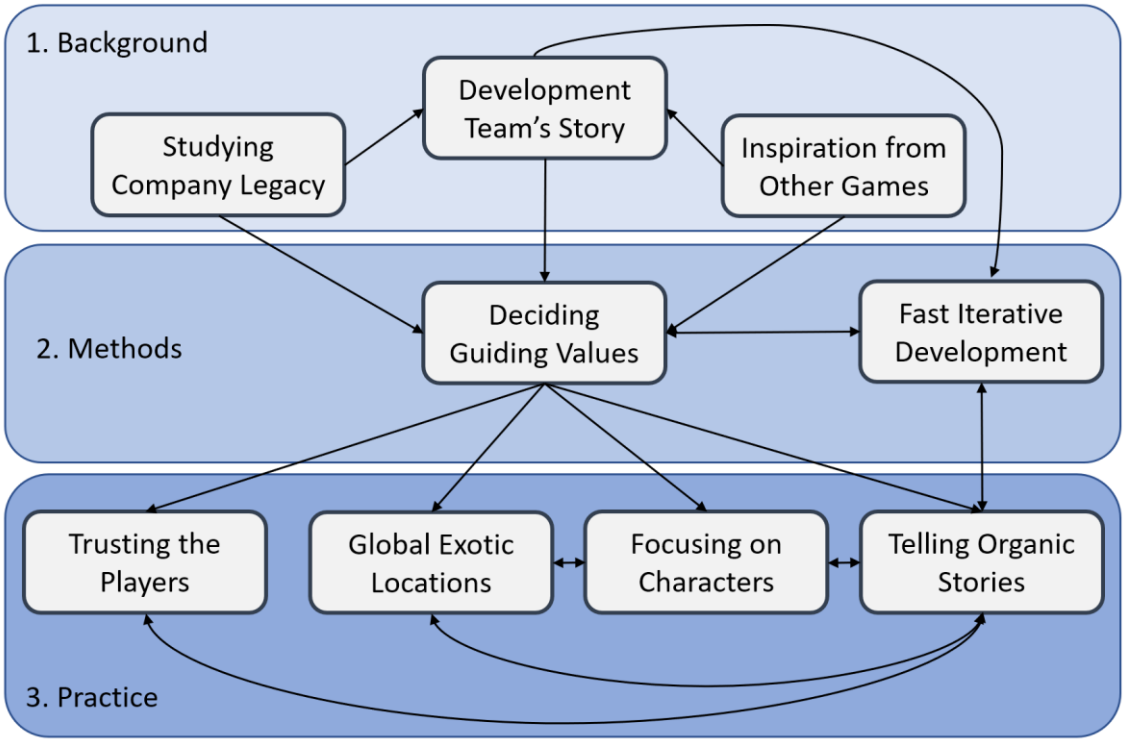

Figure 10. A proposed web of connections between the constructed themes.

I created a concept of the connections between the themes, to better explain how they fit together as a whole, which can be seen in figure 10. This helped me to grasp the entirety of them all better during the process. The map was slowly built during the GTM process, adding connections when needed and altered when needed. The map was also divided in three parts in the end to make it clearer. The first part are the background themes that affect how the project goes forward, then the second part consists of the methods used to make use of those things from background phase. Third part consists of the practical goals of how the developers wanted the game to turn out, and how the other levels could be reached in practice. These categories and their order somewhat can also be seen in the videos, as most of the time they first talk about the background research, and how the values were created, and then how the more detailed parts were designed.

As can be seen in figure 10, one of the key themes connecting all of the others is *Deciding Guiding Values*. As explained earlier, a set of values were used for the whole project, and specific areas like art and level design had their own sets of values too. The creation of these values was influenced by the themes *Studying Company Legacy* and *Inspiration*

from Other Games. What influenced the values as well were the *Development Team's Story*, and the style of development they were doing, which they described as *Fast and Iterative Development* by nature. The central theme *Deciding Guiding Values* then affected the actual development of the game and the worldbuilding in the projects through the practical themes seen on the third level of figure 10. Most of these themes on level three also affected each other in some way, sometimes both of them affecting each other, for example *Focusing on Characters* and *Global Exotic Locations* going both ways.

5.3 Discussion

Now the presented results will be analyzed in detail and in the context of this study and the literature and concepts presented earlier. Possible similarities and differences will be discussed. Also, the results will be reflected to other *Overwatch* studies.

One interesting factor is the storyline for the developer team and for the company, how they went from failure to victory themselves during the process. First, project Titan failed but, in the end, *Overwatch* succeeded, and became a success story for the team and company after all the difficulties they went though. So the whole development process wasn't just about the stories inside the gameworld, but also a story about the team creating the game succeeding. It demonstrates how important the company and team are for the Overwatch project, and since they are part of such a big organization, there is not much room for doing things solo. The whole process sounds like a lot of teamwork was needed, in giving feedback and learning from each other, and that they became a tightly knit group through the different phases of failures and successes.

The results reveal how different sets of values were used during the development of *Overwatch*. It surprised me how many different sets of values were used, as the project had one set of values for the whole world, and then additional values for art and level design. As mentioned in the literature review, directing large numbers of developers can be challenging, and there needs to be unified direction, so these guiding values are an

example of that, and help to keep the world consistent. Kultima and Sandovar (2016) presented the term *game design values*, and explored the different values, creating a framework for them. In the article the concept of value pluralism is introduced, meaning that there are multiple values used in the design process. Some of the values introduced in that article match the values constructed in their study, such as their *Value of Player Centrism*, and in this study the value of *Trusting the Players*. There are many other overlaps as well, which provides some confirmation for the result of this study. Although the framework by Kultima and Sandovar is larger and includes the game design values in general, and this project is just considering a single game project.

Another notable thing about the values is how the process included values by different actors. There was sometimes a separation between company values, the project values, and also the personal values of the developers. It looks like mostly they went with the company values but created their own project values to the mix to create new twist on things. But sometimes they also had to give up their own values to be able to develop the project in the best way possible, for example when Chu said he had to go against his own wishes when agreeing to do the story outside of the game. So that can be seen as a compromise of different values, and how they can be negotiated in a game project.

The three values mentioned in the literature when evaluating fictional worlds were invention, completeness and consistency (Wolf 2017). I will not evaluate the final product, the world of *Overwatch*, but rather how they possibly tried to go for all or some of these things during the development. It seems that the *Overwatch* team has at least aimed for most of these, as they talk about their established the values mentioned earlier, which can be beneficial for the consistency of the world, especially when developing with a large team and needing a shared direction. As the creation of fictional worlds require a lot of work, they can also need the contribution of many people as discussed in the literature review. So a good direction for the whole development team is important to be able to create a coherent and believable fictional world. This can be also seen in the results, as the *Overwatch* team created many values and pillars to guide the team through the process. They have created many games in the past, so they

probably know how important it is to go into same direction with the team. About the art, both having art direction to stay consistent and have a coherent world, as well as having artistic freedom and license, to create something new inside of the genre while still being a part of it. The second value of evaluating fictional worlds, Completeness is harder to evaluate without analyzing the whole world and based on the results they didn't go for perfect completeness. The style of storytelling that they used was not telling everything and making the world completely finished, but instead leaving something for the fans to explore. Maybe there is at least some kind of illusion of completeness, which was desirable, as the universe can seem like a whole world without actually being one. The third fictional world value for evaluation was consistency, and they admit they did some mistakes on this part. Some of the story elements on timeline weren't always consistent, so this value is maybe not so well done in this project. It might be because they worked so fast while developing and wanted to keep the storytelling organic. So maybe a development process can involve choices of what is most important, finishing the game fast but with possible mistakes, or making everything perfect and taking a longer time.

Conducting market studies is important for game companies, as it enables them to find out what others are doing and how to make their own game even better. This includes comparing other games an using them as inspiration, helping to decide how to do something or demonstrate the things to avoid. This was clearly used in the *Overwatch* development process to help during the process. In the literature review it was explained how worlds are ideally a mix of conventions and innovation. Overwatch development process looks like one that has used both of those things to create a fictional world. As said in the previous chapter, they wanted to do some things different than the other games, in how they imagined Earth to be, so they added their own unique part into the genre, but also got some inspiration from other games.

As the developers explained that they wanted to create the game for both casuals and hardcore players, which can be a hard task since the player base can be pretty divided. Some players want more difficult gameplay and focus on competitive gaming, while

others just want to enjoy the world and the fantasy. Overwatch has stories but also esports, so they have got both to some degree. And another dimension to this is how they wanted to make everyone feel welcome in the game by presenting different cultures from around the world in the game. As said in the earlier *Overwatch* chapter, the game and universe have received both praise and critique on the diversity aspect of the game. Some people being happy they are trying to be inclusive, and others critiquing the way they are doing it.

So as there hasn't been exactly the same studies in the past in this topic, it cannot be directly compared to anything. But as discussed in the previous *Overwatch* chapter, there has been some studies that touch similar subjects, which I am going to mention. The closest one is the study by Blom (2017), where *Overwatch* is presented as a shared universe instead of a transmedia universe, as explained in the previous chapter. However, that paper didn't really talk about the development phase of the game, so these studies are not comparable.

Like mentioned in the literature review, transmedia worlds are getting more popular with the new expanding media platforms. It will be interesting to see the development of them, and how they will be created in the future. There will be growing number of studies for sure, and new technologies taken into consideration with the research on the topic.

6 CONCLUSION

This chapter will summarize what was studied, how the study was conducted and what were the results. The analysis and the limitations of the study will be discussed shortly. In the end, possible future research topics will be suggested for game studies in general and then specifically for *Overwatch*.

6.1 Summary

The study started with the research questions: how was the world of *Overwatch* built? What were the goals and intentions behind the game's design? I think in the end I managed to answer these questions somewhat through the process of analyzing videos with The Grounded Theory Method in the Constructivist style of Charmaz (2006). The results were also reflected on with the literature presented earlier, to demonstrate how the results are connected to the concepts of worldbuilding and fictional worlds in the research field.

The results included the constructed categories, which were explained in detail in the previous chapter. The following categories of worldbuilding themes in Overwatch were constructed through the coding and sorting of data: *Development Team's Story, Studying Company Legacy, Inspiration from Other Games, Deciding Guiding Values, Fast Iterative Development, Telling Stories Organically, Focusing on Characters, Trusting the Players, Global and Exotic Locations.* The categories were also demonstrated as a figure, which showed the different relations between these categories. The constructed categories were also divided in three parts shown in the figure, which were background, tools and practice, meaning the shift from more investigative background information, through different tools to then reflecting the other two levels into practice and using them to create the final product. It can also be emphasized how none of these motivations or goals or intentions is strictly separate, but they are all somehow connected into each other, all being centralized around the theme *Deciding Guiding*

Values, which was directly connected to all of the other themes. Values seem to be important in the game development process, as discussed in-depth the previous chapter.

I think this study gives an idea of what kind of things can be taken into consideration when developing games and what kind of concepts can influence the worldbuilding process and the end result. It is not just about how to make a fun game, but also how to make it immersive, and deliver the developers' vision to the players, and how the game looks like in the big picture, when comparing it to the company's other games and other games in the market, to give some examples. Reading the literature and completing the study gave me an idea of how much thought and work can go into creating a fictional world. It can require many things, such as maps, geography, cultures, people etc., that are created. But as *Overwatch* is located on Earth, the developers could take the current world and imagine how the future could look like and save some time and trouble but face some different challenges.

6.2 Limitations

The biggest limitations in this study were probably limited time and small scope, since it is a master's thesis, and the nature of the data. As said, this was a study of just one game, so it can't give an answer to all of the various game projects, but just for this particular game and project. Another limitation was that the data consisted of a homogenous group of developers from the United States, and the results could be different if the data was collected from other countries, or positions in the development team and included women as well. This study takes into consideration just this one specific game and company, which naturally limits it. The game design process might be very different depending on the company and country. The data was combined from people in the leading roles of the project, who know about the bigger picture, it could be different if asked from someone who was responsible for small part of the game.

Another limitation was that the interviews were not done by me, so for this study I didn't come up with the questions myself. I also don't think collecting more relevant data would have been possible to get a proper theoretical saturation, since the available material for this study is limited. Even though I found a lot of data for my analysis, finding more of it would have been really difficult, since as said many times, this is a study of just one game. That is also a limitation, but in a way, it can also be a strength. The results can offer a deeper look into one certain development process, instead of generalizing the processes of many.

It was personally hard for me to get a grasp of the coding and analysis process in the beginning. I spent too much time worrying if I will do it perfectly straight away, instead of just trying it out and navigating problems as they arise. I think the process would be a lot smoother if I were to use the Grounded Theory Method again in another study. I wouldn't be so afraid of starting the coding process, and doing it perfectly, but would just start doing it and report the process and figure it out. Also I didn't quite understand all the phases of the method beforehand, even after reading about it in multiple sources. Only after I experienced them myself I got a better perception of the whole method.

6.3 Possible future research topics

I think there are multiple interesting topics that could be studied in the future connected to this study. Maybe some other Blizzard games could be researched too, and the results could be compared, on how the worldbuilding and design progress proceeded in those games. In the future it will be interesting to compare the fictional universe of *Overwatch* with the actual decade of 2070's. What similarities and differences there are, how much did Blizzard foretell the future development on Earth. It would be interesting to see future analysis of new games in the same genre, how multiplayer FPS games to come will tell stories. Also doing a similar study but with the researcher doing the questions and interviews to get data, instead using already existing material.

As could be seen in the chapter on Overwatch studies, it has been studied from many perspectives already. One interesting research topic on *Overwatch* would be studying what people write about it on social media, such as Twitter. There has been a wide range of opinions from people showing up on my feeds, including both positive and negative feedback on the game. Usually the community reacts to a new hero or story release, or just an upcoming patch and is vocal about how they feel about it. This could be an interesting research topic regarding *Overwatch*. As far as I have noticed, there has a lot of been tweets about many aspects of the game as well. For example esports and players, organizations, Blizzard's stance on it, heroes and their balance, fanart and cosplay etc. So the game offers a wide variety of research topics to choose from.

REFERENCES

Literature

Aldred, Jessica. 2017. “Authorship.” In *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, Edited by. Mark J.P Wolf. Routledge.

Alexander, Lily. 2017. “Genre.” In *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, Edited by. Mark J.P Wolf. Routledge.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised Edition. London and New York: Verso.

Bartle, Richard A. 2004. *Designing Virtual Worlds.* New Riders.

Belmonte, Juan Francisco. 2017. “Overwatching Blizzard: Ethnicity and National Identities in Blizzard’s Multiplayer Shooter*.”* In *DiGRA* 2017.

Blom, Joleen. 2018. “Overwatch as a Shared Universe: Game Worlds in a Transmedial Franchise.” *In DiGRA* 2018.

Castronova, Edward. 2008. *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games.* University of Chicago Press.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.

Dovey, Jonathan, and Kennedy, Helen W. 2007. “From margin to center: Biographies of technicity and the construction of hegemonic games culture.” In *The players’ realm: Studies on the culture of video games and gaming*, Edited by Jonas Heide Smith and J. Patrick Williams. McFarland. 131-153.

Eliasson, David. 2017. “What Level Design Elements Determine Flow?: How Light and Objects Guide the Player in Overwatch and Doom.” Bachelor’s thesis, Uppsala University.

Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Sociology Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide.* NYU press.

Juul, Jesper. 2011. *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds.* MIT press.

Jørgensen, Kristine. 2013. *Gameworld interfaces*. MIT Press.

Konzack, Lars. 2017. “Transmediality.” In *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, Edited by. Mark J.P Wolf. Routledge.

Kultima, Annakaisa. 2018. “Game design praxiology.” PhD Dissertation, University of Tampere. Tampere University Press.

Kultima, Annakaisa, and Alyea Sandovar. 2016. "Game design values." In *Proceedings of the 20th International Academic Mindtrek Conference.* ACM.

Mitchell, Briar Lee. 2012. *Game Design Essentials.* John Wiley & Sons.

Planells de la Maza, Antonio José. 2017. *Possible Worlds in Video Games: From Classic Narrative to Meaningful Actions*. Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press.

Roine, Hanna-Riikka. 2016. "Imaginative, Immersive and Interactive Engagements. the Rhetoric of Worldbuilding in Contemporary Speculative Fiction." PhD Dissertation, University of Tampere.

Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. 2004. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals.* MIT press.

Salisbury, John, and Tom Cole. 2016. “Grounded Theory in Games Research: Making the Case and Exploring the Options.” In *Proceedings of the 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*.

Schell, Jesse. 2008. *The Art of Game Design: A book of lenses.* Morgan Kaufmann.

Shur, Etelle. 2017. “Remixing Overwatch: A Case Study in Fan Interactions with Video Game Sound.” Bachelor’s thesis, Scripps College.

Stenros, Jaakko, and Olli Sotamaa. 2009. “Commoditization of Helping Players Play: Rise of the Service Paradigm.” In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2009*, Brunel University, London, UK.

Svensson, Tova. 2017. “Cultural Appropriation in Games: A Comparative Study between Far Cry 3 (2012), Overwatch (2016) and Horizon Zero Dawn (2017).” Bachelor’s thesis, Uppsala University.

Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel. 1947. *On Fairy-Stories.* Oxford University Press.

Välisalo, Tanja, and Maria Ruotsalainen. 2018. Abstract of: “Overwatch: The Game, the eSports, and Transmedial User Practices.” Presented in *Seminar on eSports, Exergaming, and Fantasy Leagues.* University of Jyväskylä.

Wolf, Mark J.P. 2017. “World Design.” In *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, Edited by. Mark J.P Wolf. Routledge.

Wolf, Mark J. P. 2014. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation.* Routledge.

Other

Blizzard. 2015. “Lúcio Brings Music to Life with Synaesthesia World Tour.” Published 30 July 2015. Accessed 9 April 2019. https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/news/19828053.

Blizzard. 2019. Accessed 11 April 2019. https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/media/

Blizzard Entertainment. 2019. “Get back in the fight with Ana’s Bastet challenge”. Published 8 January 2019. Accessed 9 April 2019. https://news.blizzard.com/en-us/overwatch/22835080/get-back-in-the-fight-with-ana-s-bastet-challenge.

Bolding, Jonathan. 2018. “They're making Overwatch's Lucio-Ohs into a real cereal that will be on sale this December.” PC Gamer. Published 2 November 2018. Accessed 09 April 2019. https://www.pcgamer.com/theyre-actually-making-overwatchs-lucio-ohs-into-real-cereal/.

Campbell, Colin. 2017 “Overwatch’s search for diversity. Blizzard is trying to fix gaming’s representation problem.” Polygon. Published 20 March 2017. Accessed 10 April 2019. https://www.polygon.com/features/2017/3/20/14960924/overwatch-diversity-jeff-kaplan-interview-blizzard.

Grayson, Nathan. 2018. “Blizzard Explains Why *Overwatch* Still Doesn't Have A Black Woman Hero.” Kotaku. Published 11 May 2018, Accessed 11 April 2019. https://kotaku.com/blizzard-explains-why-overwatch-still-doesnt-have-a-bla-1830241379.

Harari, Yuval Noah. 2015. ”Why humans run the world | Yuval Noah Harari” 17:08. TED. Published 24 July 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzj7Wg4DAbs.

Jenkins, Henry. 2019. “WHO THE &%&# IS HENRY JENKINS?” Accessed 10 April 2019. https://henryjenkins.org/aboutmehtml.

Purslow, Matt. 2017. “Are Overwatch’s characters bigger than the game itself?” PCGamesN. Published 31 March 2017. Accessed 9 April 2019. https://www.pcgamesn.com/overwatch/overwatch-characters-fandom.

Ramos, Jeff. 2017. “The definitive Overwatch timeline.” Polygon. Published 28 April 2017. Accessed 10 April 2019. https://www.polygon.com/2016/5/24/11722688/overwatch-timeline.

Overwatch. 2016. Video game. Blizzard Entertainment.

Overwatch cinematic trailer. 2014. Published 7 November 2014. Accessed 29 April 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqnKB22pOC0.

Overwatch Twitter. 2017. “35 Million players and counting…” @PlayOverwatch. Published 16 October 2017. Accessed 10 November 2018. https://twitter.com/PlayOverwatch/status/919925924769906688.

Wikipedia. 2018. “Overwatch (video game).” Last modified 26 November 2018. Accessed 10 April 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overwatch_(video_game).

Figures