Glossary

This glossary is an alphabetically arranged compilation of core terminology marked in bold on first instance in the main text. The definitions or explanations are my own, unless otherwise stated, and are intended to provide clarity to the nomenclature employed in the main text, rather than a more protracted consideration of problematic definition.

AAA – games developed for popular platforms with the largest production and marketing budgets.

action/adventure game – generic videogame genre of predominantly narrative and combat oriented games.

AFK – shorthand notice to other players in online games: ‘away from keyboard’.

backmasked – a recording technique that reverses the play direction of audio waves.

buffs – skills or powers that one player uses to improve the power attributes of an ally (usually in MMORPG games).

casual game – catchall category that includes anything from card games (such as Solitaire) to “Social Games” (such as Farmville, on the Facebook application platform).

cooldown – a timer linked to a particular player skill (or set of skills) that prevents that skill from being reactivated until a specified countdown is complete.

cutscene – cinematic scenes that interrupt normal gameplay, sometimes pre-rendered.

demo – demonstration software, usually made available for free.

DPS – ‘damage per second’. Damage is applied over time (usually in RPG games).

dungeon – primarily a term relating to RPGs, designating a particular area within a game, often loaded separately into the system memory.

Easter egg – hidden clues or extras for the benefit of eagle-eyed players.

fighting/beat ‘em up – martial arts/boxing games.

first-person shooter (FPS) – 3D firearm combat game played primarily in first person perspective.

griefing – the act of deliberately disrupting the gameplay or immersion of other players (predominantly in online games).
**grind(ing)** – the process a player must take in order to gain experience and other rewards through the completion of repetitive tasks.¹

**healer** – RPG role dedicated to healing other players or NPC allies.

**hit points** – numerical measure of a character’s health, usually out of 100.

**HUD** – ‘heads up display’. Interface overlay that displays information such as health and ammunition.

**incidental** – short audio cue that provides supplementary diegetic underscoring.

**instance(d)** – a demarcated virtual zone in online games that is only persistent for a particular player (and potentially their allies), usually only for the duration of the current quest.

**level up/levelling** – an event (or goal) which marks progress. Players must gain sufficient experience or complete certain objectives in order to reach higher levels, and thereby access more content in the game and greater skills or powers. Usually a mechanism employed in RPGs.

**level** – usually refers to a specific map or chapter. Game engines traditionally load one level at a time into memory so that the assets are available for the player. Some modern games avoid loading levels by employing continuous data streaming techniques.

**licensed** – copyright music licensed for use in a particular game.

**macros** – short and relatively simple software scripts that automated particular processes or actions. Players can write their own macros and then ‘map’ or ‘bind’ them to particular keys or buttons.

**massively multiplayer online game (MMO)** – usually comprise large-scale persistent online virtual worlds in which players interact and socialize through their avatars. Can be a multiplayer version of any of the above genres, but is most commonly associated with the RPG (MMORPG).

**middleware** – software that is designed to process specific tasks, such as dynamic or interactive music systems, or physics simulations. Usually licensed by developers and then integrated into their game engine.

**mod(ding)** – mods are player-created modifications to the game content. Usually made freely available to the player community.

**multiplayer** – games designed for multiple players, either with a split-screen and separate controllers, turn-based with shared controllers, or online with completely separate gaming systems.

**non-playable characters (NPCs)** – all characters in games that are controlled by the game, either with scripted actions or through an artificial intelligence (AI) engine.

open world – a virtual world in which the player(s) has considerable freedom of choice to explore.

persistent – in MMO games, changes or assets that are permanent on the main servers and therefore made available to all players (sometimes limited to specific instances or servers).

pre-rendered – a cut-scene or animation that has been recorded as a video rather than being rendered in real time.

quest – a specific mission for the player to complete, usually with clearly defined objectives (some of which may be optional).

questline – a series of related quests that must be completed in a specified order, each one unlocking the next.

racing game – a sub-genre of sport, could include any form of racing, although generally refers to motorcar racing games.

role-playing game (RPG) – often a third-person perspective action/adventure game that involves developing a character’s “statistics” (such as health) whilst exploring their story in a virtual world.

sandbox – a closed environment within which there is relative freedom.

server – a computer connected to the internet that serves content in the form of websites or databases. Players connect to game servers that store their profiles and track their movements within multiplayer games.

simulation – games that tend to emphasize realism by simulate specific real-world scenarios, such as city building/management or aviation.

single player – games (or game modes) designed for one player only.

skill rotation – a particular sequence of skills to be executed (usually in MMORPGs). Players debate the merits of specific rotations in different scenarios.

soundbank – a data collection of various sound files, often in wave format.

sport game – virtual representation of any sporting competition/activity.

stinger – a very short audio cue, sometimes comprising just a single chord or note, and often used in television shows to mark scene transitions.

strategy game – further divided into the subcategories of real-time (RTS) and turn-based (TBS) games, these are most similar to board games such as RISK, and chess, usually providing large-scale bird’s-eye overviews.

tank – an RPG role dedicated to absorbing enemy damage.

waves/.wav – standard uncompressed audio file format sometimes used in production and even the final products games. Audio files are often collated into soundbanks, and are sometimes encrypted so that they cannot be extracted (easily) from the game data.