Creating an Online Community: The Beekeeepers of Ilovebees.com

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In the Summer of 2004, a woman cried for help. Hearing that desperate plea, people from all walks of life, young and old, students and teachers alike came to her aid. These strangers did not know what they could do, but they were there and they were ready to do whatever was necessary to help. The woman, though, was not a woman in the traditional sense, in fact, she was no human at all but "Melissa" the central character in a game called "Ilovebees." Ilovebees was a game designed to advertise the at the time upcoming video game Halo 2, a shooting game set in the far future where the player assumed the role of an elite soldier fighting to save the Earth. Ilovebees did this by drawing people into the story of the video game through puzzles, both online, such as deciphering clues hidden on a website, and offline answering telephones. Ilovebees also utilized interactions with Melissa, an Artificial Intelligence whose job was to command elite soldiers like the one in Halo 2, and her opponent the Sleeping Princess, a mysterious childlike Artificial Intelligence who constantly acted against Melissa, both played by actress Kristen Rutherford. The people coming to her aid, too, were gathering in a very untraditional way. Rather than coming out to help physically, the players of the game, or "Beekeepers,"[1] as they came to call themselves, organized on the Internet. And that allowed them to gather from all corners of the United states and the world. Utilizing new technologies and building a global virtual community that shared a common language and formed a complex organization, The Beekeepers was not simply players, they were an example of the new Internet

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1 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; accessed November 4, 2008; available from
   http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=8279

generation that communicated and shared information online, a concept named Web 2.0 in 2004.[2]

One online gathering place, in particular, was the forum at the website named Unfiction.[3] Here the Beekeepers communicated, organized, and extended their efforts off of the Internet and into each other's real lives. The information archived on the forums of Unfiction reveal the language and technology used to build a widespread community that could communicate with heretofore untold speed. Using the power of communication technology the Beekeepers created a grassroots organization that despite being spread across the world was able to work quickly and efficiently together to achieve their goal. In the course of pursuing this goal, the members of this community formed the strong and long lasting bonds that come from a powerful shared experience. Ilovebees was more than a novelty. New technologies and ideas, new ways to communicate and organize, and the preservation of the ability to maintain a very traditional human camaraderie has strong implications for the abilities that people have available to them today. The Beekeepers who populated the forum at Unfiction were a shining example of cooperation and the meritocracy they created is a model on which we all can build a better tomorrow.

Ilovebees utilized ways to communicate, both old and new, and in particular focused on personal computers, payphones, and cellphones. Personal computers, or PCs, were used to communicate over the Internet. The players viewed the puzzles, such as garbled web pages with text hidden in its code, on the Ilovebees website and shared their theories and ideas over the Unfiction forums. The puzzles revealed map coordinates that were then be plugged into other websites available

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2 Paul Graham (November 2005), "Web 2.0"; accessed Dec 6, 2008; available from http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html
3 Unfiction Website; accessed November 4, 2008; available from http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/

at the time such as mapquest[4], a map providing website. The coordinates were linked to times and

would correspond to the location of payphones and the times those payphones would receive a call

mostly
Greerhom

Joined: 26 Jul 2004
Posts: 7
Location: SLC

visa 12:07 PDT 42.07759 -71.033858 map acme rand Brockton Massachusetts
visa 12:09 PDT 28.53806 -81.37944 map acme rand Orlando Florida
visa 12:11 PDT 40.26206 -96.785456 map acme rand Beatrice Nebraska
visa 12:13 PDT 40.1555 -105.102629 map acme rand Longmont Colorado
visa 12:19 PDT 39.71587 -111.836266 map acme rand Nephi Utah
visa 12:21 PDT 39.97775 -105.243039 map acme rand Marshall Colorado Boulder
visa 12:23 PDT 39.96288 -105.17039 map acme rand Superior Colorado

key_lime 15:37 PDT Map - Las Vegas, Nevada

candidate 17:59 PDT Map - Albuquerque, New Mexico

Posted: Sat Sep 04, 2004 3:22 am

profile   pm   YIM

from Melissa.

   As the Beekeepers gained Melissa's trust and earned positions on her crew, Melissa collected

cell phone numbers from players and would communicate with them that way, often requesting that her

crewmen complete a specific task. One task was photographing something and envision its equivalent

in the future, such as this photo comparing a Beekeeper to a "Spartan" from the future:

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4 Mapquest 2004 press release archive; accessed December 4 2004; available from http://company.mapquest.com/press-releases-2004.html

This interaction took place in a watershed moment of high speed communication.

The personal computer had been around since 1968,[5] and the Internet since 1981[6], and 2004 was a boom time for broadband Internet. Broadband, as defined by the Federal Communications Commission is the transfer of 200 kilobytes of information per second.[7] This is opposed to narrowband, which is defined as 64 kilobytes per second.[8] A kilobyte is about one thousand bytes and A byte is about one character of text to a computer. In comparison a page of text, double spaced, has roughly one hundred characters per line and roughly twenty four lines per page. That would translate to two thousand four hundred bytes per page, or a little less than two and a half kilobytes. A broadband

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5 Charles Burress, "PC premiered 40 years ago to awed crowd," *SFGate.com*, December 8, 2008; Accessed on December 8, 2008; available from http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/12/08/MN1714IRRA.DTL

6 Internet History -1980's, Computer History Museum, 2006; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from http://www.computerhistory.org/internet_history/internet_history_80s.shtml

7 Nilay Patel, "FCC redefines 'broadband' to mean 768Kbps, 'fast' to mean 'kinda slow'"; *Engadget*, March 19, 2008; Accessed on November 6, 2008; available from http://www.engadget.com/2008/03/19/fcc-redefines-broadband-to-mean-768kbps-fast-to-mean-kinda/

8 narrowband Definition, PCMag.com; accessed on November 4, 2008; available from http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=narrowband&i=47628,00.asp

connection, then, could transmit roughly eighty pages of text per second, as opposed to narrowband which could only transmit twenty fives pages per second. It's obvious how broadband connections assist in communicating very quickly, and in 2004 the Internet provider Cox reported a 32% increase in high-speed internet business, translating to a total of 2.4 million customers.[9] The widespread increase of both the speed and the size of the customer base using the newer, faster Internet resulted in a much smaller world, communication barriers between people on all sides of the world got weaker and weaker. Perhaps most easily visualized, the high speed transfer of information allowed for VoIP, Voice over Internet Protocol, which is telephone service between anyone with broadband internet service. [10]

The early 2000's also marked the transition from the pay phone to the cell phone, making it a perfect time for the way the game was structured. The pay phone debuted in 1891[11] and eventually became extraordinarily prominent. By 2002, though, pay phones were being phased out of use by the phone companies, which cited lack of use, expense, and use by drug dealers.[12] Simultaneously, business in cell phones was booming. 2004 marked the introduction of the Motorola RAZR, which was considered a major success and a turning point in the way cell phones were designed.[13] Unsurprisingly, in 2004 cell phone companies celebrated a thirty percent increase in sales from 2003.[14]

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9 Michael Rubinkam, "Cable companies report surge in high-speed Net business," *USAToday.com,* October 28, 2004; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from http://www.usatoday.com/tech/products/services/2004-10-28-cable-uptick_x.htm

10 Stephen Lawson, "Vonage Calls on Linksys for VoIP," *Pcworld.com*, August 24, 2004; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from http://www.pcworld.com/article/117525/vonage_calls_on_linksys_for_voip.html

11 From Coin to Cutting Edge: A Brief History of the Payphone, American Public Communications Council, Inc.; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from http://www.apcc.net/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=39

12 Todd Wallack, Vanessa Hua, "Endangered species, Expensive to maintain but vital to the poor, pay phones are disappearing all over California," *SFGate.com*, November 10, 2002; Accessed December 4, 2008, available from http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2002/11/10/BU27036.DTL&hw=payphones&sn=001&sc=1000

13 "Three phones that changed the world, and three phones that didn't," *Mobilegazette.com*, November 19, 2008; accessed on December 4, 2008; available from http://www.mobilegazette.com/three-phones-08x10x16.htm

14 Jeff Roberson, "Motorola embraces the ethos of cool," *MSNBC.com*, April 11, 2005; accessed on December 4, 2008; available at http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7432916/page/2/

These three devices framed the perfect moment for Ilovebees. Personal computers were fast enough for players to communicate efficiently, pay phones were still prominent enough to be useful to the game, and cell phones were becoming widespread enough to bring a very personal aspect to the game. With all these ways to communicate, though, it was necessary for people to develop a standard language. Language is a boon and a barrier to understanding, a long string of text can be very specific and enlightening to those who speak the language, but completely inaccessible to those who do not. The Beekeepers on the Unfiction forum got around this by shortening the lengths of texts used and using a pictorial representation that all players could understand.

Players communicated on the Unfiction forums in text, and looking at the new words presented in the forum give great insight into how Beekeepers were able to trade ideas so quickly and keep everything very thoroughly documented. Since communication on the forum was done only through text, terms that were more visual than they were pronounceable words become a quick way to communicate complex ideas. In addition to that, terms that are more common in everyday life gain new meaning in the context of a forum, both in how they are used and where they are used. For example "{edit}...{/edit}"[15] and several permutations of that structure are drawn from HTML code, which is the common language of websites. All websites can be broken down into HTML, and the image above indicates that the text between "{edit}" and "{/edit}" has been added to the text of a particular post after the original time of posting. Posts may need to be updated as new information came out, but to make sure people could keep track of what happened chronologically, edits were indicated. Even "HTML" itself is used to indicate that something is located on a website, so it became easy to point

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15 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; accessed on December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=6268

someone to a particular webpage, simply telling them to check the appropriate HTML. For example, telling someone to check "Links.html" instead of "http://www.ilovebees.com/links.html."[16] "<x>" was used to indicate something that can be changed, similar to the use of "x" in mathematics.[17] "AIM," was used to indicate that someone could be reached over AOL Instant Messenger, a program that allowed people to communicate with text in real time.[18] Other terms such as "Spec," or speculations, were used to indicate someone's guess at the answer or nature of a question.[19] "PM" referred to Personal Messages. Similar to e-mail, but only accessible on the particular forum it was sent from, Personal Messages were a way to send private information such as phone numbers.[20] All of these factor in together to indicate a very fast pictoral language. By using standardized formats and symbolic language drawn from sources that others were likely to be familiar with regardless of language spoken, Beekeepers were able to frame ideas visually to make it easier to sift through quickly.

The visual framework extended beyond the text that Beekeepers typed. Ingrained in the structure of the forum posts was information that can be used to sort through everything. Each post indicated who posted it, in the form of a User name, a unique name assigned to each individual. Additionally, each post is stamped with the time and date posted, according to a common forum time. If a Beekeeper on the East Coast posted at noon his time, and three hours later a Beekeeper on the West Coast posted at noon her time, the forum indicates that the posts were made three hours apart.

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16 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; accessed on December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=6268&start=15
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; accessed on December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=6268&start=30
20 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; accessed on December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7410

The forum also keeps track of the number of edits and the time of the most recent edit to each post.

In the example above, Clamatius is located on the west coast while C_Brennan is located on the east,

but the forum keeps track of the fact that they posted their messages two minutes apart, regardless of

their local time.

Since the forum presents information in a standardized manner, it becomes very easy to check

who made a post and when, then when reading a post visual cues draw attention to important

information. The structure of the forum posts open up the ability for fastidious bookkeeping and the

quick visual cues utilized by Beekeepers show that they adopted a very careful system of record

keeping. Because some puzzles in the game required Beekeepers to decipher fine details, careful record

keeping was required so people could go back and double check what was actually done. All

Beekeepers recognized and appreciated this, and that was one common value that helped them form a

tight knit community.

It is now obvious that the Beekeepers had the tools to talk to each other, but then the question of

who is doing the talking presents itself. Since, on the forums, people only present themselves in the way

they post there is a certain degree of anonymity involved. Looking into the structure of the posts, again,

reveals details about the nature of the online community. Each forum post maintains a rigorous structure. In the upper left corner of each post is the user name of the person who made the post. Under the user name is an image that the person selects to represent them, and under that is the location of the person, if she chooses to share it. Underneath each post, too, is a signature that the person chooses. User names are not restricted to the given name of the person, for that matter there is no requirement that the name be pronounceable. Some are some form of a person's real name, such as "C_Brennan," others indicate a person's interest, such as "CoffeeJedi," and others can be in-jokes. "Hmrpita" is short for "Her Most Royal Pain In The Ass."[21] The images chosen by each person follows the same idea, it is something unique that in some way reflects their personality. The signature line spans the entire bottom of the post, and can be several lines long so it presents a very large block of space for customization and just like the user name and picture is entirely of the person's choosing. Two of the four sides of each post, then, frame it with personal identifiers. These identifiers become the personality of the person. Unless the image is a personal photo, others may be completely unaware of a person's sex, age, or race.

The persistence of that personality in the larger online community is very important. As CoffeeJedi notes he has "had this username forever, on AIM, on Slashdot, on Xanga..."[22] so if someone were to come across the name CoffeeJedi it is likely the same person, in the same way that a George W. Bush attending a governmental function is likely the same person each time. So, then, a name that is used across several websites can become relied upon in a manner similar to a given name. This name, and the online personality that it signifies, being created entirely by CoffeeJedi, had the advantage of being stripped of any preconceived perception other than those formed by CoffeeJedi's previous

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21 Blog Title, Blogspot.com; accessed December 04, 2008; http://hmrpita.blogspot.com/
22 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; Available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=6268&start=15

actions. Because age, sex, and race are not factors considered when a Beekeeper's personality was looked at, the traditional barriers that prevented a person from succeeding[2324] were non-existent. Every person, then, is solely judged on what skills they contribute. Moreover, any changes in a forum name can be full of meaning. At one point during the game, Beekeepers Buzzkill247 and Angelo begin working in tandem to sort through new information, eventually the collaboration became so close that they merged their names and became Buzzkill Angelo, streamlining communication between others and themselves. Their relationship was entirely based on their skills as information gatherers, and the trust others gave them by being willing to contact them was entirely derived from those merits.

The forum names are so persistent that the Beekeepers begin to use them in their offline adventures. Hmrpita, while making a report on her successes in answering phones, the primary means of communicating with Melissa, shares that "Ariock and [Hmrpita] arrive on the scene and fart around in nearby stores for awhile."[25] It's easier to use a person's user name than it is to try and juggle both a user and a real name. Like Buzzkill Angelo, others begin grouping together into teams with team names. The Beekeepers Phaedra and Kali end up going by the name Goddess Squad. A group based in Washington, D.C. Calls itself the DC Axon Hunter Signal Corps. Others do not broadcast a name, but meet regionally and organize themselves in a way that could answer phones the most efficiently since phones can be very far apart, but have times very close to each other. It was necessary for groups to

23 Dana Milbank, "A Thank-You for 18 Million Cracks in the Glass Ceiling," *Washingtonpost.com*, June 8, 2008; Accessed on December 4, 2008; Available from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/07/AR2008060701879_pf.html

24 Bill Pennington, "Breaking a Barrier 60 Years Before Robinson," *Nytimes.com*, July 27, 2006; Accessed December 4, 2008; Available from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/27/sports/27hall.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2&ref=sports

25 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=6268&start=120 .

synchronize and split up to execute their plans.[26]

The Beekeepers, like a beehive, gather together into a community motivated by a common interest. They all want to help Melissa, and in doing so begin to create a meritocracy where each person contributes based on their abilities, and there are no prejudices because people are only able to perceive each others' personalities and actions. The relative anonymity of the online personality strips away any fodder for bigoted misconceptions, the basis of all the relationships between the Beekeepers is an attitude of inclusion. Thanks to that strong inclusive attitude, people are willing to share more information about themselves than they would normally be willing to share with people they've never met in person, Buzzkill247 and Angelo, for example, actually share their home phone numbers with the community. That willingness to cooperate and share with strangers extends to the real world, too, and people manage to come together and form teams offline as tightly knit as Buzzkill247 and Angelo's. The anonymity of the forum allows for people to come together, and the cooperative attitude extends into the real world. Although the community is spread out its members are definitely connected.

Unfiction's forums are a perfect example of the power of an online community, and harnessing that power requires organization. The same technologies that served as components of the game also were the tools that Beekeepers used to organize. The natural divisions within the Beekeepers, such as region or ability to handle large amounts of information, formed niches that Beekeepers could fill. Each Beekeeper fulfilled the role they were most suited for and communication between individual groups created a complex and efficient network. Early on, Buzzkill247 and Angelo established themselves as effective organizers, and Buzzkill247 says he "Got broadband pc with dual screen so chat watch no

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26 Ibid.

prob"[27] while Angelo offers to coordinate people over the phone while at work. Buzzkill247 is capable of monitoring all the information that other people are posting, so instead of going out to answer phones, he stays inside where he will be most effective. Angelo cannot go outside due to work, so he offers to help others who need to coordinate.[28] These two people combine their ability to collect and distribute information, and, as noted earlier, by the end of the game they operate in tandem under the name Buzzkill Angelo.

Buzzkill, Angelo, and another Beekeeper, KirstenS, are each assigned specific roles. Angelo serves as Password Coordinator, he receives new answers to the puzzles in the game in the form of specific passwords that are answers to questions. For example Melissa asked "what insect do I hate the most?" and the appropriate answer would be "bees"[29] and the person who solved this puzzle would call Angelo and inform him. Angelo would then then passes them along to the Passphrase Supplier and Chat Coordinator. Buzzkill, the supplier, then calls up teams and tells them the new passwords while KirstenS goes into chat rooms and broadcasts them to anyone there. Buzzkill also serves as Forum Watcher, gathering passwords that people post on the forum instead of calling Angelo; KirstenS does double duty as Blog Coordinator, posting new passwords to blogs. Entirely of their own accord, the players created a complex information network designed to gather information from Beekeepers who are offline, process it, and redistribute it to other Beekeepers over all available communication methods.[30] The technology to communicate quickly from anywhere, the language that allowed Beekeepers to sort through information quickly, and the willingness to work together borne from

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27 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7410
28 Ibid.
29 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7445

common interest and individual talents all contribute to the Beekeepers in their ultimate form, a single cohesive unit spread across the United States, and to a lesser extent France, the United Kingdom, and Australia, although these groups functioned more independently than those in the United States.[31] Since Ilovebees was a promotion for the North American release of Halo 2, it is understandable that less emphasis was put on foreign groups, and this does suggest a level of forward thinking and leadership in the formation of global communities on the part of the United States. In 2008, after the election of Barack Obama as U.S. President, a Nigerian professor echoed that sentiment.[32]

Today, grassroots Internet communities are hardly unique and their influence on the world stage is absolutely indisputable. Communities surrounding every hobby or interest, from repairing old Barbie dolls to the proper way to be manly thrive online.[33][34] Other communities very successfully promote their political viewpoints and express social concerns.

Internet communities are becoming central to American politics on both the right and the left. Grassfire.org is a popular conservative website that connects like-minded individuals and encourages them to "Join the (Patriotic, Resiliant, Conservative) Resistance" against the presidency of Barack Obama.[35] In December 2008, the FireSociety, Grassfire's online forum, had in excess of thirty one thousand members.[36] Like the Beekeepers of the Unfiction forum, their activities extend into the offline

30 Ibid.
31 Forum Post, Unfiction.com, accessed on December 4, 2008; available from
    http://forums.Unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=6704
32 Friday Ndubuisi, "Why America leads the world," *ngrguardiannews.com*, December 8, 2008; accessed December 8, 2008; available from
    http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/editorial_opinion/article04/indexn2_html?pdate=081208&ptitle=Why%20America%20leads%20the%20world
33 Barbie Collector Website, Thebdoll.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; Avalable from http://www.thebdoll.com
34 The Art of Manliness Website, Artofmanliness.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; Available from
    http://www.artofmanliness.com
35 Grassfire.org front page, Grassfire.org; Accessed December 4 2008; available from http://www.grassfire.org
36 Firesociety.com front page, Firesociety.com; accessed December 4, 2008; available from http://www.firesociety.com

world. In June 2007, Grassfire contributed to the defeat of a bill designed to make it easier for illegal immigrants to gain U.S. Citizenship. Their organization was so effective that when the call went out for people to gather signatures on a petition opposing the bill they "had way more response than [they] could handle" according to the president of Grassfire, Stephen Elliot. Grassfire managed to gather seven hundred thousand signatures on their petition.[37] Liberals, too, made very good use of grassroots organization to promote their political agenda. Barack Obama's successful bid for presidency was attributed to the efforts of groups that, like the Beekeepers, organized themselves independently in their regions and pursued their goal.[38] The official Barack Obama e-mail list has about eleven million members[39] and the Obama campaign considers them so important that the campaign directly asked the list for recommendations to give to the administration.[40] At the same time, MoveOn.org, a liberal organization, held one thousand two hundred individual parties after the election.[41] Barack Obama himself appealed to Internet communities by posting his weekly addresses to the nation on the website Youtube.com.[42]

Overtly political groups are not the only ones that gather online to organize offline activities. The Imageboard, or website where users post and comment on images, called 4chan is host to a loosely organized group simply known as Anonymous.[43] Similar to the Beekeepers and as the name implies

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37 Julia Preston, "Grass Roots Roared and Immigration Plan Collapsed," *Nytimes.com,* June 10, 2007; accessed December 4, 2008; Available from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/10/washington/10oppose.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1229634478-nuKIB8aRrIrM0KLDjBktqQ

38 Joe Garofili, "Obama testing ways to use Internet to govern," *Sfgate.com*, November 24, 2008; Accessed December 4, 2008; http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/11/24/MN7214842D.DTL&hw=obama+grassroots&sn=006&sc=509

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Steven Croop "Hit Them Where They Live" *Escapistmagazine,com*, November 25, 2008; Accessed December 4, 2008;

Anonymous is organized in a meritocracy formed around the participants' relative anonymity.

Throughout 2008, Anonymous has campaigned and protested against the religion of Scientology

through public demonstrations, video posts on Youtube, and spreading information about the practices

of the religion.[44] Although Anonymous is often referred to in a negative light, Mark Bunker, the

Producer of the anti-Scientology website xenutv.com said "Many of them are young, but not all of

them. I've met students, doctors, lawyers, people from law enforcement and so many other fields taking

to the streets, wearing the masks and speaking out because they believe it's the right thing to do."[45]

Unsurprisingly, 4chan was launched in 2003,[46] in the same era of transition to broadband that Ilovebees

was born in.

A similar structure to the Beekeepers persists through several intercontinental organizations. The

United Nations and NATO are both alliances that coordinate military actions between their respective

members. OPEC organizes oil producing countries and negotiates the price of oil on behalf of its

members. The key concept between all these groups, Beekeepers, NATO, The UN, and OPEC is the

pursuit of a common goal, be it solving a game, security, or economic growth. All these organizations

form a central communication point for independently functioning regional groups. The Beekeepers

embody the ideal of cooperation and the recognition that no matter how effective a individual group

may be, collectively the groups are greater than the whole. There is a major diction to be made between

the Beekeepers and organizations like NATO and OPEC. NATO and OPEC are groups with an insular

philosophy, intent of defending themselves from outsiders. Although they function as several small

groups helping each other to pursue a common goal, the common goal is to present themselves as a

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Available from http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_177/5510-Hit-Them-Where-They-Live
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.

large single entity capable of larger scale conflicts with outsiders. The Beekeepers, and other online grassroots communities, approach organization from a different perspective that ultimately benefits more people. Regional distinctions or consumer versus producer distinctions do not exist in these organizations, their goal is the mutual benefit of all constituents and they put no limitations on who can join. Ultimately, these groups form a stronger interconnected base that has the potential to benefit everyone, instead of an inside group benefiting on the the expense of an outside group.

The greatest lesson the Beekeepers can teach to the larger community is openness and action. The anonymity of the forums strips away barriers to cooperation and the active members of the community are active in action as well as discussion, with people like Angelo willing to inconvenience himself for the sake of helping others. It would be easy to assert that the suggestion is totalitarian, but that is a cynical oversimplification. The Beekeepers recognized that it was necessary to help each other to accomplish a goal too big for any one regional team, just like NATO, and they recognized that helping each other also made their own tasks easier, as in the case of Buzzkill Angelo's collecting of passwords to give to other teams. It is foolish to completely subjugate oneself for the sake of an intangible greater good, but it takes wisdom and openness to recognize when cooperation results in a greater benefit for everyone involved.

The strength of the large scale organization comes from the power of the bonds between the people of the organization. Unlike bees, the Beekeepers were not simply drones acting only in the interest of the community, they were people whose lives were touched by an incredible shared experience. To understand the long lasting power of the experience, it is necessary to refocus on the individual and the stories each of them shared. Throughout the game Melissa was opposed by a

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46 4chan FAQ, 4chan.com; Accessed on December 4, 2008; available from http://www.4chan.org/faq#open

character named the Sleeping Princess. Eventually groups of Beekeepers split into either being supportive of the Melissa or the Princess, and the groups would interact with each character accordingly. One Beekeeper, HitsHerMark has a conversation where the Princess "asked [her] who would miss [her] if [she] were to go away, so [she] told [the Princess] about [her] best friend"[47] Some groups, like the Goddess Squad, acted as Melissa's soldiers and in her last phone call with them she said :"of all her squads, she was most (I think she said "consistently" but I'm not sure because I was hyperventilating) impressed with the Goddess Squad"[48] as Phaedra later reported. Ranger D, a Beekeeper from San Francisco, had one of the last calls with the Princess where "She made a song out of [his] name. 'Ranger D, Ranger D, Ranger D!'"[49] and afterwards she summed up her feelings for everyone in telling him "I love you guys."[50] Even though teams split themselves along their alliance to either Melissa or the Sleeping Princess, they recognized that their allegiance should not be a blind one, and the different factions still shared information, through Buzzkill Angelo, for example, in an effort to collectively work out their differences and find the best path for everyone. The very last call with the Princess ends with her death, and despite the fact that she was never real, the Beekeeper Chulo333, one of the last people to talk to her, says "I dont know...it's all kind of sad in a weird way."[51]

It is obvious that the characters have touched the players and made a connection with them, but they were played by a professional actress, it was her job to be able to convince these assorted strangers to care. As it turns out, Mrs. Rutherford was just as genuinely touched by the players as they were by her characters. On her blog she says:

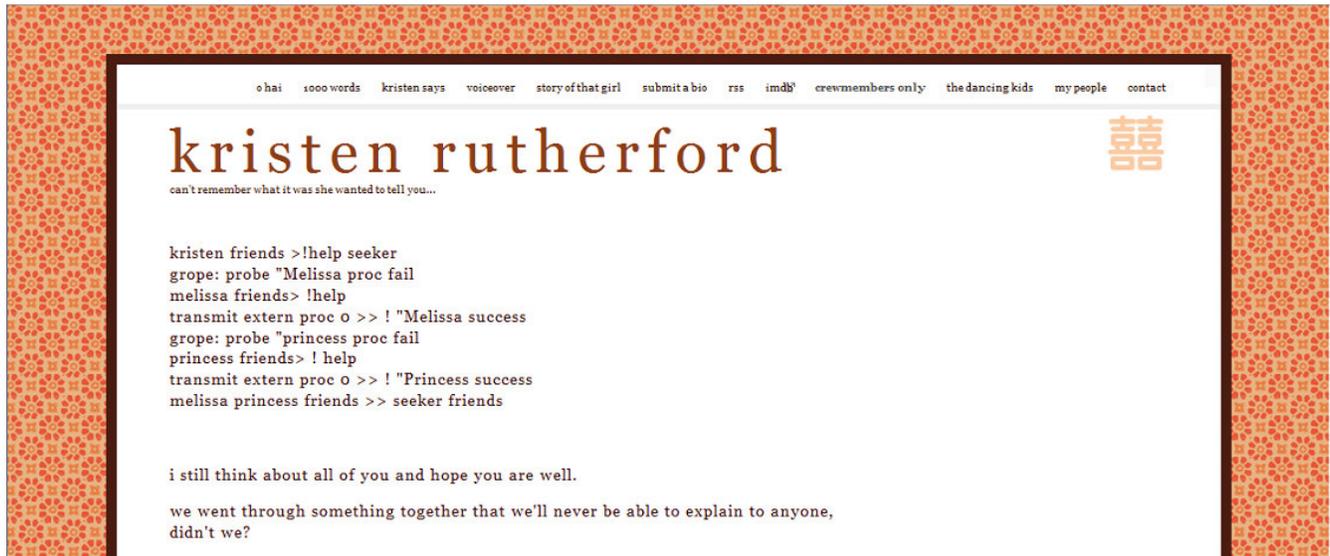47 Forum Post, Unfiction.com; Accessed December 4, 2008; Available from
    http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7512
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.

Then at the very last minute I decided to hop on a plane and go to

ARGFest-O-Con - which was an AWESOME decision, despite the pain of a Thursday night red-eye. Nobody knew I was coming - not even hmrpita, even though she knew I was entertaining the idea of hopping a flight. Eventually I called Steve Peters to say, "should i let people know I am coming? will they let me in?" and he made me his 42 Entertainment mystery guest - a.k.a. Leeloo Dallas MultiPass. There's never enough time at these things to talk to all the people I want to talk to - so, sorry if I missed anyone. And even when I do get to talk to people, it doesn't feel like enough time.

Four years later she still hops on a plane to hang out with a friend, a Beekeeper. Another bit of her website contains a very simple dedication for "crewmembers only" that says:

o hai   1000 words   kristen says   voiceover   story of that girl   submit a bio   rss   imdb   crewmembers only   the dancing kids   my people   contact

kristen rutherford
can't remember what it was she wanted to tell you...

```
kristen friends >!help seeker
grope: probe "Melissa proc fail
melissa friends> !help
transmit extern proc 0 >> ! "Melissa success
grope: probe "princess proc fail
princess friends> ! help
transmit extern proc 0 >> ! "Princess success
melissa princess friends >> seeker friends
```

i still think about all of you and hope you are well.

we went through something together that we'll never be able to explain to anyone, didn't we?

In short, the message says that the Princess and Melissa are now friend. Although not all members of the community persisted with their friendships as well as Mrs. Rutherford and Hmrpita, it is easy to see

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51 Ibid.

that even being on the other end of the game, the deep interactions, sharing personal stories and playing games has created a sense of camaraderie with all of the players that is hard to describe. The records of the Beekeepers on the forums of Unfiction do more than simply archive the posts of people who played an online game years ago. They give a glimpse of the world on the edge of the 21st century. They illustrate a turning point in the technology of how we communicate with each other and the spread of our accessibility to each other. They show the beginnings of a common language built out of ideals and needs, and how that technology and language manages to make the world a little bit smaller. We can see the incredible things that people can achieve when they not only recognize a common goal, but lift each other up to reach it. We learn that despite all the anonymity and clinical meticulousness of the forums, and any forums for that matter, human kindness and ingenuity persist.

Most importantly we see that ideas, communication, trust, and organization help to build strong and lasting friendships across borders of distance and lifestyle. It is this bond formed by sharing the experiences of life regardless of boundaries that people must embrace as the ultimate goal for everyone. As technology shatters some boundaries that separate us while blurring others into insignificance it is inevitable that people will have nothing barring compassionate understanding of one another than themselves. At that point, the Beekeepers should be looked to as a model for a community that embraces people's differences without prejudice and works together towards a positive outcome for all. On that day we can truly declare that the world is a better place.

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