

**GRADING GUIDE...FALL 2013 FINAL EXAM...DO NOT COPY OR TRANSMIT. FOR YOUR EYES ONLY.**

*INSTRUCTORS: This key is our summary of the preferred answers to the exam questions. In general, a student should get full credit only when her/his answer tracks with the preferred answer herein. **But**..We expect you to exercise independent judgment when a student's answer deviates in a spectacular way, arriving at a different conclusion through logical and skillful application of News Literacy concepts. -dm*

**PART I: Video Deconstructions (3 videos, 45 points)**

Analyze the TV news clips based on our guidelines and discussions. Be aware that any story can have strong or weak elements...or both, but in the end a news consumer has to make a judgment about the story.

**Video #1 “Store Security Search Yields Dead Fetus in Handbag”**

<http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2013/10/17/nypd-possible-fetus-found-in-teens-bag-inside-nyc-victorias-secret/>

1. Describe one or more examples of transparency in this report and explain the value of transparency to you, the viewer. (3 points)

**GRADERS NOTE: THERE ARE SIX CHECKPOINTS ON A SOURCE EVALUATION. FOR EACH SOURCE EVALUATED, STUDENTS EARN UP TO THREE POINTS. YOU CAN PUT MORE WEIGHT ON A CORRECT OVERALL CONCLUSION AT YOUR DISCRETION.**

Fill out the evaluation charts on the following sources, three points each source.

1. **Isvesty Sosa, second woman interviewed on the sidewalk near Victoria’s Secret (3 points)**

Source Evaluation: Short using DISEASE rating scales	
Put an "X" in the appropriate boxes on the scale. Don't check both sides.	
Independent	Not Independent
Expert	Not Expert
Multiple (cross-checked)	Less Reliable
Verified	Unsure
Authoritative & Credible	Untrustworthy & Unreliable
Name	Anonymous
Overall, how reliable is information from this source?	
Put an "X" in the appropriate box. Don't check both sides.	Very Unreliable
	Somehow Unreliable
	Somehow Reliable
	Very Reliable
Points	

Sosa is independent, one of several people criticizing (but providing nothing factual) who neither verifies nor is authoritative or informed. She is named. Not a reliable source. Only possible value is for color. She badly mangles the story by suggesting Ms. Rodriguez fetus was alive and could have been surrendered to authorities. Student gets points for saying this reporter, producer and editor should have been shot for including Sosa...

- The source referred to as “The police” or “The NYPD” (3 points)

Source Evaluation: Short using DISEASE rating scales	
Put an "X" in the appropriate boxes on the scale. Don't check both sides.	
Independent	Not Independent
Expert	Not Expert
Multiple (cross-checked)	Less Reliable
Verified	Unsure
Authoritative & Credible	Untrustworthy & Unreliable
Name	Anonymous
Overall, how reliable is information from this source?	
Put an "X" in the appropriate box. Don't check both sides.	Very Unreliable
	Somehow Unreliable
	Somehow Reliable
	Very Reliable
Points	

This report undercuts the police information by not naming a spokesperson or officer. So, while the police are independent, we don't know if multiple officers found the same information. There is some verification in the bagged evidence and but a lot of material attributed to the police is assertion with no checkable verification measures. The police are authoritative and informed as to the findings of their investigation, but not as to cause of death, time of death. With no name, no accountability. Sloppy attribution on CBS' part makes “police” a poor source in this report.

2. Is this story fair, balanced or biased? Cite the evidence for your conclusion. (3 points)

This story is imbalanced without sufficient clear evidence to warrant the heavy pejorative freight it carries, particularly since the girl in question is a minor and is in Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital, not a standard holding cell. Using language like “disturbing discovery,” “callously carried” and “caught shoplifting,” the reporter paints Rodriguez in an unfavorable light.

Tiana Rodriguez and Francis Estevez are identified as shoplifters, but that case has not been adjudicated. The medical examiner is still determining if the fetus was stillborn or alive when delivered. Some students may argue “fetus” and “baby boy” (both of which are used) are value judgments. Given that illegal acts are attributed to the girls, a fair report should include rebuttals to the charges made, or at least transparency about what attempts were made to get comments.

4. Based on this report, what can you conclude about Tiana Rodriguez’ role in the death of the fetus found in her handbag? Cite specific evidence or information from the report to support your conclusion. (3 points)

Be wary of students declaring a mother is always responsible. That is a moral and not an evidentiary finding. There is not sufficient evidence to conclude she caused the death of the fetus. It has not been determined if the fetus was stillborn or born alive. Complicating matters, she is in Bellevue, which might mean she is mentally ill.

## **Video #2 (15 points) Fast Food Workers Strike**

<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/fast-food-strike-workers-walkout-demanding-higher-pay-20104112>

5. Benjamin Jealous, President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (3 points)

Source Evaluation Chart using DMYAN rating scales	
Put an "X" in the appropriate box on the scale, then explain each rating.	
Independent	Self Interest
Explain	
Multiple (Concurrent)	Low Salary
Explain	
Visible	Assess
Explain	
Authoritative Reference	Unsubstantiated/Unconfirmed
Explain	
Named	Anonymous
Explain	
Overall, how reliable is information from this source?	
Put an "X" in the appropriate box, then explain your rating.	Very Unreliable
	Somewhat Unreliable
	Somewhat Reliable
	Very Reliable
Explain	

Jealous is an activist on this issue and he’s paid to do this work, so he lacks independence. He is one of several people asserting the minimum wage is too low. He attempts to verify, but without citing specific research, that’s all it is. He is informed, but not an authority. He is named. At best, somewhat reliable.

Source Evaluation Chart using DMYAN rating scales	
Put an "X" in the appropriate box on the scale, then explain each rating.	
Independent	Self Interest
Explain	
Multiple (Concurrent)	Low Salary
Explain	
Visible	Assess
Explain	
Authoritative Reference	Unsubstantiated/Unconfirmed
Explain	
Named	Anonymous
Explain	
Overall, how reliable is information from this source?	
Put an "X" in the appropriate box, then explain your rating.	Very Unreliable
	Somewhat Unreliable
	Somewhat Reliable
	Very Reliable
Explain	

The National Restaurant Association (3 points)

Activist paid to do this work, lacks independence. One of several (with McDonald’s) saying the wages are fine as they are. Quotes a statistic without providing the source of it or any context, such as how many workers earn the minimum wage plus 25cents? Certainly you would expect the association to be authoritative and informed about wages in the industry. Named, as a group...Only somewhat reliable.

6. What or who is missing from this report? (3 points)

**An independent source with no dog in this fight AND/OR someone with authority about wage effects on employment, such as an economist or business school professor.  
Also missing, someone speaking for the franchisees, since McDonald's and the National Restaurant Association threw franchisees under the bus.**

7. List one example of context and one example of transparency in this report. Explain how each example strengthens the reliability of the report. (3 points)

**The historical context, these protests happen on the same day as the march on DC and the comparison of minimum wage to the poverty line.**

**Transparencies: National Restaurant Association material came from a prepared statement, as did McDonalds'**

8. Based on this report, would you sign a petition in favor of raising the minimum wage? Justify your position, using material from the story. (3 points)

**This answer should be graded carefully to ignore the student's own politics. Is there information in this report that would permit a reasoned, defensible, decision about minimum wage. The answer is, NO. The report merely gives you partisans.**

### **Video #3 (15 points)** Medicare Billing Insurance Investigation

<http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/video/granny-catches-medicare-fraud-tape-15830592>

9. Fill out a source evaluation chart for each of the following:

Tim Menke, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services investigator (3 points)

Source Evaluation Chart using DUE-ED criteria	
Put an "X" in the appropriate boxes on the chart then explain each entry.	
Biased?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Expert?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Authoritative?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Reputable?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Timely?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Objective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Accurate?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Complete?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Clear?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Concise?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Interesting?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Useful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Reliable?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Menke has no financial/personal stake in the truth of ABC's report, making him independent. He and other investigators say fraud is rampant. He's not giving factual material, just observations, though his comments are informed by his work investigating fraud. He is authoritative in general and appears well-informed on ABC's findings. He asserts as to the legality/severity of what is shown to him. He is named. Menke is a reliable source. (Students may not notice the second HHS investigator is not Menke. No penalty, as this got past most instructors.)

✓ Doris Ace, Medicare-eligible grandmother of the producer (3 points)

Source Evaluation Chart using DUE-ED criteria	
Put an "X" in the appropriate boxes on the chart then explain each entry.	
Biased?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Expert?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Authoritative?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Reputable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Timely?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Objective?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Accurate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Complete?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Clear?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Concise?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Interesting?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Useful?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Reliable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Ms. Ace is a little complicated. On the one hand, she's utterly independent: an out-of-towner parachuted into McAllen to play a part. BUT...she is a field producer's granny, so she has a personal motivation to support, not attack the ABC report. Though her granddaughter does not speak, she tacitly supports granny's observations. Granny doesn't serve as a source, so much as bait. Verification is beside the point. There is hidden-camera footage. Not authoritative, but well-informed as to her own health and the care received in McAllen. She's named. Coming, as she does, with a built-in video diary, Granny is a reliable source.

10. List one example of context and one example of transparency in this report. Explain how each example is important to you as a news viewer. (3 points)

**"To see how it works, we went under cover in McAllen"**

- A. They explain the granny is related to the producer and identify them in the video.
- B. The “Source: CDC” chiron that appears when statistics on vaccination are being provided

11. List one example of direct evidence and one example of indirect evidence in this report. Explain how each example strengthens the reliability of the report. (3 points)

**Tons of direct evidence: granny golfing, dancing and being examined by the doc. Copies of the bills.**

**Indirect: Doctor’s lawyer says someone else rigged the bill. Reporter’s lead-in cites studies and statements that paint the picture of McAllen as a town where doctor’s rip off the system.**

12. From this report, what can you conclude about how widespread and frequent Medicare fraud is? (3 points)

**On the one hand, this report merely documents one instance. On the other, by demonstrating how it’s done (easily) and providing the context of a federal investigation, this report provides a convincing picture of the problem HHS investigators claim to have documented. So, you can’t absolutely conclude, but your justified in having a strong suspicion there’s a lot of this.**

**PART III: Text Deconstructions (questions for 35 points)**

*Read the accompanying story before answering the following questions. Be aware that any story can have strong aspects and weak aspects or elements of both, but in the end a news consumer has to make a judgment about the story. BE SPECIFIC IN YOUR RESPONSES AND SUPPORT YOUR CONCLUSIONS by referring to the paragraph number where your support is found. Hand the print-out of the story in with your answer sheet, with your name on both.*

13. Identify, by paragraph, two examples of context and briefly explain their value to you as a reader. (3 points)  
**See examples. They put the current findings in the broader context, allowing a reader to see the reasons for and against this expensive project.**

14. Identify, by paragraph, two examples of transparency and briefly explain their value to you as a reader. (3 points)  
**There is a mega-ton of transparency in this report, which constantly reminds you where the material comes from.**

15. Is this story balanced, fair or biased? Cite specific paragraphs and use News Literacy course concepts to explain your answer. (4 points)  
**It is reasonable for us to expect students to note this report provides a mostly-negative view of the results, a jaundiced view of the methods and costs and that this is fair to the evidence. Efforts are made to get intelligence agencies to defend the project or re-characterize it. But the documents show not only the depth of the intrusion, but the fruitlessness of it.**

16. Did the reporters open the freezer? Cite specific paragraphs to support your answer and explain, using the concepts of direct and indirect evidence, how their opening or not opening the freezer affects the reliability of the article. (5 points)  
**The reporters seem to have gotten online a little, to describe gamer comments and the atmosphere of the games. More importantly, they have opened up the agencies’ own files, seeing first-hand the evidence that this surveillance was carried out. Compare it to the Brian Thevenot Freezer situation: if he had opened that freezer door, he would not have seen the murders or lack thereof. He would have seen the aftermath. This is what the NYT/ProPublica team saw: the aftermath, in the form of reports generated and contracts let, etc...**

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt, No underline, Font color: Auto

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt, No underline, Font color: Auto

**Formatted:** Font: Times New Roman, 12 pt, No underline, Font color: Auto

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt, Font color: Black

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt, Font color: Black

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt, Font color: Black

17. Which of the following sources do you consider reliable and which do you rate as unreliable? Use the IMVAIN rubric to explain your ratings of each source.

Peter W. Singer, of the Brookings Institution (3 points)

Singer has no dog in this fight. He is one of several sources describing what was done. Though he is authoritative and informed, as the author of a book on cyberwar, he merely asserts without providing verification that there are easier ways to spy. He's named and at least moderately reliable, if not very reliable.

Un-named spokesman for Blizzard Entertainment (3 points)

Not very reliable. His customers don't want to know they're being surveilled. He's the only Blizzard source, and part of a pack of game company sources who all dummy-up. He might be authoritative, but we have no way of knowing if he's informed and in fact all he says is they are uninformed about this activity. Little weight should be given to his statement.

## **Philip Rosedale, NO CHART NEEDED. EACH STUDENT GETS 3 POINTS FOR THIS GLITCH**

Un-named spokesman for Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (3 points)

Same rating for the civil serpent at GCHQ. He claims his agency is operating well within the law, with no proffer of evidence of activities that have been found to be legal. Un-named, this really is a case in which a source is provided not for information but as a device to prove the reporters' efforts to be fair.

18. After deconstructing this article, would you take the position that online games pose a serious security risk that justifies NSA surveillance of online gamers? Explain your position using facts from the story and noting what, if anything, was missing from the article. (8 points)

Depends on the student's security/freedom orientation. We don't care about that; only that in supporting a position, they marshal evidence drawn from the story itself. There's some indication that online games have NOT been a haven for evil-doer skullduggery. Once the student establishes their proposition on that matter,

they next have to use material from the story to support an argument that: Surveillance should be rare, hence this was an over-reach; or Surveillance is freedom, privacy is theft, Big Brother Knows Best...

**RED HIGHLIGHT IS TRANSPARENCY**

**YELLOW IS CONTEXT**

**BLUE IS FREEZER MATERIAL**

**GREEN IS FAIRNESS MATERIAL**

Note to Students: For the purposes of this News Literacy exam, a New York Times article has been greatly altered, mostly by cutting it from 2,002 words to 1,700. Students are reminded to answer exam questions based on this version, not any version they may recall reading. Paragraphs are numbered to allow you to answer questions by making reference to specific paragraphs. Underlined words indicate hyperlinks that were built into the Times' online version of the report.

*The New York Times*

## *Spies Infiltrate a Fantasy Realm of Online Games*

By MARK MAZZETTI and JUSTIN ELLIOTT

Published: December 11, 2013

1. Not limiting their activities to the earthly realm, American and British spies have infiltrated the fantasy worlds of World of Warcraft and Second Life, conducting surveillance and scooping up data in the online games played by millions of people across the globe, according to newly disclosed classified documents.
2. Fearing that terrorist or criminal networks could use the games to communicate secretly, move money or plot attacks, the documents show, intelligence operatives have entered terrain populated by digital avatars that include elves, gnomes and supermodels.
3. The spies have created make-believe characters to snoop and to try to recruit informers, while also collecting data and contents of communications between players, according to the documents, disclosed by the former National Security Agency contractor Edward J. Snowden. Because militants often rely on features common to video games — fake identities, voice and text chats, a way to conduct financial transactions — American and British intelligence agencies worried that they might be operating there, according to the papers.
4. Online games might seem innocuous, a top-secret 2008 N.S.A. document warned, but they had the potential to be a “target-rich communication network” allowing intelligence suspects “a way to hide in plain sight.” Virtual games “are an opportunity!” another 2008 N.S.A. document declared.
5. But for all their enthusiasm — so many C.I.A., F.B.I. and Pentagon spies were hunting around in Second Life, the document noted, that a “deconfliction” group was needed to avoid collisions — the intelligence agencies may have inflated the threat.

6. The documents, obtained by The Guardian and shared with The New York Times and ProPublica, do not cite any counterterrorism successes from the effort. Former American intelligence officials, current and former gaming company employees and outside experts said in interviews that they knew of little evidence that terrorist groups viewed the games as havens to communicate and plot operations.
7. Games “are built and operated by companies looking to make money, so the players’ identity and activity is tracked,” said Peter W. Singer of the Brookings Institution, an author of “Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know.” “For terror groups looking to keep their communications secret, there are far more effective and easier ways to do so than putting on a troll avatar.”
8. The surveillance, which also included Microsoft’s Xbox Live, could raise privacy concerns. It is not clear exactly how the agencies got access to gamers’ data or communications, how many players may have been monitored or whether Americans’ communications or activities were captured.
9. One American company, the maker of World of Warcraft, said that neither the N.S.A. nor its British counterpart, the Government Communications Headquarters, had gotten permission to gather intelligence in its game. Many players are Americans, who can be targeted for surveillance only with approval from the nation’s secret intelligence court. The spy agencies, though, face far fewer restrictions on collecting certain data or communications overseas.
10. “We are unaware of any surveillance taking place,” said a spokesman for Blizzard Entertainment, based in Irvine, Calif., which makes World of Warcraft. “If it was, it would have been done without our knowledge or permission.”
11. A spokeswoman for Microsoft declined to comment. Philip Rosedale, the founder of Second Life and a former chief executive officer of Linden Lab, the game’s maker, declined to comment on the spying revelations. Current Linden executives did not respond to requests for comment.
12. A Government Communications Headquarters spokesman would neither confirm nor deny any involvement by that agency in gaming surveillance, but said that its work is conducted under “a strict legal and policy framework” with rigorous oversight. An N.S.A. spokeswoman declined to comment.
13. Intelligence and law enforcement officials became interested in games after some became enormously popular, drawing tens of millions of people worldwide, from preteens to retirees. The games rely on lifelike graphics, virtual currencies and the ability to speak to other players in real time. Some gamers merge the virtual and real worlds by spending long hours playing and making close online friends.
14. In World of Warcraft, players share the same fantasy universe — walking around and killing computer-controlled monsters or the avatars of other players, including elves, animals or creatures known as orcs. In Second Life, players create customized human avatars that can

resemble themselves or take on other personas — supermodels and bodybuilders are popular — who can socialize, buy and sell virtual goods, and go places like beaches, cities, art galleries and strip clubs. In Microsoft's Xbox Live service, subscribers connect online in games that can involve activities like playing soccer or shooting at each other in space.

15. According to American officials and the documents, spy agencies grew worried that terrorist groups might take to the virtual worlds to establish safe communications channels.
16. In 2007, as the N.S.A. and other intelligence agencies were beginning to explore virtual games, N.S.A. officials met with the chief technology officer for the manufacturer of Second Life, the San Francisco-based Linden Lab. The executive, Cory Ondrejka, was a former Navy officer who had worked at the N.S.A. with a top-secret security clearance.
17. He visited the agency's headquarters at Fort Meade, Md., in May 2007 to speak to staff members over a brown bag lunch, according to an internal agency announcement. "Second Life has proven that virtual worlds of social networking are a reality: come hear Cory tell you why!" said the announcement. It added that virtual worlds gave the government the opportunity "to understand the motivation, context and consequent behaviors of non-Americans through observation, without leaving U.S. soil."
18. Mr. Ondrejka, now the director of mobile engineering at Facebook, said through a representative that the N.S.A. presentation was similar to others he gave in that period, and declined to comment further.
19. Even with spies already monitoring games, the N.S.A. thought it needed to step up the effort.
20. "The Sigint Enterprise needs to begin taking action now to plan for collection, processing, presentation and analysis of these communications," said one April 2008 N.S.A. document, referring to "signals intelligence." The document added, "With a few exceptions, N.S.A. can't even recognize the traffic," meaning that the agency could not distinguish gaming data from other Internet traffic.
21. By the end of 2008, according to one document, the British spy agency, known as GCHQ, had set up its "first operational deployment into Second Life" and had helped the police in London in cracking down on a crime ring that had moved into virtual worlds to sell stolen credit card information. The British spies running the effort, which was code-named Operation Galician, were aided by an informer using a digital avatar "who helpfully volunteered information on the target group's latest activities."
22. Though the games might appear to be unregulated digital bazaars, the companies running them reserve the right to police the communications of players and store the chat dialogues in servers that can be searched later. The transactions conducted with the virtual money common in the games, used in World of Warcraft to buy weapons and potions to slay monsters, are also monitored by the companies to prevent illicit financial dealings.
23. In the 2008 N.S.A. document, titled "Exploiting Terrorist Use of Games & Virtual Environments," the agency said that "terrorist target selectors" — which could be a computer's



Internet Protocol address or an email account — “have been found associated with Xbox Live, Second Life, World of Warcraft” and other games. **But that document does not present evidence that terrorists were participating in the games.**

24. Still, the intelligence agencies found other benefits in infiltrating these online worlds. **According to the minutes of a January 2009 meeting**, GCHQ’s “network gaming exploitation team” had identified engineers, embassy drivers, scientists and other foreign intelligence operatives to be World of Warcraft players — potential targets for recruitment as agents.
25. At Menwith Hill, a Royal Air Force base in the Yorkshire countryside that the N.S.A. has long used as an outpost to intercept global communications, American and British intelligence operatives started an effort in 2008 to begin collecting data from World of Warcraft.
26. **One N.S.A. document** said that the World of Warcraft monitoring “continues to uncover potential Sigint value by identifying accounts, characters and guilds related to Islamic extremist groups, nuclear proliferation and arms dealing.” In other words, targets of interest appeared to be playing the fantasy game, though the document does not indicate that they were doing so for any nefarious purposes. **A British document from later that year** said that GCHQ had “successfully been able to get the discussions between different game players on Xbox Live.”
27. By 2009, the collection was extensive. **One document says** that while GCHQ was testing its ability to spy on Second Life in real time, British intelligence **officers vacuumed up three days’ worth of Second Life chat, instant message and financial transaction data, totaling 176,677 lines of data, which included the content of the communications.**
28. For their part, players have openly wondered **whether the N.S.A. might be watching them.**
29. **In one World of Warcraft discussion thread**, begun just days after the first Snowden revelations appeared in the news media in June, a human death knight with the user **name “Crrassus” asked whether the N.S.A. might be reading game chat logs.**
30. “If they ever read these forums,” wrote a goblin priest with the user name “Diaya,” “they would realize they were wasting” their time.
31. **Even before the American government began spying in virtual worlds, the Pentagon had identified the potential intelligence value of video games.** The Pentagon’s Special Operations Command in 2006 and 2007 worked with several foreign companies — including an obscure digital media business based in Prague — to build games that could be downloaded to mobile phones, according to people involved in the effort. They said the games, which were not identified as creations of the Pentagon, were then used as vehicles for intelligence agencies to collect information about the users.
32. Eager to cash in on the government’s growing interest in virtual worlds, several large private contractors have spent years pitching their services to American intelligence agencies. **In one 66-page document from 2007**, part of the cache released by Mr. Snowden, the contracting giant SAIC promoted its ability to support “intelligence collection in the game space,” and warned

that online games could be used by militant groups to recruit followers and could provide “terrorist organizations with a powerful platform to reach core target audiences.”

33. It is unclear whether SAIC received a contract based on this proposal, but one former SAIC employee said that the company at one point had a lucrative contract with the C.I.A. for work that included monitoring the Internet for militant activity. An SAIC spokeswoman declined to comment.

34. In spring 2009, academics and defense contractors gathered at the Marriott at Washington Dulles International Airport to present proposals for a government study about how players’ behavior in a game like World of Warcraft might be linked to their real-world identities. “We were told it was highly likely that persons of interest were using virtual spaces to communicate or coordinate,” said Dmitri Williams, a professor at the University of Southern California who received grant money as part of the program.

35. After the conference, both SAIC and Lockheed Martin won contracts worth several million dollars, administered by an office within the intelligence community that finances research projects.

36. It is not clear how useful such research might be. A group at the Palo Alto Research Center, for example, produced a government-funded study of World of Warcraft that found “younger players and male players preferring competitive, hack-and-slash activities, and older and female players preferring noncombat activities,” such as exploring the virtual world. A group from the nonprofit SRI International, meanwhile, found that players under age 18 often used all capital letters both in chat messages and in their avatar names.

37. Those involved in the project were told little by their government patrons. According to Nick Yee, a Palo Alto researcher who worked on the effort, “We were specifically asked not to speculate on the government’s motivations and goals.”

38. Justin Elliott is a reporter for ProPublica. Andrew W. Lehren contributed reporting.