

The Chronicles of the Ranger

Author: Nendiilya (Cestus Dei, Veeshan)

Original Publish Date: 10/24/2004

Re-release Date: 05/02/2006

Author's New Introduction:

When I originally wrote the Chronicles it was intended as an outlook into the history and development of the ranger class. This original goal became sidetracked as time went along and ideas for expansion of the document continued along, and soon it was trying to layout the entire ranger class and how it fit into the spectrum of class balance.

During the time of it's writing, EverQuest, specifically for Rangers, was going through a time period of tumultuous growth and loss. The game was expanding, sitting on the eve of impending loss to game releases such as World of Warcraft and EverQuest II. Players were looking for answers as to what really was the definition behind being a ranger? What is **my** role? In response to these pervasive times, the document intended as the most accurate historical account of EverQuest for any class became a tool to try and answer these questions.

Perhaps this was my first large scale breakdown of the game, if the answers didn't occur at the surface and evaded the think tanks of three prominent ranger boards operating at the time, then clearly the game itself would have to be broken down logically in order to make any progress. However, the more I delved, the more complicated things became (as with the theory of game balancing layers used extensively in this documents conceptualization) the harder it became to answer the questions at hand.

In fact, one attribute that this document recognizes is the extreme fluctuation that EverQuest continually goes through, and that attribute alone contributes to a lot of the information presented (at the time up to date) to be out dated now (such as the first phase of class re-envisionment that updated ranger nukes and heals, among other things), and other theories of mine have simply evolved as my intrinsic interest in the dissection of MMO games has continued.

A lot of parts that I had partially completed couldn't be put into the original release of the document due to time constraints. The Kunark, Velious and Luclin historical accounts, the breakdown of AA utility, heal and nuke utility and other similar categories are among these things. The passing of time destroyed my original copies of these writings (and nearly made The Chronicles

themselves lost to the annals of the Internet), and as such, I have decided to write both a sequel to the Chronicles, and another document of significant length that portrays MMO mechanics in general.

Why not just revise the Chronicles? This thought had crossed my mind, but my decision now is that it is far better to preserve this primary document of the time period in which it was written, than to modify it with modern values. Thus, I have done only minor modifications to the Chronicles formatting and included a Table of Contents. As such, the Chronicles remains without an ending, to be continued on in future works with revised concepts that in many ways the Chronicles set up the foundation for. The rest of the Chronicles comes to bear as a testament to an age in EverQuest that was both progressive and cohesive for the separate ranger communities, something that like the original historical accounts in the Chronicles is now a monument in EverQuest history.

Reviews of the Chronicles:

“Basically what he's done is compile a sort of history of the Ranger class, and attempted to devise a definition of what our role has been and continues to be in groups and on raids. He has done a lot of work for this, including going back over every single patch note released by Sony and then a lot of discussion with Rangers who have been around since Alpha to put this together. It's worth a read, to have a good understanding of where we've come from and possibly, where we might be going.” – Maegwin

“Holy crap my head hurts from reading all of that. Good stuff though” – Hawkwind

“How best to know what roads lay ahead than to look at the paths that have been tread before us? In this breathtaking recount of the ranger class in one of the bedrock MMORPG's to date, Everquest, Nendiilya of Cestus Dei recounts it's true history and offers an in depth analysis of the class in relation to it's design and purpose.”

– Vanguard Ranger

“Damn you, I thought that rambling abomination had passed into eternity!”

- Renwin

“I know this is a very long and complicated read, especially if you've never played as a ranger in Everquest, but it really paints a picture of the complexity of issues that the ranger as a class had to deal with over the years, as told by one of the most experienced rangers to ever play.” - Forsh

List of Edits and Revisions:

The sections detailing raid wipes and group structure was taken out- mostly because it has little to do with rangers, and while the original intent was to try and help

put things into the “big picture,” this segment actually did very little to achieve that goal, if anything it impeded reading.

Formatting: large sections of text were reformatted into more easily readable lengths of text.

Additions: Table of Contents, Review Quotes, and an all new introduction!

Table of Contents:

Simply use the find function in your program (normally ctrl+F) to locate these sections (make sure to use the full titles), they occur in the order they are presented in otherwise.

History

Original EverQuest (released 03/16/1999)

Primary Class Role

Quick Primary Class Role Breakdown:

Being a Melee-Oriented Class

Being a Hybrid Class

Class Balance Layers

Class Balance First Layer: Levels

Class Balance Second Layer: Spells and Skills

Class Balance Third Layer: Itemization

Class Balance Fourth Layer: Alternate Advancement

Class Balance Fifth Layer: Content

Utility Definition

Utility Layers

Layers of Utility: Skills

Weaponshield

Archery

Layers of Utility: Spells

Attack Buffs

Call of the Rathe line

Layers of Utility: Alternate Advancement

Ranger Class Desirability

Grouping as a Ranger, and why a group wants one

Raids, the basic needs and why a Ranger has a spot

History

I feel it is important to include our past as well as our modern aspects to the game, so that we may look back on things and be able to move forward without making the same mistakes. Many people have different views on how they remembered the past, so this information had to be gathered from many different sources to be deemed accurate. This may also eliminate misconception for those who have a basic vision of the past but never experienced it.

Original EverQuest (released 03/16/1999)

In the original game, many things were very, very different. For example, Kithicor didn't have undead, and the server populations were low and compressed together, for example you might find 120 people in Lower Guk, some fighting over single static spawns. In the raid scene you could keep track of who got what loot on raids, since they just didn't happen as often as they do today. In fact, raiding guilds as a whole didn't start really developing until Kunark.

Often times up to 10 guilds would co-raid places like Fear, Hate, Nagafen or Vox. For example people knew how many Cloak of Flames were on their server, because it was much easier to track when and who killed what mob. The raiding scale was also much, much less, in fact due to technical problems that would come up, you oftentimes could not have 30 or more people in your raid, because people would just start to mass LD.

Ranger's were one of the few "completed" classes at release, this probably lead to the idea that the Ranger class was "fine" in its current state and didn't need much revision with the Kunark implementation later. The Ranger class could easily be considered the best tank available, comparable even to warriors. Ranger hit points were the same as our counterparts, Shadowknights and Paladins, and only slightly less than Warriors.

Due to itemization, specifically Rubicite armor, Rangers had the same available AC as most other warriors and knights of the time. With self only buffs, like the coat line, Rangers often exceeded Warriors and Knights of similar gear. As the early game progressed, class specific armors like the Ivy-Etched armors, began the separation of AC levels between Rangers (chain) and Warriors and Knights (plate).

However, with the introduction of the Planes (Fear and Hate), and the earliest version of planar armors, rangers had access to the same gear as warriors and knights (Lustrous Russet). It wasn't only in the armor department that Rangers had comparable and even exceeding gear by comparison to other classes, but also in the weaponry aspect.

Items like Mistwalker's Scimitar that were Ranger (and druid in that case) only, in addition to access to weapons that warriors used commonly like Spine Dragon Claws, gave Rangers a clearly defined spot in the DPS ladder by comparison. The Mistwalker's Scimitar was a weapon that had to have been nerfed 4 or 5 times before it was removed from the loot tables (Lady Vox), it was simply too overpowering. Originally the pet that would spawn from the proc would stay up infinitely until killed by a mob or player. After one of the initial nerfs the hp of the pet was reduced to 1, the problem being that the pet would be a high level mob with 1 hp. As a result people could have rangers spawn the pet, then kill it for very fast and easy exp.

What scared the devs into finally removing it from the loot tables were rumors such as the following: One of the strategies thought up, included Plane of Sky and getting

about 15 rangers, all with the Mistwalker's Scimitar and attack Djorn. Because the pets would only have one hitpoint when spawned, they'd get low hp agro, and in theory 15 rangers with high dexterity chain procing (spawning pets) would result in no agro for the ranger and an easy Djorn kill, as the pets would take all the damage.

Paladins and Shadowknights were crippled by the limitations of 2hs and only one 1hs (that were designed for non-duel wielders), and DPS suffered badly. The one exception was the Soulfire quest.

Bufs like SOW reigned supreme; Rangers could be invited into a group for the sole purpose of sowing people and snaring mobs. Strength was a primary focus to get in items, as things like attack modifiers weren't implemented into the game yet.

At this stage in the game there wasn't a large difference between casual and hardcore gamers, as among the best weapons could often be found and accessible to those that didn't raid at all. With the introduction of the Plane of Fear and the Plane of Hate, raids were radically redefined. What these zones did was show the first real raid only zones and had the only zone-ins that were not safe with easy accessible (or no) zone outs.

You did not go to these zones without a raid force, and without having a time commitment to raiding. On Contrast, zones like Permafrost or Nagafen's lair, people would still go to exp. Things were forced into being much more organized than prior concepts of a raid; During raids, rangers often fell into the role of pulling alongside monks, and keeping adds off of enchanter, shamans, and clerics, and even tanking, a concept today that is laughable in a raid environment for most raid encounters.

One frequent problem that is seen, is holding agro (among warriors), however, rangers at this time were among the very best of getting and holding spot agro in a crunch. At the tail end of the Original game we see Plane of Sky released, however it is designed by Kunark mob rules (i.e. enrage), and wasn't even beatable before Kunark release.

1.2 Kunark (Released 04/24/2000): To Be Released

1.3 Velious (Released 12/05/2000): To Be Released

1.4 Luclin (Released 12/06/2001): To Be Released

1.5 Planes of Power (Released 10/21/2002): To Be Released

1.6 Lost Dungeons of Norrath (Released 09/09/2003): To Be Released

1.7 Gates of Discord (Released 02/10/2004): To Be Released

1.8 Omens of War (Released 09/14/2004): To Be Released

Primary Class Role

Every class needs a primary role to fulfill in the EverQuest environment, whether it is healing, tanking or dps (as we see just about every class in EQ fall into, bards being the exception). Perhaps in the original EQ one could say that a class was purely around for one role, like Enchanter crowd control or warrior tanking.

Based on our definition of Utility (see “Utility Definition” section) we find that, there are a few different forms of division between class roles. One is classes that perform one primary role and have utility primarily designed to not affect the current situation of things (for example if you’re fighting Fennin Ro, a Rogue’s CR capabilities is of no use to you until after the fight, in the case of a wipe), then there are classes that perform their primary role and have utility designed to affect the current situation (like Shaman heals or Rogue DPS), and finally you have those few limited classes in today’s game that have one primary function and little else (like Warriors).

So the case can be simply defined as having your primary role, then having a varying level of utility as designed. Classes that fulfill the DPS role, which the majority of classes in EverQuest do, can be divided into two camps, those that perform melee DPS (2hs, 1hs, hand to hand, etc), and those that perform non-melee DPS (this includes both nukes and pets). Classes often have both means to do DPS (non-melee and melee) but their primary form of damage comes from one or the other and their utility use comes from the DPS role that is not their primary form of damage (for example, a Beastlord or Shadowknight nuking is a utility DPS role, although it is meant to aid or enhance their DPS). Extending on the Beastlord class, which altogether is one of the harder classes to clearly define as being non-melee or melee, they can be more clearly defined as being a melee dps class, and a non-melee utility class (pet).

That said, the primary role, or focus of the ranger class, and the primary reason why a ranger is ensured a spot on a raid, or why groups want a ranger in a group, is to perform melee DPS. Sony Online Entertainment, and the Dev team verified this as the main form of DPS intended for the ranger to perform publicly towards the close of 2004.

You can say that a group wants a ranger to tank, or to pull, or to WS on raids, however; these are specific variables for situational needs for the group. When at first glance someone sees a ranger LFG their first reaction tends to be “DPS class” not a tank, or puller. This does not mean that the Ranger cannot be asked to a group to perform these roles, but rather performs these roles as an alternative utility tool, much similar to warriors performing DPS rather than tanking in the case of having more than 1 warrior in a group.

For example, in my personal experience I’ve tanked quite a bit- anything from Plane of Fear to Qvic and specific MPG trials, I’ve offtanked for raids, and I’ve tanked in many exp groups. This does not mean that this is my primary role to fulfill though, it means I have the **capacity** to fulfill such a role, and in many cases things like tanking are heavily dependent on gear and other variables, when by contrast the primary role is not affected by gear (yes you get more dps from a time ranger than an ldon armored ranger but that’s not what I mean), for example every ranger in EQ performs DPS, but not every ranger in EQ can tank with the same versatility as other rangers.

Quick Primary Class Role Breakdown:

Bard: Utility (Bards are the true swiss army knife of EQ, they're primary role is utility, and is the only class in EQ that can be defined as such)

Beastlord: Melee DPS (note* bstls can be defined as being non-melee based on the fact that Pets are not dependent on gear by comparison as much as Melee dps is.)

Berserker: Melee DPS (primarily 2hs, the only class in EQ designed specifically for 2hs, though paladins and shadowknights perform 2hs to much the same versatility)

Cleric: Healing (obvious)

Druid: Healing / Assist Healing (though Druids can be non-melee DPS via nukes and dots, they perform healing roles more often)

Enchanter: Crowd Control / Slow (though they buff a lot, enchanters are the best at crowd control (argued by some Enchanters that Bards can provide better))

Magician: non-melee DPS (yes this includes their pet and nukes in the equation)

Monk: melee DPS (yes they are great pullers with FD, but that is more of a utility device)

Necromancer: non-melee DPS (yes this includes pet)

Paladin: Tanking (secondary being group healing, cc etc)

Ranger: melee DPS (this does not include archery damage)

Rogue: melee DPS (Discs can be considered crude utility due to the fact that they aid / enhance they're primary role)

Shadowknight: Tanking

Shaman: Debuffing and assist healing (Buffs, and CC would be secondary / utility)

Warrior: Tanking (yes due to itemization they can perform nice DPS, but you don't ask a warrior to group for DPS generally, it's a nice side effect)

Wizard: non-melee DPS (secondary/utility being CC, Evac, etc.)

Being a Melee-Oriented Class

One unique trait of all melee classes is that all are dependent upon gear to measure effectiveness. Casters and Priests obviously get more effective with better gear, and gain obvious benefits that make them more desired just like melee, however; melee are much, much more dependent on the itemization factor.

Melees have always had a stronger dependence on primary contributions (tanking, damage dealing) through gear than casters. While the gap has narrowed a bit with the introduction of focus effects, melee efficiency remains almost completely determined by their gear in how much they bring to a group or raid.

Two level 70 enchanters can effectively perform crowd control at the same level, assuming both have the same spells and both have a good measure of skill at playing their class. Now assume one has Anguish and Tacvi level gear, and the other has Velious gear. Obviously the one that's better geared will perform better, and have more margin of error room than the Velious enchanter, but he can still perform his role to the same measure of effectiveness as the Tacvi enchanter.

In many cases, gear allows a few things for priests and casters A) more room to recover from errors B) Larger mana pool and mana regen C) higher resists for AE's; In other words, primarily traits that no amount of skill can make up for. However, by contrast melee classes are hugely dependent on gear to be effective to the same or similar degree. A Kunark warrior will never be able to tank Tacvi until his gear is upgraded, no amount of skill can change that. A Kunark enchanter can still keep mobs mezzed in Tacvi, but the break or resists will be a lot less forgiving.

The difference between two rangers, one in Anguish or Tacvi gear, compared to one in Velious gear is so extreme, even given that both are the same level, have the same spells, and have the same basic skill abilities, that by comparison the Velious ranger is as ineffective at dps as the Kunark warrior is at tanking, no matter how good or bad the player is. Just looking at attack and attack alone can prove this. The DPS from a ranger at 1620 attack unbuffed versus one with 1100 attack is phenomenal. Not to mention weapons at that level would have a sub par ratio by a lot. One doesn't even need to parse to see the obvious difference. Once melee reach a certain plateau of skill, little can be done to improve upon it save gear upgrades to increase efficiency.

As a result, the difference between a good ranger and a great ranger lies in extremely subtle things, assuming both have similar gear. Things like knowing when to time Weaponshield effectively or when to crowd control without being told. When it comes down to it, the difference is timing, when to WS, when to snare all mobs being cc'd (should be always), when to root park, and when to offtank if possible. All these things distinguish from a ranger whom merely hits on auto attack, knowing he could do something but opts not to.

Being a Hybrid Class

Hybrids are a particularly hard class to layout and balance, because of the fact of what they are in EverQuest. In EverQuest hybrids are not unique classes, but rather combinations of two classes. Paladins are combinations of clerics and warriors; Shadowknights are combinations of necro's and warriors; Beastlords are combinations of Shamans and monks; and finally, rangers being a combination of warriors (though seemingly more rogue-like) and druids.

Now the hard part about balancing a hybrid class is that it can't be so overpowering (i.e. taking strongest points of each class it is made of and becoming much stronger), but needs to be wanted as equally as the parent classes and provide unique contributions to raid and grouping situations. A hybrid cannot have the ability to defensive like a warrior and complete heal like a cleric, or the uses of the parent classes diminish.

Also a hybrid can't have just lower versions of spells of each parent and no unique spells or the hybrids value is diminished. Originally, because of the nature and theory behind hybrids, they were given an exp penalty, which affected the entire group this factor, however, was eliminated.

Hybrids have evolved more or less out of their traditional balance of being a combination of two classes and rather into unique classes. In fact in newer MMORPGS hybrids aren't even "hybrids" but considered completely individual. Hybrids usually end up with hard balancing issues because tweaks can't be too overpowering or too weak. Finding a niche' can be difficult when the parent classes the hybrids were originally derived from already fill the roles that hybrids have to a better efficiency.

What a ranger provides to a raid environment that's truly unique and fits in with the theme of a ranger is Attack buffs. Via these buffs, a ranger can provide the most overall DPS to a raid than any one other class. The reason being is that a piece of every melee class doing damage comes from a ranger, by not looking at just the individual ranger, but at an overall body, one can notice the impact that a ranger provides to an entire raiding or grouping sense (though more apparent in raids).

Class Balance Layers

Class balancing comes in many different layers, layers being a descriptive term used in this document to show and break down aspects of the game into easily understandable segments that build upon each other. By subdividing our thinking down like this we can easily see where each problem resides and what may be needed to fix these problems. The layers of Class Balancing start out simple, and as they build up upon

each other they become more complex and much easier to imbalance the game. Layers follow as such: Levels, Spells and Skills, Itemization, AA's, and Content.

Class Balance First Layer: Levels

Levels are the most basic aspect of the game, adding in nothing else but levels, every class is exactly equal. The basic formula of this layer is simple: higher level > lower level and level = other classes of same level. Levels are also the most important aspect to the game in character development as many fundamental sequential layers build upon levels. The higher the level you are, the larger your access to AA's, gear, and spells.

Class Balance Second Layer: Spells and Skills

Now, this level gets more complex but still remains fairly balanced. The formula being that a 70 ranger with all spells should be = to a 70 wizard with all spells. However, this is a comparison that cannot be given, because in this case casters will always be greater than any melee (this equation assumes no gear, or the very lowest quality of items to represent slash, blunt, etc that has no function other than for show), due to the nature of melee classes and caster classes. But also this means at this level Rangers are greater than any pure melee (in this layer, Casters > Hybrids > Melee).

So what we have to compare rangers to at this level is other hybrids. Does ranger utility = paladin utility? Does it equal beastlord utility? Also at this layer you have to compare casters to casters, pure melee to pure melee, etc. Every class should more or less be equal to the others in its class type at this level. This could be parsed out and equated using only rusty weapons and no other gear, as the itemization level has yet to come into play.

This level is probably the subtlest, being almost impossible to completely balance on spells and skills alone due to the nature of class make-up in EverQuest, which is reliant on gear to level out the playing field. Due to these comprising factors, I will not try to further elaborate on balance at this layer, because you simply cannot without incorporating the future layers.

Class Balance Third Layer: Itemization

Itemization begins to show us where class balancing truly begins to have a high tendency to deviate from balance. Let me start off with an example. Rangers never were designed to be main tanks (as a primary role). Itemization in Original EverQuest (typically had the same gear quality to both warriors and rangers), gave us the **capability**

to tank the same, or even to a better degree. Itemization also allows pure melee to perform such tasks as snaring, stunning etc (though normally heavily reliant upon procs).

Melee, by nature are heavily dependent on their gear to be balanced. Itemization in EverQuest's history has gone from high-end gear and normal gear being very close, to the huge difference in stats you see today (which is probably what some players of the non-raiding preference argue about). The reason being that the higher the difficulty level of the encounters, the better the drops should be, and part of what measures those drops as good items is whether or not single groups can easily get access to them without the coordination of a raid (why raid something when you could solo or one group another thing for better or similar?).

Itemization tends to also balance the gap between the class types. For example Melee see the greatest increases in effectiveness with gear, Hybrids a careful balance of increases, though still very significant, and casters and priests the least returns by comparison. Many problems that existing rangers have today with melee dps charts (rangers should be firmly #3 on the DPS line), resides in a problem with improper itemization.

Rangers, due to innately being less DPS than pure melee or about equal in the case of warriors, should have superior ratio weapons so that the damage output provided places them at a square, undisputed #3 for melee DPS, rather than this fog of confusion. Itemization also makes content of the past less and less valuable, leading to the contents abandonment.

Another problem it causes is when items like the Elemental Bows are allowed to be tradable in an environment where the common weapons are not of the elemental level, this leads to a HUGE misconception that archery DPS is superior to melee DPS, which it isn't, and is only superior in the situation where your weapons are below elemental quality when using an elemental bow. This also imbalances the game for other melee classes whom don't have access to tradable elemental level weapons, leading to further misconception on the side of other classes towards one item.

Class Balance Fourth Layer: Alternate Advancement

Alternate Advancement (AA) also makes class balance more difficult because they provide utility and tools otherwise not available to classes that don't always fit in with the norm of what is

typically available to them. This often causes hell with other classes, even if the AA ability is fairly useless. Look at the Monk snare AA, it is completely worthless, because it adds a proc to eagle strike, making it very unpredictable, very unreliable and also with a short duration, nothing controlled like ranger snare, but because it is **snare** it causes turmoil.

AA's in their natural state should be left at enhancing existing class roles, but the argument can be made that since roles adapt with content, the AA's available to classes needs to also vary. AA's make Archery a much more powerful utility then it is without those AA's, and also more convenient, not needing to replace arrows (Endless Quiver). Some spells, like SOW, become useless with AA's, but normally the fact is it's more of a benefit than a hindrance to anyone since there are upgrades to sow (like SOE) that are better.

Class Balance Fifth Layer: Content

Content is an ever-changing paradigm, and thus with changes in content, comes changes in use. Certain content rewards some class's primary abilities while eliminating the need for others, and then the next change in a zone or expansion can bring about another radical turn about.

Immunity flags, resistances, the stats of mobs, their levels, the number of them, pulling tricks, all alters the relative use of classes. The most extreme cases are support classes (offtanks, Crowd control, etc), who's spells and abilities directly rely on the abilities of their targets (like a mob spawning adds etc, or mobs that run away at low health). All classes are affected to some degree by the fluctuations of content.

Content is a hard degree to balance, because unexpected bugs or new designs can bring about results never originally intended. A lot of perceived ranger problems are often found to be directly related to content and the ranger's ability to adapt to that contents demand, rather than the actual design of the ranger class.

Content patterns tend to follow the same basic theorem as economics. Economics tends to follow a trend that can be called the "boobs" of economics. That is, the Economy will rise, cap out at a plateau and then fall, at about the same rate that the initial rise was, bottom out, and then rise again. Such is the typical pattern classes normally follow, the rise and falls being equivocal to need and varies from class to class.

Utility Definition

To start off, I will provide the dictionary definition of utility. While it can be argued that, in EverQuest the definitions of such things seldom reflects that of its definition in the real

world (like a ranger is not a member of a special division in the US armed forces in EQ), the Devs, however; like everyone else in the world are influenced by what the definition and classical influences of the real world in the products of their imagination (unless rumors that the Devs are actually non-human are true, that is).

Utility (as defined by dictionary.com)

The quality or condition of being useful; usefulness

A useful article or device.

Utility as defined by Merriam-Webster Online

<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>

Function: noun

fitness for some purpose or worth to some end

something useful or designed for use

Now, for a closer examination of this word, and concept of utility I also took the liberty to refer to the thesaurus for another outlook on utility.

Utility (<http://thesaurus.reference.com/>)

Definition: serviceableness

Synonyms: account, adequacy, advantage, advantageousness, applicability, appropriateness, avail, benefit, convenience, efficacy, expediency, favor, fitness, function, point, practicality, productiveness, profit, relevance, service, serviceability, use, usefulness.

Utility (Merriam-Webster Online)

Text: synonyms USE 3, account, advantage, applicability, appropriateness, fitness, relevance, service, serviceability, usefulness.

From first glance, it is noticed that EQ utility must fall under a few concise parameters. It must have a worth to some extent, it must be useful or designed for use. It in general must have a relevance to the character, provide a beneficial aspect to the character, have a useful function and practicality and again must be useful. From fulfilling these parameters, and given the unique environment in which EverQuest is involved in, a clear definition of utility is as follows:

Utility is anything, skill, spell, disc, or aa that is not specifically the main role of said class, or aids / enhances said primary role in some form or fashion. The utility must have a purpose to fulfill, be it either raid or group functions, additionally it must be useful, or designed for use. For example, the primary role of a rogue is to do melee dps, rogue utility would be classed as offensive disciplines, CR capabilities etc.

Obviously certain utility becomes obsolete due to varying factors and is no longer useful in its pure form, or some abilities are enhanced such that they become better

utility, the former is less likely to occur, utility in EverQuest tends to not go from uselessness into usefulness.

Utility Layers

Utility is more easily described and cross-analyzed when its divided into “layers” A layer is a game mechanic or aspect that usually has the capacity to be built upon from the bottom up. Bottom layers are the most simple and top layers the most complex. As such, by cross analyzing from this kind of perspective we can dissect exactly where problems and imbalances occur, often eliminating many misconceptions.

Utility layers are very similar to class layers, which were described before, that covered a broader range of aspects of the game, including itemization and levels that can tie into Utility but are better in a separate form all together, with the overall picture and not just utility in mind. The three layers of Utility (in order) are skills, spells, and alternate abilities.

Layers of Utility: Skills

Skills are more properly defined as disciplines and skills like forage, track etc. A skill utility can be something like offensive disciplines that aid melee dps (or Trueshot that aids Archery DPS), or something like Archery (more on this later).

Weaponshield

This is one of two useful discs available to Rangers. It provides a roughly 24 second period of invulnerability to incoming melee damage from the front (all-parry's). These and other similar discs can be referred to as “no-hits” as you literally don't get hit by the mob, unless via spell, or other non-melee damage when positioned correctly.

When the disc was originally created it lasted 10 seconds and was the only one of its kind that was able to be effectively used with a snap aggro utility. When the still fairly recent pure-melee changes went live, monks, and warriors gained a no-hit disc as well. These discs were roughly equivalent to the old Weaponshield disc, which at that time got revamped to its current version.

The logical thinking behind the difference between the two types is clear and definitive: Ranger WS lasts double the length, at double the reuse timer as all other no-hit discs. So essentially we get the most beneficial use timer for our no-hit disc in comparison to the lengths of the other classes. Why? Because a 30 minute reuse timer for 10 seconds of no-hit disc won't help you when you need that disc to last as long as possible. The only time that the re-use timer becomes an issue is when the disc is accidentally blown (it happens), or improperly timed, in which instances it becomes painfully annoying to have a double reuse timer as other classes.

Weaponshield still remains the most effective means of raid debuffing and slowing. “But Nend, warriors have fortitude, why not just have your main tank go in and debuff then hold steady agro from then on?” There are many logical answers to this, the best being that Warrior fortitude only lasts about 10 seconds, so if something goes wrong (like slow resists) you have less time to react again and get it down right. If slow doesn’t land and it’s a particularly hard encounter, your tank is at a high chance to die from bad rounds during the period it’s unslowed in this event. When you go in with Warrior fortitude you have roughly half a chance of success of the tank surviving the round, in which case, if that tank dies your one tank short for the duration of the encounter normally.

There is also a problem that presents itself in some warriors not being able to get as fast spot agro as a ranger could. For example if the tank cant get that spot agro and the debuffers die on a resist or after one cast, you’ve already lost more than acceptable for so early into the encounter. Many also argue that, a tank using fortitude is more effective than ranger ws because the tank maintains steady agro and you don’t have to worry about making a steady transition. This is also fairly irrelevant. Expanding past this layer of utility and going into the next we see two spells, tangling weeds, a fast cast low-level snare used for agro and Jolt, an agro reducing spell. Once debuffs get in and slow is called the tank should be taunting and doing everything he can to get agro, at this point its up to the ranger to simply cast jolt and step aside once you see the Health of Target’s Target window change from the rangers name to the warriors name. The Warrior should be at #2 on the hate list due to the spam taunting at this time etc, and get easy transition in all cases from the ranger who prior to passing agro should be #1 on the hate list.

In my personal experience I find it best to add extra script line to my WS hotkey including after about 18 seconds it saying “ws down soon” as a good time reminder that I better get ready to get rid of agro or a good notification to my group that I’m going to be needing heals soon.

Now the second most common raid instance that WS is very handy for is when the mob is at low health and the tanks or healers are dead. This is were many raiders that play rangers should be thankful that rogues monks and bards also have no-hit discs as this means more time to stay alive and try to kill the mob, rather than wipe and lose out. Rangers again in this situation are the most valuable of the classes that can no-hit disc thanks to our ability (even though drummed down after warrior agro increase) to get spot agro in a tight spot with the right spell setup, especially compared to monks, rogues, and bards.

Archery

Many view archery as a main form of DPS, in addition to many that used to argue insatiably for hours and hours and hours over this viewpoint. Archery is part of the cause to some of the division between rangers, especially aggravated by gear and play style (raider / casual). However, even as officially defined by Sony Online

Entertainment, archery is not debatable as a secondary form of damage to melee.

Archery is in no way shape or form melee damage. “You hit the big red dragon for 999 points of non-melee damage.” As previously stated, the primary role of the ranger is to perform melee DPS. Therefore, based on that factor alone Archery is not part of our main role as a class. Additionally look at the other evidence that points out that archery is utility, based on the definition of utility previously stated. Archery is situational; it is useful in these situational periods of time. Nuking is meant to assist our DPS, but that doesn’t mean our main role encompasses nuking.

Archery not being a part of our main role does not diminish its value as utility however. Archery can be very valuable and even of more use than melee at times (hence situational). Archery as viewed from a raid leader standpoint: Apostate (raid leader of Cestus Dei) mentions “I view rangers in a raiding situation using a bow as free DPS, and by free DPS I mean DPS that doesn’t need healing upkeep.”

In many raid encounters devastating AE’s tend to rock melee (like AE Slows, or DOTs and DD’s), requiring many group healing classes to be staged with them to keep up the DPS (or we lose the encounter). However, because of the fluctuations from day to day of available classes (like paladins, clerics etc) there isn’t always enough healing to go around. It makes it much easier from the raid leader perspective to have the ranger grouped with wizards or other classes that can easily dodge AE’s and still perform DPS to a high degree, normally using Trueshot in these cases.

Archery has many subtle uses, and archery is more than any other ranger skill a matter of preference in the amount of use it receives, so in most cases there is two sides to every role archery -may- fulfill. Archery has its best usage during encounters in which the mob has something like a devastating, melee range AE DD, Dot, or Slow, or when the mob has a devastating AE Rampage. The purpose behind this, as seen from the big picture standpoint, can be quite beneficiary when compared to doing melee dps under these specific parameters. In fights such as this group healing or spot healing is critical, making paladins, druids, shamans and clerics important. Additionally our only offensive non-AA discipline comes from Trueshot, which creates the pinnacle of offensive DPS a ranger is capable of doing. However, Trueshot suffers from the same pitfalls and strengths of Archery- it’s situational.

Layers of Utility: Spells

Spells make up the next layer of utility. Many spells are of the common opinion of needing tunings, this information will probably be added in later versions like comparative charts etc.

Attack Buffs

Ranger attack buffs provide undoubtedly worthwhile DPS to raids, however; the problem rangers often have with this is that only one ranger is required to buff an entire

raid, or a ranger bot to buff a group. The same arguments however can be applied to any class that buffs. Most Rogues will go on a blood frenzy if they don't get their attack buffs.

The Strength of Tunare and Spirit of the Predator buff lines are unique buffs available only to rangers, though classes can buff attack, none can group buff it to multiple groups at one time.

Call of the Rathe line

This line is a beneficial primarily for the AC benefit to it. Self Buffs Lines like Protection of the Wild, Procs, and Mask of the Stalker. All these spells are useful, usually saving spell slots, and the Procs do tend to increase DPS. Protection of the Wild = SoT+SoP+Rathe. Nukes Nuking while meant to increase are DPS seldom does with the way its coded, there is much information that will be added with the next revision.

Nature Veil
To Be Released
Heals
To Be Released
Rooting/Snaring
To Be Released
Other: To Be released

Layers of Utility: Alternate Advancement

The third layer of utility includes AA abilities, however the analysis of many aspects needs more looking into and will be released with Version 2.0.

Ranger Class Desirability

Grouping, is there a problem with getting a spot? Many Rangers and melee complain about the availability of getting a spot in a group. The arguments over having so many DPS classes, that a ranger have no chance of getting groups; however, this is mathematically a mute argument.

Mathematically, every class has a 6.25% chance of getting a group (1/16 assuming if one of each class is LFG), this is, however an incomplete equation because it only factors in the first layer, and possibly the second of class balance, in which all classes are equal dependent on level and spells. Dealing with the next steps, and adding in additional information to the perfect setting in which all classes are equally desired, I'll start with assumed "perfect" group set up. 1 healer, 1 tank, 1 slower/cc, and 3 DPS, now compare this to the amount of classes to fulfill each role available, based on main roles: 2 healers (cleric, druid)(2/16), 3 slower/cc (enchanter, bard, shaman)(3/16), 3 tanks (warrior, paladin, shadowknight)(3/16), and 8 DPS (ranger, rogue, beastlord,

wizard, necro, mage, monk, berserker)(8/16). 16 equals the amount of classes in EverQuest. Now compare these values together in a ration of group spots to available classes: Healers: grp = 1/6 = 16.6%, classes = 2/16= 12.5%; Slowers/CC grp=1/6=16.6%, classes =3/16=18.75%; Tanks grp=1/6=16.6%, classes =3/16=18.75%; and DPS grp =3/6=50%, classes 8/16=50%. So what we see is that the common demand for DPS classes is exactly on par with the availability of DPS classes.

However, in the case of healers, the demand is higher than the availability; therefore we have the scenario clerics always get groups. Tanks also tend to run into a problem, because there is seldom flexibility in one grouping situations for two tanks, since it diminishes effectiveness, DPS wise. In the tanking situation we have the availability of classes is greater than the demand slightly. This is also true for that of slowers and CC classes. Because demand and availability are exactly equal percentages for DPS, we have the situation where there isn't much demand for the classes because that demand is almost always met (this goes for tanks too and CC too). Without adding any additional filters and assuming the availability of previously stated, DPS classes are perfect in the spectrum, ratio wise.

Once the equation is broken down further, rangers make up 1/8 of the DPS classes, so that's 12.5% chance of getting a group while LFG in one of the 3 available spots for DPS. However, since EverQuest is never perfect as far as availability to of classes LFG at all times, the equation is often offset because of the fact that there are more DPS classes than other classes in EQ, so there is a natural tendency for more to be LFG than healers or tanks or slowers/CC.

Grouping as a Ranger, and why a group wants one

Grouping situations are hard to pinpoint exactly what a ranger could be called in for, as there are many different things a ranger can perform. Rangers typically have a few common roles to perform, without being "to do so by specific group parameters, and they are as follows. DPS, whether by archery or melee (gear dependent) it is of primary concern for a ranger to be doing DPS to a mob, if a ranger isn't doing DPS, a ranger is simply not living up to there primary role, or utility archery role. Snare, it is almost always the rangers responsibility to snare mobs, unless grouped with a necro or shadowknight. It's usually more effective for a ranger to snare over a druid etc because of the fact that they are concerned with assist healing and such.

Rangers also can be patchy CC with rooting and snaring, usually CC in every case as it should always be their responsibility to snare mobs being mezzed or simply rooted, even with a necro or SK in group (their snares are dots). Rangers also provide Attack buffs which can be as important to melees as KEI is too casters and priests. These buffs are almost always underestimated in what they provide for groups and raids.

Rangers can also perform the pulling task in a group outdoors especially, though drummed down in Omens of War due to a lack of Harmony upgrade, which leaves the ranger in reliance to snaring and rooting to delay the mobs incoming times. But when

push comes to shove, the Ranger class can provide any number of roles for a group, just like most classes, and there is little that can be defined to say one way rules all in the way a ranger carries out his or her grouping strategies. Grouping is simply raiding on a smaller proportion, in which division of roles is apparent, but not as severe as in Raids.

Raids, the basic needs and why a Ranger has a spot

I'm not going to elaborate on all the intricacies of raiding in this version of the chronicles, because I'd be here all day thinking of new scenarios as to why something isn't applicable in all situations etc. One of the biggest rules of raiding is probably that one strategy will never fulfill every raid encounter's demands. I will, however; elaborate on why a ranger has a firm place in a raid, in most, if not every, situation.

The basic strength of raids is the concept of division of labor, via large numbers. This works a lot easier in a raid situation as compared to a grouping situation because you simply have a bigger ratio of people and roles available immediately (for example one ranger could be CCing the other could be doing DPS, and a third could be watching for weaponshield). Dividing roles like this makes the raiding more efficient in an overall sense since you don't have everyone trying to do everything at once, this is a basic stream-of-thought thinking that leads to the development as such strategies as the CH rotation, more effective for 10 clerics to line up and heal one after the other than all 10 trying to heal the same tank with no coordination.

During any said raid any number of set occurrences can happen. Due to this fact it is not efficient to have a raid comprised of just three or so classes, or even feasible in most cases. There is a common, often unheard of equation that goes into forming every raid, and often determines what classes get recruited into raiding guilds based on needs and demand. This equation calls for the balance of non-melee DPS, melee DPS, healing, tanks and offtanks, CC, and debuffers. It is ineffective for a raid to have 25 healers, 5 tanks, 5 cc and 10 DPS; the mob would simply take to long to kill. It is also ineffective to have 10 offtanks, 10 clerics with any number of DPS in an encounter that involves no tanked adds.

One final example of this particular point is, it's also ineffective to have 40 DPS, 5 healers and 2 tanks, etc in an encounter of heavy attrition (AE fights, AE rampage etc) especially, As the healers just would go oom healing so much and spread so thin. It's usually not a negative consequence to have too many healers in a raid, unless you're talking like 50 healers (which wont happen) to 4 Tanks. So now one must find adequate proportion for each raid to compose their raid of. There are more DPS classes in EQ than the rest of the primary role classes combined. However one cannot raid without a much larger proportion of DPS to the rest of the classes effectively in just about every situation. Usually the most spots are reserved for DPS (and healers) and the least to CC, the least depending on encounters. The proportion will always vary slightly depending on the following factors: A) The encounter B) the amount of classes immediately available and C) Flexibility of the encounter. Factor A is probably the most

important because you don't need offtanks for fights like Ixt's in Txevu, but in Uqua for example, you need plenty of offtanks and the healers to accommodate them.

In heavy AE fights you need ae healers like paladins, clerics, and spot healers like druids and shamans to maintain and counter the attrition. But for a fight like Noquifel in Inktu`Ta you need much more DPS than offtanks and healers than normal. Factor B is important as well; you can't always (or usually ever) have the perfect combination of classes at every raid, because of lack or excess in certain classes. Which leads to Factor C, the flexibility of the encounter, for example, you probably need a more perfect balance of classes for a new encounter than for one on farm status. All DPS classes in every situation are needed; the fluctuations are also much, much less than when compared to other classes and primary roles. For example an enchanter is greatly useful for a fight with plentiful adds that needs lots of CCing, but not even useful as DPS in a fight that has no adds at all, except to provide buffs.

Tanking is always needed, as does healing (and every role for that matter), but again these roles vary much more extremely than DPS based on the encounter (do you need many offtanks for a straight up fight like Avatar of War or Lord Inquisitor Seru? No.), but in every situation you need DPS and that number does not vary nearly as extremely based on the encounter as any other role. Thus by those parameters alone, looking at a Ranger just by its place in DPS, and without its utility, a ranger is almost always guaranteed a firm spot in a Raid due to the nature of being a DPS class.